Affirming the Unique Contribution of Ellen G. White Writings to the Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Under the theme “The Adventist Theologian and the Nature, Mission and Unity of the Church,” Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars and theologians met in Turkey on July 7-17, 2006, for the Second International Bible Conference. These meetings organized by the Biblical Research Institute, aim to engage in dialogue with Adventist theologians, in order to explore the biblical doctrine of the church.

About twenty-five seminars and ten plenary sessions were presented. Each session challenged the audience to an undivided commitment to Jesus, His remnant people and the mission of the church. One of the topics discussed was “The role of Ellen G. White and Bible prophecy in the development of the church.” Scholars and biblical theologians agreed upon the unique contribution of the writings of Ellen G. White to the study of the nature and mission of the church.

According to Dr. Ekkerhardt Muller, Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute, “The Second International Bible Conference was not only an opportunity to exchange ideas and share biblical and theological insights, but it was also intended to contribute to the theological unity among Adventist theologians and scholars. Therefore, toward the end of the meeting a statement was drafted which was discussed in three committees before it was brought to the floor, where it was again discussed for about two hours. Finally, a vote showed that this statement [printed on the next page], was almost unanimously accepted by the participants of this conference” (Reflections, October 2006: 2).

Among those who attended this conference were Jan Paulsen, President of the General Conference (GC); the majority of the GC vice presidents, the GC undersecretary, GC departmental staff, the Geoscience Research Institute staff, division presidents and secretaries, as well as other leaders of the church.

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Consensus Statement
II International Bible Conference
Turkey, July 7-17, 2006.

Preamble
The Second International Bible Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Theologians brought together Bible scholars and administrators from around the world to Izmir, Turkey. The purpose of this gathering was to explore the biblical doctrine of the church, to inspire commitment to its mission and unity, and to foster fellowship. The program included visits to archaeological sites related to the seven churches of the book of Revelation. Theologians and administrators prayed and studied together, seeking a deeper understanding about the truth that we hold dear.

Affirmations
At the conclusion of the Conference, the attendees took the following affirmations:

1. We affirm, first and foremost, our commitment to Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, to the final authority of God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

2. We affirm the unique contribution of the writings of Ellen G. White to the study of the nature and mission of the church.

3. We affirm our commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God’s end-time people recognizing that it is the responsibility of the world church to establish biblically based doctrines and standards.

4. We affirm, in continuity with our understanding of Bible prophecy and our theological heritage, the unique identity and role of our church as God’s end-time remnant, entrusted by Him with the message that prepares the world for the soon return of our Lord.

5. We affirm that the fulfillment of our mission as a church depends on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To a large extent it also depends on a clear understanding of the nature and function of the remnant church and the degree of theological unity in the church.

6. We affirm the vital role of theologians in the fulfillment of the mission of the church—a task to which all theological activity should aim, and without which our endeavours are incomplete.

A Call
In view of the above affirmations we extend:

1. A Call to all theologians, teachers, pastors, administrators, and local elders around the world to join us in our commitment to take positive steps that will bring these affirmations to fruition.

2. A call to all institutions and organizations worldwide to support and promote the affirmations set forth in this document.

3. A call to all local churches and church members to study the Scriptures and, together with us, affirm the unique role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God’s end-time remnant.

Thanksgiving
“We praise God, for in His abundant grace He has called us to the pastoral, teaching, and administrative ministry of His church. In a response of love and gratitude for His goodness we re-consecrate ourselves to that divine call and ask God to grant us wisdom and power to effectively continue to serve Him and His church.”
How did the Spirit of Prophecy lead to thorough organization in our early history?

In the years just previous to the year 1844, there was a growing feeling among the advent believers that all church organization was Babylon. Many had withdrawn their names from the churches and many others had been cast out because they believed in the soon coming of Christ in 1844. It was, therefore, natural that after the October disappointment of 1844, that it would take some time for the new Sabbath keepers to rid themselves of the feeling that any human organization was against the counsel of God. As early as 1854 messages regarding organization had come through Mrs. White. She wrote: “The church must flee to God’s word, and become established upon gospel order which has been overlooked and neglected. This is indispensably necessary to bring the church into the unity of the faith” (Early Writings, 100).

In those early days of the beginning of our work, how was gospel order studied and brought to light?

“We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again. But we knew that the Lord God of Israel was leading us, and guiding by His providence. We engage in the work of organization, and marked prosperity attended this advance movement” (Testimonies to Ministers, 26, 27).

How did the Lord direct in choosing the name for this movement?

In 1863 a committee of three was appointed to frame a definite plan of organization and to select a name for the church: J. N. Andrews, Waggoner, and G. I. Butler. They “desired a distinctive name which would express their principal beliefs, and they proposed the name Seventh-day Adventist, which indeed had already been applied to them as much as any other. This name Mrs. White supported, saying, 'The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind. Like an arrow from the Lord’s quiver, it will wound the transgressors of God’s law, and will lead to repentance toward Go and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.’” (Captains of the Host, 275, 276).
John Byington was a Methodist preacher before he became a Seventh-day Adventist preacher. He was also a vigorous opponent of slavery and his home was said to have been a station on the old underground railroad that offered shelter for slaves who escaped from the South and sought their freedom. He did not accept the Seventh-day Adventist message until he was past fifty. Then he became a vigorous preacher of the truth. He helped to organize one of the first Seventh-day Adventist Churches, in Buck’s Bridge, New York. He was a practical man and helped to build several early Seventh-day Adventist churches.

In May, 1863, representatives of the Sabbath-keeping Adventists were sent to Battle Creek for the first General Conference Session. Twenty delegates came, representing six conferences. Elder Byington, on May 21, was chosen the first president of the General Conference.

