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## **The Church in the Light of Scripture**

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### **Introduction**

Late Tuesday afternoon of the Passion Week the disciples sat with Jesus on the Mt. of Olives. Earlier, as they had left the Temple, several had called Jesus' attention to its massive structure. Addressing their natural pride, He had told them the Temple would soon be completely destroyed and that not one stone would be left on another. The solemn comment disturbed the disciples, because they associated the destruction of the Temple with the end of the world.

As the group rested on the side of the mountain, four of the disciples "privately" asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the world (Mark 13:3-4; Matt 24:1-3). Surprisingly, the first answer Jesus gave them was not a sign about His coming, but rather He expressed His heartfelt concern about their spiritual safety. "Take heed," He said, "that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am Christ,' and will deceive many. . . Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. . . [they will] show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt 24:4-5, 11, 24).<sup>1</sup>

This conversation occurred only a few days before the Saviour's death. While He desired to share with them the signs of His coming,

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He was more concerned that his followers not be deceived. Jesus knew Satan would attempt to confound the faith of God's people, especially near the end of time. He would try to confuse them about the authority of Scripture, the meaning of Calvary, the prophecies of Daniel, and the importance of the church. In our present study we will focus on Satan's endeavor to confuse Christ's followers about the importance of the church.

In addition to the warnings Jesus uttered (Matt 24), are the pointed warnings given in the book of Revelation. John writes, "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17). Commenting on this verse Ellen G. White says, "I saw [in vision] that Satan bade his angels lay their snares especially for those who were looking for Christ's second appearing and keeping all the commandments of God. Satan told his angels that. . . sect of 'Sabbathkeepers we hate; they are continually working against us, . . . As they appoint meetings in different places, we are in danger. Be very vigilant then. Cause disturbance and confusion if possible. Destroy love for one another. Discourage and dishearten their ministers; for we hate them.'"<sup>2</sup>

Satan hates the church, because Jesus Christ gave His life for her (Eph 5:25). She is His bride (2 Cor 11:2). Satan also hates the church whenever the members and ministers of the church love their Savior and put their faith in Him. As Phillips in his translation says, "In all this stands the endurance of the saints—those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (Rev 14:12). Jesus is the Rock on whom the church is built and to whom we cling.

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say I am?" They told Him some thought He was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matt 16:13, 14). When He wanted to know who they thought He was, Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vss. 15, 16). Then Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not

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revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (vss. 17-18).

The rock Jesus referred to was not Peter, as some think, nor was it Peter’s faith, as others think, but Jesus Himself. David says, “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation” (Ps 95:1). Paul says that Christ is the Rock (1 Cor 10:1-4), and so does Peter (1 Pet 2:4-8). Ellen G. White agrees. “The Rock of faith” she says, “is the living presence of Christ in the church. . . . The Lord ‘is the Rock, His work is perfect.’ ‘Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him,’ Jer 17:5; Deut 32:4; Ps 2:12.”<sup>3</sup>

What is a Seventh-day Adventist? It is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Rock on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church is built and that all the onslaughts of hell will not prevail against it.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of these affirmations we will examine some strategies Satan is using to confuse us about the importance and function of our church: its authority, unity and universality.

**The Authority of the Church**

All genuine religious authority finds its source in God.<sup>5</sup> He is above all authority, over all kings and rulers (Dan 2:20-22). God can delegate His authority to whomever He wills. And it was Israel’s responsibility and duty to uphold God’s authority.<sup>6</sup> When the people showed disrespect for Samuel, they had shown disrespect for God (1 Sam 8:7). So those who despise and reject a prophet of God, or the message God sends through the prophet, are rejecting the authority of God.<sup>7</sup> The Father has given authority to His Son (Matt 28:18), to the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16-17), and in a limited sense to the church (Matt 16:19).

**The Church Under Scripture.** Although Christ is the head of the church, and the church as His body is subject to Him (Eph 1:22-23; 5:22-24). When He became one of us, He submitted Himself to

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what was written in Scripture. This was evident in Christ's wilderness experience when Satan tempted Him by challenging His faith in the Father's declaration that He was the Son of God (Matt 4:3). Jesus replied, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (vs. 4). When confronted by the Sadducees, who challenged Him about the feasibility of a resurrection, Jesus said, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29). From these and other passages it is evident that Christ submitted Himself to and relied upon the authority of God's word. And if the Son of God, the head of the church, did so, then the church is obligated to do so as well.

