

The Nature of Anti-creedalism and its Seventh-day Adventist Expression

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Any attempt to ensure compliance through coercion will not work. It doesn't work in a marriage. It doesn't work with children. It doesn't work in religion. Whenever coercion is used to ensure compliance, love and unity and the first casualties. And it is the one seeking compliance that is responsible for their demise.

Creeds are often the tool used in the religious sphere to bring about compliance. At the outset of a discussion of anti-creedalism, we need to be clear about our use of terms. The word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credo* which simply means, “I believe.” Any statement of beliefs is a creed. However, creedalism is the belief that unity is ensured by using an authoritative creed to ensure compliance. Creeds as descriptions of belief are valuable. However, creeds as prescriptions for belief are dangerous.

Though Seventh-day Adventists have not used the word “creed” to describe their statements of belief, they have never hesitated to describe and promote their beliefs. The opposition of early Adventists to creedalism was to **using** any statement of beliefs as a test of a person’s fitness for fellowship or ministry. Thus, it was not the formulation of a list of doctrines that Adventists opposed when they opposed creeds, it was the use of that list to determine or enforce compliance.

When the 27 Fundamental Beliefs were proposed at the 1980 General Conference session, the concern about their creedal nature was addressed with a preamble:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

If the word creed used in the first sentence means a statement of beliefs it is ridiculous.

How can the Bible with its 783,137 words function as a statement of beliefs? But if the word creed here means an authoritative standard by which orthodoxy is judged, it makes perfect sense.

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only authoritative standard by which orthodoxy is judged. At the same time, Seventh-day Adventists hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. They have a creed. They have crafted a list of doctrines.

However, this statement of fundamental beliefs is not to be used in a creedal way as the authoritative standard by which orthodoxy is judged. That place belongs only to the Bible.

As it reads, the preamble is inadequate to protect the statement from being used as a means of ensuring compliance. It needs to be revised to reflect the history of the proper use of statements of belief and their misuse to enforce compliance. This paper will describe that history and conclude with a suggestion of how a revised Adventist statement of Fundamental Beliefs can prevent its misuse.

At its beginning, the Sabbathkeeping Adventist's creed was simply the phrase "keeping the commandments of God the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). James White was able to state his opposition to creeds in the same sentence that included a creedal statement. Speaking of Sabbathkeeping Adventists he wrote, "This peculiar people will stand forth free from the

confusion of creeds; free from the traditions and commandments of men—keeping the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”¹

According to Peter Lillback, the formation and use of creeds often goes through certain stages. Originally creeds are formed for confessional, apologetic, fraternal or pedagogic purposes. They then move toward ensuring uniformity, defining orthodoxy and heterodoxy, qualifying candidates for the clergy, and defining beliefs. Finally they become polemical, restrictive, and coercive.² This pattern is evident in the early church as well as in the Adventist Church.

CREEDS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The first creeds were formulated in the second century of the Christian era by those who wanted to distinguish themselves from others who they considered to be heretics. Creeds were used by “orthodox” Christians to define those whose beliefs did not agree with their own. Once the fact of disagreement was established, the importance of the creed became evident. It could be used to exclude those who were considered deceptive and dangerous. Thus, even for the very earliest creeds the way the creed was used was every bit as important as the content that the creed defined.

The early church responded to the challenge of Gnostic ideas in three ways. First, they established the canon by determining the texts that were authoritative. This excluded many Gnostic documents. Then, they formulated creeds and administered them to baptismal candidates

¹ James White, “Gospel Order,” *Review and Herald*, IV, 22 (December 6, 1853), 173.

² Peter A. Lillback, “Confessional Subscription Among the Sixteenth Century Reformers,” in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, David W. Hall, ed., (Lanham, MD. ,University Press of America: 1995), 58-9.

in order to exclude Gnostics from their membership. Finally, the church developed the concept of apostolic succession in order to disprove the Gnostic claim that Jesus had passed on secret knowledge to the apostles.³ In their context each of these responses was reasonable. Yet there were inherent dangers in the latter two responses. Becoming a Christian could easily become nothing more than two simple things: assent to a creed and submission to the successors of the apostles.

After dealing with the Gnostic challenge, the church was forced to define the relationship of the Son to the Father. However, the way in which the church met that challenge brought even greater division within the church.

In the midst of the Arian controversy, the Roman Emperor Constantine called Christian bishops to Nicea urging them to agree on the question of the deity of Christ. The bishops formulated a creed that has come to define Christian orthodoxy.

Constantine had apparently decided to align himself with Christianity by the time of the Council of Nicea. However, his coins still depicted the sun god and he was not baptized for another fourteen years. The idea of adopting a formula that was to be accepted across the Christian church did not come from the bishops themselves but from this still semi-pagan Roman emperor. In this, Constantine was simply following what a Roman ruler was expected to do. Unity was important to the Roman Empire and the Empire sought to enforce compliance through force of arms. Since Rome had failed to secure unity on the basis of pagan ideas through its persecution of the Church, Constantine sought to create that same unity based on Christian ideas.

³ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Rev. and updated [ed.], 2nd ed (New York: Harper One, 2010), 75-81.

Once the bishops agreed on a statement about the deity of Christ, Constantine believed he could enforce compliance to that statement and unity would result. However, that is exactly what did *not* happen.

Constantine let it be known before the final adoption of the Nicene Creed that all who dissented from it would be exiled. Thus, many who sympathized with Arian ideas came to assent to the Creed even though it really did not express their personal beliefs. For example, it is said that Eusebius of Nicomedia and ten other bishops subscribed to the Nicene creed “with hand only, not heart.”⁴ Nonetheless, there were two bishops, out of the roughly 300 attendees, who were willing to dissent from its final decree. They were immediately excommunicated and exiled to Illyria.

Within months of the Nicene decree Eusebius of Nicomedia was out of favor with the emperor for his continued support of Arian ideas. He was sent into exile and only returned three years later because of his close connections with the court. Eventually his support for Arian ideas spread throughout the court. He persuaded the emperor that Arius’ ideas were compatible with the Nicene Creed. He baptized Constantine prior to his death, and was the major influence over his sons, the Arian emperors Constantine II and Valens. His machinations elevated numerous Arian bishops to the episcopacy creating continued conflict with Nicene bishops. Thus, instead of solving the controversy, the definition of Nicea created an unresolved and long-lasting conflict. Ultimately, Nicene ideas did come to dominate the Christian Church, but only after the Constantinian dynasty ended with the appointment of Theodosius as emperor in 379.

