

Creeds

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The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church exhibited a strongly critical attitude toward creeds, affirming the Bible alone as their creed. However, an examination of their literature shows a gradual development towards what can be called statements of belief. Statements of belief are more like a confession of faith than a creed.¹ This article covers the history of the gradual change from opposition towards creeds to appreciation for statements of belief that express the Adventist understanding of biblical teachings. This article also explores why this change occurred within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and chronicles and examines the development of statements of belief. The scope of this research² covers the years 1840 until the present day. During this time, three major Seventh-day Adventist statements of belief were drafted—one in 1872, another in 1931, and the last one in 1980.

Early Christian Creeds and Protestant Creeds

Creeds have played important and varying roles in Christian history. A creed is a formal pledge of allegiance to a set of doctrinal statements about God and His relationship to His creation. A creed is typically characterized by the following features: it is an authoritative summary statement of belief affirmed by a believer or a community of believers; it has a stable and fixed wording; it is composed and authorized by a synod or magisterium and has the sanction of ecclesiastical authority; and, as a summary of essential articles of faith, it serves as a test of orthodoxy.³ While one can find several confessions of faith in the Bible⁴ the development of a creed with a fixed wording that became the standard for church unity and a test of orthodoxy by which legitimate bishops and members might be known and others be excluded is a later development of the fourth century. While a creed is man's answer to God's word and as such, at least in theory, holds a subordinate role to the Bible, it nevertheless receives its authority from those who compose and enforce it. As such it also functions as a test of fellowship and orthodoxy of faith. While a creed is subject and subordinate to Scripture it nevertheless interprets Scripture⁵ and as such significantly modifies and puts into question the *sola Scriptura* principle.⁶ Creeds may be seen as the church's attempt to articulate an intelligible expression of its understanding of the Christian faith.⁷

The Apostles Creed (Old Roman Creed), the Nicene Creed, and Chalcedonian Creed were the three creeds that gained widespread acceptance in the ancient church. The Nicene Creed became the first creed to have governing authority.

While creeds were intended to foster unity and provide common affirmations of orthodox faith they ultimately played a divisive role because believers disagreed over specific wording and interpretations. For example, Augustine favored the later addition “and from the Son” (*filioque*) with reference to the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Council of Toledo accepted this addition in AD 589, and it became the pattern for the Western church. The Eastern churches, however, followed Cyril of Alexandria in his belief that the Spirit proceeds only from the Father. This addition to the creed triggered a Trinitarian controversy between Latin and Byzantine theologians, contributing to the ultimate separation of the Greek and Latin churches (AD 1054).

The authority ascribed to various confessional statements has varied with time and circumstance and is largely dependent upon the theological persuasion of the Christian group that adheres to them.

The Protestant Reformation inspired the production of new creeds,⁸ especially within Lutheran,⁹ Methodist,¹⁰ and Reformed churches¹¹ as well as the Church of England.¹² In the end, only a few creeds were accepted, including the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicæan Creed, and for some the Athanasian Creed. In their view, these were the only creeds that agreed with the Bible. The Reformers held that the Roman Catholic Church had not consistently taught biblical truth during the medieval period.¹³ They also felt that the ancient confessions did not always speak directly to the prevailing needs of their time. To explain where they stood with regard to the practices of the medieval Catholic Church, several Protestant groups constructed their own confessional statements.¹⁴

The Christian Connexion: Church and Creeds

Because many Seventh-day Adventist pioneers came from the Christian Connexion, it would be good to establish and understand some historical and theological background for that religious movement. At the turn of the nineteenth century, numerous groups of Christian churches arose in North America. Three in particular are noted as combining to create the Christian Connexion. James O’Kelly (1735-1826) led the first movement out of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North Carolina and Virginia, eventually calling their group the Christian Church.¹⁵ Around the same time, a second group led by Elias Smith (1769-1846) arose in Vermont as they left the Baptist denomination. This group simply called themselves “Christian.”¹⁶ A third group led by Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) came out of the Presbyterian Church, with this group also calling themselves “Christian.”¹⁷ In time, these three groups, having arisen independently of one another, came together without negotiation or formal action. Their binding points of commonality were the acceptance of the Bible as the only creed, “Christian” as their only name, and Christian character as the sole test of fellowship.

About this time, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and his son Alexander (1788-1866), members of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian Church, came to America. Thomas Campbell, however, was denied licensure in the Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh on the grounds that his theological views were not in full harmony with the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. The Campbells subsequently began another independent church, which they called the "Christian Association." In 1824, Alexander Campbell met Barton Stone, who was then the leader of the Christian Church of the West. The two men immediately recognized that their teachings and sympathies had much in common. Early in the 1830s they decided to unite the two groups, which came to be known as the Christian Church of the Disciples of Christ.

However, a number of the so-called "Christian" churches in the western United States and the majority of those in the northeastern part of the country refused to recognize Campbell and Stone's union. These churches came to be known as the Christian Connexion,¹⁸ the church to which several leaders of the Millerite movement belonged, including Joshua V. Himes (1805-1895), Joseph Bates (1792-1872), and James White (1821-1881).¹⁹ Bates and White went on to become cofounders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Christian Connexion stipulated that the Bible alone should be the guide and standard for any belief. Unlike most other Christian churches, the Connexionists believed that freedom of theological opinion was better than conformity to a standard and that Christian character was to be the only test of fellowship. Bates, who confessed, as did Stone before him, that he could not believe in the Trinity, was taken into membership and later accepted into the ministry. This was possible, Bates indicated, because the Christian Connexion renounced all creeds and believed the same as he did about the Trinity.²⁰ Thus the Christian Connexion and the Disciples of Christ took a stand against ecclesiastical formalism and creeds²¹ which paved the way for a similar stance by several pioneers in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The Millerite Movement and Creeds

By 1818, William Miller (1782-1849) was convinced through his study of the Bible that Christ would return to earth "about 1843." However, he waited for someone else to discover this truth and proclaim it to the world. Thus, Miller's movement did not build momentum until 1839 when Joshua V. Himes teamed up with him as an organizer and promoter. The result of this union was that Miller's message of the Second Coming spread like wildfire. Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain, joined the ranks in 1839, and James White became a supporter in 1842. Hundreds of ordained and lay pastors joined the movement by 1843 and the word was spread not only in North America, but also in Western Europe.

The time for the great event of Christ's return was, finally, set for October 22, 1844. But this time came and went, nearly bringing the whole movement to an end. The disappointment was heightened by the fact that many had nowhere to go since they had been ostracized and excommunicated by their churches. There were others, however, who felt that the blessed hope must be kept alive and that this could not be done by returning

to the established churches. The result was that several different congregations were formed. Three in particular arose. The Evangelical Adventist Church was the most numerous of these three.²² Today only the other two prominent congregations still remain: The Advent Christian Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As a direct result of the mistreatment they had received from the established churches, the Millerites tended to be opposed to creeds, which had been, in many cases, the grounds for disfellowshipping them. This vehement attitude against creeds can be seen in early pioneer Charles Fitch's (1805-1844) sermon entitled "Come Out of Her, My People."

Christ said, by their fruits ye shall know them; and the fruit which he expected his true disciples to bear was, obedience to his precepts. . . . By such fruits they were to be known. The practical motto in this day is, by their creeds ye shall know them. If a man subscribes to an orthodox creed, and covenants to deny himself all ungodliness and every worldly lust, he may after this serve the devil with both hands, and yet be regarded as a good Christian. With a Presbyterian, or an Episcopalian, or a Methodist, or a Baptist book of discipline in his pocket, he may gird up all the energies in his being to amass wealth, and live solely for purposes of personal aggrandizement, and yet pass among professedly Christian sects as a disciple.²³

Often the Millerites had been given "no opportunity for defense, no chance to give a Bible answer for their new-found faith."²⁴ LeRoy Edwin Froom notes:

This dictatorial handling created strong feelings of revulsion against church organization as such, and all organizational controls and evictions. Such arbitrary procedures all came to be looked upon as 'ecclesiastical despotism.' Organization was accordingly considered a part of 'Babylon,' from which they had been compelled to flee. They were thus instinctively set against organizing another church, or formulating any restrictive creed—or even a specified Statement of Faith.²⁵

Moreover, Miller did not intend for his good news to originate another church, but that it would bring revival to all the churches through the "blessed hope" contained in the hearts of the members.²⁶ Besides, there was certainly no time for forming a new church if Christ was to come soon.

