

“Not On a Platform of Error”

(A Review of *Questions on Doctrine: What Should Be the Enduring Theological Legacy*
by Woodrow W. Whidden)

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Questions on Doctrine: What Should Be the Enduring Theological Legacy?, by Woodrow W. Whidden, (hereinafter referred to as *Enduring Legacy*), is largely a template for achieving unity between what Whidden sees as the two predominate theological view points which have arisen within Adventism over the past fifty years, in response to the controversial presentation of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine in the 1957 book *Questions on Doctrine*. These two groups are identified as the “perfectionistic SDA theological tradition” and the “Reformationist/Arminian Adventist theological tradition”. In the “perfectionistic”¹ group Whidden includes those who descend from the theological perspective of Jones and Waggoner, M. L. Andreasen, Herbert Douglass, Dennis Priebe and Larry Kirkpatrick. The “self-identified historicists” and the 1888 Message Study Committee are also identified with this group. In the “Reformationist” group *Enduring Legacy* includes “Adventist academic theologians (and numbers pastors) who have been serving in the church’s seminaries, under-graduate religion departments, major editorial offices, and the leadership of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference”.

According to *Enduring Legacy*, at stake in the controversy between these two groups, is the SDA theological definition of two key concepts, the “atonement” and the “nature of Christ”. One group describes the activity of Christ, within the second apartment of the heavenly

¹ Many if not all of the individuals that Whidden identifies with this group would take exception to this label. It is used in this paper to clearly identify which elements of Whidden’s discussion we are referring to. Perfection is a good Bible term and thus most “historics” would regard Whidden’s use of the terms “perfectionistic” and “perfectionism” as an uncharitable caricature of their position.

sanctuary as “atonement”. The other group describes that activity as “ministering the benefits of His completed atonement”. Thus fundamentally there are two questions at stake in this one question. What is the nature and significance of the atonement, which both groups agree was completed at the cross? And what is the nature and significance of Christ’s high priestly ministry?

The second vital question which *Enduring Legacy* identifies as precipitating from the QOD presentation of Adventism concerns the humanity of Christ. The Reformationist group is pre-lapsarian in its view of Christ’s human nature. The “perfectionistic” group is post-lapsarian. These concepts, (atonement and the humanity of the Savior) are of course interrelated concepts and both vitally impact the definition of the Gospel that we have been called to proclaim. Thus, as result of the two view points on these issues *Enduring Legacy* informs us that the two groups have “developed two, essentially distinctive versions of Soteriology, Christology and Eschatology”.

Ostensibly, *Enduring Legacy* would have us understand that *both* groups are in error. On page nine of the document we read: “I simply want to earnestly urge both groups . . . to give up their sincere but mis-guided theologies.” *Enduring Legacy* appears to suggest, (if I correctly understand the point being made), the key to resolving the theological conflict between these two groups is for both groups to adopt the theological perspective taught by Hans K. LaRaondelle, which is labeled “Effective Forensic Justification”. The description of “Effective Forensic Justification” provided in *Enduring Legacy* sounds so much like the second phase of justification (i.e. justification by faith) as taught by the 1888 Study Committee which the paper condemns, one has to wonder if there is any validity to the thesis at all. It may be that the author’s own experience constitutes such dubious evidence in support of the possibility of what he calls

“sinless perfection”, he cannot accept any premises which leads directly or indirectly to that unacceptable eschatological conclusion. Although in this writer’s opinion, the premise that Christ assumed a “fallen sinful nature” does not necessarily lead exclusively to the conclusion that the final generation will someday experience the gift of a sinless character. That conclusion is not inevitable or logically imperative.

Major Problems

There are numerous problems with the arguments presented in *Enduring Legacy*. The first glaring weakness is the failed attempt to lump all of the theological groups within Adventism into two groups. This is an over simplification of the problem at best. One obvious example of a “case in point” is the attempt to place “the self-identified historicists” and the “1888 Study Committee” in the same group. The author does “pay lip service” to the recognition of a “fracture” between these two groups but it then proceeds to give all of the members of this artificially contrived “group” (the perfectionistic group) the same formula for achieving reconciliation with the preferred theological perspective. This formula is based upon an analysis of the problems within Adventism that reveals no significant understanding of the distinctions between these two groups or any appropriate suggestions for reconciling them with the position which is advocated. Most of the “advice” and many of the “questions” which are addressed to the 1888 Study Committee “misses the mark” due to the fact that this group already believes the concepts presented and implements many if not all of the “suggestions”. Yet *Enduring Legacy* urges the necessity for this group to give up its theology in order to answer the questions and harmonize with his suggestions. This is a major weakness of the paper. One should never attempt to provide a prescription for treating a “problem” which has not yet been properly diagnosed.