A similar story of theological dissension, Council, and controversy could be told about the Christological discussions surrounding the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The discussion

⁴ *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia*, 10.5. See http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/rufinus_he.html.

concerned the relationship of the human and divine in Jesus. The contention prior to the Council was even sharper than that of Nicea and the ensuing controversy split the church into fragments. Some taught that Jesus had only one nature, a divine one. Others taught that Jesus not only had two natures but he contained both a human and divine person where both persons were separate and able to act on their own. There were also controversies over whether Jesus had both a human and divine source of energy and whether He had both a human and divine will. The creed formulated at Chalcedon stated that Jesus had both human and divine natures but was only one person. However, the controversies continued and each controversy sparked an attempt to create a formula that would accurately define the issue. Subsequent to each new formula there were attempts to impose that solution on the church. The result was even more division. To this day the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Nestorian church in other areas of the Middle East are separated from Catholic and Orthodox churches on the basis of their differing beliefs about Jesus' nature, person, energy, and/or will. The adoption and enforcement of a formula did not bring compliance.

DEALING WITH HERESY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The pattern where dissension was met with a Council followed by further conflict suggests that an alternate way of dealing with theological issues might have been more successful. Instead of adopting the Roman practice of reaching consensus and then enforcing conformity, the church could have affirmed its unity and excluded those who sought to impose their aberrant ideas on the whole church. The New Testament church spent little time seeking to define contentious issues in abstract and rational terms. Instead, when confronted with controversy, Paul dealt with theological ideas and then encouraged personal confrontation and

exclusion for those who were divisive. Correct teaching was important, but it was primarily a person's attitude that determined whether they were in fellowship with the church or not.

For example, Paul urged Titus to avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels over the law (Titus 3:9). If a heretic, ('a□□□□□□□□'), insisted on engaging in these kinds of activities Paul counseled Titus to admonish them once or twice, and then have nothing to do with them (Titus 3:10). Paul does not encourage the formulation of a creed that could be used to condemn and exclude. It is not a person's ideas that cause him to be excluded. Rather, the basis of exclusion was the factious person's tactics in seeking to impose his or her ideas on the whole church.

CREEDS AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION

In contrast to this biblical approach, the Roman idea of enforced conformity became the norm in the Christian Church. Even the Reformation did not change this general pattern. Protestants adopted numerous creeds based on each of their contexts. The Lutherans submitted a Confession to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in 1530 consisting of 28 articles. Calvin and Farel submitted a Confession of Faith to the city of Geneva in 1536.⁵ The Church of England adopted Thirty-nine Articles in 1563 and enshrined them in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The Presbyterians created the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1646. Because each of these creeds expressed Protestantism differently, the resulting variety of beliefs expressed in the creeds proved to be a barrier to Protestant unity. Each creed seemed to embody the identity of those who adhered to it and the adherents seemed ready to defend their creed against all comers. The moments of compromise and agreement were few and far between.

⁵ See <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/gnvconf.htm>. Accessed on 7-25-2013.

The churches of the Reformation used their creeds for two basic purposes. One of the initial impulses toward formulating creeds was for the education of the laity. Since membership in the dominant churches was through infant baptism, the creeds were used by the clergy to teach Protestant Christianity to the church members both young and old. The second use for the Protestant creeds was to ensure unity among the clergy. Ministers were required to subscribe to the creed as a way of demonstrating their conformity to the doctrines of the church.

An example of this second use of creeds occurred in England in 1583 under Archbishop John Whitgift. All clergy were required to subscribe to eleven articles that included a statement that the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordination service of the Church of England contained nothing contrary to the Word of God. Whitgift was seeking to uphold Queen Elizabeth's position as the supreme governor of the Church of England. While most ministers subscribed, accepting the royal supremacy, about 400 refused. Under pressure, Whitgift eventually accepted conditional subscriptions from ministers who were allowed to state the areas of their disagreement. Those who absolutely refused to subscribe were brought before a Court of Bishops to be interrogated about their aberrant ideas concerning the Prayer Book. In a pre-trial investigation, they were asked to swear an oath that anything they said could be used against them at a formal civil trial. They were not allowed to know their accusers or the accusations against them. Those who refused to swear the oath were cited with contempt of court and imprisoned. The proceedings, "formed in a Romish style," were so unjust that Lord Burghley, as a nobleman in favor of limiting royal supremacy, protested them, saying that they savored much of the Roman Inquisition.⁶ He felt that the process was "rather a device to seek for offenders than

⁶ Burghley, Letter of July 1, 1584 to Archbishop Whitgift in Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), 295. Leo F. Bloomington, *Church and State in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 112-113.

to reform any.”⁷ Over the next fifty years, the numerous attempts by the officials of the Church of England to bring about conformity to the Church’s teachings and practice contributed to the puritan revolt and the English Civil War. Instead of bringing unity it brought about tragic and bloody schism.

CREEDS IN THE AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

An example of how a church might come to use a creed to enforce compliance comes from the American Presbyterian church in the eighteenth century. In 1720-21 the Synod of Philadelphia found two ministers guilty of significant misconduct. The Synod convicted Robert Cross of fornication and John Clement of alcoholism, using abusive language, quarreling, and stabbing a man. Cross received a four-week suspension for his fornication but was allowed to return to his ministry “if the congregation would have him back.” Clement was suspended for a year. Apparently, feeling that these penalties were too lax, many in the Synod urged it to consider how ministers should be disciplined and who had the authority to discipline them. The debate eventually expanded to a discussion of the standards ministers should be held to and finally to a debate about subscription to the Westminster Confession.⁸

The presbytery split along ethnic lines. Those of Scotch ancestry favored an enforced subscription to a creed, believing that it was the best remedy for immorality and theological deviation.⁹ They rallied behind George Gillespie who had protested the gentle treatment of Cross

⁷ Burghley, Letter of July 1, 1584 in Read, *Lord Burghley*, 295.