Thus, the idea of formulating a creed to define what they believed was not an issue for the Millerites. Rather, the intent was to withdraw from the "sectarian organizations" (i.e., the creedal churches), but this withdrawal was not to result in the formation of a new organization.²⁷ Commenting on this, Himes stated that "We neither expect nor desire any other organization until we reach the New Jerusalem, and organize under the King of Kings."²⁸ Again, in 1844, Himes said of the Millerites that "All peculiarities of creed or policy have been lost sight of in the absorbing inquiry concerning the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom."²⁹

Miller also spoke against denominational "peculiarities," stating: "We must then, either let our brethren have the freedom of thought, opinion and speech or we must resort to creeds and formulas, bishops and popes. . . . I see

no other alternative.”³⁰ In another place, he wrote: “I have been pained to see a spirit of sectarianism and bigotry.”³¹ It seems that in this statement Miller points to the history of the misuse of creeds in Christianity, and applies this misuse to the Millerite experience. Miller thus came to identify creeds with oppressive church organizations that restricted the religious freedom of Christians.³²

While Miller initially was strongly opposed to church creeds,³³ he employed similar measures in the organization of believers at the Albany Conference.³⁴ Bates, however, criticized Miller and the First-day Adventists for this inconsistency. He wrote: “Look at your publications, and your Albany and subsequent conferences. . . . All such as did not subscribe to this creed and countenance this organization, and of course yield up their former views have been treated as disorganizers and fanatics.”³⁵

The Founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Creeds

The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who emerged after the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, shared the Christian Connexion’s and the Disciples of Christ’s belief about creeds. Creeds were the basis upon which they had been expelled from their former churches and were also the reason why Seventh-day Adventists had been rejected by other Advent groups. Their peculiar beliefs regarding the seventh-day Sabbath, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, and, later, the visions of Ellen G. White (1827-1915) set them apart from other movements and established churches.³⁶

With the experience of rejection still fresh in their minds, they wrote forcefully against creed-making. For example, in 1847, Bates asserted that creeds hampered the progressive nature of revelation; truth is always unfolding in fresh and relevant ways to every generation. Creeds would fix the understanding of truth, making it rigid and unchanging.³⁷ As Froom summarized, the early Adventists “clearly recognized that Bible truth must continue to unfold through continuing study and divine leading. . . . They feared any hampering, stultifying creed or rigid formulary. They determined not to drive in any credal boundary stakes, as most others had done, saying, ‘Thus far and no farther.’ The tragedy of the creed-bound churches all about them was an example of that fallacy and futility.”³⁸

Bates was not alone in his renunciation of creeds. In May of 1847, a tract titled *A Word to the “Little Flock”* was published, including articles by James and Ellen G. White and Joseph Bates, firmly stating their opposition to creeds: “The Bible is a perfect, and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice.”³⁹

James White spoke against creed-making on other occasions as well, blaming the confusion and infidelity among Christian bodies on the formulation of creeds. He asked: “Why is this world filled with infidelity? . . . Human wisdom, unaided by the spirit of truth, has sought the way to heaven. It has sought out a strange confusion of creeds. Men have forsaken the fountain of living water [the Bible] and with their broken cisterns that can hold no water [their Babylon of creeds] they have blocked up the very gate of heaven against a world of sinners.”⁴⁰ In the same issue of the *Review and Herald*, James White wrote another article in which he stated his strong

opposition to creeds again: "We want no human creed: The Bible is sufficient. . . . It is the will of the Lord that his people should be called away from the confusion and the bondage of man-made creeds, to enjoy the oneness and freedom of the gospel."⁴¹ In the very next issue, he wrote:

It is the opinion of the mass of professors of religion that human creeds are indispensable to the maintenance of the gospel order. . . . Creed making has produced the Babel confusion now existing among them. . . . And while we reject all human creeds, or platforms, which have failed to effect the order set forth in the gospel, we take the Bible, the perfect rule of faith and practice, given by inspiration of God. . . . 'As the heavens are higher than the earth,' so is our creed, which is the word of God, higher in perfection than all human creeds.⁴²

Like many others who came out of the Christian Connexion, James White believed passionately that the confusion that existed in the churches at that time was significantly due to their creeds. He also believed that the use of creeds was an unbiblical attempt to secure doctrinal unity. He noted to this effect:

The gifts [i.e., spiritual gifts] have been superseded in the popular churches by human creeds. The object of the gifts, as stated by Paul, was 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith' [Ephesians 4:12, 13]. These were Heaven's appointed means to secure the unity of the church. But the popular churches have introduced another means of preserving unity, namely, human creeds. These creeds secure a sort of unity to each denomination; but they have all proved insufficient.⁴³

Interestingly, from August to December 1854, a list of five "Leading Doctrines" was included under the masthead of the *Review and Herald*: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, the rule of faith and duty; The Law of God, as taught in the Old and New Testaments, unchangeable; The Personal Advent of Christ and the Resurrection of the dead just before the millennium; The Earth restored to its Eden perfection and glory, the final inheritance of the Saints; Immortality alone through Christ, to be given to the Saints at the Resurrection."⁴⁴ Although this list of "doctrines" was not intended to constitute a form of fundamental beliefs or a creed, it may be regarded as the beginning formation of statements of belief for the Seventh-day Adventist Church through which the Adventist believers tried to articulate and confess their understanding of certain biblical truths.

The early Seventh-day Adventist leaders rejected creeds not only because they could be misused, but also because they were fallible human documents that could lead to affirm things that were contrary to Scripture and thus could even lead to infidelity or apostasy. This understanding was summarized by J. N. Loughborough (1832-1924) at the 1861 organization of the Michigan Conference. He stated: "We call the churches Babylon, not because they covenant together to obey God. . . . The first step in apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such."⁴⁵ Here, Loughborough linked creeds clearly with the test of fellowship in a church organization

and the persecution of those who were opposed to creeds. In the minds of many founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, creeds, church organization, and ecclesiastical hierarchy were linked with the system of Babylon and thus needed to be opposed, rather than approved.

The Seventh-day Adventist founders also rejected the adoption of creeds because they thought creeds stood in contrast to spiritual gifts. For example, after referring to the gifts in Ephesians 4:11-13, James White stated:

I take the ground that creeds stand in direct opposition to the gifts. Let us suppose a case: We get up a creed, stating just what we shall 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. But suppose the Lord, through the gifts, should give us some new light that did not harmonize with our creed; then, if we remain true to the gifts, it knocks our creed all over at once. Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement.⁴⁶

The issue to be faced, James White contended, was how the Church would respond to new light from God, granted through the gifts, if the new light was at variance with an accepted creed. He feared that new light might be rejected in favor of the creed and was of the opinion that “making a creed” would halt the acceptance of future new revelation and thus the advancement of our understanding of biblical truth.

In 1874, Uriah Smith (1832-1903) wrote an article in which he listed some “Romish errors” that had been followed by Protestants. Like James White before him, he argued that creeds would not only bar all further progress into truth. He also added that the Bible itself would be used to support the wrong, predetermined system of belief.⁴⁷ He thus viewed the creeds as a rigid and unalterable system of doctrine.