The second glaring problem with *Enduring Legacy*, is the confusion, contradiction and lack of commitment to any position on the nature of Christ. How can one “rally the troops” to unite upon an unknown position or to an unidentified theological destination? *Enduring Legacy* attempts to do just that. Therefore, the proposal is fundamentally defective, “dead on arrival”.

The author first states a preference for the “Alternative Christology” in these words: “It is the essence of the ‘Alternative Christology’ that I find more appealing both in terms of the Biblical and Ellen White textual evidence and its theological implications” (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 6, para. 2). But a few paragraphs later the author states a preference for the QOD position. “I must confess that as I reflect further on this issue, the QOD ‘imputed’ sinful nature position is more attractive.” (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 6, para. 6). But in the very next paragraph we are told the QOD position merely highlights the need for “clarification”. “The key theological contribution of QOD was to propel Seventh-day Adventism onto a track which demanded further clarification of its Christology . . .” (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 7, para. 1).

So we must ask “Which is it Prof. Whidden”? You first suggest QOD is defective and that the “Alternative Christology” taught by LaRondelle is “more appealing”. But almost in the same breath you say QOD is “more attractive”. And finally you conclude QOD merely highlights the need for “clarification”. Before one presumes to call various groups to unite around a position one must take a position himself. He who knows not where he is going should not presume to lead.

A third problem with the *Enduring Legacy* presentation is the call to act upon the non-existent counsel to the 1888 Study Committee to “cease and desist”. In *Enduring Legacy* Prof. Woodrow Whidden urges “‘the 1888 Study Committee’ and Sequeira to follow the counsel given to them by the General Conference ADCOM appointed ‘Primacy of the Gospel

Committee’’’s [sic] final report (functioned from 1995 until 2000) that they cease and desist their fruitless agitation over this peculiar version of justification by faith’’. The problem with this “counsel” is it is very similar to President Bush’s WMD justification for the war in Iraq. The call to “cease and desist” cannot be found in the Primacy of Gospel Committee’s report.

The entire statement by the Primacy of the Gospel Committee report on this issue reads as follows:

It is confusing to state that everyone is legally saved until they have "chosen to resist the saving grace of God," and then turn around and say that one needs faith in order to have saving (rather than legal) justification. For example, 1888 *Re-examined* claims that "Christ's sacrifice is not merely provisional but effective for the whole world, so that the only reason anybody can be lost is that he has chosen to resist the saving grace of God" (p vi). Interestingly, Ellen White is quite content to say that "the *provisions* of redemption are free to all; [but] the *results* of redemption will be enjoyed by those who have complied with the conditions" (PP 208).

That is all that we find in the report regarding the Committee’s “peculiar version of justification by faith”. Evidence for the claim that the report “counsels” the “Committee” to “cease and desist. . . agitation over this peculiar version of justification by faith” is clearly lacking. (The entire text of that report is presented in Appendix A of this document.)

A forth problem with *Enduring Legacy* is the distortion of the “perfectionistic” groups position on perfection, which amounts to a caricature. On page 3 we read:

Now Andreasen was quick to claim that such a final victory would be achieved only through the grace which would be imparted from the Great Exemplar Who is ministering in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. In other words, this faithful “Remnant” would develop sinless characters that would replicate the sinlessly perfect life which Christ had wrought out in the very same fallen, sinful nature in which the final generation will have to overcome (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 3, last para.)

Neither Andreasen nor those who are named with him in the “perfectionistic” group teaches that the final generation will “replicate the sinlessly perfect life which Christ” lived. This is caricature of the “perfectionistic” position evidently crafted to facilitate a “straw man” argument. The “perfectionistic” group believes as the Bible says “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). But they also believe that at some point the victory will be complete and the final

generation will in the words of the apostle Peter “cease from sin” (1 Peter 4:1). This clear demonstration of the power of the Gospel will not “replicate” the sinless life of Christ. Nor does it, in the view of most in this group, become the basis for their acceptance with God.

Justification through faith remains their only title to heaven.

Ellen White, whose writings contain many statements of support for the victory of the final generation does not teach that they will “replicate” the sinless life of Christ. She said:

Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability. When we fall, all helpless, suffering in consequence of our realization of the sinfulness of sin; when we humble ourselves before God, afflicting our souls by true repentance and contrition; when we offer our fervent prayers to God in the name of Christ, we shall as surely be received by the Father, as we sincerely make a complete surrender of our all to God. We should realize in our inmost soul that all our efforts in and of ourselves will be utterly worthless; for it is only in the name and strength of the Conqueror that we shall be overcomers (Ellen G. White, RH 2-5-95).

