

A Personal Response to
**The "Majority Report" of the Primacy of the Gospel Committee of the General
Conference (PGC), of February 8, 2000**

by Robert J. Wieland, a member of the 1888 Message Study Committee

(1888MSC) and a member of the Primacy Committee

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On May 17, 1994 the PGC was formed by action of the then president of the General Conference and by its ADCOM members (the highest administrative committee). The main purpose for forming this *ad hoc* committee was to study into the actual message which A.T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner taught during the 1888 decade (which message was then endorsed by Ellen G. White over 300 times), to determine if their message finds clear support in the Bible, and to understand what it was. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church proclaiming it clearly today? A secondary purpose later emerged—to seek for Christlike unity in understanding and proclaiming God's last-day message of justification by faith.

In view of counsels from the Bible and Ellen White's writings, these two goals are praise-worthy, for in John 17 Jesus pleads that His followers allow themselves to be "one," and in 7:24 He commands us, "Judge righteous judgment." The "Majority" members of the PGC on February 8, 2000 issued their "Report" as the result of the final meeting. Widely published on the web, it has aroused deep interest. Questions sent me and requests have led me to write this personal "Response."

The 1888 message was declared by Ellen White to be something far in advance of the "gospel" understandings of the Sunday-keeping churches. In her view, it was "the beginning" of the loud cry of Revelation 18 and of the long-awaited (and long-prayed-for!) latter rain. Thus she saw the 1888 view of justification and righteousness by faith as a unique truth parallel to and consistent with the special Adventist idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, which work began in 1844.

She recognized that no other church grasps this truth embodied in Daniel 8:14, which is the "foundation of our faith," she says. She identified the 1888 message as "the third angel's message in verity." Yet the great majority of Seventh-day Adventist Church members are uninformed of the actual content of the 1888 message, and are perplexed about confusing views of its history.

The six 1888MSC representatives rejoiced when the General Conference leadership appointed them to be voting members of the PGC, for it seemed that at last these serious issues were to be studied fairly and thoroughly, with the Bible as the ultimate source of authority.

The PGC was composed of 17 individuals, eleven from the General Conference and six from the 1888MSC. It met about twice a year for a total of 15 full days. Frequently the six from the 1888MSC were alternately disappointed by what seemed an

unwillingness to receive the Good News understandings taught by those whom Ellen White described as "the Lord's special messengers," and on the other hand they were encouraged by what seemed evidence that some in the General Conference were beginning to perceive that message more positively. In general, the spirit that pervaded the sessions was one of cordial Christian fellowship and mutual respect.

The prevailing attitude was thus the most open, friendly, and reasonable of any of the previous committees for 50 years. We appreciated what seemed to be sincere efforts to reach consensus. Several of the General Conference members at times expressed sincere appreciation for key 1888 concepts that had previously been misunderstood. The six members from the 1888MSC cherished hopes that the PGC would result in a fulfillment of Jesus' John 17 prayer that His followers become "one."

At the final brief meeting on February 8, 2000, the spirit abruptly reversed. It was apparent that an animus had developed, something mysterious. The hoped-for unity of spirit had vanished, as is clearly evident in the "Majority Report" published by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

The General Conference members of the PGC maintained that they are "the brethren of experience" to whom Ellen White said all theological questions should be submitted and whose judgment thereof should be considered final. But we are perplexed because other "brethren" of very extended "experience" fully support positions of the 1888MSC. In fact, at least one General Conference member of the PGC supports our basic gospel understandings and rejoices for the existence of the 1888MSC.

The "Majority Report" was prepared by the General Conference personnel of the PGC in advance of that brief final meeting. It was not brought to the committee as a whole for a vote. However, the apparent minority were assured that if they disagreed with the majority findings, they were at liberty to prepare a "Minority Report" which would be submitted to the General Conference leaders, and we understood, would be published alongside the Majority one. This is the normal procedure with responsible investigating committees (indeed, dissenting justices on the U. S. Supreme Court regularly publish their views). World-wide interest in the realities of the 1888 message in the Seventh-day Adventist church suggests that confidence in church leadership would require that the minority members of the PGC be heard. The issues discussed are important. History is being made.

A point-by-point analysis of the "Disagreement" items of the Majority Report.