Other reasons that Seventh-day Adventists opposed creeds can be found in the arguments used to defeat a proposal for the preparation of a church manual in 1883. It was stated that creeds would cause members to “lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless.”⁴⁸ As to its impact on preachers, the preparers of the manual stated: “If we had one [a church manual], we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in spiritual matters, rather than to seek it from the Bible and from the leadings of the Spirit of God.”⁴⁹ Thus another reason that Seventh-day Adventists rejected a formal creed was from fear that creeds would stifle the church spiritually and block the work of the Spirit through the gifts. Meanwhile, they continued to uplift the Bible as the only source of faith and practice.

Ellen G. White's Counsel

Ellen G. White, one of the principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the wife of James White, was also against creeds. Referring to the discovery of the “truths” by the founders, she emphatically stressed that

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.⁵⁰

She also saw the danger of exalting a creed above the status of the Bible, thus making the creed the standard of authority. She advised: "Do not carry your creed to the Bible and read the Word in the light of your former opinions. Do not try to make everything agree with your creed."⁵¹ Thus she clearly saw that there was a risk of attempting to make Scripture meet "established opinions," instead of judging opinions by the Scriptures.⁵² She seemed to also believe that subscription to a creed may tempt some to neglect the more vital issue of personal spirituality, noting that "to subscribe the name to a church creed is not of the least value to anyone if the heart is not truly changed."⁵³ Nor was true unity in the church to be found in using creeds. She wrote that "the prayer of Christ to His Father, contained in the seventeenth chapter of John, is to be our church creed. It shows us that our differences and disunion are dishonoring to God."⁵⁴ True unity is accomplished only when we are united in Christ through the Spirit who leads us to be sanctified in the truth of God's Word.

Justification of Statements of Belief

It may seem paradoxical that the Seventh-day Adventist founders, in spite of their opposition to creeds, did indeed have a statement of beliefs. L. A. Smith (1863-1958), son of Uriah Smith, wrote in 1887 that "adopting a statement of faith amounts to taking a doctrinal position, and taking such a position is scriptural." He was quick to point out, however, that only beliefs in harmony with Scripture should be confessed. Defending the necessity of the statement of beliefs, he wrote: "If there is anything which Scripture plainly teaches, it is the importance of possessing a clear and definite faith, or summary of religious beliefs; in short a 'creed' in harmony with the truths God's word has revealed."⁵⁵

Another justification for statements of belief was given by J. H. Waggoner (1820-1889) in his book on church organization, written in 1886. He stated that

Repentance and faith are almost universally recognized as requisites to Christian character. But beyond this brief statement—too brief to indicate the position of the church or of the candidate—each denomination of professed Christians has some definite declaration of its faith; some peculiar expression of faith and practice, which it requires that all its members shall endorse and receive. Were not this the case they would not possibly satisfy even their own minds that there is any reason for their denominational existence. Which is to say that different denominations attach different ideas to the word repentance and faith and these definitions with their results become the peculiar basis of their organization.⁵⁶

Waggoner seemed to emphasize that certain Christian phrases such as “repentance and faith” are ambiguous since other Christian bodies use them in differing ways. Therefore, affirming the Bible as the only creed is not sufficient. The Bible must be opened, and what it teaches must be confessed. L. A. Smith drove this point home when he wrote again in 1888 that “every person has his creed and might have it in spite of himself. His creed is simply his belief.” Since this was the case, he insisted that individuals must adopt creeds that have the support of the Scriptures.⁵⁷ For these reasons, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had no problem adopting some statements of belief.

Development of Statements of Belief in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

In the course of the development toward a full-fledged statement of belief, the Seventh-day Adventist Church passed through a number of phases. The very fact that these statements of belief were not rigidly fixed in their wording but were capable of being revised indicated that they enjoyed a different quality and nature than creeds. In this section, we will briefly trace the development of these formulations from 1850 to the present day.

Original Faith (1850). In an article intended to “expose the absurdities in the position of those who reject the present truth and still profess to stand on the original faith,” James White stated that the “2300 days [prophecy of Daniel 8:14] has been and still is the main pillar of the Advent faith.” The reason for this brief statement of faith was to differentiate the Adventists who ascribed to the doctrines of the seventh-day Sabbath and the sanctuary from other Advent believers.⁵⁸

Seventh Day Baptist Questions (1853). In August 1853, James White, in answering some questions from a Seventh Day Baptist believer, made what could be regarded as an early statement of faith. After commenting on the background of the body of believers that made up the “Little Flock” and pointing out that there were “different views on some subjects,” he said: “As a people we are brought together from the divisions of the Advent body, and from the various denominations, holding different views on some subjects; yet, thank Heaven, the Sabbath is a mighty platform on which we can all stand united. And while standing here, with the aid of no other creed than the word of God, and bound together by the bonds of love—love for the truth, love for each other, and love for a perishing world—‘which is stronger than death,’ all party feelings are lost. We are united in these great subjects: Christ’s immediate, personal Second Advent, and the observance of all the Commandments of God, and the faith of his Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for his Advent.”⁵⁹

Leading Doctrines (1854). In 1854, James White wrote what might be considered the first statement of belief of Seventh-day Adventism. For four months, the masthead of the *Review and Herald* included “Leading Doctrines,” with five separate beliefs given: “The Bible, and the Bible alone, the rule of faith and duty; The Law of God, as taught in the Old and New Testaments, unchangeable; The Personal Advent of Christ and the Resurrection of the Just, before the Millennium; The Earth restored to its Eden perfection and glory, the final Inheritance of the

Saints; and Immortality alone through Christ, to be given to the Saints at the Resurrection.⁶⁰ While no discourse was given on the subject, the collection and display of these five beliefs perhaps signal the beginning of an official formulation of beliefs.

Covenant Resolution (1861). The year 1861 was to be a landmark for the loosely organized “Sabbatarian Adventists.” Even though James White had been calling for organization (“Gospel Order”⁶¹) for years, the deep prejudices of the believers against any form of organization had made themselves felt. On October 5 and 6, a meeting to organize the Michigan Conference convened. A covenant resolution presented by James White was adopted, which stated: “Resolved, that this conference recommend the following church covenant: We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together as a church, taking the name Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ.”⁶² While the resolution was adopted, the vote was not unanimous. This troubled James White and he urged another discussion of the issues. Since no one vocalized their concerns, he raised some possible objections, such as “We are patterning after the churches around us” or “We are following after Babylon.” Then various individuals present, including Loughborough, who had voted in favor of the covenant, argued for the propriety of the covenant. Finally, James White commented: “I take the ground that creeds stand in direct opposition to the gifts. . . . Making a creed is setting the stakes and barring up the way to all future advancement. God put the gifts into the church for a good and great object; but men who have got up their churches, have shut up the way or have marked out a course for the Almighty. They say virtually that the Lord must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed. A creed and the gifts thus stand in a direct opposition to each other. Now what is our position as a people? 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. . . . We are not taking one step, in what we are doing, toward becoming Babylon.”⁶³ After the discussion, a vote was again taken and the resolution passed unanimously.