Note the expression “We can never equal the pattern”. The perfect life of sinless performance from birth to death, which Christ achieved in our behalf, will never be equaled by any human being. The claim that this is what is taught by the “perfectionistic” group is a significant distortion of their true position.

Concepts With Which We Agree

We shall now review some of the points discussed in *Enduring Legacy*, which seem to have solid Bible and Spirit of Prophecy support.

First Point of Agreement

On page four, *Enduring Legacy* affirms two phases of atonement, the first at the cross and the second in the heavenly sanctuary.

The atoning work of Christ on the cross was completed in the sense that full *provision* had been made to save all. But it was not complete in the following sense: “That completed act of atonement on the cross is valueless to any soul unless, and until, it is *applied* by Christ our High Priest to, and appropriated by, the individual recipient.” (L. E. From, “The Priestly Application of the Atoning Act,” *Ministry*, February 1957, p. 10; compare QOD, pp. 349-355). Thus it is very clear that L. E. From, R. A. Anderson and

W. E. Read were not doing away with a most holy place phase of atonement. They consistently used the language of “atonement *provided*” at the cross and “atonement *applied*” in Christ’s heavenly ministry during the day of atonement antitypes in the most holy place (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 4, para. 3).

Although the concept of a two phased atonement has wide Bible and Spirit of Prophecy support, the gratification of being able to agree with *Enduring Legacy* is short lived when one realizes that this statement of faith presented in the quotation above amounts to an unfair criticism of M. L. Andreasen’s position in view of the available evidence.

Andreasen did not protest an imaginary distortion of the historic SDA position on the atonement. The distortion was real and unambiguous. For evidence of the unfairness of this criticism one need only read Andreasen’s *Letters to the Churches*. In Letter No. 2 Andreasen cites the same Ministry article cited by *Enduring Legacy*. Here is what he found:

The sacrificial act of the cross (is) a complete, perfect and final atonement for man’s sin (*Ministry*, The Priestly Application of the Atoning Act, February, 1957, p. 10, cited in *Letters to the Churches*, pg. 32).

Seventh-day Adventists have never taught that the atonement completed at the cross was a “final atonement”. This concept contradicts the two phase atonement idea which *Enduring Legacy* claims has always been affirmed. If it has always been consistently affirmed, this is strange language with which to affirm it.

We must also point out that some Seventh-day Adventists will take issue with the thought that the phase of atonement which was completed at the cross is “valueless” unless it is “applied” and “appropriated by the individual”. Life on earth would not be possible, after sin, unless the phase of atonement which was completed at the cross was in some sense effective for all mankind.

Second Point of Agreement

The second point noted in *Enduring Legacy* for which there is wide Bible and Spirit of Prophecy support is the concept of “final generation perfection”. The reference is somewhat oblique. It states:

What I am getting at with these questions is that I want to more directly address the issue of what the real final generation perfection consists of. If we can get this cleared up, then I sense that there is a good chance the “final generation” vindication thesis will take care of itself (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 6).

In this passage we get the first clue that while the author of *Enduring Legacy* does not appreciate the concepts of perfection held by those whom he refers to as “perfectionistic”, he does believe in some form of “final generation perfection”. Just what that concept of perfection is, never quite comes through clearly in the manuscript. But the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly teach “perfection” and it has been a widely held Seventh-day Adventist belief upon which we can all agree.

Third Point of Agreement

We should all agree that the standard in the judgment is perfect righteousness, which none but Christ has ever demonstrated. There must never come a point when we slip into thinking that we have somehow comprehended that type of perfection. The apostle Paul said “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

For the Pharisee, if the basket in basketball was seven feet high, they can possibly convince themselves that they are very good players. But we all know that such is not the case. The basket is still ten feet tall and that means that we are all in desperate need of sports grace to make up for the numerous “unavoidable deficiencies” of our smallness and poor shooting hands (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 12, para. 4).

This thought is also well supported by a Spirit of Prophecy quote found in one of the appendices of *Enduring Legacy*.

“None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit one wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.

“So will it be with all who behold Christ. The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin, and humbling of the heart before Him. At every advance step in our Christian experience our repentance will deepen. We shall know that our sufficiency is in Christ alone and shall make the apostle’s confession our own: ‘I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.’ ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.’ Romans 7:18; Galatians 6:14.” (Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, pg. 561)

Fourth Point of Agreement

We should be able to affirm that while there is no such thing as a “little sin”, since every sin requires the death of Christ, there *are* differing degrees of guilt. There are also differing impacts upon the person who commits the sin.