When Jesus questioned His disciples about their understanding of His identity, Peter affirmed their belief that He was the Christ the Son of the living God (Matt 16:15, 16). Then Jesus laid out the parameters within which His church was to exercise its authority. "I will give you," He said, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (vs. 19).

This rendering could be understood to mean that whatever the church decides, heaven will do. Unfortunately, some Christians interpret the verse just that way. But the periphrastic future perfect constructions in these verses read literally, "whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>8</sup> The church must make decisions in harmony with heaven's previously recorded decisions in Scripture, not the other way around.

While the authority delegated to Peter and the apostles, including Paul—who considered himself an apostle (Rom 1:1)—was given to them by Christ, their authority was not limitless. And though their authority extended beyond the local congregation, even beyond the numerous congregations which they founded, they always recognized the antecedent authority of Scripture. Peter could be inconsistent in his

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behavior (Gal 2:11-14), and Paul in personal judgment (Acts 15:37-40; cf. 2 Tim 4:11). But both knew that the ultimate authority of the church rested with the inspired Scriptures, not with any human being or collective human beings, not even with those who were used by the Holy Spirit to write Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

**The Roman Catholic Position.** The order of authority—Christ, Scripture, and the church—was gradually inverted. In a few short centuries after the apostles, the Roman Catholic Church assumed an authority that went beyond Scripture. This is the position it still holds today.

George Johnston, writing in the October 1995 issue of the Catholic journal, *Crisis*, says, “So far as we know, he himself [Christ] never wrote a word (except on sand). . . . Who, then, decided that it [the New Testament] was Scripture? The Catholic Church.”<sup>10</sup> The 1994 edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is even more explicit. It says, “The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”<sup>11</sup> “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

**The Protestant Position.** The claim by the Roman hierarchy that the church is above Scripture continues to be challenged by Protestants and more specifically by Evangelicals. In a recent Protestant publication, Dave Hunt challenges the Catholic Church’s claim to have sole authority to interpret Scripture, and the Pontiff’s claim to Apostolic succession, for these claims are not in harmony with divine Revelation.<sup>14</sup>

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However, while Protestants challenge the Catholic Church's claim to authority over Scripture, they do similarly by exchanging their belief in *sola scriptura* (the Bible and the Bible only) for *prima scriptura* (the superiority of the Bible as one source among other sources of authority).

Unfortunately, such concepts have also been suggested by some within the Adventist Church. In a recent scholarly paper it is stated that proper hermeneutics will not only take into consideration the authority of Scripture, but also the authority of tradition, natural reason, and experience. The paper states that "this is precisely the kind of process and outcome for which we Adventists, like others, should strive in all of our doctrinal efforts."<sup>15</sup> However, this kind of hermeneutic raises the question: By what authority are tradition, experience, and natural reason to be tested? From what source do they derive their authority?

Another suggestion by some in the Adventist Church is to give more authority to the "community of faith." One publication claims that doctrines do not rise from the Bible alone, but from the interplay between the Bible and the experience of the members of the church. We must see the Bible through their understanding of truth. Doctrines, the author says, are not so much right or wrong as they are more adequate or less adequate expressions of religious experience. Each new generation of believers should study the Bible and reformulate our doctrines according to their understanding. He calls this hermeneutical approach *sola scriptura*, claiming that it stands for the superiority of the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

As the late Gerhard Hasel pointed out, "The Protestant principle of the 'Bible only' (*sola scriptura*), also often referred to as the 'Scripture principle,' was the battle cry of the Reformation. It involves the supreme authority of the infallible Holy Scriptures to the exclusion of all human authority as regards 'the standard of character, the revealer of doctrine, and the test of experience.'"<sup>17</sup> And as Ellen G. White says, "Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for

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tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation."<sup>18</sup>

Throughout its history the Seventh-day Adventist Church has held to the "Bible and the Bible only" as providing the supreme authority to determine faith, doctrines, reforms and practice.<sup>19</sup> And true Seventh-day Adventists will continue to do so.