The Buck’s bridge church school started around 1854. This church school was founded two years before the first elementary church school in Battle Creek. Byington’s daughter, Martha, taught this school. His son, John F. Byington, taught church school in Battle Creek in 1860 and became a physician.

Elder Byington was a courageous man. He lived to see the church he helped to establish become a missionary church with a work begun on several continents. He died in 1887, at 88 years of age.

Great truths were revealed to the pioneers of the church through diligent study of the Bible. Such men as Joseph Bates, Hiram Edson, James White, and others—about fifty in number—came together in a series of Bible conferences in 1848. During this year pioneers met in Rocky Hill, Connecticut (April 20-24) in Albert Belden’s House; in Volney, New York, in Brother Arnold’s Barn; in Port Gibson, New York (August 27, 28) in Hiram Edson’s barn; again in Rocky Hill (September 8, 9) and in Topsham, Maine (October 20-22) in Brother Howland’s house. Concerning these meetings Ellen G. White wrote:

“I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. We often remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, 'We can do nothing more,' the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively” (Selected Messages, 1:206-207).

In 1854, she described that experience in these words: “We had to search and wait the opening of truth, receiving a ray of light here and a ray there, laboring and pleading for God to reveal truth to us. But now the truth is plain; its rays are brought together.” (Manuscript Releases, 1:34) “We have the truth, we know it” (Manuscript Releases, 5:91).
**THE HEALTH CORNER**

The Blessing of Physical Activity

Dr. Yasmin Williams, a family doctor and public health specialist, reminds us of the importance of physical activity in order to keep away chronic non-communicable diseases like heart attack, stroke and some cancers, such as colon cancer. “It can decrease and prevent obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes and can increase HDL, the ‘good’ cholesterol. Additionally, psychical activity can strengthen the bones to prevent osteoporosis and improve muscle strength, flexibility and joint function” (Williams, “Change your Lifestyle,” in the Gleaner, March 2, 2005: C4).

Physical activity is also important for the maintenance of mental and emotional well being. “J. Michael McGinnis, MD, senior vice-president an director of the Health Group, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/USA is reported as saying, ‘It is exciting and empowering to know that something as basic, and as regular moderate physical activity can produce such fundamental health benefits for all people, but especially for individuals who are age 50 and older’” (Ibid).

Ellen G. White also wrote about the benefits of regular physical activity. She wrote, “Each organ and muscle has its work to do in the living organism. Every wheel in the machinery must be a living, active, working wheel. Nature’s fine and wonderful works need to be kept in active motion in order to accomplish the object for which they were designed” (My Life Today, 130). “Without physical exercise, no one can have a sound constitution and vigorous health; and the discipline of well-regulated labor is no less essential to the securing of a strong active mind and a noble character” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 601).

Let us embrace an active lifestyle today. “Action gives power” (My Life Today, 130).

**CHRISTIAN LEADERS**

Counsels from the pen of Ellen G. White

“Solemn are the responsibilities resting upon those who are called to act as leaders in the church of God today” (Acts of the Apostles, 92).

Leadership “requires the closest attention, care and mental labor. It requires the exercise of sound judgment and wisdom. It requires self denial, a whole heart, and a firm will to push matters through” (Testimonies to the Church, 1:320).

“The path of men who are placed as leaders is not an easy one. But they are to see in every difficulty a call to prayer. Never are they to fail of consulting the great Source of all wisdom. Strengthened and enlightened by the Master Worker, they will be enabled to stand if firm against unholy influences and to discern right from wrong, good from evil. They will approve that which God approves, and will strive earnestly against the introduction of wrong principles into His cause” (Prophets and Kings, 30, 31).

“Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance. At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were ‘established in the faith,’ and increased in number daily” Acts 16:5....He...found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before he Jewish elders “ (Acts of the Apostles, 402).
“Dear Editor…”

“A century ago the columns of our church paper, The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, not only included articles on theological or other topics being discussed by church members, but also answered questions sent in by subscribers. The responses often contained touches of humour that reveal the warmth and wit of long-time editor, Elder Uriah Smith (1832-1903). A man who was obviously concerned when he wrote out his question to send to the Review asked, ‘Will we know each other in heaven?’ He added the comment after his signature, ‘per order of wife.’ Editor Smith responded, ‘We are little at a loss to understand just what condition of things this indicates. If these parties want to know each other in heaven, and both get there, we apprehend there will be no difficulty whatsoever. But if they do not want to know each other there, it is very clear they will never both get there, and hence there will be no danger.”

(Eugene Durant, Review and Herald, May 20, 1982: 4, 5)

Comments from Our Visitors

“Thank you for this wonderful experience. We are going to make use of it, and we are sure that the Lord is going to bless this part of the world,” Pastor Jules K K Lumbu, Spirit of Prophecy Coordinator, East-Central Africa Division.

“Thanks for another interesting newsletter!” Dr. Martin Hanna, Andrews Theological Seminary, Michigan, United States.

“Thank you so much for this interesting and informative news letter. I am learning so much!” Dr. Gloria Gregory, Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville, Jamaica.

“Your articles are excellent,” Terry Weeden, online visitor.

“I admire [the way] in which your university is carrying out [its performance]. The articles are excellent,” Colline Brown, online visitor.

“Your articles are very good,” James Dalo, online visitor.

The Ellen G. White-SDA Research Centre
Northern Caribbean University

Invites you to our

II SPIRIT OF PROPHECY CONVENTION

OCTOBER 20, 2007

At the NCU Gymnatorium
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Come and enjoy workshops, exhibitions, wonderful singing and much more.

Guest speaker: Dr. Donald King, President, Atlantic Union Conference.

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