

GOD'S TRUE CHURCH IN 1986

by Robert W. Olson

Rom. 11:5 The invisible remnant represents all of God's true children, regardless of their formal religious affiliation. God has always had a "remnant" who have loved and served Him.

Rev. 12:17 The visible remnant. In the wilderness; not identifiable until some time after 1798. Then the remnant church can be recognized as the body of people who (a) keep the commandments and (b) have the testimony of Jesus. Not all members of the visible remnant church will be saved, but God works through this organization to proclaim the three angels' messages to the ends of the earth.

Only the SDA church meets the requirements called for in Rev. 12:17.

Question: Is the SDA church still the remnant church or has God spewed us out of His mouth because of our controversies, sins, and failings?

1. The church has never been pictured as perfect.

(a) Matt. 13:47, 48 The Net
Matt. 13:24, 25 The Tares

(b) "The pen of inspiration, true to its task, tells us of the sins that overcame Noah, Lot, Moses, Abraham, David, and Solomon, and that even Elijah's strong spirit sank under temptation during his fearful trial. Jonah's disobedience and Israel's idolatry are faithfully recorded. Peter's denial of Christ, the sharp contention of Paul and Barnabas, the failings and infirmities of the prophets and apostles, are all laid bare by the Holy Ghost, who lifts the veil from the human heart. There before us lie the lives of the believers, with all their faults and follies, which are intended as a lesson to all the generations following them. If they had been without foible they would have been more than human, and our sinful natures would despair of ever reaching such a point of excellence. But seeing where they struggled and fell, where they took heart again and conquered through the grace of God, we are encouraged, and led to press over the obstacles that degenerate nature places in our way."--4T 12.

2. The Seventh-day Adventist church has been in the Laodicean state from its very inception. As early as 1856 we recognized that the Laodicean message applied to us. During the fourteen months from November, 1856, through the year 1857, 348 items appeared in the Review on the Laodicean message. James White and other editorial writers accounted for sixteen. Seventy came from ministers, the other 262 from lay members. All, without exception, applied the Laodicean message to the Sabbathkeeping Adventists. (See Felix Lorenz, The Only Hope, p. 38.)

3. Nevertheless, that imperfect church was invested with heaven's authority.

"God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for in so doing he despises the voice of God."--3T 417 (1875).

4. In the 1880's and 1890's the SDA church suffered serious spiritual declension.

(a) At the 1888 G.C. many ministers made light of the prophet.

"When I purposed to leave Minneapolis, the Angel of the Lord stood by me and said: 'Not so; God has a work for you to do in this place. The people are acting over the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. I have placed you in your proper position, which those who are not in the light will not acknowledge; they will not heed your testimony; but I will be with you; My grace and power shall sustain you. It is not you they are despising, but the messengers and the message I sent to My people.'"--Letter 2a, 1892 (AVO 39-40).

(b) The revivals held by A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and Ellen White from 1888 to 1890 produced encouraging results but did not stem the downhill slide. See the Historical Foreword to Testimonies to Ministers (TM xv-xxxvi).

(c) In 1891 our church leaders got rid of Ellen White by sending her to Australia.

"That the people of Battle Creek should feel that they could have us leave at the time we did was the result of man's devising, and not the Lord's."--Letter 127, 1896.

(d) Our publishing leaders were unchristian in their business practices.

"Plans contrary to truth and righteousness are introduced in a subtle manner on the plea that this must be done, and that must be done, 'because it is for the advancement of the cause of God.' But it is the devising of men that leads to oppression, injustice, and wickedness. The cause of God is free from every taint of injustice. It can gain no advantage by robbing the members of the family of God of their individuality or their rights. All such practices are abhorrent to God. He inspires no such practices as have been entered into by your councils in regard to the publication of books. . . . Men have taken unfair advantage of those whom they supposed to be under their jurisdiction. They were determined to bring the individuals to their terms; they would rule or ruin."--TM 359, 360 (1895).

(e) A few men in Battle Creek developed kingly power and acted in an overbearing, dictatorial manner toward their brethren.

"The high-handed power that has been developed, as though position has made men gods, makes me afraid, and ought to cause fear. It is a curse wherever and by whomever it is exercised."--TM 361 (1895).