**The Unity of the Church**

The church cannot achieve internal unity by working at worship, action, and mission if it fails to address unity of thinking. Unity in thinking will intensify the church's global mission and carry it beyond a simple growth spurt into the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> The reception of the Holy Spirit is in part dependent on a theology firmly and faithfully grounded in divine revelation.<sup>21</sup>

**Theological Unity.** The core beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were carefully crafted over decades of diligent Bible study and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy.<sup>22</sup> As Ellen G. White says, "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history"<sup>23</sup>

The modern phenomenon of theological pluralism, which allows for diversity of beliefs—not only on peripheral issues, but on the core of Biblical faith—is not conducive to greater unity and mission. In fact, the opposite is true. It slowly erodes the church's identity, unity, and mission.

Notice the effects of pluralism on the United Methodist Church. In his book, *The Problem of Pluralism*, Jerry Walls points out that in 1972 the United Methodist Church voted to adopt pluralism as official policy. Pluralism was seen as a promise of a new beginning. The church would be revitalized. She would be alive with dialogue.

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Members would be freed from the restrictive rules which had bound them to formally held doctrines. They would be stimulated to vital worship and celebration, as well as to significant, evangelistic outreach.

Has pluralism delivered to these Methodists, over the last two decades, what it promised? Has it helped to lay a more solid theological foundation for their ministry? Has it contributed to the unifying vision of the church's mission and the growth of the church's institutions? Why did the United Methodist Church begin to modify its official position on pluralism? According to Walls, the twenty-year-plus official era of pluralism has not brought about a greater unity, nor contributed to the growth of their institutions. To suggest that pluralism will hold the church together and be its most distinctive mark is to suggest chaos and disintegration. Pluralism has actually undermined the kind of unity needed for outreach and ministry.<sup>24</sup>

The delegates to the 1972 United Methodist conference wrestled with such questions as the ordination of homosexuals, abortion, and the issue of sexual inclusive language in the worship of God. They decided that the church needed to be less judgmental and more tolerant. That was the thing to do. However, the United Methodist Theological Commission on Doctrine found it impossible to agree on which doctrines should constitute the core of the church's beliefs. There were theologians and pastors and laity on the Commission who represented every segment of the theological spectrum. All the Commission could do was to decide to let each board, each person, hammer out his or her own understanding of faith. As Walls points out, here was a group of official church representatives, serving on a doctrinal commission, whose theological views were so diverse that agreement was impossible.<sup>25</sup>

The transition in the United Methodist Church from traditional doctrinal standards to official acceptance of pluralism was not made overnight. This transition must be seen against the background of years of gradual erosion of their adherence to Biblical authority, which

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eventually made its impact on the unity and mission of their church.

**Organizational Unity.** The church (ekklesia) is called out, summoned, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to proclaim the “good news of the gospel” to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Matt 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6, 7).<sup>26</sup> The church is a new body, but not without a continuity with the OT people of God. It is also the kingdom of God on earth to the extent that the followers of Christ have accepted God’s rule of grace with the understanding that they are heirs of the kingdom of glory to come.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the book of Acts the leadership of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit are unmistakably evident.<sup>28</sup> After Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road, Christ personally directed him to go into the city, to a street called Straight, to the house of a man called Judas, and there to make contact with the church (Acts 9:1-19). By placing Paul in connection with His church, Christ sanctioned an organized body of believers. He did not give him an experience independent of His church.<sup>29</sup> Though Paul had been personally taught by Christ, and continued to look to Him for guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers, and to lay matters of importance before the representative of the church.<sup>30</sup>

God has not changed His way of directing the work. The Holy Spirit does not give one person an experience contrary to the experience of the church, nor does He give one person a knowledge of His will for the entire church, while the rest of the church is left in darkness. He brings men and women in connection with an organized body of believers so they may have less confidence in themselves and their own judgment, and greater confidence in the judgment of others whom He is also leading, especially those in the offices God has appointed.<sup>15</sup>

Any worker who thinks his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, places himself “in a position where he is liable to be deceived.”<sup>16</sup> “When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is

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exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.”<sup>33</sup>