(The introductory 12 "Areas of Agreement" are largely platitudinous and could have been agreed on just as well on the first day of the sessions in 1994. All but the last one would be endorsed by any orthodox Christian church. But that last one appears to cancel the later negative ones, for it says, "We agree that studying the 'most precious message' presented by Jones and Waggoner is important." That is what the 1888MSC pleads for — study! Our very name has "*study*" built in. We would want to insert the word "very" important, because if Ellen White was right to say that the 1888 message was the "beginning" of the "light" of Revelation 18 and of the latter rain, it would follow logically

that nothing could be more important to the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and to the world—than for us together to recover that message, be united in understanding it, and in proclaiming it to the world).

"Areas With Disagreement"

1. *The use or misuse of Ellen White's statements about the 1888 message and its history.*
The 1888MSC have asked only that a fair anthology of her actual *bona fide* comments regarding the message and its history be made available to the church at large. Her testimony is clear if readers can see it in context. The 1821-page photocopy collection (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*) published by the Ellen G. White Estate is valuable for special scholars, but is difficult to read and expensive for the average church member to buy. A more concise collection of her endorsements of the 1888 message is needed. We all agree that the spiritual condition of the church as a whole is as "lukewarm" now as it was in the 1888 era. What she said then regarding the value of the message of Jones and Waggoner is therefore applicable today.
2. *Applying the primacy of the Bible.*
We are faulted for reading the Bible through the eyes of Jones and Waggoner. To this we reply: Yes, we want to read the Bible — just as it is, the naked text of Scripture; and present that Bible evidence so all can read and judge for themselves. Indeed, there are truths in the Bible to which Jones and Waggoner called our attention, which otherwise we would not have seen. (They called some things to Ellen White's attention, too). But what else should Jones and Waggoner do for us whom "the Lord in His great mercy sent"? If *anybody* calls our attention to *any* Bible truth, we must be grateful and receive it.
3. *How much did Ellen White endorse the message of Jones and Waggoner?*
We want to be in warm heart-felt unity with our General Conference and Seminary brethren and sisters. But we must recognize that no evidence exists that says there are "*many* areas in which Ellen White differs with Jones and Waggoner." While the two were fallible mortals as are we all (Ellen White said *she* also was not infallible!), she would be guilty of gross ineptitude to write over 350 expressions of endorsement if she disagreed with them in "*many* areas"! Where, in a very few instances during the years of her endorsements, she cautioned or corrected them, they accepted her corrections humbly and wholeheartedly. Even if the Majority members were to reconsider and withdraw their word "many" and substitute "some," still no scholar has to date been able to document *even one area* of their mature message about righteousness by faith that she rejected. If her remarks are read in context, the picture of wholehearted support emerges clear and bright.

4. *Historical accuracy.*

The history is there for all to read for themselves. Ellen White's judgment as an agent of the gift of prophecy renders her appraisal as more accurate than any non-inspired contemporaries. We rest our case with the simple historical evidence that any reader can observe for himself. Time can never efface that history or change it. Our denominational post-1888 history is an exposition of Christ's message to "the angel of the church of the Laodiceans" (Rev. 3:14-21).

5. *Corporate repentance.*

This indeed is the point of greatest objection, and probably the focal point of the animus directed against this author on February 8, 2000, who wrote the book, *Corporate Repentance—Plea of the True Witness*. The Majority Report says that "the impression should not be given that Ellen White called for corporate repentance" (in other words, it's a wrong idea). But the issue is not did Ellen White "call for corporate repentance," but does the Lord Jesus *Himself* call for it? The Majority Report implies that O A Olsen's leadership did not "take the same position in regard to Jones and Waggoner as the Butler/Smith administration," so that leadership after 1888 led the church in appropriate repentance—which therefore is unnecessary today.

But Ellen White says the new president elected in 1888 supported the men who *opposed* the 1888 message. He "acted as did Aaron in regard to these men who have been opposed to the work of God ever since the Minneapolis meeting." He could talk well, but his deeds did not support his words: "I feel very sorry for Brother Olsen. . . . He has not acted upon the light given. The case is a mysterious one. . . . He has ventured on, directly contrary to the light which the Lord has been giving him. All this confuses his spiritual discernment, and places him in a relation to the general interest, and wholesome, healthy advancement of the work, as an unfaithful watchman. . . . He has given unmistakable evidence that he does not regard the testimonies which the Lord has seen fit to give His people as worthy of respect, or as of sufficient weight to influence his course of action."