⁸ Michael Bauman, "Jonathan Dickinson and the Subscription Controversy." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (September 1998): 455-467.

⁹ In this they were following the practice of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland which had required subscription to the Westminster Confession by all ministers beginning in 1690. See, S. Donald Fortson, *The Presbyterian Creed: A Confessional Tradition in America, 1729-1870* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 1-2.

and Clement and urged the Synod to “act in a way suitable to ‘the carrying on in the matters of our government and discipline.’”¹⁰ Gillespie and the Scots intended to enforce both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Those of English ancestry, coming mainly from the New England colonies, opposed the idea of mandatory subscription. They were led by Jonathan Dickinson, later the first president of what became Princeton University.

Dickinson held that the Bible alone was sufficient as a rule of faith and practice. Still, he held that the Westminster Confession was not to be done away with. According to him, the Confession, and formulations like it, were helpful in understanding the rule and practice, but they should never be forced upon anyone. He believed that “no church had the authority to make new laws or add to what is in the Bible.”¹¹ Dickinson feared that should subscription become the norm for the church, creeds would become the standard for belief and practice rather than the Bible. His solution to the problem of corruption within the church was to examine the candidates more carefully and administer discipline more faithfully.

In the ensuing discussion, John Thomson, a minister in Delaware, argued in 1727 that requiring ministers to subscribe to the Westminster Confession defended the truths of the church while preventing error from entering and spreading. According to him, subscription would ensure that doctrinal and moral corruption would be prevented through the “comprehensive, external control in the form of a theological bond able to promote both unity and purity.”¹²

¹⁰ Klett, G. S., ed. *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), 51. See Michael Bauman, "Jonathan Dickinson and the Subscription Controversy." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (September 1998): 457.

¹¹ Luder G. Whitlock, "The Context of the Adopting Act," in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, by David W. Hall, 94-104. (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 97.

¹² Fortson, *The Presbyterian Creed*, 7. Bauman, "Jonathan Dickinson," 460. Thomson's concern about the entrance of heresy came from his perception that the young American Presbyterian Church was feeble since it was dependent on outsiders in England and Scotland for ministers and financial support. As a result, he believed that the church was threatened by heresy, schism, moral laxity, and doctrinal impurity.

Dickinson wrote to Thomson in 1729, pointing out that unscriptural terms of unity were a direct and natural means “to procure [w]rents and divisions in the church...[A] subscription to any human composure as the test of our orthodoxy is to make it the standard of our faith, and thereby to give it the honor due only to the word of God.”¹³ Dickinson further argued that subscription was not a requirement in the “primitive” church, which had not been infiltrated by heresy and was still able to fence out heretical beliefs without the standard of a creed. According to Dickinson, subscription had proven to be a faulty means of achieving unity since in the past doctrinal impurities still entered the church and subscription to a creed had only sifted out the honest dissenters. Those that were unscrupulous could agree to the creed but still hold on to their dissenting beliefs, and once within the church they could spread the seed of corruption. To Dickinson, history showed that a church did not need a creed in order to remain orthodox.¹⁴

The two sides eventually reached a compromise that required subscription to the Westminster Confession while still allowing ministers to retain some flexibility of judgment in relation to those things that were not “essential and necessary.” While this solution was not perfect, and while it did not prevent further division and schism in the American Presbyterian church, it provided a basis for ministerial expectations over the next century.

The issue of creedalism in the Presbyterian Church explains the origins of much of the anti-creedalism in early nineteenth-century America. To appreciate this, it is necessary to understand how the Presbyterian church of Scotland splintered in the eighteenth century. In

¹³ Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian in the United States of America, Part 1*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), 144.

¹⁴ Bauman, "Jonathan Dickinson," 461. This thought was echoed by the report of a committee charged with preparing a church manual for Seventh-day Adventists: *Review and Herald*, Vol. 60, No. 46 (Nov. 20, 1883), 733 (13).

1733 a group of dissenters separated from the Church of Scotland primarily because they were opposed to the patronage system whereby the right of appointing the minister belonged to the local lay landlord.¹⁵ This Seceder Presbyterian Church affirmed the right of each local church to select its own ministers. In 1747 there was a division among the Seceder Presbyterians over the requirement that city councilmen in Scotland swear an oath of adherence to the religion of the realm. The Burgher faction supported their members in taking the oath while the Anti-Burgher faction opposed this requirement.¹⁶ Around 1795 both of these factions split again into “Old Light” and “New Light” camps, creating four different bodies of Seceders, each with its own “testimony” and all professing to adopt the Westminster Confession as their creed.¹⁷

Thomas Campbell was a minister of the Old-Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church.¹⁸ Born of Anglican parents in Ireland, Campbell graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1786, joined the Seceder Presbyterians, and was trained at an Anti-Burgher Seceder theological school. He arrived in the United States in April of 1807 and began serving as a minister in the Washington Pennsylvania Seceder Presbyterian Church, thirty miles southwest of Pittsburgh.¹⁹

The *Memoirs* of his son Alexander describe the pivotal incident that ultimately propelled him out of Presbyterianism. He was asked to visit some scattered members of his flock who

¹⁵ Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. Degroot, *The Disciples of Christ, A History* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1948).

¹⁶ Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1975), 97.

¹⁷ Lester G. McAllister, *Thomas Campbell Man of the Book* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1954) 45-46.

¹⁸ McAllister, *Thomas Campbell*, 46.

¹⁹ Douglas A Foster, et al, eds, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 140.

lived some distance above Pittsburgh on the Allegheny River. A young minister named Wilson accompanied him on the visit and celebrated a communion service with him. Campbell had become aware of several people in the isolated area who were Presbyterians but not members of his faction. They had not had the opportunity of partaking of the Lord's Supper for some time and were present at the communion service. In the sermon that he preached before the celebration of the Supper he expressed his sorrow over the divisions in the church and suggested that all who felt properly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper should "without respect to party differences, enjoy the benefits of the communion."²⁰ At the time, Wilson did not publicly oppose this invitation. However, as they traveled together Wilson became aware that Campbell did not have much respect for the divisions within the Presbyterian Church. So, at the next meeting of the Seceder Presbytery Wilson presented formal charges against Campbell, claiming that he had "failed to inculcate strict adherence to the Church standard and usages." The charges also stated that Campbell had expressed his disapproval of some things in the standard and of "the uses made of them."²¹ Clearly, it was not just the doctrines that Campbell disagreed with but also the way that doctrinal compliance was enforced.