Insanity at Monterey, Michigan (1869). Another brief statement of beliefs appeared in a pamphlet dated 1869. It was written by the church board at Monterey, Michigan, to explain that the insanity of two ladies there could not be blamed on efforts to proselytize them to the Seventh-day Adventist faith, nor on the writings of Ellen G. White. Apparently, such an allegation had been published in some local papers. The statement lists the Second Advent, the Sabbath, the judgment, the state of the dead, and the gifts of the Spirit as essential beliefs that distinguish Seventh-day Adventists from “the Christian world at large.” Ellen G. White was specifically mentioned and described as “a worthy Christian woman of blameless life,” who was also the recipient of the gift of God.⁶⁴ What makes this statement somewhat important is that there is some evidence that the Monterey Church was the place where the first annual session of the Michigan Conference was held from October 4-6, 1862. Furthermore, Ellen G. White and James White visited the church several times in 1868 for revival meetings.⁶⁵

The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists (1869).⁶⁶ In 1869, the *Review and Herald* published an article entitled “The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists,”⁶⁷ in which the unnamed author (likely the editor, J. N. Andrews [1829-

1883]) described the 15 articles of faith expressed by a group called Evangelical Adventists⁶⁸ and gave gentle critique to their creed. Overall, Andrews' tone appears to have been reconciliatory, desiring to sway the beliefs of the Evangelical Adventists that they may join the Seventh-day Adventists at large. Andrews noted several key ways in which Evangelical Adventists differed from Seventh-day Adventists. In the process, he articulated some of the beliefs of the main body of Seventh-day Adventists. The Evangelical Adventists differed in the following ways: believing in conscious existence in death, believing in the eternal torment of the wicked, maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity, avoiding giving a time for the second advent, and observing Sunday as the Sabbath. The article discussed all of the stated points of belief given by the Evangelical Adventists, pointing out significant similarities. Andrews also commented on certain posited beliefs, giving great discourse on the Sabbath article in particular. Interestingly, he used the word "creed" to refer to what Seventh-day Adventists believe about the Sabbath, saying, "it is due that we now offer them that article of our creed which relates to the same subject."⁶⁹ A scriptural quotation of the fourth commandment was then given, showing that early Seventh-day Adventists claimed the Bible as their creed.⁷⁰

The Fundamental Principles Declaration (1872). The year 1872 is a focal point for any discussion of the development of the statements of belief. This was the year that the Adventist publishing house published the pamphlet *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*. The (unnamed) author was Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*. This was the most comprehensive statement of belief that Adventists drafted between 1844 and 1931. In fact, all the fundamental belief statements appearing in church publications during this period were based on this document. The introduction is of particular interest: "In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of great unanimity among them, as a system of faith. But it is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on this subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only object is to meet this necessity. . . . As Seventh-day Adventists we desire simply that our position shall be understood; and we are the more solicitous for this because there are many who call themselves Adventist who hold views with which we can have no sympathy, some of which, we think, are subversive of the plainest and most important principles set forth in the word of God."⁷¹

Uriah Smith's explanation makes it clear that this statement of fundamental beliefs had more the character of a confession of faith rather than being used restrictively as a creed. These principles of belief were reprinted first in pamphlet form and later in the *Signs of the Times*⁷² and *Review and Herald* in 1874,⁷³ usually prefaced with the same or a similar introduction. The statement contained twenty-five articles of belief, covering a wide array of subjects including God, Christ, the Scriptures, baptism, the judgment, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the

second coming, and the new earth. While great unanimity existed on the content of the statement of beliefs there was no dispute about the fact that a statement of belief had been formulated and published. Ellen G. White did not protest the publication of the statement; rather she pleaded for unity. In 1875, she wrote: "God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing, and moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to unity of faith. . . . He has given His people a straight chain of Bible truth, clear and connected. This truth is of heavenly origin and has been searched for as for hidden treasure. It has been dug out through careful searching of the Scriptures and through much prayer."⁷⁴

Explanatory Remarks on the Celestial Railroad (1874). In the mid-1800s, American author Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1874) wrote a short story entitled "The Celestial Railroad," an allegory about a Christian's spiritual journey. As early as 1874, the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association began publishing a tract that included Hawthorne's short story as well as some concluding commentary on the story.⁷⁵ In that commentary, the publishing committee responsible for the remarks noted eight distinct beliefs which separated Seventh-day Adventists from other Christian churches. Among others, these articles included the Sabbath, the conditional immortality of humans, hell, the millennium, immersive baptism, the saints' inheritance beyond the bounds of time and space, the Trinity, and the Second Advent.⁷⁶

The Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook (1889). The 1889 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook contained a slightly revised form of the "Fundamental Principles" of 1872.⁷⁷ This was presented in a section containing general information about the church and its activities. The statement was not published in every yearly update of the Yearbook, however. After 1889, the statement was not published again until 1905. It appeared again in the years from 1907 to 1914. Then it disappeared again until 1931, when the statement was rewritten. These gaps between the publication of the statements of belief are significant. They are a silent witness to the absence of the unity for which Ellen G. White continued to plead. A thorough comparison of the 1931 edition and earlier editions of statements of belief shows that there were disagreements over the divine nature of Christ, as well as over the nature of the atonement.⁷⁸ The important point for this discussion, however, is that the statements were not omitted because of opposition to statements of belief as such.

Creeds and Error (1890). Two articles of interest concerning creeds⁷⁹ were printed one week apart in the *Review and Herald*. The first article by J. M. Manning, "The Use of Creeds," favored creeds as a safeguard against error.⁸⁰ The second article by W. A. Blakely, "Why Not Have a Creed?" attacks creeds as tending "to embitter the controversy, to multiply sects, to suggest and foster intolerance, and to transform persons who are naturally amiable into acrimonious and ambivalent persecutors."⁸¹

Battle Creek Statement of Faith (1894). In 1894, Battle Creek church, the largest and most prominent Seventh-day Adventist church at the time with 1521 members, published within its church directory a statement entitled

'Some Things Seventh-day Adventists Believe.' After a preamble affirming that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no creed but the Bible, it listed thirty articles which the church generally all agreed upon.⁸²

What Seventh-day Adventists Believe (1913). F.M. Wilcox (1865-1951), editor of the *Review and Herald*, published an article on October 9, 1913 entitled "The Message for Today." After giving a brief history of movements within the Christian church and declaring the imminent return of Christ, Wilcox suggested that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been raised up at that time to lead others to the truth. From here, he went on to describe fifteen distinct beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the preamble led with an eschatological tone, only three of the fifteen articles directly related to eschatology. Wilcox also devoted the first article to the Trinity, a belief that by then, Seventh-day Adventist writers had increasingly advocated for about twenty years. He also included an article on the separation of church and state, a sentiment that was never explicitly stated in any other iteration of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.⁸³ This statement in 1913 is significant because at that time Ellen G. White was still alive and no objection of her to such a statement of belief or any of its content is recorded.

Wilcox's Fundamental Beliefs (1931). The statement of belief of 1931 is the next comprehensive statement of beliefs written after the 1872 Declaration.⁸⁴ Three reasons can be given for the formulation of this document.⁸⁵ Lack of a Seventh-day Adventist statement of faith after the *1914 Yearbook* gave an unfortunate impression to other denominations that Adventists had no defined or specified beliefs. The presence of fundamental beliefs was to reveal to the world "both what we believe and why." As such this statement of belief is more like a confession of faith than a creed. Second, Adventist leadership in Africa made a formal request for a statement of beliefs that could guide "government officials and others to a better understanding of our work."⁸⁶ Third, the document was produced to correct misrepresentations and distortions of the Adventist faith by apostates. Most of the differences between the twenty-five fundamental principles of 1872 and the twenty-two beliefs of 1931 were minor and due to differences in the organization of the two documents. However, the 1931 statement reflected the church's movement forward regarding its official acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity and also a view of Jesus' ministry that balanced his work in the heavenly sanctuary with a stronger emphasis on his birth, life, and death.⁸⁷ Christian lifestyle (such as modesty in dress and abstinence from drugs and alcohol), and tithing were also new additions compared to 1872. Just as the 1872 statement became the basis of all belief statements prior to 1931, the "Fundamental Beliefs" of 1931 served as the basis of all Seventh-day Adventist confessional statements until the Dallas Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of 1980.

