

*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"*

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)



TAKING ISSUE WITH ISSUES

PART ONE

One of the key chapters of the book - Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries (ISSUES) - is a recitation of the Church's history from 1844-1992 in a specifically defined format. The format consists of four categories: 1) Content of faith, in other words, the teachings of the Church during the specified period; 2) Structure, meaning its organization and procedures; 3) Spirit, which covers the tone and atmosphere in which the Church conducts its work; and 4) Dissent, how the Church has related to and dealt with dissident movements.

The Church's history is in turn divided into three periods of time: 1) The Formative years from 1844 to 1863 when formal organization was achieved; 2) The Organized Church during the life time of Ellen G. White (1863-1915); and 3) The Organized Church after her death to the present.

It should be noted also that this publication was produced as was Questions on Doctrine, without an author being named. There is a notation that it was authorized by the North American Division officers and the presidents of the various Union Conferences which comprise the Division. However, unconfirmed reports indicate that Elder Robert Dale, vice president for the Division, is the principal author.

Each period as discussed in ISSUES warrants a careful review, but in this first analysis, we shall focus on a glaring omission which goes to the very heart of the problem not only for the Church but also for the four independent ministries named, a problem which all have thus far skirted.

One subsection in the discussion of the second period of the Church's history is captioned - "The 1901 General Conference Session: Prelude and Aftermath." (pp. 43-44) While key parts of the message which Ellen G. White gave immediately after the opening of

the conference are quoted, including the ones often used by dissidents, the history is made to turn on a quotation used in C. C. Crisler's book, Organization - E. G. White Letter 54, 1901. It was written to a minister who was still critical of the Church's direction after the session. The quotation from the letter reads:

Your course would have been the course to be pursued if no change had been made in the General Conference. But a change has been made, and many more changes will be made and great developments will be seen. No issues are to be forced. ... It hurts me to think that you are using words which I wrote prior to the conference. Since the conference great changes have been made. ... (ISSUES, p. 44)

Crisler quoted one more paragraph from the letter which is omitted in ISSUES. It reads:

A terribly unjust course has been pursued in the past. A want of principle has been revealed. But in pity to His people, God has brought about changes. ... The course of action which before the conference might have been a necessity, is no longer necessary; for the Lord Himself interposed to set things in order. He has given His Holy Spirit. I am confident that He will set in order the matters that seem to be moving wrong. (pp. 174-175; Emphasis by Crisler)

This omitted paragraph rounds out the picture. While "great changes" were made at the 1901 Session, and God entered the assembly "that the work [He] designed should be done and should not be hindered" (GC Bulletin, 1901, p. 463), yet there were matters which seemed "to be moving wrong" when she wrote the letter. The "changes" and what was taking place which hindered the full implementation of those changes is not discussed or even hinted at in ISSUES. There is at this point in the recitation of Seventh-day Adventist Church history a strange historical amnesia. The author of ISSUES "leap frogs" to 1909.

What "changes" were made in 1901? How were they carried out? What happened in 1903? What was Ellen G. White's message then? These questions must be answered because the whole of the present crisis turns on this period in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

THE CHANGES OF 1901

A new Constitution was drawn up in the 1901 session which abolished the office of president of

the General Conference. In its stead was set up an Executive Committee which was given "power to organize itself, choosing a chairman, secretary, treasurer, and auditor." (GC Bulletin, 1901, p. 379) During the discussion of the Constitution, a question was raised on this point. In replying to it, W. C. White said, "It is quite possible that a sentiment will be created, or a sentiment that already exists may manifest itself, that no one should be chairman of this committee for a period of more than twelve months at a time." (ibid, p. 206) Elder A. G. Daniells was in the chair when this discussion took place, yet when the report of the organization of the General Conference Committee was given to the session, A. G. Daniells was listed as "Permanent Chairman." (ibid., p. 377)

The General Conference at that time was meeting every two years in session. This suggestion of a rotating chairman of the Executive Committee would be midway between sessions. The work of the chair would come up for review by the committee as a whole. This discussion was not lost on Daniells, but he maneuvered things to his own ends. As the first twelve months were approaching their close, Daniells called a minority meeting of the Committee on February 14, 1902. Only six of the 25 member committee were present - Daniells, I. H. Evans, C. W. Flaiz, H. W. Cottrell, W. W. Prescott, and S. H. Lane. Some others were called into this noon meeting - Professor Magan, Elders Mitchell and Spicer, as well as Brethren Edwards and Palmer. On the motion of I. H. Evans, it was moved that the Chairman appoint a committee of three to nominate the officers of the General Conference Committee. Daniells appointed Elder H. W. Cottrell, Elder W. H. Thurston, and Professor Magan. Only Cottrell is a member of the Executive Committee. Here is a clear violation of the 1901 Constitution which stated the Committee was to organize itself.