In his defense, Campbell appealed to the Bible as the only true standard of faith and practice. In the end, the Presbytery censured him for "not adhering to the 'Secession Testimony.'"²² He appealed the censure to the Synod and eventually submitted to their censure, hoping that peaceful relationships could be restored. But his hopes were not realized and he found himself in a poisonous atmosphere where his opponents were sending spies to record

²⁰ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1868), 224.

²¹ Richardson, *Memoirs*, 225.

²² Richardson, *Memoirs*, 224-225.

further accusations against him.²³ The experience convinced him that “bigotry, corruption and tyranny were qualities inherent in all clerical organizations.” He decided to separate from those who “seemed utterly unwilling to tolerate any overtures for healing the religious dissensions of the times, and who seemed to regard their own particular ‘Testimony’ as practically a more important rule of action than the Bible.”²⁴ Having left the Presbyterian Church, he formed his own Association of Christians and with his son Alexander became the leaders in a movement to restore Christianity to its non-creedal roots.

In one of the founding documents of the Christian Association, Thomas Campbell wrote that he opposed creeds in three situations: when they contain ideas not expressly revealed in scripture; when they are used in such a way as they “become the instruments of a human or implicit faith;” and when they are used to oppress the weak. He also stated that his opposition to creeds was only to those creeds that hinder the unity of the Church. “It is the abuse and not the lawful use” of the creeds that the Christian Association opposed.²⁵ Concerning creeds, Campbell felt it was highly expedient to develop great systems of Divine truths and defend those truths against error. He affirmed that “the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better.” Yet, because they are human constructs and contain many inferential truths not explicitly taught by the Bible, they ought not to be made into “terms of Christian communion.” If they were, then only those who were intellectually sharp or had the ability to retain large amounts of doctrinal information could be in communion with each other. However, the Church has always and ever will consist of “little children and young men, as well as fathers.”²⁶

²³ Richardson, *Memoirs*, 225-230.

²⁴ Richardson, *Memoirs*, 230.

²⁵ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, first paragraph of the Appendix.

²⁶ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, Proposition 7. The reference is to I John 2:13.

The movement that Campbell participated in had a wide impact on American religion. Anti-creedalism influenced not only restorationist churches, but also many Baptists and Methodists, so that the slogan, “The Bible and the Bible alone is our creed,” and “The Bible is the only source of faith and practice” became watchwords in many Christian communities.²⁷

Thomas Campbell’s intention was to restore the Christian Church to its earliest beliefs and practices when there was no prescribed creed. One of the movements that aligned itself with Campbell’s preaching and writing was the “Christian Connexion.”

Members of the Connexion strenuously opposed centralized church governance and rallied around what may have been the first religious journal published in the United States, the aptly titled *Herald of Gospel Liberty* (1809). One of the early founders of the group, Elias Smith, rejected all church government because he considered it to be inherently “British,” a part of the old European system that needed to be done away with in the new republican United States. He stated that the first church gathering outside denominational boundaries was like the American declaration of independence.²⁸ Followers of the movement believed that “they should trust God to create order spontaneously from within apparently random circumstances rather than through a humanly organized structure.”²⁹ According to Nathan O. Hatch, the leaders of this movement

²⁷ See the “Free Sunday School Lesson” on Biblical Authority: “One of the primary distinctions that sets Baptists apart from other groups, and especially from Catholic traditions, is their belief that the Bible is the sole rule for faith and practice.” <http://www.freesundayschoollessons.org/youth/sunday-school-lessons/baptist-distinctives/biblical-authority-baptist-distinctives/> accessed May 2, 2019. Presbyterian Charles Hodge affirms, “the word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice,” *Systematic Theology*, 1, 151. For Methodists affirmation of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice see Jonathan Crowther, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodists* (London: 1815), 212.

²⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, “The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People,” in *Reckoning With the Past*, ed. D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 169. Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, N.Y., 1816), 292.

²⁹ Christopher Mark Steinacher, “An Aleatory Folk: An Historical-Theological Approach to the Transition of the Christian Church in Canada from Fringe to Mainstream 1792-1898,” Th.D. Thesis, Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto, 1999, 83. http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape10/PQDD_0004/NQ42813.pdf. Steinacher refers to the

convinced themselves that the time had come for a church that had no organization and for a theology that had no theory.³⁰

Both Millerite and Sabbatarian Adventists were part of the Christian Connexion including Joshua V. Himes, Joseph Bates, and James White.³¹

However important the Christian Connexion was to early Sabbath-keeping Adventists, Charles Beecher was the principle source of ammunition for their anti-creedal stance.³² Beecher was a “New Light” Presbyterian who preached two sermons on the theme “The Bible a Sufficient Creed” at the dedication of the Second Presbyterian Church in Ft. Wayne, Indiana on February 22, 1846.³³ In the first 15 years of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Beecher’s sermons were quoted or referred to eleven times, and some of the quotations were quite lengthy.³⁴

Herald of Gospel Liberty 1, 23 7 July, 1809, p. 91, c. 2 as the reference for the idea that the Methodist episcopacy was part of the British order.

³⁰ Hatch, “The Christian Movement,” 168.

³¹ See Bert Haloviak, *Some Great Connexions: Our Seventh-day Adventist Heritage From the Christian Church* (General Conference Archives, May 1994), <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Resources/Papers/ChrConn94.pdf>.

³² Charles was the son of Lyman Beecher and brother of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. For a more complete treatment of Charles Beecher’s Anti-creedalism see Edward Allen, “The First Step in Apostasy: The Anti-Creedalism of Charles Beecher as a Source of Early Adventist Historiography” (presented at the Adventism and Adventist History: Sesquicentennial Reflections, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, January 6, 2014), <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/conferences/ASTR/ASDAH%202014/02.%20Allen,%20Beecher%20and%20Adventist%20sources.pdf>.