Now in some respects, this is a practical, Biblical distinction (see Hebrews 10: 26) which many Christians have used to make a helpful point—sins of willful presumption are much more deadening in their spiritual effects on the transgressor than are sins of ignorance, the actions which are unintentionally blundered into (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 13, para. 2).

The Bible clearly presents a supporting thought when Jesus said “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required;” (Luke 12:47-48).

The thought also seems to be supported by one of John’s epistles.

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death (1 John 5:16-17).

This concept also finds support in the Spirit of Prophecy.

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God (*Steps to Christ*, pg. 30).

Concepts Not Held by All

First Point of Limited Agreement

There are many concepts articulated in *Enduring Legacy*, which according to the author would have Spirit of Prophecy support with which many will disagree. One with which many will give a *qualified* approval is expressed in the following statement.

What follows is an Ellen White and Bible inspired verbal vision of what the “final generation” should look like: Humble before God due to their sinfulness, responsive to the offers of God’s mercy, showing this mercy in their own dealings with others, fully embracing the possibilities of deeply satisfying victories over known sin, never manifesting any excuse for sin, and equipped for the most enriching lives of loving service and uplift. Is there not a balanced vision in these concepts that will take us all the way to glorification? (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 14, para. 3)

This statement appears to support some concept of “victories over known sin”. Which is supported by Bible passages such as 1 John, 2:1, 1 John 3:8-10, Rev. 14:5. And Spirit of Prophecy statements like:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14. (*Great Controversy*, pg. 425)

One wrong trait of character, one sinful desire cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel.... The pains of duty and the pleasures of sin are the cords with which Satan binds men in his snares. Those who would rather die than perform a wrong act are the only ones who will be found faithful (*Maranatha*, pg. 82).

Let no one say, “I cannot overcome my defects of character;” for if this is your decision, then you cannot have eternal life. The impossibility is all in your will. If you will not, that constitutes the cannot (*Sons and Daughters of God*, pg. 115).

Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God’s commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God’s precepts (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pg. 314).

The problem that some will have with this *Enduring Legacy* statement is the qualification represented by the term “known”. Some will interpret the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to support a cleansing from “*unknown sin*” as well as “known sin”. Of course this would be through a process in which the Holy Spirit brings the unknown sins to the knowledge of the person who is experiencing the cleansing. Another reason for the qualification may be due to the fact that the cleansing of our natures does not take place on this side of eternity. But that aspect of cleansing is not regarded as essential to the process of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary.

Second Point of Limited Agreement

A second point upon which there would be some agreement is articulated in *Enduring Legacy* as follows:

It is in this pivotal chapter that Andreasen forthrightly stated that Satan was not definitively defeated at the cross. The ultimate defeat of Satan would only be finally effected through the sinlessly perfected histories of the “Last Generation” of “sealed” saints (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 3, para. 5).

I have not taken the time to read the chapter referred to in this statement. Therefore, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement made by the author of *Enduring Legacy*. However, there does seem to be some relationship between this concept and statements in the Spirit of Prophecy like:

When the law is trampled in the dust, the sacredness of the commandments of God will be vindicated by those who are loyal to Him (2MR141).

God invites all men to the fullest investigation of the claims of His law. His word is sacred and infinite. The cause of truth is to go forth as a lamp that burneth. Earnest study of the word of God will reveal the truth. Sin and wrong will not be sustained, but the law of God will be vindicated (9T64).

The judgment scene will take place in the presence of all the worlds; for in this judgment the government of God will be vindicated, and His law will stand forth as “holy, and just, and good.” (7BC986)

Each one in the day of investigative Judgment will stand in character as he really is; he will render an individual account to God. Every word uttered, every departure from integrity, every action that sullies the soul, will be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. Memory will be true and vivid in condemnation of the guilty one, who in that day is found wanting. The mind will recall all the thoughts and acts of the past; the whole

life will come in review like the scenes in a panorama. Thus every one will be condemned or acquitted out of his own mouth, and the righteousness of God will be vindicated (RH 11-04-84).

Paul seemed to express the idea that there was more to be done after the cross:

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). The atonement has been described by the servant of the Lord as “at-one-ment”. It is the process of fully reuniting God and mankind. This reunion could not take place at the cross. Something more needed to be accomplished to bring about the “at-one-ment”. Another aspect of atonement is yet to be completed. This need is highlighted by this inspired statement:

Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve (Desire of Ages, pg. 761).