This nominating committee reported back to the minority meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee held on February 15 at 7 p.m. While the same six official members of the Executive Committee were present, Elder Thurston was present for this evening meeting in addition to the other five who were present at the noon meeting the day prior. The Nominating Committee made several recommendations for changes in the personnel at the General Conference, but except for these changes, the officers of the Executive Committee were to remain the same for the next twelve months.

It is to be noted further that in this evening meeting, Elder W. W. Prescott was chosen to be Vice President of the General Conference. No such office was provided for in the 1901 Constitution. Obvious rebellion was beginning to set in against what Ellen G. White perceived to be a divinely inspired Constitution. While a structure of Heaven's ordering had been voted in 1901, the hearts of those operating the structure were not sanctified. At this very time in 1902, Ellen White was writing of the individual heart work that should have been done at the 1901 session. While writing, she was taken off in vision and saw a work of confession and repentance as enjoined upon Laodicea taking place in Battle Creek. But when aroused to consciousness, she was told, "This might have been." Then she wrote - "I thought of where we might have been had a thorough work been done at the last General Conference [1901]" (8T:104-106) It still hasn't been done, and the Church's leadership is unwilling to come to grips with what happened in 1903 because it was not done. The power behind ISSUES prefers historical amnesia instead of simply facing truth.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1903?

The Committee on Plans and Constitution chaired by H. W. Cottrell at the 1903 session submitted a "Majority Report" which set aside the 1901 Constitution and submitted in its place an instrument which returned the Church to the hierarchical form of governance under which it functioned prior to 1901. This is the same Cottrell who had been appointed by Daniells to chair the nominating committee in 1902. However, for the first and only time in the history of the Church a "Minority Report" was submitted by E. J. Waggoner, David Paulson, and Percy T. Magan. This report read:

The minority of your Committee on Plans and Constitution beg leave to submit that the Constitution proposed by the majority of the Committee appears to us to be so subversive of the principles of organization given to us at the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901 that we can not possibly subscribe to it.

The proposed new Constitution reverses the reformatory steps that were taken, and the principles which were given and adopted as the principles of reorganization, in the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901, and embodied in the present Constitution; and this before that Constitution or the organization according to it, has ever had adequate trial.

We therefore recommend that the Constitution of 1901 be given a fair trial before it be annihilated. (GC Bulletin, 1903, pp. 146-147)

As soon as this "Minority Report" was read, a motion was made to adopt the majority report, and was immediately seconded. P. T. Magan countered with a motion of substitution recommending that the minority report be considered in place of the majority report. His motion was seconded by E. J. Waggoner. This motion was rejected. The rest of the morning session was used by Waggoner in stating why he opposed the newly proposed Constitution.

In the afternoon session with Cottrell again in the chair, the Constitution was the subject of discussion. P. T. Magan asked to speak to the matter as a whole. He was interrupted by a motion to limit every speaker to five minutes because of the shortness of time. The motion was immediately seconded, but the chair declined to push the issue opening the question for remarks. A. T. Jones obtained the floor. He said in part:

It seems to me that it is rather late to begin to talk of calling time, under the circumstances. Here is before us the most complicated situation, in many ways, that this General Conference has ever seen; and it is a matter that concerns the whole cause. ...