Fundamental Beliefs Attached to Baptismal Vows (1941). In 1941, the General Conference in session voted on a new set of baptismal vows, a change proposed with the plan of unifying baptisms within the Adventist Church. Attached to these vows was a new summary of Fundamental Beliefs which was supposed to be given to baptismal candidates. Compared to the Fundamental Beliefs of 1931, six key additions can be seen in this list: (1) Article 3 was entirely devoted to the Holy Spirit. This was a newly articulated tenet as previously the Holy Spirit had only been mentioned as a part of the Godhead or Trinity. (2) Article 21 had to do with Church Organization,

calling followers of God to fulfill their spiritual obligation to participate within the church. (3) Article 23 discussed the Lord's Supper, stating that this ordinance should be kept in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice. (4) Article 25 described prayer and the study of God's word as important to gain union with God, victory over sin, and development of character. (5) Article 26 declared that every member should use his or her talents for the winning of souls. (6) Article 27 stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church. This was the first time this concept was articulated as such within the Fundamental Beliefs.⁸⁸ While this perhaps might have been the first articulation in a statement of faith the concept of the remnant church was clearly present and in existence much earlier, as the discussion about the name of the Church indicates already in 1863.

Although this list of Fundamental Beliefs was voted on and passed in 1941 as part of the Baptismal Vows, the *Yearbook* continued to publish the Fundamental Beliefs of 1931 until 1980, and the vote of 1941 was evidently soon forgotten. The decade between 1931 and 1941 proved an important one for Seventh-day Adventism, as it began with the development and acceptance of the Fundamental Beliefs and ended with the adoption of the uniform baptismal vows.⁸⁹

The Changes in the Yearbook (1950, 1951). In 1950, the *Yearbook* included the Fundamental Beliefs published in 1931. Article 19, on spiritual gifts, nevertheless dropped the mention of the Spirit of Prophecy and the gift given to Ellen G. White. Two phrases were also added, saying that gifts were given for "the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ."⁹⁰ At the 1946 General Conference Session, it had been voted that any changes to the Fundamental Beliefs needed to be made at a subsequent General Conference Session.⁹¹ Therefore, during the 1950 General Conference Session, which was held several months after the 1950 *Yearbook's* publication, it was voted to amend article 19 to include the two added phrases while also adding back in the original statements referring to Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy.⁹² This adjusted list of Fundamental Beliefs continued to be published in the *Yearbook* through 1980. In 1981, the *Yearbook* reflected the newly accepted Statement of Fundamental Beliefs from the 1980 General Conference Session.

The Fundamental Beliefs Voted at Dallas, Texas (1980). In 1980, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs was approved at the General Conference in session. There were a number of conflicts that served as the backdrop for this landmark. In 1957, the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*⁹³ was published, answering many questions that had arisen concerning the Seventh-day Adventist faith. From 1973 to 1976, a committee was formed to attempt to clear up questions regarding righteousness by faith. In light of this issue, as well as a desire to update language and correct literary inadequacies, many leaders in the General Conference agreed that a new statement needed to be crafted—one which could give answers to debated questions.⁹⁴ In 1978, the General Conference put together a committee to revise the Fundamental Beliefs, and the process began. Over the next year, this committee worked with a task force of professors from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary to create a preliminary draft of the new statement. On October 16, 1979, members of the Annual Council approved the preliminary draft. After a couple of small adjustments, the draft was sent to division and union officers around the world. It was also printed in the *Adventist Review* with the

hope that reactions and suggestions could be given from members everywhere. Many responses were received and considered as the draft was adjusted some more.⁹⁵ When the 1980 General Conference Session in Dallas, TX began, the draft of the Fundamental Beliefs had undergone numerous revisions⁹⁶ and, as a result, the version to be discussed by the delegates differed significantly from the draft that they had previously received.⁹⁷ During the first several days, there was much debate, conversation, and revision. Significant time and discussion were given to each article, until finally on April 25, 1980, the General Conference in session voted to approve the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, a document including 27 separate articles of belief. It was also voted that any further revisions to the Fundamental Beliefs could only occur at another General Conference in session,⁹⁸ a reaffirmation of a similar vote at the 1946 General Conference session.⁹⁹

This newest edition of the Fundamental Beliefs was organized into six categories: Doctrine of God; Doctrine of Humanity; Doctrine of Salvation; Doctrine of the Church; Doctrine of Christian Living; and Doctrine of Restoration. Many ideas mentioned in the 1931 statement were rearranged and grouped differently in the 1980 edition and the language used was updated to be more relevant for 1980. Several articles were added as well: (1) Articles 3-5 describe each member of the Godhead in their own article of belief. Prior to this, God the Father and the Holy Spirit had been mentioned as part of the Trinity but were not given their own articles. (2) Article 6 discusses Creation, a belief added at the request of church leaders to clearly articulate the doctrine and make sure that the church was not divided on its interpretation of the events of Genesis 1-11.¹⁰⁰ (3) Article 7 delineates the condition of humanity before and after the Fall. (4) Article 8 describes in brief the story of the Great Controversy, an idea which undergirded the statements of beliefs from previous years but here is more clearly defined in its own article. (5) Article 11 gives an expanded look at the Church, another belief that is more clearly expressed as its own article. (6) Article 12 combines and clarifies several ideas from previously stated beliefs to discuss the Remnant in a new way. (7) Article 13 discusses Unity in the Body of Christ, which expounds upon the bond of believers. (8) Article 15 adds the Lord's Supper, which was included in the 1941 iteration of beliefs but not in the more widely accepted 1931 statement. (9) Article 22 describes God's plan for Marriage and the Family.

Addition of Growing in Christ (2005). A couple of decades after the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of 1980 were established, a new article, "Growing in Christ," was suggested to be added to address a need experienced within the area of missions. In 2004, Dr. Barry Oliver, the serving general secretary for the South Pacific Division, explained this felt need: "There is no succinct summary in the current statement that refers to the powers of darkness and the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged. Given our emphasis on the great controversy between good and evil and the very real consciousness of spiritual warfare in the lives of many of our church members, particularly those who come from animistic, Buddhist, Hindu or other backgrounds, it is being suggested to us that a statement of our understanding of the teaching of the Bible in this regard is needed. Further, the proposed statement will also refer to the manner in which each of us may wage war with these powers— through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through prayer and through the practice of the presence of the power of God in our lives."¹⁰¹ *Ministry Magazine* in June 2004 also ran an article discussing the

need for a stated belief to address what was being encountered in many places around the world: "Today, national workers largely carry forward the mission of the church. . . . The big view of finishing the work and the conversion of Animists, Buddhists, Communists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews has challenged traditional methods of evangelism. National workers having an innate sense for effective methodology have struck the core values of not only the religion but the culture. Here we confront two main areas of great concern for us among non-Christian religions, namely transcendental meditation and the power of demons."¹⁰²

Thus, the 28th Fundamental Belief was first proposed during the 2004 Spring Meeting. During this meeting it was voted to submit the proposed article to the world Church for further discussion and critique before presenting it to the 2005 General Conference.¹⁰³ This two-fold fundamental belief addressed overcoming the powers of darkness and affirmed growing in Christ through prayer, worship, and study of his Word.¹⁰⁴ A procedure for the processing of this proposed belief was also developed at the 2004 Spring Meeting, as adding articles to existing Fundamental Beliefs was new territory for the church. This procedure held that the General Conference would coordinate the processing of the document through an ad-hoc committee; a draft would be sent to the divisions to gain reactions and suggestions; theology departments, seminaries, and the Biblical Research Institute Committee would be consulted; a draft would be made available through the internet as well as several printed publications so as to gain reactions and suggestions from church members; all reactions and suggestions would be compiled and considered by the General Conference ad-hoc committee before preparing a final draft for Annual Council; and only at the General Conference Session could the new article be approved as an addition to the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.¹⁰⁵ The proposed article went through the developed process and was indeed submitted in final form to the 2005 General Conference Session where it was approved and added to the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.¹⁰⁶

Alterations to Creation (2010). In the early 2000s, numerous International Faith and Science Conferences were held with the purpose of discussing how theology and science can be used to explain the origins of life and the world. As a result of these scholarly conferences, a recommendation was given at the 2004 Annual Council to more explicitly clarify the meaning of article 6 of the Fundamental Beliefs—Creation.¹⁰⁷ It was not until the 2010 General Conference Session when it was voted to begin the process of adjusting Fundamental Belief #6 as per the recommendation of the committee which presented in October 2004.¹⁰⁸ Actual changes were not voted on until the 2015 General Conference Session.