Evidently the issues involved in the great controversy and the issue which must be understood before the atonement (i.e. the “at-one-ment) is complete, have not yet been understood. There must be some way in which the final generation participates in the process of atonement.

Concepts Beyond Verification

First Point Beyond Verification

One statement which appears to be beyond verification in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy is found on page 11 of *Enduring Legacy*. It reads as follows:

But does anyone here want to argue that the grace of Christ will be able to give us perfect insight into all of our motives so that we can be totally sinless in all of our actions, thoughts, and reasons for doing what we do? If you do, I would guess that you have a quite superficial view of your personal depravity and the infinite demands of Christ's just and righteous requirements (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 11, para. 7).

This statement suggests that it is impossible for the saints, even “through the grace of Christ”, to overcome sinful action completely. (I use the term “action” to refer to thoughts and motives as well).

In reaction to this statement I must say that it is philosophically impossible to prove a negative. Therefore, this statement cannot be proven. Furthermore, there are a number of statements in Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy some of which have been cited above which speak to the contrary.

Second Point Beyond Verification

But do we really want to say that we will be meritoriously saved by perfect insight into our sinful motives and perfect performance of God’s latest revelations of duty? (*Enduring Legacy*, pg. 12, para. 3).

This challenge from Prof. Whidden speaks to the fact that there are some who have been included in *Enduring Legacy’s* “perfectionistic” group, who teach that after we are converted and empowered by the Holy Spirit, our works become meritorious. This concept is rightfully challenged by *Enduring Legacy*. It is beyond verification. Both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly teach the opposite.

Conclusion

Enduring Legacy is in many respects an attempt to encourage and foster unity within the Seventh-day Adventist theological community. I appreciate that focus. All efforts toward bringing harmony and unity to the church are noble and appropriate. We should all recognize that unity is essential to the success of the churches mission.

Before Christ departed to begin His heavenly work, He prayed for our unity. The astonishing element of this prayer is the intimation of what is at stake in the issue.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be

one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:20-21).

Those are amazing words: “that the world may believe that You sent Me”. Evidently, in some sense, the validity of Christ’s testimony depends upon ours. There is a sense in which the ultimate success of His mission depends upon ours. By our united stand we give the world reason to believe what Christ said over and over again. The Father sent Him. Therefore, we should see unity as absolutely essential.

The Bible speaks of two types of unity. In Ephesians, Paul counsels the believers about “unity”.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

There should always be unity in the Spirit among believers. But the Bible also speaks of another dimension of unity.

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (Ephesians 4:11-13).

This is the second dimension of unity, “unity of the faith”. Note that Paul says we are to “keep” the “unity of the Spirit”. But we are given the “gifts” “till we all come to the unity of faith”. One dimension of unity should already exist, while we strive for the other dimension. Unity of the Spirit is essential, but it must eventually include “the unity of the faith”, a unity based in “the knowledge of the Son of God”.

The Spirit of Prophecy also speaks of unity and the essential elements of the unity that we seek. We are told that we are to unify but note the qualifications:

God is leading out a people to stand in perfect unity upon the platform of eternal truth. . .
God designs that His people should all come into the unity of the faith (4T17).

We are to unify, but not on a platform of error (15MR259).

We are to stand united, but we must recognize that an essential element of that unity is a foundation upon the “platform of eternal truth”. Therefore, it is essential that we clarify the significant theological differences among us. It is essential that we as Seventh-day Adventists begin to present before the world a united front. It is essential that we use every advantage afforded us by the gifts which Christ is showering upon His church, “till we all come into the unity of the faith”. Our commission to carrying the gospel message to “every nation, and kindred and tongue and people”, cannot be a success without both dimensions of unity. But more significantly, Christ’s mission of saving the world cannot be brought to a successful conclusion without it. He has told us that the success of His mission depends upon our unity. Heaven is waiting. It is high time for the divisions precipitated by *Questions on Doctrine*, to be healed, and for “the unity of the faith” to prevail.

APPENDIX A

Primacy of the Gospel Committee Report

Primacy of the Gospel Committee - Report

Introduction

In pursuing matters raised in a small group—which included Robert S Folkenberg and George W Reid from the General Conference and Robert J Wieland, Donald K Short, and Gerald Finneman who are leaders in the 1888 Message Study Committee—the Administrative Committee appointed a committee to consider in depth the biblical doctrine of righteousness by faith. The particular focus of the committee was to give attention to the special understanding of this doctrine that has been advanced over the past 50 years by Robert J Wieland and Donald K Short, joined now by additional persons of the 1888 Message Study Committee. Included was an effort to relate the doctrine to the events of the 1888 General Conference Session in Minneapolis and subsequent events which reflect major concerns of the 1888 Message Study Committee.