I know that it is late in the session, and therefore it is [too] late to bring in such a report as this in such a complicated situation. How could it be expected by anybody that such a report as this, involving such important things as this does, should be brought in and simply swept through. Why, even the first thing has not yet been done on a constitutional question in all matters of a constitution. There has been presented to this Conference for adoption a constitution, when we already have one, and I have not heard a single word as to why the one we have is so altogether defective that we have got to have a new one, and it is so open on its face that everybody shall simply say, Amen, and let it go. I have never learned of any such proceeding as that, on a constitutional question from the day of the Magna Charta unto today. (ibid., pp. 147-148)

After another delegate, A. J. Breed, suggested that restricting the time of each speaker "is not the best thing to do," A. G. Daniells stated that he "would not want to see this motion passed." "The question was called, and the motion was

lost." (*ibid.*) P. T. Magan was allowed to speak to the question as a whole. He said in part:

As a member of the minority of the Committee on Plans and as a man, if I had not been on the Committee on Plans at all, I am conscientiously opposed to the proposed new constitution. I have always felt that the hardest place that any man could be put in in this life is to have to stand conscientiously opposed to what the majority of his brethren believe to be right. To me it has always appeared to be a much easier thing to stand in a position of opposition to the world, and even to have to face a court of justice in the world, for your faith, than to have to face your brethren for your faith. And therefore I shall say to-day, as briefly and modestly as I know how, what I shall say. ...

It may be stated there is nothing in this new constitution which is not abundantly safeguarded by the provisions of it; but I want to say to you that any man who has ever read Neander's History of the Christian Church, or Mosheim's, or any of the other of the great church historians, - any man who has ever read those histories can come to no other conclusion but that **the principles which are to be brought in through this proposed constitution, and in the way which they are brought in, are the same principles, and introduced in precisely the same way, as they were hundreds of years ago when the Papacy was made.**

Further: This whole house must recognize this, before we are through with this discussion, that the proposed new constitution, whatever improvements may be claimed for it, whatever advantages it may be stated that it contains, that in principle, as far as the head of the work is concerned, it goes back precisely where we were before the reformatory steps of two years ago. ...

Another point: It is a fact which I do not believe any one in this house will deny, but that for many years every General Conference that we have come to has been more or less of a crisis over the question of the progress of the General Conference and the General Conference administration. ...

Now I want to say in all candor and sincerity, this afternoon, that this question will never, and can never be, settled until it is settled right. This whole new constitution may pass this body, I do not know, but that will not settle it. This thing will keep on coming up until the **principles of the gospel**, approximated and aimed at in the last constitution, **are given their full and free**

place in this church. (*ibid.*, pp. 150-151; emphasis supplied.

In an evening session, April 9, the discussion continued, and the new constitution was approved by a vote of 85 to 20 with three absentions. On April 13, the General Conference adjourned in Oakland, California, to reconvene again in Battle Creek, Michigan on April 22. While the brethren were crossing the continent, Ellen G. White returned to her home in St. Helena, and was moved to write a testimony, dated April 21, 1903. In it she wrote:

In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence, "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged. (8T:247)

The language of this paragraph is corporate language - "She" - "on her," etc. The Lord put the Church on notice that "she" faced a judgment in the sanctuary above. She was "to be weighed" and she would "be judged." Further, there was the possibility that the verdict would be negative - "she" could be "found wanting." The judgment of heaven on the action taken at the session was declared to a "backsliding." A remedy was indicated - "Unless the church, which is now being leavened with her own backsliding, shall repent and be converted, ..." (p. 250) Here is the call to denominational repentance, and that repentance is related to the issues involved in constitutional change in 1903.

Here is the point which over the years both Wieland and Short have missed and are still missing. In the final section, "Constructive Recapitulation," of their original edition of 1888 Re-Examined, they used the reference in Testimonies, Vol. 8, p. 250 to support their call for corporate repentance - but not for what the Lord called, but what they perceived the call to be - the 1888 message itself. Now in a recent publication, Wieland again renews his call for denominational repentance, but stops short of a discussion of 1903. In his chapter - "What Our Denominational History Tells Us" - he asks the question - "Did the 1901 General Conference Cancel the 1888 Unbelief?" - and ignores any reference to 1903, when the call for repentance was given. (See Corporate Repentance, p. 131)

This we shall discuss in depth when, in a future issue of WWN, we discuss this latest book by Wieland. We have already written to him calling his attention to factual and linguistic errors he has made in the publication which leads to deceptive conclusions.

ISSUES also chose to ignore the Church's reaction to the 1901 Constitution as well as Heaven's reaction to the rebellion at the 1903 session. They would have the laity of the Church believe that all has been well since 1901 and the leaven of "backsliding" has not done its baleful work. One has only to look at the present state of the Church to know that this "backsliding" has come to full fruition.