Minor Modifications of Many Fundamental Beliefs (2015). While it had been voted to adjust the Fundamental Belief about Creation in 2010, the 2015 General Conference Session brought about many adjustments to the rest of the Fundamental Beliefs too. This involved a long and comprehensive process in which an open invitation was issued to all members of the Adventist Church to submit suggestions for revisions. There were six different reasons for change: (1) to find smoother language; (2) to find language easier for translation; (3) to update language and terminology; (4) to clarify previously stated ideas; (5) to address new issues that may require clarification; and (6) to emphasize previously underemphasized concepts.¹⁰⁹ Revisions were made to all of the

articles. Journalist Andrew McChesney reported that, “Many of the proposed changes were minor, such as the replacement of the word ‘which’ with ‘that’ to reflect modern usage. Instances of ‘man’ and ‘mankind’ were changed to ‘people’ and ‘humanity’ to make them gender inclusive. Delegates overwhelmingly backed revisions that clarified that marriage is between a man and a woman in belief number 23.”¹¹⁰

The primary motivation of these changes was to make the Fundamental Beliefs more understandable and accessible to current generations. The ideas underscoring these beliefs remained the same.¹¹¹ While the majority of changes were relatively minor, a few are noteworthy. In belief #2, dealing with the Trinity, the phrase “God, who is love,” was added. In belief # 9 the word “bodily” was added to express the bodily resurrection of Christ. The new belief dealing with Growing in Christ, belief #11, had a sentence added to emphasize the importance of serving others holistically. In mentioning specific Spirit-given gifts in belief #17, “apostolic” ministry was removed. For belief #18, which deals with the Gift of Prophecy, an introductory phrase was added to affirm prophecy as a concept rooted in Scripture. The expression that Ellen G. White’s writings “are a continuing and authoritative source of truth” was changed to state: “Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.” This language avoided the misunderstanding that Ellen G. White’s writings had a similar character than tradition plays as an equal source besides Scripture in Roman Catholic theology.¹¹² It also emphasized Ellen G. White’s prophetic authority while asserting that she was still subject to the Bible.

Changes in the Preamble

Besides the formation of stated beliefs throughout time, it would be good to note another key element that often accompanied these statements and also underwent changes. Since 1872, Seventh-day Adventist statements of belief contained a preamble. Those preambles served numerous purposes and have often also reflected beliefs of the denomination.

In 1872, Uriah Smith prefaced his statement of beliefs with a lengthy explanation for what the statement was meant to do. It was primarily apologetic in nature, written in the attempt to correct false ideas that had been circulating about what Seventh-day Adventists believed. There was also a tone of setting a distinction from other Adventist sects, pointing out several key differences of belief: for example, the unconscious state of the dead, the final destruction of the wicked, and maintaining the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.¹¹³

In the *1889 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, the stated beliefs were prefaced with a confirmation that the Church did not hold a creed. Instead, the listed beliefs should be used to help explain the primary beliefs of the Church to those who wanted to know. Therefore, it was to serve more as a summary to give understanding.¹¹⁴ From 1889 to 1980, all such preambles were quite short, simply stating a succinct introduction to the list and noting it as a summation of principle beliefs.

However, the preamble, which was voted in 1980¹⁵ and which has remained the same since, had greater theological implications. In that preamble, the Bible is declared the only creed for Seventh-day Adventists. The list of beliefs is noted as simply an expression of the teachings from Scripture. The preamble also notes that the articles of belief may be changed as the Church experiences leading by the Holy Spirit to do so, though revision should only happen at a General Conference Session. Changes may be due to an increase in understanding of Scriptural matters or due to language clarification to better represent the belief.

General Observations

Although there have been many contributions to the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs through the years, three iterations remain the most influential and prominently used: Uriah Smith's from 1872, F. M. Wilcox's from 1931, and the General Conference Session vote from 1980.¹⁶ Below are several key observations comparing and contrasting these three lists.

1. Eschatology. A greater emphasis was placed on eschatology in the earlier years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While Uriah Smith devoted 14 of his 25 articles to last day events, the 1931 list only devoted 10 out of 22 as such. The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs for 1980 only includes 5 articles specifically about last day events.
2. Ecclesiology. As overt eschatological emphasis seemed to decrease, ecclesiological emphasis seemed to increase. The 1872 rendition did not spend time discussing the church. But the 1931 list made several references to it, including how the church is gifted with spiritual gifts. In 1980, an entire section was devoted to the Doctrine of the Church which includes 7 articles.
3. The Great Controversy. In 1872 there was some allusion made to the Great Controversy as Smith wrote about prophecy and earth's history through time. However, there was no mention of the Great Controversy in 1931. This belief was picked up as its own doctrine and was referenced in other articles as well in the 1980 list.
4. The Papacy. The stated beliefs of 1872 were quite combatively written, particularly regarding the papacy. Two articles specifically mention the papacy and its abominations. However, neither the 1931 nor 1980 lists made any mention to papal power.
5. The Trinity. The Trinity was not mentioned at all in the 1872 list, but it was included in 1931, even getting its own article. In 1980, not only was there an article devoted to the Trinity, but each member of the Trinity was also given a specific article. The concept of the Trinity was interwoven much more systematically in this list.
6. Creation. In the early years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there was not much controversy surrounding this belief. But in 1980, as a result of conflicting ideas within the Adventist Church, not only did Creation receive its own article, it also can be found highlighted in a number of other articles, tying beliefs together.

7. Scripture. The word “infallible” was used to describe Scripture in 1872. In 1931, “unerring” is used instead. This word may have been changed so as to avoid the Adventist Church being associated with verbal inspiration. Ellen White uses both words to refer to Scripture in her writings.¹¹⁷

8. Restoration. While each list varies from the others in its own way, all of them conclude with the same concept: the new heaven, new earth, and eternal life. This is the capstone in each Statement of Beliefs.

9. Tone. There is a noticeable change in tone from one list to the next. Uriah Smith’s list was written in a more argumentative tone, using combative language. Wilcox wrote more apologetically and used less provocative language. The tone in 1980 is much more relational and personal and descriptive of what the Church stands for.

10. Scripture Usage. As each iteration became increasingly more systematic, there was also an increase in Scripture citation. Uriah Smith uses few references, with Wilcox using more, and the 1980 list giving substantial references. An example of this can be seen in the article on the Scriptures themselves: no citation is given in 1872, only one citation is noted in 1931, and eight are given in 1980 for the Fundamental Belief of the Scriptures.

11. Arrangement. The arrangement of the 25 articles in 1872 does not seem to have a strong pattern or order—they seem to be randomly organized. Denis Fortin, however, argues that the order is instead arranged around the concept of the sanctuary.¹¹⁸ The structure of 1931 is more systematically arranged, and 1980 is even more systematic in its arrangement with articles building upon one another.

12. Process. What began as the writings of a single individual (whether James White in 1850 or Uriah Smith in 1872), shifted to become the work of a committee of four in 1931. From a committee, this task grew further in 1980 to become the work of the entire global Church. As the Church grew, so too did the responsibility of crafting the stated beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Creeds or Statements of Belief

The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, while exhibiting a critical, at times even hostile attitude toward creeds, eventually saw the need to express what Adventists believe with the formulation of statements of belief. The opposition to creeds and the acceptance of statements of belief may be harmonized in various ways.