As we near the final crisis, instead of feeling that there is less need of order and harmony, we should feel the need of more harmony. Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in disorganizing the work at a time when thorough organization is needed and will be a great force to refute false claims not endorsed by the Word of God. All lines should be held evenly, that there be no breaking down of a system of organization.<sup>34</sup>

Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently. Ellen G. White was instructed that “In this work there is no such thing as every man’s being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. . . . [In] order that the Lord’s work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must also draw together.”<sup>35</sup>

**Soteriological Unity.** In His prayer for unity, Christ lifted up His eyes to His Father and said, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, . . . that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21). One reason Christ prayed for unity among His followers was for the impact of their united witness on the unsaved. When unbelievers see what the power of God can do to bring people together into cooperative union in spite of their national and cultural differences, it provides a powerful witness to what Jesus Christ can do to change lives. Christ’s underlying motive in His prayer for unity was to save others. This is the motive behind members’ commitment to organization also. The salvation of men and women is at stake, and church organization is part of the means to reach out to save them.

The church is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. When

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probation closes and God says, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; . . . he who is righteous, let him be righteous still" (Rev 22:11), the work of the church will be finished. There will be no need for church organization. When that time comes, the church and those who keep God's commandments will not be able to buy or sell (Rev 13:17). The Church's funds will be worthless and the organization as we know it will no longer exist. However, the church as a movement, made up of men and women who love the Lord, will go through to the end.<sup>36</sup> As Ellen G. White said, "I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us 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."<sup>17</sup>

**The Universality of the Church**

The goal of the Good Shepherd is to bring all His sheep into one fold. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. . . . And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14-16). Christ envisions His sheep bound together in a global unity, yet each is individually known by the Shepherd; and they know Him.<sup>18</sup>

**The New Ecumenism.** The Roman Catholic Church also envisions one fold under one shepherd, one global body, but with a different view to organization. Commenting on the Pope's 12th Encyclical, in his article, "That They May All Be One," Richard Neuhaus says, "Ecumenism is not a program of the Catholic Church; ecumenism is in the nature of being the Catholic Church. The Church cannot be true to itself unless it is ecumenical. . . . the ecumenical mandate is indelibly imprinted on the Church's mind and mission."<sup>19</sup> He continues by saying, "[the] earlier ecumenical movement, a movement too often marked by compromise and evasion, has been replaced by a new ecumenical movement that seeks no unity other

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than unity in the truth revealed by God. The difference now is the irrevocable pledge of the Catholic Church to take the lead, as only she can take the lead, in striving for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord that they may all be one.”<sup>20</sup>

Over against this new ecumenism by the Roman hierarchy—in which global unity may be coerced if need be (Rev 13:1-18)—stands the self-chosen ecumenism of the remnant (Rev. 12:17; 14:1-5). The basis of this self-chosen unity is a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture and the total submission to Jesus Christ. It is this commitment that will eventually bring these two church organizations into conflict. For there is only one global faith (Eph 4:4-6).

The Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are the only two global organizations which oversee a global network under one central authority. But there is a difference. The authority of the Roman Catholic Church rests with the Pope and his appointed cardinals, while the authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church rests in the hands of its global representatives elected by churches and organizations around the world. It is through these two world bodies that the final movements of the “Great Controversy” will take place.

**True Universality.** The children of God, the world over, are one family.<sup>21</sup> Some persons once said to Ellen G. White, “‘You do not understand the French people; you do not understand the Germans. They have to be met in just such a way.’ But I inquire: Does not God understand them? Is it not He who gives His servants a message for the people? He knows just what they need; and if the message comes directly from Him through His servants to the people, it will accomplish the work whereunto it is sent; it will make all one in Christ. Though some are decidedly French, others decidedly German, and others decidedly American, they will be just as decidedly Christlike.”<sup>22</sup>

We are a universal church. There is not an American Seventh-day Adventist Church, not a French, German, Mexican, Japanese,

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African, or Russian Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the Seventh-day Adventist in America, France, Germany, Mexico, Japan, Africa, and Russia. We are members of a globally united church. We are part of the universal body of Christ whatever our culture, race, or country. We are Seventh-day Adventists first, then we are whatever other identity we have due to our nationality or birth. We all belong to Jesus Christ, who is the head of one undivided body. This is true universality, true global oneness, true brotherhood.<sup>23</sup>

**Conclusion**

When we were baptized, we gladly responded to all thirteen questions in the baptismal vow. This included the question which asked, “Do you believe in church organization? Is it your purpose to support the church by your tithes and offerings and by your personal effort and influence?”<sup>24</sup> We answered, Yes. Then we were baptized—married to Jesus. This “marriage” vow is not to be taken lightly. We made a covenant with God to be faithful to Jesus and to His church forever. And we intend to keep that covenant.