³³ Charles Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, (Boston, 1846). The book is available on Google Scholar.

³⁴ J. N. Andrews, “Thoughts on Revelation XIII and XIV,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, I, No. 11, May 19, 1851, 84; [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, IV, No. 10, Sept. 13, 1853, 74; J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201; [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 28, May 1, 1855, 220; [Uriah Smith], “A Sad Picture,” *Review and Herald*, IX, 4 (November 27, 1856), 31; [Uriah Smith], “THE TWO-HORNED BEAST.—Rev. Xiii. Are the United States a Subject of Prophecy? (Concluded.),” *Review and Herald*, IX, 21 (March 26,

Eventually, this material was used by Ellen White in *The Great Controversy* to argue that people in the popular churches were taught to rest their faith upon their creed rather than on the Scriptures. She also quoted Beecher as evidence that Protestant Churches use their creeds to pressure ministers to hush up the truth and bow the knee to apostasy in a manner like that of Rome.³⁵

Like Thomas Campbell, Beecher did not oppose the creation and publication of systems of belief or lists of doctrines. In his opinion, the church can presumptuously claiming to have *the* one system of Bible doctrines. But it moves toward apostasy when it goes further and requires the acceptance of that system “by every candidate for licensure or ordination, as a test of his qualification.”³⁶ In fact, Beecher was explicit: when he is preaching against creeds he does not mean articles of belief, but “articles made an authoritative test.”³⁷

Beecher found parallels between his day and that of the first four centuries of the Christian era. The worship of saints began innocently, fostered by good men for good reasons, but then grew peacefully and piously far beyond what they imagined. The same thing happened with fasting from meat and the prohibition of marriage. Beecher says that the desire to make

1857), 164; James White, “SIGNS OF THE TIMES. BRIEF EXPOSITION OF MATT. XXIV.” *Review and Herald*, X, 21 (Sept. 24, 1857), 164; J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (*Concluded.*),” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; S. B. Whitney, “Both Sides,” *Review and Herald* XIX, 13 (February 25, 1862), 102; M. E. Cornell, “Azazel or Satan,” *Review and Herald* XXVII, 15 (March 13, 1866), 116; “Creed Power,” *Review and Herald*, XXX, 16 (Sep. 1, 1867), 250-1. Beecher’s sermon is also quoted by J. N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation xiv, 6-12* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Assn., 1872), 87 and Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy*, (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Assn., 1874), 86-7,110; Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation* (Battle Creek: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1907), 661.

³⁵ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992) 444-445. The quotation is from *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 44.

³⁶ Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 23.

³⁷ Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 30.

creeds arises innocently, among the most devoted servants of Christ, and from good motives, but in the end it will “show itself to be of the spawn of the dragon.”³⁸

What follows this statement is a passage Ellen White quotes in *Great Controversy*. Speaking of the Protestant churches Beecher says: “They shrink from any rude word against creeds with the same sensitiveness with which those holy fathers would have shrunk from a rude word against the rising veneration of saints and martyrs which they were fostering.” Ellen White continues to quote Beecher as the authority who claims that, “The Protestant evangelical denominations have so tied up one another’s hands, and their own, that, between them all, a man cannot become a preacher at all, anywhere, without accepting some book besides the Bible.... There is nothing imaginary in the statement that the creed power is now beginning to prohibit the Bible as really as Rome did, though in a subtler way.”³⁹ What is that subtler way?

Beecher describes how ministers are taught that they must find in the Bible what their creed teaches, or be martyred.

He asks, “Is this freedom of opinion?” The liberty of a ministerial candidate, according to Beecher, is the liberty to choose his handcuffs, whether they be Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, or Evangelical handcuffs. So they dare not study the Bible for themselves. It would be criminal to preach something new. Anything without the mold of age on it is shocking. Beecher argued that through this handcuffed ministry the same spirit has been communicated to the

³⁸ Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 25-27.

³⁹ White, *The Great Controversy*, 388-9. The quotations are from *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 27, 37, 41.

members in the pew. Quoting the Laodicean message, Beecher argued that those involved in this creed-making process are poor, blind, and naked and unaware of it.⁴⁰

Even though Beecher had a significant impact on Sabbath-keeping Adventist perceptions of creeds, the Christian Connexion was also important in influencing these Adventists. As they began to coalesce into a movement, virtually all Sabbathkeeping Adventists followed the Christian Connexion in their opposition to creeds, their suspicion of church government beyond the congregational level, and their inclination to oppose what they considered to be the unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. Like the Christian Connexion, the earliest Sabbathkeeping Adventists were held together by a periodical, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* founded in 1851.

Concern about creeds came to the forefront as the church began to consider formal organization.

The impetus for organization seems to have come from the experience of James White. Initially, he owned all of the property that served the Sabbath-keeping Adventist community including the press that printed the *Review and Herald*. He was also personally liable for the group's debt. Early in the 1850s he became ill and he worried what would happen if he were to die and leave the debt to his wife and very young children.

Beginning in 1853 James White urged the community to think about "Gospel Order." He pointed to Paul's statement that God was not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33).

⁴⁰ Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, 42-44.

He argued that Paul favored order as a means of preserving “purity, unity and strength in the body.” He urged that “Vigorous efforts should be put forth to restore as fast as possible the order of the gospel. We want no human creed; the Bible is sufficient. The divine order of the New Testament is sufficient to organize the church of Christ.”⁴¹

It seemed to many of the loosely knit Sabbath-keeping Adventists that organization and creeds went hand in hand. In their thinking, a legally organized body must state its beliefs, but to state its beliefs was to create a creed which would inevitably be used as a tool of oppression. The followers of the *Review and Herald* struggled to come to terms with the fact that the group could legally organize without setting out a statement of beliefs. That struggle, played out in the pages of the *Review*, illuminates the reasons early Adventist opposed creeds.

The first reason Adventists opposed creeds was their desire to avoid the kind of experience they had as Millerites. They had espoused the biblical truths of Jesus’ coming and had been expelled from the mainstream churches of their day.