First, it is necessary to understand that for the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church the word “creed” had a certain negative connotation that is not necessarily how everyone would define a creed. Funk and Wagnalls define “creed” as a “formal summary of fundamental points of religious belief; an authoritative statement of doctrine on points held to be vital, usually representing the views of a religious body; a confession of faith.”¹¹⁹ This definition makes creeds sound quite similar to statements of belief. In the minds of the Seventh-day Adventist founders, however, a church creed was more than a statement of belief; it was an elaborate, all-inclusive, binding, officially adopted summary to which all members must subscribe and which became the test

of orthodoxy. By contrast, they understood statements of belief to be simply a description of who they were, what made them unique, and what Bible truth they had discovered up until their present time. Statements of belief were used to refute false teachings, to expose errors in the nominal churches, and to clear themselves of false charges. As such, they functioned more like confessions of faith rather than fixed creeds that determined the orthodoxy of the believer.

Second, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church viewed creeds as unchangeable, but saw fundamental beliefs as open to revision as new light was received. They wanted the freedom to revise their confessional statement so as to reflect more accurately progressive biblical revelation. When the denomination became convinced its belief was in error, it thought it appropriate to amend the belief. For example, according to Gerhard Pfandl, many pioneers of Adventism held an Arian or Semi-Arian belief. However, as time passed the Church changed its position on the matter through increasing light from Scripture and began accepting the belief of the Trinity. Years later this belief was included in statements of belief, and by 1980, each member of the Trinity was viewed as equal.¹²⁰

Third, the weightiest concern of the church founders was that the adoption of creeds would discourage people from studying the Bible, citing instead the creed as their final authority. They believed that as the believers advanced in their spiritual lives they should not cease to search diligently for the truth. Ellen G. White wrote in this regard that “However much one may advance in spiritual life, he will never come to a point where he will not need diligently to search the Scriptures. . . . All points of doctrine, even though they have been accepted as truth, should be brought to the law and to the testimony; if they cannot stand this test, ‘there is no light in them.’”¹²¹

Fourth, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church understood creeds to be rigid and authoritative documents that required the full assent of the believer, without recourse to further study and reflect. This caused much pain for them since they had been disfellowshipped from their previous churches on the basis of creeds. On the other hand, they emphasized that statements of belief should not be used as binding authority on the conscience of the believer. Did the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church believe in discipline over doctrinal disagreements? Ellen White differentiated between “teaching” and “enforcing” the pure doctrine. While the need for discipline was seen, it was recognized that discipline could never be a matter of forcing unity. “The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord; but they cannot quench it, and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christ-like forbearance.”¹²²

For all these reasons, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had no difficulty in accepting statements of belief, while strongly opposing creeds. They wanted to emphasize that statements of beliefs carry no degree of finality or infallibility and that they are subject to change as new light emerges.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history has maintained a similar attitude towards creeds and truth as was held by the early Adventist pioneers. The early pioneers held to the idea that revelation is progressive, fearing that a creed may hinder the Church's growth in understanding the truth of the Bible, such as had been seen in other churches where historical creeds and traditions had been followed. Throughout the Adventist Church's history, this conviction has been demonstrated as statements of belief have repeatedly been adjusted, rewritten, added, and clarified. While the Bible has ever remained the basis of belief, as greater study has revealed more light, the stated beliefs have been altered to better share that light, even as they interact with changing times and cultures. In order to be true to the practice of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, statements of belief must continue to be viewed in the light of continued growth and understanding. To at any point declare a set of statements of beliefs as the final word would be in direct opposition to the spirit of the founders of the Church. Openness to new light must always be allowed for a clearer or better interpretation of truth.

Furthermore, the Adventist Church has continued to state its beliefs in a way that addresses the needs of the current time and culture. For example, Uriah Smith's statement from 1872 was understandably more combative in nature as the fledgling church carved out its distinct place within Christianity. While the insertion of an article on Creation may have been unnecessary in earlier years, the climate of science and religion in the late 1900s required a clarification. Whereas in the earlier stages of the movement the Adventist believers focused more on matters of eschatology, the Adventist Church has given more attention to day-to-day Christian life and behavior in recent years. These changes were made not necessarily due to a change in belief but due to attempts to reach the people of the times.

Throughout history, the most consistent aspect of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's beliefs has been that they are always faithful to the Bible. New revelations of truth and new ways of interacting with people and culture have all been based upon Scripture. This faithfulness to the Scripture is illustrated by one of the Church's founders, Ellen G. White, who pointed out the normative role of Scripture in the following statement:

In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experiences. 'Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.' 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, R.V.¹²³

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NOTES

1. On the distinction between confessions of faith and creeds see Frank M. Hasel, "Creeds and Confessions" in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, et.al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software. A confession is the answer of faith that expresses the conviction of what is true in the context of something that is contested or denied. As such a confession implies a certain *orthopraxis*, where the believer not only affirms a theological truth but is willing to live by it. A creed designates different aspects of a related subject and is characterized by a fixed wording that becomes the test of orthodoxy (Hasel, "Creeds and Confessions").
2. Portions of this article have been adopted from Joseph Kidder, "Creeds and Statements of Belief in Early Adventist Thought," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 101-116.
3. See John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 3-4; and Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent, "Recent Research on the Origin of the Creed" *Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 2 (1999): 535-559, esp. 554. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003).
4. See the discussion in Frank M. Hasel, "Creeds and Confessions."
5. Pelikan, *Credo*, 127.

6. Ibid., 5.
7. E. Glenn Hinson, "Confession of Creeds in Early Christian Tradition," *Review and Expositor* 76, no. 1 (1979): 5-16. On the distinction between confessions of faith and creeds see Frank M. Hasel, "Creeds and Confessions".
8. See Pelikan, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003); and Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998).
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13. John Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 1-11, 196-228.
14. Ibid.
15. Thomas H. Olbricht, "Who Are the Churches of Christ?" *Wayback Machine*, January 11, 2012, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120111205307/https://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/who.html>.
16. C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988).
17. Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1981).
18. For more information on the development of the Christian Connexion see Thomas H. Olbricht, "Christian Connexion and Unitarian Relations: 1800-1844," *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1966): 161-167.
19. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 31.
20. Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1868), 204-205.

21. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 31-32. See Winfred E. Garrison, *An American Religious Movement: A Brief History of the Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany, 1960), 41-59.
22. Denis Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, no. 1 (1998): 51-67.
23. Charles Fitch, *Come Out of Her, My People: A Sermon* (Rochester, NY: J. V. Himes, 1843), 11, 12.
24. LeRoy E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1971), 134.
25. Ibid.
26. Don F. Neufield, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 892-895.
27. Joshua V. Himes, "Second Advent Conference," *Advent Herald*, February 21, 1844, 21.
28. Joshua V. Himes, "The Rise and Progress of Adventism," *Advent Shield and Review*, May 1844, 91.
29. Ibid., 90.
30. William Miller, cited in F. D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), 294-295.
31. William Miller, cited in Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrines and People* (Yarmouth, ME: The Author, 1874), 411.
32. Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 134.
33. Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs," 51-53.
34. William Miller, "The Albany Conference," *Advent Herald*, June 4, 1845, 1-3.
35. Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps: or A Connected View of the Fulfillment of Prophecy, by God's Peculiar People, from the Year 1840-1847* (New Bedford, MA: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 53-54.
36. A. W. Spalding, *Captains of the Host: A History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1949), 141-143.
37. Ibid.
38. Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 135.