The Primacy of the Gospel Committee (ADCOM-S) was appointed on May 17, 1994. Its original members were as follows:

Calvin B Rock, Chairman; Robert L Dale, Vice-chairman; George W Reid, Secretary; Richard Davidson, Gerald Finneman, Lloyd Knecht, George R Knight, Angel M Rodriguez, Donald K Short, Peter M Van Bemmelen, Mario Veloso, Nancy J Vyhmeister, Robert J Wieland, and Kenneth H Wood.

To provide a favorable environment for understanding one another, the committee membership was composed of leaders from the 1888 Message Study Committee and from the General Conference, including theologians from two General Conference educational institutions—the Andrews University Theological Seminary and the School of Religion at Loma Linda University. Of the original members, Kenneth H Wood asked to be released and Robert L Dale retired. The following additional persons were added to strengthen the group: Ivan Blazen, Robert J Kloosterhuis, Sidney Sweet, Woodrow Whidden, and Brian Schwartz. Robert J Kloosterhuis occasionally served as chairman.

Beginning with an initial meeting on May 24, 1995, the committee met 8 times, generally for 2½ days each, for an equivalent of 15 full days. It studied prepared papers and held extended discussions on a variety of subjects identified by the 1888 Message Study Committee as important to their understanding of righteousness by faith as presented in Minneapolis.

The concluding session, held February 8, 2000, at Loma Linda University, spent the major portion of its time examining a summary report from the nearly five years of committee discussions. Although this report was reviewed by the entire committee during the final meeting and corrections were made, only the first section titled "Areas of Agreement" represents overall concurrence of the entire group. This full document should be understood as a report to the Administrative Committee by the General Conference, Andrews University, and Loma Linda University members of the committee.

Areas of Agreement

1. *Emphasis on God's Initiative in Salvation.* We agree that salvation is always at God's initiative and that the Church needs constantly to give that message to the world.
2. *Emphasis on the Saving Merits of Jesus.* We agree that God unconditionally made provision for the salvation of all.
3. *Emphasis on Faith in Accepting God's Gift of Salvation.* We agree that by faith we believe, appreciate, trust, and receive the objective truth of God's salvation. The experience of eternal life begins when individuals exercise faith in Jesus Christ.
4. *Emphasis on Salvation by Grace Through Faith Being Intimately Connected with a Transformed Life and the Keeping of all the Commandments of God.* We agree that the new birth takes place at the very moment when a person comes to Jesus and is justified by faith; and that in the new birth experience God through the Holy Spirit gives Christians a heartfelt desire to live God's will through His imparted grace.

5. *Emphasis on Agape.* We agree on the centrality of agape in the Christian's life and on its foundational role in Christian living.
6. *Emphasis on the Inability of Humans to do Right in and of Themselves.* We agree that human beings are incapable of doing right in and of themselves or of initiating their personal salvation.
7. *Emphasis on the Nearness of God to the Sinner.* We agree that the good news is that God is on the side of sinners rather than being against them and that He draws near to them in Christ Jesus.
8. *Emphasis on Bringing People to Christ.* We agree on the fundamental importance of bringing people to Christ as our response to the gospel commission.
9. *Emphasis on Repentance in the Body of Christ.* We agree that, for the sake of and in fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ, the Christian believer experiences a deep identification with the sins of others, knowing that they could be his or hers but for the grace of the Saviour. Such identification leads to calling the unrepentant to repentance and to new life in Christ. We further agree that the more pervasive this spirit of identification within the body of Christ, the more intensely will he felt and experienced the outpouring of the Spirit of God.
10. *Rejection of Universalism.* We reject universalism, defined as the belief that every person will be saved independent of personal commitment to the Lord.
11. *Emphasis on the Primacy of the Bible in the Formation of Christian Understandings.* We agree that the teachings of the Bible represent the center of any theological process.
12. *Emphasis on the "Most Precious Message" Set Forth by Jones and Waggoner.* We agree that studying the "most precious message" presented by Jones and Waggoner is important. Ellen White has provided us with a summary of the essential elements of that message in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp 91-93:

"The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.

"The uplifted Saviour is to appear in His efficacious work as the Lamb slain, sitting upon the throne, to dispense the priceless covenant blessings, the benefits He died to purchase for every soul who should believe on Him. John could not express that love in words; it was too deep, too broad; he calls upon the human family to behold it. Christ is pleading for the church in the heavenly courts above, pleading for those for whom He paid the redemption price of His own lifeblood. Centuries, ages, can never diminish the efficacy of this atoning sacrifice. The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh- day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ.