The intent of the break in the recitation of the Church's history in ISSUES can be discovered from the context. They faithfully recorded what Ellen White had said in 1901 in regard to the authority of the General Conference, even marking it with emphasis - "That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be - that is past." But they did not dare to leave it in the "past." The 1909 statement furnished them a link by which they could reassert the authority of the General Conference and skip the history of 1903. (See p. 44, col. 2) However, the message of 1903 dare not be overlooked, for if the Church has been weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and found to be wanting, what force has its authority following that event?

The "private" ministries named in ISSUES will not come to grips with the message Ellen White gave following the 1903 session. With an agnosticism which parallels the Jews of old (See John 7:27 and Matt. 21:23-27), they declare, "When the probation [of the Seventh-day Adventist Church] does close, no one will know." (OFF, Vol. 7, #8, p. 24)

Herein lies the answer to the whole issue troubling the Community of Adventism today. "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. ... The most solemn truths ever committed to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them." (9T:19) In 1903, this people were warned that they would be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary concerning how they related to this trust. It is ludicrous to think that God, who

called a special people, and gave to them a sacred trust unparalleled in history, and who told them that they faced an accounting of how they handled that trust, would not give a sign when it was about to occur, and tell them when it occurred, and the decision rendered. Why do we continue to insult God either with our agnosticism, our presumption, or by ignoring God's sovereignty? A series of soul-searching questions are in order:

1) Has the Church been true to the trust committed to it? Or has the Church officially or unofficially compromised its doctrinal integrity? If the latter in any respect, how is the Church any longer able to proclaim the everlasting gospel?

2) Has the Church been weighed in the balances of the sanctuary? If so, when and what was the verdict?

3) Unless these questions have been asked in sincerity, and truthful answers given, one is not in a position to relate properly to the present crisis in Adventism. Nor will he as an individual be able to follow the Biblical example as how to relate to such a disclosure.

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NEWS NOTE

The November 9, 1992 issue of Christianity Today (p. 68) carried a report in its "News" section on Saturday Worship Services in large Evangelical Churches in the United States. While this trend has only involved 1% of the nation's churches, it represents 10% of America's "100 largest." The question is asked - "Why Saturdays?" The answer should give us pause. It read:

One operative factor involves cultural acceptance of alternate-day worship engendered by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1970 the Vatican gave approval for Saturday masses. Now, two decades later, a number of dioceses report that attendance is greater for Saturday's masses than for Sunday's.

Carl F. George, director of the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, calls the alternate-day services "the trend of the future." For a number of churches, it is already here. One church in Kirkland, Washington, hopes to fill its 1200-seat auditorium twice on Saturday night. Another church in Alta Loma, California, conducts five services a week - two being on Friday night.

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LET TALK IT OVER

History is not merely a revelation of facts in a particular human drama, but also a revelation of character, the character of the players in any particular historical episode. The events of 1901 and 1903 in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are no exception. During the discussion of the 1901 Constitution, W. C. White spoke positively that it seemed "to be the mind of this Conference that responsibility not be centralized and fixed upon a few individuals for a long period," suggesting the very concept that there be a rotating chairman of the Executive Committee of the General Conference every twelve months. There is no question, he knew his mother's gratitude to God because of the results of that session. But in 1903, W. C. White affixed his name to the Majority Report to "annihilate" that Constitution. In this decision, W. C. White joined the forces which introduced the leaven of backsliding into the Church which could be reversed only by corporate repentance and individual conversion. His character is here revealed not as a man who would stand for principle regardless of the opposing forces as did Magan, but as a policy man. This may account for some of the problems extant in regard to the Writings of Ellen G. White which were left to his guardianship following her death in 1915.

There is another factor from history which needs to be carefully considered. When Ellen G. White and her family returned from Australia, they located in Elmshaven. Arthur White in his biography of the events in the life of his grandmother noted that in setting up the office, "W. C. White ordered self-inking rubber stamps, one with Ellen White's signature, another with his own, ..." (EGW, Vol. 5, p. 46) Had the record of W. C. White been beyond question in the matter of principle versus policy, there would be no reason to question this particular act on his part, - having a rubber stamp made with E. G. White's name on it. But this opens the whole question of control and influence. It even suggests the question as to who may have used that "rubber stamp," and the authenticity of some of the manuscripts which appear with only the stamped name on them. The fact remains that W. C. White's influence came down on the side of those who were leavening the Church with their backsliding. This influence on his mother would grow in her declining years and needs to be considered in the evaluation of decisions made and messages given at succeeding General Conference sessions.