39. Ellen G. White, "Thoughts on Revelation 14," in *A Word to the Little Flock*, ed. James White (Gorham, ME: James White, 1847), 13.
40. [James White], "Gospel Union," *ARH*, December 6, 1853, [1]72.
41. [James White], "Gospel Order," *ARH*, December 6, 1853, 173.
42. [James White], "Gospel Order," *ARH*, December 13, 1853, 180.
43. James White, "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts," *ARH*, February 4, 1862, 77.
44. See *ARH* issues from August 15, 1854 to December 19, 1854.
45. James White, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Acts 5:16, 1861," *ARH*, October 8, 1861, 148-149.
46. Ibid.
47. Uriah Smith, "The Reformation Not Yet Complete," *ARH*, February 3, 1874, 60-61.
48. George I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-Second Annual Session," *ARH*, November 20, 1883, 733.
49. Ibid.
50. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 416.
51. Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vols., vol. 3 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981-1993), 432.
52. Ellen G. White, "Search the Scriptures," *ARH*, July 26, 1892, 465.
53. Ellen G. White, "The Truth as It is in Jesus," *ARH*, February 14, 1899, 1.
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55. L. A. Smith, "The Value of a Creed," *ARH*, May 10, 1887, 298.
56. Joseph H. Waggoner, *The Church: Its Organization, Ordinances, and Discipline* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1886), 105.
57. L. A. Smith, "Creeds," *ARH*, November 6, 1888, 699.
58. James White, "Our Present Position," *ARH*, December 1850, 13-15.
59. James White, "Resolution of the Seventh-day [sic] Baptist Central Association," *ARH*, August 11, 1853, 52.

60. See endnote 33.
61. James White, "Gospel Order," 180.
62. James White, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference," 148.
63. Ibid.
64. *The Cases of Insanity at Monterey, Mich.: A Candid Statement of Facts* ([Monterey, MI]: [Monterey Seventh-day Adventist Church], [1870]), 1-2, 4-5.
65. James White, "Report From Brother White," *ARH*, May 12, 1868, 344; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols., vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 22-23.
66. Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs," 62-63.
67. [J. N. Andrews], "The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists," *ARH*, July 6, 1869, 12-13.
68. The Evangelical Adventists were a Sunday-keeping group which had some similar beliefs as the Seventh-day Adventists but also had some key differences.
69. Ibid., 13.
70. In 1869 James White appears to reiterate his conviction that the Bible serves as the only creed for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a sentiment he frequently stated. See above section "Seventh Day Baptist Questions (1853)" as well as [James White], "Fundamental Principles," *Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874, 3.
71. [Uriah Smith], *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1872), 3.
72. "Fundamental Principles," *Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874, 3.
73. Uriah Smith, "The Seventh-Day Adventists," *ARH*, November 24, 1874, 171.
74. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 3:446-447.
75. See tract advertisement in *Signs of the Times*, June 4, 1874, 8.
76. Publishing Committee, *The Celestial Railroad* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, n.d.), 30-31, accessed October 28, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Tracts/Tracts/TCR.pdf>.

77. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889), 147-151.
78. Merlin D. Burt, "History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (2006): 135-137.
79. It is possible that Philip Schaff's book *Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches* triggered controversy over creeds (or confessions of faith, as they are called in the Presbyterian church), triggering the writing of the articles in the *Review and Herald*. Philip Schaff, *Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1890).
80. J. M. Manning, "The Use of Creeds," *ARH*, January 7, 1890, 5.
81. W. A. Blakely, "Why Not Have a Creed?" *ARH*, January 14, 1890, 20.
82. Walter R. L. Scragg, "Doctrinal Statements and the Life and Witness of the Church," unpublished paper presented at workers' meetings in Vasterang, Sweden, and Manchester, England, between August 24, 1981 and September 4, 1981, quoted in Fritz Guy, "Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs" (paper presented at the Being Adventist in 21st Century Australia Conference, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, September 13-15, 2002, accessed October 28, 2019, <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/doctrines/au2002conference/guy/guy27origin.htm>). See also "The Fundamental Beliefs and 'Growing in Christ': Proposal for a New Fundamental Belief," *Ministry*, June 2004, 20-21, 23-26.
83. F. M. Wilcox, "The Message for Today," *ARH*, October 9, 1913, 21.
84. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1931), 377-380. Two less important statements should be noted. The Battle Creek, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church published a statement of beliefs in 1894 that represented a modification of the 1872 statement (Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 338-342). A brief forerunner of the 1931 statement appeared in 1913; see Wilcox, "The Message for Today," 21.
85. See Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 410-419.
86. Action taken on December 29, 1930. See General Conference Committee Minutes, Seventy-second Meeting, December 29, 1930, 195.
87. See Karen K. Abrahamson, "Adventist Statements of Belief: A Comparison of Five Statements of Belief Covering the Period of 1872-1980" (term paper, Andrews University, 1999), Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.
88. Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee Minutes, October 21-29, 1941, 152-157.
89. Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 415.
90. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 376-378.

91. "Proceedings of the General Conference," *ARH*, June 19, 1946, 197.
92. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1951), 5-7. See also "Fundamental Beliefs," *ARH*, July 23, 1950, 230.
93. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957).
94. Lawrence T. Geraty, "A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum Magazine* 11, no. 1 (1980): 2-13.
95. Fritz Guy, "Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum* 32, no. 3 (2004): 19-21.
96. Additional revisions may have been due to Desmond Ford's controversial 1979 lecture at Pacific Union College concerning the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary. Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*, Friedensauer Schriftenreihe, Reihe A, Theologie, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 173-178.
97. Geraty, "A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," 3-9.
98. *ARH*, May 1, 1980, 23.
99. "Proceedings of the General Conference," *ARH*, June 19, 1946, 197. See also "Fundamental Beliefs," *ARH*, July 23, 1950, 230.
100. Sergio Silva, "Development of the Fundamental Beliefs Statement with Particular Reference to the Fundamental Belief #6: Creation," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 21, nos. 1-2 (2010): 14-44.
101. Dr. Barry Oliver in Nathan Brown, "A New Fundamental Belief?" *Adventist Record*, July 17, 2004, 8.
102. "Fundamental Beliefs and 'Growing in Christ': Proposal for a new Fundamental Belief," 20.
103. Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee, April 14-15, 2004, 24-25.
104. Michée Badé, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church and 'Growing in Christ': From Ecclesiological Awareness to Missiological Engagement," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 13, no. 2 (2017): 1-13.
105. Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee, April 14-15, 2004, 23-24.
106. Mark Kellner and John Surridge, "World Church: Growing in Christ, New Belief Statement, Voted," *Adventist News Network*, July 3, 2005, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://adventist.news/en/news/world-church-growing-in-christ-new-belief-statement-voted>.
107. Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 8-14, 2004, 144-145.

108. Tenth Business Meeting, Fifty-ninth General Conference Session, June 30, 2010, 1080.
109. Ed Zinke, "What Got Changed in Fundamental Beliefs," *ARH*, July 7, 2015, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2975-what-got-changed-in-fundamental-beliefs>.
110. Andrew McChesney, "Delegates Approve Landmark Update of Fundamental Beliefs," *ARH*, July 7, 2015, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2970-delegates-approve-landmark-update-of-fundamental-beliefs>.
111. For a detailed explanation of the changes made, please see "What was Changed in the Fundamental Beliefs Document?" *Adventist Today*, July 12, 2015, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://atoday.org/what-was-changed-in-the-fundamental-beliefs-document/>; and Andrew McChesney, "28 Fundamental Beliefs Get an Update," *ARH*, October 14, 2014, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/28-fundamental-beliefs-get-an-update>.
112. For the role of tradition as the source of Roman Catholic theology see the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (Piscataway, NJ: New Century Publishers, 1966), 111-132, esp. section 9, p. 117.
113. [Uriah Smith], *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*.
114. "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists," in *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1889), 147.
115. *ARH*, May 1, 1980, 23.
116. From here on, reference to the 1980 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs encompasses the changes made to it in the time since 1980 until 2015.
117. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:416; Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 462. On Ellen G. White's understanding of the process of inspiration and revelation and its implications for the Bible see Frank M. Hasel, "Revelation and Inspiration" in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 1087-1101, 1089-1091.
118. Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs," 64.
119. *Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1966), s.v. "creeds."
120. Gerhard Pfandl, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (2006): 160-179.
121. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:595.

122. Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 11:266.

123. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 7.

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