"The arrangement that all monies must go through Battle Creek and under the control of the few men in that place is a wrong way of managing. There are altogether too many weighty responsibilities given to a few men, and some do not make God their Counselor. What do these men know of the necessities of the work in foreign countries? How can they know how to decide the questions which come to them asking for information? It would require three months for those in foreign countries to receive a response to their questions, even if there was no delay in writing."--TM 320, 321 (1896).

"Those living in distant countries will not do that which their judgment tells them is right unless they first send for permission to Battle Creek. Before they will advance they await Yes or No from that place."--Letter 100, 1896. (See Special Testimonies, Series A, No. 9.)

"It is not wise to choose one man as president of the General Conference. The work of the General Conference has extended, and some things have been made unnecessarily complicated. A want of discernment has been shown. There should be a division of the field, or some other plan should be devised to change the present order of things."--TM 341, 342 (1896).

5. Ellen White used exceptionally strong language in describing the deplorable spiritual condition of the SDA church in the 1890's.

(a) 1893: "Of those who boast of their light, and yet fail to walk in it, Christ says, 'But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum [Seventh-day Adventists, who have had great light], which are exalted unto heaven [in point of privilege], shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.'"--RH Aug. 1, 1893, p. 481.

(b) 1896: "The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God."--Letter 4, 1896.

(c) 1898: "It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God."--Letter 77, 1898.

(d) 1898: "The church is in the Laodicean state. The presence of God is not in her midst."--Ms 156, 1898.

6. Did Ellen White advise our church members to withdraw from the SDA church and form a new organization? Had she given up on the church completely?

(a) 1892: "God is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order. If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. . . . God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port."--2SM 390.

(b) 1893: "Although there are evils existing in the church and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprov'd, warn'd, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard."--TM 49.

(c) 1893: "Has God no living church? He has a church, but it is the church militant, not the church triumphant. We are sorry that there are defective members, that there are tares amid the wheat. . . . Let all be careful not to make an outcry against the only people who are fulfilling the description given of the remnant people who keep the commandments of God and have faith in Jesus. . . . God has a distinct people, a church on earth, second to none, but superior to all in their facilities to teach the truth, to vindicate the law of God."--TM 45, 58.

(d) 1893: "When anyone is drawing apart from the organized body of God's commandment-keeping people, when he begins to weigh the church in his human scales and begins to pronounce judgment against them, then you may know that God is not leading him. He is on the wrong track."--3SM 18.

(e) 1898: "The bulwarks of Satan will never triumph. Victory will attend the third angel's message. As the Captain of the Lord's host tore down the walls of Jericho, so will the Lord's commandment-keeping people triumph, and all opposing elements be defeated."--TM 410.

7. In 1901 Ellen White returned to America and attended her first General Conference session in more than ten years. She called for a complete reorganization.

- (a) April 1, 1901, to leaders in the Battle Creek library
- (b) April 2, 1901, to the General Conference session:

"What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle. . . .

"Here are men who are standing at the head of our various institutions, of the educational interests, and of the conferences in different localities and in different states. All these are to stand as representative men, to have a voice in molding and fashioning the plans that shall be carried out. There are to be more than one or two or three men to consider the whole vast field. The work is great, and there is no one human mind that can plan for the work which needs to be done. . . .

"Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. . . . There must be a renovation, a reorganization; a power and strength must be brought into the committees that are necessary."--GCB 1901, pp. 23-26.

8. The reorganization Ellen White called for was effected. Major changes later enumerated by A. G. Daniells were:

"1. The organization of union conferences and union mission boards in all parts of the world where either the membership or the staff of workers make it advisable.

"2. The transfer of the ownership and management of all institutions and enterprises of the cause to the organizations with which they are by location directly connected.

"3. Making all the leading lines, such as the Sabbath school, educational, medical missionary, religious liberty, and publishing work, departments of the General Conference, and placing the chairmen of these departments on the General Conference Committee.

"4. Enlarging and strengthening all conference committees and mission boards by placing on them men especially qualified to represent the evangelical, educational, medical missionary, and publishing interests of the cause.

"5. Placing the responsibility of attending to the details of the work in all parts of the world, upon those who are located where the work is to be done.