When she was "exiled" to Australia with his approval she left manuscripts with him for our leaders in America, rebuking them for opposition to this "most precious message." To illustrate the "Aaron" comparison, she had to say, "The President of the General Conference . . . went directly contrary to the cautions and warnings given him." Regarding her "exile," she says "you were willing to have the strong experience and knowledge that comes from no human source removed from you." She wrote to I. H. Evans that the new president had "rejected" the trust placed with him in regard to the 1888 message.

If the rejection of corporate and denominational repentance is based on leadership repentance in the administration of O A Olsen, thoughtful people will understand

that the call of the Lord Jesus Christ for such denominational repentance is valid today. This is the underlying issue.

6. *Universal Legal Justification.*

During the PGC's sessions, serious attention was given to what the Son of God accomplished by His sacrifice. We know that not all on the "majority" side agree with this apparent disregard of what Paul teaches in Romans 3-6. Again, our focal point of study was expressly said to be *the Bible*. To cite Ellen White as in *apparent* conflict is impossible. According to Scripture teaching, there are two consequences of Christ's sacrifice: as "the Saviour of all men" and as "the Saviour of the world," He gives *a gift* to "all men . . . justification of life," this present life being for "all men" the gift of His grace. And to those who "believe" He also gives something extra — eternal life. The quotation from Ellen White says the same, as do all her writings.

7. *The "in Christ" Motif.*

There is a vital evangelistic truth articulated in this aspect of the 1888 message as proclaimed by Jones and Waggoner. The sinner must know how God has totally taken the initiative in his salvation. When the Father put His arms around Christ at His baptism in Jordan, He also embraced the human race, adopted them "*in Him*," made "all men" "accepted *in the Beloved*," unworthy as we are. *In this sense*, the entire human race is "adopted" "*in Him*." Christ by His sacrifice has died the second death of "all men" and so redeemed them.

The world needs to know it! The truth of the third angel's Good News is not to arouse an egocentric-motivated, fear-response, but one of gratitude for what Christ has *already* accomplished and already given as a gift as surely as Esau was given his birthright. It is unfair to attribute to the "in Christ" idea the charge of antinomianism. The sinner's "acceptance" is not what initiates the process of salvation; it was *already* accomplished by Christ's sacrifice. Contrary to the misreading of Romans 5 in the "Adventist Bible" (*The Clear Word*), what Christ accomplished on the cross is not a mere "offer," but in the actual words of Paul repeated *five* times, it is a *gift given* to "all men" (vss. 15-18).

The "in Christ" truth is consequent on understanding the work of Christ in the Most Holy Apartment. We see this truth as the essence of the "most precious message" the Lord sent to us. This is not an invention of the 1888MSC—it is the message itself in the original sources, and documented in the 1888MSC publications. Earnestly, we plead with the General Conference—we do not seek to be contentious; we want Christ's harmony and unity. We seek only to defend a glorious Scriptural truth. In its dense darkness the world is hungering to know it clearly. The Sunday-keeping churches are *not* proclaiming it. Surely the General Conference cannot oppose light which "the Lord in His great mercy sent" us.

Surely they should let the people see that light *as He sent it*.

8. *The Nature of Christ.*

All that can be said in response is that we *must* indeed be "careful, *exceedingly* careful as to how [we] dwell upon the human nature of Christ." Careful attention to our published writings on the subject demonstrates this "exceeding carefulness," more so than some of the published writings of our brethren on the PGC. For example, we never say carelessly that Christ "had" a sinful nature; we insist on the exact inspired language, "He *took* on His sinless nature *our* sinful nature." Again, since the PGC was enjoined to study *the Bible*, we submit that Jones' and Waggoner's writings on the nature of Christ are clearly supported by Scripture. In fact, certain individual, thoughtful non-Adventist writers and theologians in recent times are forging ahead of the General Conference in coming to embrace this Bible truth as Jones and Waggoner understood it.

9. *Jones and Waggoner and the Reformers.*

We have re-read this comment and find it perplexing. We see salvation *in* the third angel's message. The idea that Jones and Waggoner saw no truth on justification by faith beyond what Luther and Calvin saw is difficult to substantiate. We earnestly prayed that the Lord might help us demonstrate to the General Conference that the righteousness by faith in "the [1888] third angel's message in verity" is truth beyond what Luther, Calvin, and the Reformers taught, and greatly beyond what the contemporary Sunday-keeping churches teach today. But this Majority Report would seem to indicate that we did not succeed.