This covenant promise means to stand up for what Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has taught our church. It also means to stand up for the church in spite of its shortcomings and human inconsistencies, as disappointing as some of these might be. It is an indication of our immaturity, if we expect a global church of nearly ten million members to be perfect. It is also a sign of our immaturity, if we refuse to support the “family” because we see among us human failings and imperfections.

Notice what Paul said to the Galatians, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel. . . there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed [anathema]” (Gal 1:6-8).

Let us be careful not to lose our first love for Jesus Christ (Rev

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2:1-7). It is, therefore, right and proper that we periodically reaffirm our vow of love to Him who loves us, and of our loyalty to His church. As Seventh-day Adventists we sincerely intend to do this.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).

**Endnotes**

1 All scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise specified.

2 White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945, Copyright, 1882), pp. 266-267.

3 White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940, Copyright, 1898), p. 414. For a discussion of Matt 16:18 see *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), pp. 430-432. The application of this verse to Peter as the rock came first from Pope Leo I, about A.D. 445. Leo claimed that his authority came from Christ through Peter, who was the rock, the foundation, the door-keeper of heaven. And through the Pope, Peter continues to carry out his responsibilities. From the original language we know that petros (Peter) means a small stone, while petra means a large mass of rock. Jesus said that on petra He would build His church, not on petros. The word petra is also used in Matt 7:24 for the rock on which the wise man built his house.

While the distinction between petros and petra is an acceptable interpretation, sometimes this distinction is given more emphasis than it should. For instance, the two words (petros and petra) both come from the same Aramaic root (kepha). Also we find that in the parable of the sower, Luke 8:5-15, the word petra is used for the stony ground on which the seed fell.

The best evidence against the Roman Catholic claim that Peter is the rock, is found in the immediate context of Matt 16:13-23. In vs. 23 Jesus rebukes Peter for allowing Satan to confuse him about the importance of the cross. Peter would certainly not be the one on whom Christ would build His church.

Protestants, on the other hand, interpret Matt 16:18 to mean that Peter’s faith in Christ is the rock on which the church is built. But our faith is too unreliable on which to build the church. Paul says, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest

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anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8, 9). Ellen G. White agrees and says, "Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, . . ." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 175.

A third interpretation of Matt 16:18 is that Christ Himself is the Rock on which the church is built and to which our faith clings. This is what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

4 In Matt 16:18 Jesus said, "On this rock [meaning on Himself] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it." This verse is often understood to mean that although Satan will attack the church, he will not be able to break down its gates. While this interpretation is allowable, it could give the church a fortress mentality and place our minds in a defensive rather than an offensive position. A more fitting interpretation would be: "The gates of the city of hell, Satan's stronghold called Babylon, will not be able to stand up against an advancing church." Figuratively speaking Satan guards the gates of hell (the grave), but Christ by His death, entered into Satan's stronghold and conquered it. And at the return of Christ, death itself will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). (See SDABC Vol. 5, p. 432.) The church is to be like a mighty army with banners, going forth to conquer the world for Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

5 Frederick Sontag, *How Philosophy Shapes Theology* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), pp. 219-227. Sontag is correct when he says that for contemporary men and women the question of authority is quite central in their lives, whether that authority be political, social, religious, or their own person. But religion requires the willingness of people living in a democratically-elected society to submit to an authority higher than that of the individual, or the vote of the majority. Therefore, the meaning of religious authority is crucial since it defines the context in which religious issues are to be considered. As Sontag points out, when submission to a king or obedience of a slave to a master was the norm, accepting religious authority did not seem as difficult. However, after the almost universal spread of democratic reform in recent centuries and in the resulting era of violent self-assertion and intense concentration on the rights of the individual, submission to an authority higher than oneself has become a major issue in religious life. For contemporary men and women, authority flows from the individual upward, not from some authoritative figure downward. Consequently, (and should we say, unfortunately) after the achievement of democracy, too often the acceptance of divine authority becomes much more difficult and is rejected as incompatible with individual freedom.