"6. Arranging an organic connection or union of all the parts of our organization and field by placing on the union conference committees the presidents of local conferences who are elected by the local churches; and further by placing on the General Conference Committee the presidents of union conferences, the superintendents of union mission fields, and the chairmen of all department committees. Thus every church, every department of work, and every institution in the denomination is represented in local and union conferences, and in the General Conference as well."--RH March 29, 1906.

9. There were, however, two disappointments:

(a) The Battle Creek Sanitarium management refused to acknowledge church ownership and church guidance.

(b) Ellen White hoped for a spiritual revival that did not take place. See 8T 104-106, "What Might Have Been."

10. Yet Ellen White was thrilled with what was accomplished at the 1901 General Conference session.

(a) April 23, 1901, at the closing meeting of the session:

"Who do you suppose has been among us since this conference began? Who has kept away the objectionable features that generally appear in such a meeting? Who has walked up and down the aisles of this Tabernacle? The God of heaven and His angels. And they did not come here to tear you in pieces, but to give you right and peaceable minds. They have been among us to work the works of God, to keep back the powers of darkness, that the work God designed should be done should not be hindered. The angels of God have been working among us. . . .

"We have been trying to organize the work on right lines. The Lord has sent His angels to minister unto us who are heirs of salvation, telling us how to carry the work forward. . . .

"I was never more astonished in my life than at the turn things have taken at this meeting. This is not our work. God has brought it about. Instruction regarding this was presented to me, but until the sum was worked out at this meeting, I could not comprehend this instruction. God's angels have been walking up and down in this congregation. I want every one of you to remember this, and I want you to remember also that God has said that He will heal the wounds of His people."--GCB 1901, pp. 463, 464.

(b) June, 1901, to Edson:

"Your course would have been the course to be pursued if no change had been made in the General Conference, but a change has been made and many more changes will be made and great developments will be seen. No issues are to be forced. . . .

"It hurts me to think that you are using words which I wrote prior to the Conference. Since the Conference great changes have been made. . . .

"A terribly unjust course has been pursued in the past. A want of principle has been revealed. But in pity to His people, God has brought about changes. . . . The course of action which before the Conference might have been a necessity is no longer necessary; for the Lord Himself interposed to set things in order. He has given his Holy Spirit. I am confident that He will set in order the matters that seem to be moving wrong."--Letter 54, 901.

(c) November, 1901: "During the General Conference the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately steppings of the Lord our Redeemer. We praise His holy name; for He has brought deliverance to His people."--RH Nov. 26, 1901.

11. Ellen White expressed renewed confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Once again she spoke of the actions of the church counsels as the "voice of God."

(d) 1905: "We cannot now step off the foundation that God has established. We cannot now enter into any new organization; for this would mean apostasy from the truth."--Ms 129, 1905, p. 3.

(e) 1908: "I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time."--2SM 397.

(f) 1909: "God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority."--9T 261.

(g) 1911: "God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God."--AA 164.

(h) 1913 GC: "I am encouraged and blessed as I realize that the God of Israel is still guiding His people and that He will continue to be with them, even to the end."--LS 437, 438.

(i) 1915 W. C. White to E. E. Andross: "I told [Mrs. Lida Scott] how Mother regarded the experience of the remnant church, and of her positive teaching that God would not permit this denomination to so fully apostatize that there would be the coming out of another church."--May 23, 1915. White Estate W. C. White Correspondence File.

12. But we must not become smug and self-confident, as God's promises are conditional.

(a) 1903: "The Lord Jesus will always have a chosen people to serve Him. When the Jewish people rejected Christ, the Prince of life, He took from them the kingdom of God and gave it unto the Gentiles. God will continue to work on this principle with every branch of His work. When a church proves unfaithful to the work of the Lord, whatever their position may be, however high and sacred their calling, the Lord can no longer work with them. Others are then chosen to bear important responsibilities. But, if these in turn do not purify their lives from every wrong action, if they do not establish pure and holy principles in all their borders, then the Lord will grievously afflict and humble them and, unless they repent, will remove them from their place and make them a reproach."--The Upward Look p. 131.

(b) 1904: "In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work

entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: 'Found Wanting.' By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged."--8T 247.

(c) Rev. 3:14-22 still definitely applies to us.

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July 2, 1986