"The efficacy of the blood of Christ was to be presented to the people with freshness and power, that their faith might lay hold upon its merits. As the high priest sprinkled the warm blood upon the mercy seat, while the fragrant cloud of incense ascended before God, so while we confess our sins and plead the efficacy of Christ's atoning blood, our prayers are to ascend to heaven, fragrant with the merits of our Saviour's character. Notwithstanding our unworthiness, we are ever to bear in mind that there is One that can take away sin and save the sinner. Every sin acknowledged before God with a contrite heart, He will remove. This faith is the life of the church."

Areas With Disagreement

1. *Application of Ellen White's Remarks Related to 1888.* There is disagreement on how to understand many of Ellen White's remarks related to 1888 and how they apply to the condition of the Church today. We believe these must be read in the context of the blatant legalism held by Butler, Smith, and their colleagues in beliefs. One must be extremely cautious in applying statements that were made in one context to a later period in which some of the factors have changed. Only a fuller understanding of the public teaching of the leading brethren of the Church in the pre-1888 period will enable readers in the 21st century to understand the impact of Ellen White's commendations and condemnations related to 1888 events and personalities.

2. *Primacy of the Bible.* While we affirm the intent of the 1888 Study Committee to uplift the primacy of the Bible, it appears to us that this is not consistently applied. At times it appears that the scriptural evidence is being examined through the theological understandings of Jones and Waggoner.

3. *Ellen White's Endorsement of Jones and Waggoner.* Ellen White's repeated endorsements of Jones and Waggoner did not mean that she agreed with all their teachings. It would be helpful if the 1888 Study Committee would seriously examine the many areas in which Ellen White differs with Jones and Waggoner or is virtually silent on topics or on a theological linkage that they emphasize.

It would also be informative to enumerate and explore the ramifications of those areas in which Ellen White *explicitly* commends (rather than alludes to) specific items in the writings of Jones and Waggoner (TM 91-93 is one example of this). Such explorations might help avoid giving Jones and Waggoners' theology an across-the-board endorsement. On the other hand, it would heighten the importance of those issues she specifically commended. Jones and Waggoner need to be read as theologians who had a "most precious message" that the Church desperately needed to hear, rather than as prophets or infallible guides—even in areas related to righteousness by faith.

4. *Historical Accuracy.* At times we sense a lack of historical accuracy when claims are made about Jones and Waggoner. History must speak for itself, even if it disagrees with Jones and Waggoner's evaluation of certain details or modern interpretations of them and their teachings.

5. *Corporate Repentance.* The impression should not be given that Ellen White ever called for corporate repentance in respect to events in 1888 or 1893, or that the General Conference administration of O A Olsen took the same position in regard to Jones and Waggoner as the Butler/Smith administration. The 1888 conflict witnessed a turnover in the leadership of the Church because of problems relating to the Minneapolis meeting. The new administration gave prominence to Jones and Waggoner throughout the 1890s. After 1888 it was Smith and Butler who were on the "outs" with the General Conference administration. Ellen White continued to call individuals to repentance, but did not call the denomination to repentance.

6. *Universal Legal Justification.* It is confusing to state that everyone is legally saved until they have "chosen to resist the saving grace of God," and then turn around and say that one needs faith in order to have saving (rather than legal) justification. For example, 1888 *Re-examined* claims that "Christ's sacrifice is not merely provisional but effective for the whole world, so that the only reason anybody can be lost is that he has chosen to resist the saving grace of God" (p vi). Interestingly, Ellen White is quite content to say that "the provisions of redemption are free to all; [but] the results of redemption will be enjoyed by those who have complied with the conditions" (PP 208).

7. *The "in Christ" Motif.* We believe that the Pauline phrase "in Christ" expresses a relational rather than a legal concept. Romans 5, for example, is tied to the experience of justification by faith in the once-for-all work of Christ that is so central to the first five chapters of Romans, rather than being a legal declaration of something that happened to every person when Christ died on the cross. Such a view seems to imply that when a person is born he or she is born legally justified before God. However, the "many" who "will be made righteous" of Romans 5:19 must be understood in the context of Romans 1:16-17; 3:25-26; 4:1-5:1 and Paul's thesis that we are justified by faith rather than justified "in Christ" independent of a personal faith-commitment. It is important to see the "in Christ" and "in Adam" concepts as spiritual conditions rather than as a legal status. A merely legal interpretation of the "in Christ" motif has not led to a proper understanding of the biblical concept of corporate solidarity.