In modern times, more than in prior centuries, the problem of authority can

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scarcely be considered apart from that of individual freedom. But it is the unique nature of religious authority—as contrasted with social or political theory in which individual freedom is the fundamental question—that determines that freedom can only be defined in the context of authority. This is the proper order of procedure by virtue of God's particular status—of who He is, what He has done, is doing, and will yet do. If we would place authority in the individual, in his or her personal freedom, can we still grant God ultimate authority? The philosophical context that we accept—that is, where we place the locus of authority—will spell out our theological answer.

Not only is the issue of God's authority a major challenge to contemporary men and women with their preoccupation with individual freedom, but it also includes the question: How much authority has Jesus Christ delegated to humans? When believing men and women recognize no authority above themselves, then they cannot feel called and impelled to speak in God's name, nor be accepted in such a role. The question of a "divine spokesperson," such as a prophet or an apostle, is a crucial first step in settling the issue of delegated authority. The issue is not in the spokesperson but whether any authority lies behind them. And speaking of organized religion, every member must not only first reach a decision about the authority of prophet and apostle but also about the authority of church officials who are to carry on the "Great Commission." In one sense this is impossible if authority in full or in part has been removed from God or if the status of religious authority is uncertain or the method of its communication—such as the claim that "all Scripture is given by God" (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21)—is in doubt.

6 White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917), pp. 15-16.

7 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1890), p. 605.

8 Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 370-371. The New King James Version has a notation to this effect in the margin.

9 D. A. Carson, "Church, Authority in." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 228.

10 George Sim Johnston, "Scripture Alone" as part of "Catholics vs. Evangelicals" by Mary Jo Anderson, *Crisis*, October 1995, p. 27.

11 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 2 "The Transmission of Divine Revelation" (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994), No. 82, p. 26.

12 *Ibid.*, No. 78, p. 25.

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13 Ibid., “The Magisterium of the Church” No. 85, p. 27. In Article 9, “I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church,” Paragraph 4, No. 1, “The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church” the meaning of the authority claimed by the Catholic Church is made still clearer. No. 889, p. 235 says, “In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share of his own infallibility.” No. 890 continues, “The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium’s task to preserve God’s people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church’s shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms:” No. 891, pp. 235, 236 speaks to one such form, “‘The Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith and morals. . . . The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium,’ above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed,’ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.’ This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.”

14 Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), chapters 8 and 22, pp. 99-107; 329-344.

15 David R. Larson, “Beyond Fundamentalism and Relativism: The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and the Development of Adventist Theology” (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Adventist Society for Religious Studies, November 17, 1995), p. 9. Larson misunderstands John Wesley’s use of the word experience for understanding the Bible. What Wesley meant by experience is explained by Jerry L. Walls, *The Problem of Pluralism, Recovering United Methodist Identity* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Good News Books, 1986), Chapter 5, pp. 77-101. “The failure to grasp the objectivity of spiritual experience in Wesley’s thought can easily lead to misunderstanding of his theology. It has been argued, for instance, that Wesley’s emphasis on experience prepared the way for the classical liberal, experience-oriented theology of the nineteenth century. Wesley’s objective view of experience, however, is quite at odds with the subjective understanding of experience which was central to liberal theology in the following centuries,” pp.

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84-85. For a more complete explanation of the meaning of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and the authority of Scripture, see pp. 77-101.