In one instance, in September of 1843 Robert Harmon and his entire family of seven were disfellowshipped from the Chestnut Street Methodist Church in Portland, Me. The family was not expelled for wrong or immoral conduct, for defects of character or reputation, or for doctrinal errors, but for “walking contrary to the rules of the Methodist Church.” Harmon’s daughter Ellen, who tells the story in her autobiography, commented that the action was taken in order to frighten into subjection others who were waiting the appearing of the Savior.⁴²

⁴¹ “Gospel Order,” *Review and Herald*, IV, 22 (December 6, 1853), 173.

⁴² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1915), 53.

A similar event would *not* have happened in the Christian Connexion due to its opposition to church organization and creeds. James White experienced conversion within a Millerite context while his parents were members of the Christian Connexion. As he accepted the call to preach the Adventist message in 1843, he spent much of his time working in Vermont among Free Will Baptists.⁴³ As a result of his efforts, it was reported that a thousand people joined that Church. Sometime in April 1843 in Palmyra, Me., James was ordained at the hands of ministers in the Christian denomination.⁴⁴ Apparently, neither the Free Will Baptists nor the Christian Connexion had any objection to his Millerite Adventism at that point in his ministry.

A second reason early Sabbath-keeping Adventists opposed creeds was that they became a standard or test of correct beliefs and thus a barrier to the acceptance of further truth.

In an early *Review*, Hiram Bingham described how many in his local church accepted the Millerite Advent message but when they began to compare the message with their creed, they left and no longer walked with the Adventists.⁴⁵ J. B. Frisbie commented, “Many who are honest in heart, if they can only be led to see we have the truth, will embrace it more readily than many old professors of religion who are creedized [sic].”⁴⁶

Sabbath-keeping Adventists often noted people’s reaction to their teaching about the Sabbath and human mortality. Frisbie describes how some of the preachers of his day advocate a

⁴³ From its beginning, the Christian Connexion and the Free Will Baptists were closely related especially in New Hampshire and Vermont. Abner Jones, another of the founders of the Christian Connexion, was ordained by Free Will Baptist preachers but as a “Christian.” Elias Smith also had close relations with Free Will Baptists. Tomas H. Olbricht, “Christian Connexion and Unitarian Relations 1800-1844,” *Restoration Quarterly* 9 (September 1966): 162-3.

⁴⁴ James White, *Life Incidents* (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the SDA Publishing Assn., 1868), 95-96, 104.

⁴⁵ Hiram Bingham, [Letter], *Review and Herald*, Vol. II, #4, Sept. 16, 1851, 31.

⁴⁶ J. B. Frisbie, “Meetings in Convis, Mich.,” *Review and Herald*, XIII, 7 (January 6, 1859), 49.

“spiritual interpretation” of the scriptures. According to Frisbie, these preachers understand spiritual interpretation to mean that when God's word conflicts with their creed the Word means exactly the opposite of what it says. Such preachers are better learned in the creed than in the Scriptures. Illustrating this, Frisbie pointed out that when the Bible says that “the soul shall die, they say it cannot because it is immortal. Death does not mean death, but life and eternal misery.”⁴⁷

Like other Adventists, Ellen White pointed out how doctrinal positions embodied in the creeds prevented men and women from abandoning the unbiblical positions of eternal torment and Sunday Sabbath.

She explicitly contrasted her position with that of the Roman Catholic Church. For her, the Bible is the standard and guide to truth in contrast to the papal position that the Bible must be interpreted by the Fathers and the Church. She argued that God has given judgment to the common people and not just to the priests and rulers. It is not enough to trust priests and creeds as the source of truth. She calls for people to be Bible students who know the truth for themselves, having been converted through an individual and personal experience.⁴⁸

A third reason Sabbath-keeping Adventist opposed creeds was the fact that they were of human origin and were therefore inherently in contradiction with each other.

Adventists believed that the mainline churches were Babylon since they were a confusion of names, creeds doctrines, worship, ordinances, and practices.⁴⁹ How could an incomplete and

⁴⁷ J. B. Frisbie, “Spiritual Interpretation,” *Review and Herald*, XIII, 8 (January 13, 1859), 57.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Darkness Before Dawn*, 16; *From Here to Forever*, 282; *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1902, par. 5; *Faith and Works*, 77.

⁴⁹ *The Voice of Truth* of Sept. 1844. Reprinted in *Review and Herald*, Vol. II, #8, Dec. 9, 1851, 59.

fallible creed created by human beings become the standard of truth? Adventists resonated with the ideas, though not the details, of Brother Smith, a Christian Church pastor in Fish Lake, Wisconsin. He agreed with J. H. Waggoner's lecture in which he identified the beast of Revelation 13 with Rome. However, he identified the two-horned beast as the Church of England. He then interpreted the mark of the beast to be the practice of sprinkling for baptism and the signing of one's name to the creed. Creeds were the number of the beast—666. According to him, there were already 642 creeds, and the Seventh-day made 643. Perhaps he believed that the end would come when the full number of confused and confusing creeds were finally created. According to Brother Smith, churches with creeds were Babylon, and all Christians were warned to leave her that they might not partake of her sins [Rev. 18:4].⁵⁰

It came as a shock to many to discover that what they had been taught by human creeds was in contrast to the teachings of the word of God. Jacob Decker wrote the *Review* in 1858 describing how he was formerly a Lutheran, but when he examined his creed, he found it very different from the word of the Lord particularly when it came to keeping all the commandments of God.⁵¹

Along the same lines, Ellen White pointed out that Protestant churches claim to derive their doctrines from the Bible “yet they are divided into almost innumerable sects. The unity for which Christ prayed does not exist. Instead of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there are numberless conflicting creeds and theories.”⁵² Adopting a creed is evidently not the way to the kind of unity that Christ prayed for in John 17. When human beings construct a creed and use

⁵⁰ S. C. Welcome, “From Brother Welcome.” *Review and Herald*, XI, 26 (May 13, 1858), 206-7.

⁵¹ Jacob Decker, “From Bro. Decker,” *Review and Herald*, XII, 12 (August 5, 1858), 95.

⁵² Ellen White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. IV, 232.

force to control the conscience, they do so in defiance of God's holy law.⁵³ What then is the way to unity?

In 1885 Ellen White wrote,

When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts.

Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.⁵⁴

This suggests that unity in the Church comes not from the adoption and enforcement of a statement of beliefs but from being drawn first to Jesus and then to the Bible as the sole rule of faith and disciple.

A fourth reason Sabbath-keeping Adventists objected to creeds was that creeds became a barrier to Christian fellowship.

Millerite Adventists discovered that if a person began to mix his prayers and alms with those of another creed around their common hope of the Second Advent, they were suspected and then tried for heresy. The resulting envy and strife produced confusion, evidence that churches with creeds were Babylon. Both Millerite and Sabbath-keeping Adventists believed that every Christian's duty was to come out of these confused churches.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ellen White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. IV, 444.

⁵⁴ *The Review and Herald*, December 15, 1885. [1SM 416.2]

⁵⁵ *Voice of Truth*, Vol., 1844. II.[sic] in [James White], "Church Organization," *Review and Herald*, III, 17 (Jan. 6, 1853), 135.

Ellen White states that Christ never asked about another person's creed. He recognized no distinctions of creed, nationality, or rank. In His vineyard, people are to work according to their individual abilities without walls partitioning them off from others. Those who hear the message and believe the truth will no longer be confined and bound to creeds. Instead, they will take the Bible as their guide, seeing it as "the very creed of life, as the waters of salvation."⁵⁶

Fifth, early Adventists believed that intellectual assent to creeds is not the same as holiness of heart. One can assent to all the essential articles in the creed and still be spiritually dead. The *Review* underscored this by publishing a chapter from a book by Jacob Helffenstein (1802-1884) entitled *Self-Deception: Its Nature, Evils, and Remedy*.⁵⁷ Helffenstein was a German Reformed pastor who flourished in the 1850s, opposing the liberalizing tendencies within his denomination. In the chapter reprinted in the *Review*, he describes how easy it is for a person committed to a creed to mistake "mere intellectual conviction of the truth for holiness of heart, especially if with an orthodox creed there be connected morality of life and a strict attention to the forms of godliness. The truth, however, may be *seen*, and yet not *loved*. The head may be filled with light, while the heart remains chilled with spiritual death."⁵⁸

The *Review* printed a satirical poem, four lines of which made much the same point:

Had good St. Peter, in his hour of need,
Stopped to recite the Calvinistic [sic] creed,
As he was sinking through the yielding wave,

⁵⁶ *Desire of Ages*, 86. *Ministry of Healing*, 25; *Manuscript Release* Vol. 15, 223.

⁵⁷ The *Review* incorrectly credits Flavel with this material. *Review and Herald*, XII, 16 (September 2, 1858), 121-2. In subsequent issues of the *Review*, additional chapters from Helffenstein's book were reprinted with the correct attribution. The entire book is available at: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/2201-2300/HDM2269.pdf>. Accessed 7-31-2013.

⁵⁸ Jacob Helffenstein, *Self-Deception: Its Nature, Evils, and Remedy* (Uxbridge, Ontario, Canada: Albert Sims, 1887). Chapter 1, paragraphs 7, 8, quoted in *Review and Herald*, XII, 16 (September 2, 1858), 121-2.

The Galilean sea had been his grave.⁵⁹

Knowing and being able to recite a statement of beliefs cannot save you. Reciting a creed is merely an intellectual exercise and not a matter of the heart.

Late in her life, Ellen White underscored this point. She argued that for Paul religion was not a matter of rites, ceremonies, creeds, and theories. If it was, the natural man could grasp it as he does worldly things. Instead, Paul taught that religion was practical, a saving energy wholly from God, a personal experience of God's power in the soul.⁶⁰ A person can change creeds, even moving from Catholicism to Protestantism, without experiencing this personal conversion. Subscribing one's name to a church creed is of no value unless the heart is truly changed.⁶¹ Christianity, according to Ellen White, is not a creed. It has a much broader meaning. It is a living, animating principle that takes possession of the entire person. It is a vital and personal experience that elevates and ennobles the one who accepts it.⁶² A person's creed may be perfectly sound, but holding to that creed is not enough to bring restoration into the image of God. An ancestral faith cannot correct the evils of a natural heart. The whole heart must be given to God. One cannot obey the law unless it is written on the heart.⁶³

Sixth, Sabbath-keeping Adventists opposed creeds not so much for their statements of theology as for the use that was made of them. J. N. Loughborough made a foundational observation in an article on the "Image of the Beast" found in Revelation 13. Loughborough

⁵⁹ *Wilder's Poems*, "To Young Theologians," *Review and Herald*, XII, 18 (September 28, 1858), 142.

⁶⁰ *Acts of the Apostles*, 451.

⁶¹ *Evangelism*, 290.

⁶² *Testimonies to Ministers*, 421.

⁶³ *Signs of the Times*, September 12, 1900, par. 8.

argued that the image of the beast is formed through the process of creedalization. In an observation similar to Peter Lillback's, he described a five-steps process that would lead to the formation of the image to the beast. First, a creed is created. Then, creeds are made a rule of faith and test of fellowship. Third, creeds are used to try unruly members instead of the Bible. The creed becomes the tribunal by which men are judged. Fourth, all those who do not subscribe to the creed are branded as heretics. And finally, those branded heretics faced civil penalties for their heresy. Thus the image of the beast would be formed when Protestant America uses civil penalties to enforce its creedal first-day Sabbath observance.⁶⁴ Loughborough made it clear that the problem with creeds is not so much their content but the use made of those creeds.

Seventh, Sabbath-keeping Adventists opposed creeds because they believed in the continuing ministration of the gifts of the Spirit.