10. *The Old Covenant.*

We are asked to believe "that the old covenant . . . is equated with the Torah [Ten Commandments] of Sinai." Is this not the position taken by former Adventist minister Dale Ratzlaff and other contemporary anti-Adventist writers? Ratzlaff is Adventism's new "Canright," the most assiduous opponent of our denomination. The issue of the two covenants was one of the most hotly contested truths of the 1888 message; must it remain so today? Despite Ellen White's unequivocal endorsement (by vision) of the truth of Waggoner's position, it is here again classified as an area of General Conference "*disagreement*," just as it was a century ago.

11. *Attitude of criticism.*

Is there need for extended comment? Ever since the Holy Spirit has been working in our sinful world, the possibility has existed of "loyal criticism." Our record demonstrates more than half a century of unequivocal loyalty to the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church and to its doctrines.

- We have never held a camp meeting anywhere in the world.

- We have never held a "conference" in a non-Adventist venue.
- We have spoken in hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist churches in many lands, but never without an official invitation.
- We teach and practice loyal tithe-paying to the organized church.
- We teach the support of the organized church with offerings.
- For years we have requested the General Conference to appoint someone to be a member of our board of directors.
- We welcome General Conference counsel.
- The fact that we have a legal organization is what other loyal para-church ministries have within the denomination.
- We have always invited General Conference criticism or refutation of anything we have ever published, and seek to dialogue.
- In no way are we in competition with the organized church. "Conflict within congregations" occurs when pastors or individuals are influenced by the General Conference to create contentious opposition to the essential Good News elements obvious in the 1888 message itself.
- We "support no activity across the world" that is in the least detrimental to the objectives of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church.

What then is our fault for which we are thus denigrated in this Report?

We appeal to leaders and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to study a message which Ellen White declared to be "most precious," the "beginning" of the Revelation 18 loud cry proclamation and initial "showers from heaven of the latter rain"— which message is fully supported in Scripture.

The Majority Report likens us to John Wesley. His history is said to be "extremely informative here" with respect to the 1888MSC. Anyone who has read history knows that the reason why John Wesley preached in the streets and in the open fields is because the Anglican hierarchy closed the doors of their churches against him. He saved England from the horrors of the French Revolution, in spite of his church leadership's opposition to him. He died a clergyman loyal to the Church of England. We pray that the Lord may give us grace to emulate his loyal ministry.

12. *The church and justification by faith.*

We would ask with deep respect, in what way can it be truthfully said that we "differ" with the official statements cited? It would seem reasonable that the General Conference should wish us well for emphasizing in an effective heart-warming way what those statements say.

Regarding the "Observations."

Never have we said that the Church is "proclaiming a false gospel." What we have said is quite different. There are elements of the gospel that the Lord "sent" to us in 1888 that have been "kept away" from our people and from the world; what was rejected by leadership and "kept away" from the church and the world was the message God intended would prepare *that generation* to meet the final issues and to be ready for the coming of Christ. *The church is not preaching a false gospel*; it desperately needs the enrichment that "the Lord sent" in the 1888 truths. Time has continued longer than was then expected in order to give us opportunity to repent and to recover what has been "kept away" from the world, and now to give it to the world.

And in reality, *who* has called for repentance? Not we, but "the True Witness" to the "angel of the church of the Laodiceans." What we say or think is of no moment. It is He who says that "angel" of the church feels "rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing," to whom He says (not we!), "Be zealous, therefore, and repent."

Re the "Appeal."

Evidence is clear that we are not in any way working "outside the organized Church." We are very much (thank God!) a part of the Church. Like John Wesley, we choose to minister within the organization; it is others who try to force us "outside" by publishing misleading judgments about us. But we remain loyal, trusting in God.

We appeal to the General Conference: please take the initiative to "promote harmony in both doctrine and relationships" with those in the church who sense a hunger and thirst for a clearer understanding of righteousness by faith in "the third angel's message in verity." The Holy Spirit will never cease to plead with the General Conference and with ourselves to come into genuine heart-unity and to "be of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). Such unity is not only possible (contrary to some pessimistic opinions), but it will be certain in the providence of God. May it be soon!