16 Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (Riverside, California: La Sierra University Press, 1991), pp. 88-98. An example of attempting to make *prima scriptura* to be understood as *sola scriptura* appears in the following paragraph: "Noting the inevitable influence of Christian doctrine on the way we read the Bible raises the important question of Scripture and tradition. And this brings to mind the famous Reformation maxim, *sola scriptura*. People sometimes think of this as a call to eliminate everything but the Bible from theological consideration. This is not only impossible, as we have seen, but it is not faithful to the activity of the great Reformers themselves. As developed and followed by Luther and Calvin, for example, this principle represents an affirmation of the Bible's authority, rather than a procedural rule for biblical exegesis. For the Reformers themselves, the Bible was by no means the only object of theological reflection. Their writings contain references, appeals and allusions to a great variety of sources, from the writings of Augustine to the myths of pagan literature," p. 93. A careful reading of Rice's statement will show the confusion of thought between the legitimacy of using other sources for theological study and using such sources as authority for settling Biblical truth. The Bible alone is the sole source and final authority for truth, whereas theological sources have often been used to discredit the plainest statements of Scripture, even the bodily resurrection of Christ.

17 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1980), p. 72.

18 White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.

19 Hasel, p. 73.

20 Fernando L. Canale, "Importance of Our Worldview," *Ministry* (December 1995), p. 14.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

22 R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), pp. 53-71.

23 White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), p. 196.

24 Jerry L. Walls, *The Problem of Pluralism, Recovering United Methodist Identity* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Good News Books, 1986), pp. 3-9.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-17. Walls speaks of the many faces of pluralism—such as equality among races, respect for human diversity, and the right for non-Christian religions to exist. Such generous concern for others—if this is what is meant by pluralism—he says, is not in question. What is in question is theological pluralism,

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pp. 18-28. Pluralism maintains that various theologies and theological-interest groups within the church must be legitimized, p. 31. It is hard to see how all of these theologies can be expressions of the same Christian message, p. 43. Must all doctrinal developments be open ended? Are all doctrinal and theological opinions viable? p. 44. Pluralism, as a truth-claim, is inconsistent with itself, for it is not open to any other serious theological opinions except those which support the principle that doctrines are neither right nor wrong, pp. 74-75. Accepting so many competing viewpoints, as pluralism requires, the question whether there is a non-negotiable theological core will inevitably arise, p. 77.

26 G. W. Bromiley, "Church" *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. One (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 693. Behind the New Testament term (ekklesia) stand both the Greek concept of democracy and the Hebrew concept of theocracy, and in the church the two are brought together in a theocratic democracy or in a democratic theocracy.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 693-694. The church is not a simple organism, but multi-dimensional in nature as the following expressions show: the church is the Israel of God (Gal 6:15-16); it is the planting of God (1 Cor 3:10-11); it is the household and family of God (Eph 2:19; 3:15; 4:6); it is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25); it is the body of Christ (Eph 4:15; 1:22-23); it is the temple of God (Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:4-5); it is a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9); it is under the government of the King of kings.

28 In the book of Acts the powerful leadership of the Holy Spirit empowers the apostles in their proclamation (Acts 2:1-4; 4:23-31). Deception and lying to church officials is lying to the Holy Spirit and is punished with death (Acts 5:1-11). Recognition of the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of deacons is a prerequisite for ordination (Acts 6:1-7). Refusing to listen to and to accept the gospel is considered as a resisting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-53). Difficulties and persecution are not evidence of the absence of the Holy Spirit in the church (Acts 7:54-8:1). The Holy Spirit cannot be purchased nor can His presence be guaranteed by large donations to the church (Acts 8:14-25).

The Holy Spirit directs and transports evangelists to those ready to hear the gospel (Acts 8:26-40). He directs church leaders to baptize former persecutors whose conversion is still in doubt (Acts 9:10-19). Through the power of the Holy Spirit members are added and churches are multiplied (Acts 2:47; 9:31). Through His power the dead are raised (Acts 9:36-40). Through visions and demonstrable evidence the Holy Spirit directs church leaders when to go contrary to their own convictions against accepting Gentile converts (Acts 10:1-48). The Holy Spirit guides the church to elevate local leaders to positions of prominence (Acts 11:19-

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26). He directs the church to set aside persons, by laying on of hands, for special ministries (Acts 13:1-3). The Holy Spirit guided officials and delegates in a general church council to decide that "it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit" not to require Gentiles to be circumcised (Acts 15:6-29). He designates which mission territory to enter and which one not to (Acts 16:6-10). Rebaptism, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, is made mandatory (Acts 19:1-10). The Holy Spirit uses one prophet to warn another of coming persecution (Acts 21:8-14). Christ, through the Holy Spirit, comforts those in prison (Acts 23:11). The Holy Spirit does not always prevent accidents and disasters (Acts 27:39-44).