At the conference in 1861 at which the church was organized James White argued that creeds are in direct opposition to spiritual gifts. If Sabbath-keeping Adventist were to “get up a creed, stating just what we believe on this point and the other, and just what we shall do in reference to this thing and that, and say that we will believe the gifts too,” then what happens when the Lord reveals some new light through the gifts that does not harmonize with the creed? His answer is that it “knocks our creed all over at once.” Continuing the argument he says, “Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement.” In his opinion, creedal churches shut up the way of God's communication through the gifts and

⁶⁴ J. N. Loughborough, “Image of the Beast,” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 9 (January 15, 1861), 69. Loughborough reiterates this in the discussion of organization in September 1861. See “DOINGS OF THE BATTLE CREEK CONFERENCE, *October 5 & 6, 1861*,” *Review and Herald*, XVIII, 19 (October 8, 1861), 148.

virtually say that the Almighty “must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed.”⁶⁵

James White drew a clear distinction between organizing the church based on “Gospel Order” and the organization of a creedal church. He urged Sabbath-keeping Adventist to organize, but he affirmed that “The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed. We are not taking one step, in what we are doing, toward becoming Babylon.” When he rejected everything in the form of a creed he was not rejecting an attempt to *describe* the beliefs of the church. Rather, he is rejecting a statement of beliefs that would be used to *prescribe* beliefs. In fact, his final statements imply that the use of a creed to prescribe beliefs would be taking the first steps toward becoming Babylon.⁶⁶

James White used these remarks as the basis for a subsequent article on the perpetuity of spiritual gifts which he then expanded into the introduction to his wife’s book *Spiritual Gifts* Volume 3.⁶⁷ In this material, he pointed out that the underlying issue in the conflict between creeds and the gifts is the manner whereby a church ensures unity. The popular churches use human creeds to achieve unity. In contrast, James White argued, on the basis of Paul’s affirmation in Eph. 4, that the gifts of the spirit are “Heaven’s appointed means to secure the

⁶⁵ “DOINGS OF THE BATTLE CREEK CONFERENCE, *October 5 & 6, 1861*,” *Review and Herald*, XVIII, 19 (October 8, 1861), 148.

⁶⁶ “DOINGS OF THE BATTLE CREEK CONFERENCE *October 5 & 6, 1861*,” *Review and Herald* XVIII, 19 (October 8, 1861), 148.

⁶⁷ James White, “The Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” *Review and Herald* XIX, 10 (February 4, 1862), 77. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts* Vol. 3 (1864), 29-30.

unity of the church.” Those who have sought unity on the basis of creeds have failed to find that unity.⁶⁸

He pointed to the many different kinds of Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and (Millerite) Adventists. Even those who claim that the Bible is their only creed, find themselves in factions. Some might suggest that the Seventh-day Adventists were giving priority to the gifts instead of the Bible but James White denied this. Instead, he says, “we are not satisfied with a part of the sacred volume, but claim as ours the Bible, and the whole Bible, gifts and all.” Concluding his thoughts, James White held out the possibility that a person with a spiritual gift might be rejected because the new truths they reveal from God are at variance with the creed of the church.⁶⁹ Apparently, James White believed that instead of preserving unity, the crafting of creeds created divisions. The gist of his statement is that Seventh-day Adventists affirm both the Bible as their creed and the possibility that God might reveal new truths through spiritual gifts.

Early Sabbath-keeping Adventists saw a great danger in using creeds as ways of achieving compliance. They knew that using coercion to ensure compliance did not work.

When a committee studied the idea of a church manual in 1883 its unanimous report to the GC session rejected the idea. The committee stated:

It would seem to many like a step toward the formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination. If we had one, we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in religious matters, rather than to seek for it in the Bible, and from the leadings of the Spirit of God, which would tend to their hindrance in genuine religious experience and in knowledge of the mind of the Spirit.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, 29.

⁶⁹ *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, 30.

⁷⁰ *Review and Herald*, Vol. 60, No. 46 (Nov. 20, 1883), 733 (13).

Statements of Faith were included in the Yearbooks for 1889, 1905, and 1907 to 1914. According to Froom, they were omitted from the other editions due to conflicting views on the Trinity and Atonement.⁷¹ In 1930, three factors lead to the inclusion of a statement of beliefs in the SDA Yearbook in 1931. First, Edson Rogers, the Statistical Secretary of the General Conference urged the inclusion of such a statement. Second, according to L. E. Froom, there was a felt need to counter the distortions in publications critical of the SDA Church, such as *The Gathering Call* by E. S. Ballenger. Third, there was a request from the African Division for a statement of beliefs to be printed in the Yearbook to help government officials and others better understand Adventist work. Because of fears that the statement might be used as a creed, it was written by F. M. Wilcox and approved by M. E. Kern, E. R. Palmer, and GC President C. H. Watson and published in the 1931 Yearbook without further approval. Froom points out that it was without formal denominational adoption, but was accepted by *common consent*.⁷² According to Watson, it was deliberately not prepared as a creed but to be “a summary of our fundamental beliefs, to see how it would be received.”⁷³ In 1942 it was voted that changes to this statement had to be authorized by the General Conference in Session.

In the 1970s there was an attempt to force two documents on Adventist colleges, one on creationism and the other on the inspiration of the Bible. These efforts met with strong

⁷¹ L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1971), 413.

⁷² Froom, *Movement of Destiny*), 409-419. Italics are Froom's. See a valuable summary of SDA publications on this issue in Robert W. Olson and Bert Haloviak, “Who Decides What Adventists Believe,” unpublished document available at <http://drc.whiteestate.org/files/280.pdf>

⁷³ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*), 419.

opposition on the part of many faculty at those colleges.⁷⁴ Concerns about how these statements would be used were uppermost in the minds of many.⁷⁵

In 1980 when the current statement of Fundamental Beliefs was approved by the General Conference in Session, the preamble was added in an attempt to address the question of the creedal nature of the statement. It affirms that the *description* of truth contained in the statement is not absolute. However, nothing in the statement would prevent it from becoming a creed in the sense to which early Adventists objected. To prevent its misuse, it would have been more effective to explicitly rule out the use of the statement as a *prescription* of belief. One way of doing that would be to state that: “Use of these statements as an authoritative test by which a person’s beliefs are measured is incompatible with the affirmation that the Bible is our only creed.”

The world church needs to be warned that the statement of Fundamental Beliefs is not absolute, but it also needs to be warned away from using the statement as a means of ensuring compliance to a human document rather than the Bible.

⁷⁴ See discussions in *Spectrum*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (August 1977), 37-59.

⁷⁵ See in particular the article by William Wright [Pseudonym], “Adventism’s Historic Witness Against Creeds,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (August 1977), 48-56.