8. *Nature of Christ.* We accept the admonitions of Ellen White to "avoid every question in relation to the humanity of Christ which is liable to be misunderstood" and that "the incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery" (5BC 1129). Here every human being must tread softly. It is important to treat fairly *everything* that the Bible and Ellen White have to say on this topic, realizing that neither of those sources necessarily gives the human nature of Christ the same prominence as did the post-Minneapolis Jones and Waggoner. The interpretation that Jones and Waggoner gave to the biblical materials on the human nature of Christ is not necessarily supported by Ellen White's full understanding of Christ's human nature.

9. *Jones and Waggoner and the Reformers.* We believe that on the subject of justification by faith Jones and Waggoner should not be set against the great reformers. To do so would contradict both Waggoner and Ellen White (Waggoner, *Gospel in the Book of Galatians*, p 70; White, Ms 8a. 15, and 24, 1888). The fuller understanding needs to be framed in terms of relating righteousness by faith to the third angel's message rather than to salvation itself.

10. *The Old Covenant.* It appears that the first time that the old covenant is explicitly mentioned in the Bible it is equated with the Torah of Sinai (2 Cor 3:14-15). We believe that the Bible describes the Sinaitic Covenant as a covenant of grace which the people willingly accepted as expressing God's will for them. The misunderstanding and misuse of the covenant by the people as a means of salvation does not alter the fact that it was never God's intention to institute a covenant of works with Israel.

11. *Attitude of Criticism.* Although 1888 Study Committee members consistently and genuinely express loyalty to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the overall effect of their criticizing of the Church body and its leadership, along with their separatist activities, has probably been one of the most powerful forces in moving large numbers of Adventists into schismatic criticism and activities. The committee has organized itself legally as a separate organization; presents as crucial certain positions that differ from those held by the body of the Church, leading at times to confusion and even conflict within congregations; holds its own convocations; publishes its own materials; authorizes its own speakers; and supports activities across the world, often without approval of the acknowledged leaders of the Church in those fields.

The historical study of similar developments in the formation of new denominations (as in the Wesleyan movement between 1738 and 1800 in Britain, and between 1870 and 1900 in America) is extremely informative here. At any rate, many Seventh-day Adventist schismatics initially cut their teeth on 1888-type criticisms. Church history tells us that the first generation of many movements had no intention of forming a new religious body, but subsequent generations, having been nourished on so-called "constructive criticism," merely follow the logic to its natural conclusion.

12. *The Church and the Message of Justification by Faith.* The church in its official documents has stated clearly its understanding of salvation through faith in Jesus.

"He [Christ] suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf" (Fundamental Belief# 4).

"God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker" (Fundamental Belief #7).

"In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life" (Fundamental Belief #9).

"Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life" (Fundamental Belief #10).

"Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments" (Fundamental Belief #18).

A comparison between the understanding of the Church and that of the 1888 Study Committee reveals significant differences that have contributed to confusion and in some cases division among church members.

Beyond question, the Church is in constant need of revival and reformation. Unless the gospel of justification by faith takes control of the life of each church member, transforming the person, we will remain in

a state of lukewarmness. It is important for the Church, as it fulfills its mission, constantly to listen to the message of the True Witness (Rev 3:14-22).

Observations

The charges raised by the 1888 Study Committee against the leadership of the Church are very serious. If the Church is proclaiming a false gospel, it has no right to exist. A partial understanding of the gospel, as they claim the Church to have, is not a true understanding of the gospel. If they are the only ones who have a *clear and complete* understanding of the gospel, then everyone else is proclaiming a false gospel. They are implicitly accusing the Church, or at least the leaders of the Church, of apostasy. We have found such accusations to be groundless as evidenced in the official statements of beliefs of the Church.

Therefore, we firmly believe that the 1888 Study Committee should discontinue its claims that the true message of righteousness by faith was rejected by the leaders of the Church, that they never genuinely accepted it, and that they have intentionally kept it away from the Church and the world.

An Appeal

We do not question the sincerity of the leaders of the 1888 Study Committee, but we do question the wisdom of the current course of action. If the committee chooses to continue its work outside the organized Church, we appeal to it to adopt the pattern of what is described as a supportive ministry. Such groups seek places to work where, in harmony with and under guidance of Church leadership in that field, they carry out activities that are part of the planned program for that field. Almost always their efforts are designed to reach out to unbelievers, calling them to Christ and His righteousness, and enlisting them among His remnant people. Supportive ministries promote harmony in both doctrine and relationship with the Church. We desire this as the outcome of our prayer and study together.