The desire to omit, forget, obliterate the history of 1903 is even reflected in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia of the Commentary Reference Series. In verifying data for the use of the lead article, I had occasion to note the section in the Encyclopedia - "General Conference Constitution and By-Laws." In the revised edition is found this statement:

The present constitution (1976) is not an amended form of the original one (1863); it is a new constitution adopted in 1901. (p. 496)

This is simply a blatant falsehood, and casts a shadow on the Encyclopedia itself. Does the Encyclopedia give the true perspective of history, or is it an instrument of propaganda to serve the ends of the hierarchy of the Church. Again the question arises, why the purposeful avoidance of what happened in 1903? There is no question but that the rebellion which manifested itself set the Church on a backsliding course which has not been arrested to this very day. The call to corporate repentance has been misinterpreted, and the possibility of a negative judgment upon the Church for its failure to do so has been denied. We will not even give consideration to the insight manifested by Magan in 1903 when he said that administrative problems involving the General Conference "will keep coming up until the principles of the gospel...are given their full and free place in the church." It means 1888 correctly applied instead of misapplied.

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"UNITY MEETING" REPORT

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As a church body, we have become very concerned that things vital to God's people were not being really addressed by "independent" ministries. So we sent out invitations for various like believers to join us in Nora Springs, November 6-8, in an attempt to speak with one voice, rather than being "many voices" leading to confusion.

It is our conviction following two attempts to arrange and host similar meetings that not many Adventists, whether they call themselves "historical," or whatever, manifest much genuine interest.

We invited brethren whom we had met in various meetings; others who through their written and/or spoken word, we thought were standing for truth, and who would be willing to work together to help fulfill Christ's prayer for unity. (John 17:20-23)

Not everyone invited was able to attend - some because of distance, some because of concern for weather conditions, and some because of health reasons. However, we felt the response was good, whether all invited could attend or not.

Because of a misunderstanding concerning the format, the meetings were conducted somewhat less formal than we had planned. Nevertheless, everyone participated in all the subjects studied. Agreements were reached. We learned new things. There was an openness in the consideration of new ideas. There was an awareness of the urgency of the times to which we have come. There was a seeking for truth. The discussions were frank, but in a good spirit.

It is our opinion that the general consensus of the group on the topics discussed is as follows:

"State of Affairs in the Adventist Community"

Confusion and chaos reign both inside and outside of the regular Church.

"Final Atonement - - Jesus' End-Time Prophecy"

We discovered that these topics need much more discussion and study. The final atonement is one of the most vital truths which needs to be fully understood now. Most recognized Luke 21:24 as "present truth" for this time. Much more study needs to be given so that we can understand how best to relate in this end-time period.

"Use of the Spirit of Prophecy"

We discussed the nature of "spiritual gifts" and their relationship to Scripture. Everyone agreed that the Bible is the only infallible source of truth, and that further, the Writings of Ellen G. White places that emphasis on the Bible. In many ways the Writings are being misused by those both inside and outside of the regular denomination.

"Sunday Laws"

Consensus was that with "all" the events taking place, we must not side track ourselves with the single "Sunday Law" issue, but must be awake and watching as the scroll unrolls.

"Closing Work - Present Truth"

Some present expressed their concern that adequate consideration be given to the part health reform is to play in the closing work. Personal preparation was stressed, and the need to work for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

"Gospel Order"

It was generally agreed that how we relate to God individually is not necessarily the same as how we relate to the Church collectively. God's church is ORGANIZED! There must be gospel order. We need - under the Holy Spirit - guidance to be better organized so that God can use us individually and collectively to finish His work.

Summary: There were some misunderstandings and disagreements on all points discussed. However, we believe there was nothing which separated any of us to the extent that we cannot network together and help each other as well as others to become better prepared for the "end-time" crisis just before all of us. No specific date or time was set, but future meetings are planned.

"Those who do not know Jesus as their personal Saviour, do not avail themselves of the promised blessings; but to all who believe, He is as the Tree of Life in the paradise of God. His branches reach to this world, that the blessings which He has purchased for us may be brought within our reach."

Ellen G. White

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