29 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1875, reprinted 1948), p. 430.

30 White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 200.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

32 White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 164. Notice the following statements: Be afraid of those who turn their verbal weapons on the church. "They do not bear the divine credentials of heaven." White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), p. 22. The spirit of pulling away from our fellow workers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. Some regard all efforts to establish order in the church as dangerous, a restriction of personal liberty, and similar to popery. It is Satan's special effort to lead men and women to feel that God is pleased to have them choose their own course. This presents a grave danger to the prosperity of the church because God cannot then work with us and for us. See *ibid.*, pp. 488-489. Whenever there is a drawing away from the organized body of God's people, when the church is weighed in human scales and judgment is pronounced against it; it is evident that God is not leading those who do so. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, compiled 1980), p. 18. It is thought to be weakness to yield individual ideas of what is right and proper and to obey the voice of the church; but to yield to such separatist feelings is unsafe and will bring about anarchy and confusion. There comes a time when individual judgment must submit to the authority of the church. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1876, 1948), p. 19.

33 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 260.

34 White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, p. 26.

35 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 258.

36 White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 46-47. See

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also, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888, 1907, 1911), p. 396; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1904, reprinted 1948), p. 41; *Acts of the Apostles*, previously cited, p. 536; and *Review and Herald*, Sept. 20, 1892 where the following thoughts are expressed: The majority of God's people are still in the other churches. Company after company will leave the Lord's side, but tribe after tribe will come in. The remnant will endure to the end. God is at the head of the work and will carry the noble ship which bears His people safely into port. Also in *Selected Messages*, Book Three, p. 422, it says, "There are men who will receive the truth, and these will take the places made vacant by those who become offended and leave the truth. . . . The ranks will not be diminished."

37 White, Letter 54, 1908. (Jan. 21, 1908).

38 Paul had this same global vision for the church. In Eph 4:7-16, he mentions five spiritual gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The purpose of these gifts is to edify and strengthen the church as is the purpose of all the other spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12). They are to uphold the work of ministry, to equip the saints, and to keep the church from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine until we all come into the unity of the faith. This means that men and women are to grow up into Christ, who is the head, from whom the whole body is knit together by what every joint supplies.

39 Richard John Neuhaus, "That They May All Be One" (The Pope's 12th Encyclical), *Crisis*, September, 1995, p. 27.

40 Ibid. Neuhaus, commenting further on this new ecumenism says, "While acknowledging that much progress has been made in theological dialogues, especially with Lutherans and Anglicans, *Ut unum sint* recognizes that it cannot be assumed with Protestants, as it can be assumed with the Orthodox, that there is already a secure foundation for full communion."

"The encyclical lists five areas where much work is needed 'before a true consensus of faith can be achieved.' They are: 1) the relationship between scripture and sacred tradition, 2) the real presence and sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, 3) the sacrament of Ordination and the meaning of apostolic ministry, 4) the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church, and 5) Mary as Mother of God and Icon of the Church."

"Some may be discouraged by that list, since there are issues that have been in dispute between Protestants and Catholics for almost five centuries. The difference at the edge of the third millennium is that they are now the subject of a common exploration in the words of the encyclical, as 'we look at one another in the light of the Apostolic Tradition.' The difference now is that the exploration

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begins from the premise that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The difference now is that we mutually ask forgiveness for sins against unity in the past, and encourage one another, above all, to conversion to Christ, which of necessity is conversion to the unity of his body, the Church," p. 27.

41 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 132.

42 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 180.

43 White, Notebook Leaflets, *The Church*, No. 1. (Written Dec. 24, 1905). Ellen G. White says that the Lord has instructed us to rehearse the history of our past as we enter the closing work. Every truth He has given us is to be proclaimed to the world. We cannot step off the foundation that God has laid. We cannot enter into any new organization because this would mean apostasy from the truth. In *Selected Messages*, Book One (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 179, she says that as we near the end of time some will talk about a purer and holier people coming out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All this pleases the enemy and is not in harmony with the Testimonies.

44 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 15th edition, 1995), p. 31.

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