

## 1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance—No. 2

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### I. Unity Achieved Through Baptismal Certificate

1. UNIFORM "BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE" FORMULATED.—During the decade of 1931 to 1941 the practice had developed in various unions—and even in a few large local conferences, and with certain leading evangelists—of having their own baptismal certificates. While these were in general agreement as to basic content, certain strange added stipulations appeared on some.

Not a few of our leaders were perturbed over these variations, and the occasionally strange requirements added. A uniform baptismal certificate was therefore proposed, to be used by all. A representative committee of thirteen was accordingly designated, with General Conference General Vice-President W. H. Branson\* as chairman, and when organized, naming this writer as secretary. He is therefore acquainted with the full proceedings.

The commissioned task of this committee was to formulate a uniform "Baptismal Covenant" and Baptismal "Vow," to be printed in the form of an appropriate Certificate. Be it noted that *it was based*

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\* WILLIAM HENRY BRANSON (1887-1961), after training at Battle Creek and Emmanuel Missionary colleges, engaged in evangelistic and pastoral work in Florida (1908-'10). In 1911 became president of South Carolina Conference—and was thenceforth in administrative posts for 43 years. Was president of Cumberland Conference (1913-'15), Southeastern Union (1915-'20), and next of the African Division (1920-'30). Became vice-president of General Conference in 1930. For a time was head of Central European Division, Section II, then of China Division (1938-'40). From 1941-'46 was vice-president of General Conference, then of China Division (1946-'49), and last, president of the General Conference (1950-'54). Author of six books.

upon our "Fundamental Beliefs" statement of 1931. This Certificate was to be used thenceforth, by all ministers, as the approved "profession of faith" for all candidates seeking admission and membership through baptism, into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CERTIFICATE.—As to the Eternal Verities, this Covenant—now appearing along with our "Fundamental Beliefs" statement in the *Church Manual*—stipulates in explicit terms our united belief in the First, Second, and Third Persons of the Godhead, or Trinity, as well as trust in the atoning Act of the Cross, and in the imperative of Righteousness by Faith. To these each candidate for baptism subscribes. They are thus set forth as an integral part of our profession of Faith, acceptance of which is a requirement for entrance into the Church of the Remnant.

This uniform Baptismal Certificate, with its summary of declared Adventist beliefs, and its 12-point "Covenant" and "Vow," was adopted by the Church in 1941, for presentation to each candidate as this solemn rite is performed, and for the permanent record of the Church. In relation to our "Fundamental Beliefs" statement of 1931, in addition to specific emphasis on the Three Persons of the Godhead, two points in the "Vow" are here emphasized that had not always been stressed in the past, owing to formerly divergent views thereon.

One of these (No. 2) pressed on the "death" of Christ as an "atoning sacrifice." The other (No. 4) bore on *Righteousness by Faith*, thus putting these two fundamental provisions in the forefront for all candidates, as they pass through the baptismal portal of the church into full-fledged membership. They consequently are and will continue to be, an affirmed part of the Adventist faith.

3. READIED FOR THE GREAT ADVANCE.—We were now ready, so far as an acceptable Statement of Faith and Baptismal Certificate were concerned, to go to all the world with the *Everlasting Gospel* message in a clearer and more compelling way. We were no longer subject to a legitimate charge that on the Eternal Fundamentals—the basic principles, provisions, and Personalities of redemption—we were divided, or in conflict with the testimony of the soundest Christian faith of the centuries. And in addition, that we ourselves were out of harmony with the repeated and cumulative declarations of the Spirit of Prophecy.

So it was that we passed the last major theological roadblock in the series of obstacles that we have been compelled to survey in tracing our history. The culminating events of the decade 1931 to 1941 consequently marked the end of an old epoch, and the beginning of a new day in

unification and auspicious witness for us as a Movement. It was definitely another major turning point in denominational history.

4. REPRESENTATIVE PERSONNEL OF COMMITTEE.—For the record, the representative character, and range of responsibility and experience, of the original Baptismal Certificate Committee of thirteen can be seen by scanning its personnel:

“W. H. Branson [vice-president, General Conference], W. G. Turner [vice-president, General Conference], J. L. McElhany [president, General Conference], J. L. Shuler [evangelism teacher, Seminary] R. A. Anderson [associate secretary, Ministerial Association], A. W. Peterson [secretary, MV Department, General Conference], J. F. Wright [vice-president, General Conference], T. J. Michael [associate secretary, General Conference], J. E. Weaver [secretary, Department of Education, General Conference], R. Ruhling [field secretary, General Conference], L. E. Froom [secretary, Ministerial Association, General Conference], D. E. Rebok [president, SDA Theological Seminary], A. B. Russell [pastor, Takoma Park church].” (*GC Committee Minutes*, July 14, 1941, p. 35.)

5. REPRESENTS UNITED FAITH, NOT VARIANTS.—The Baptismal Covenant and Vow represents the united faith of the Church as a whole—not the personal concept of any individual minister, or even of a geographical or language section of the church, whether large or small.

It is for all, and all alike. And its content is properly limited to the agreed fundamental teachings and practices of the church. Never should it be cumbered with extraneous minor features. That was the clear objective of the committee, and of the Church.

## II. Revision of *Daniel and the Revelation* Inevitable

1. CORRECTION OF CERTAIN BOOKS NECESSARY.—The next logical and inevitable step in the implementing of our unified “Fundamental Beliefs” involved revision of certain standard works so as to eliminate statements that taught, and thus perpetuated, erroneous views on the Godhead. Such sentiments were now sharply at variance with the accepted “Fundamental Beliefs” set forth in the *Church Manual*, and with the uniform “Baptismal Covenant” and “Vow” based thereon, which, in certificate form, was now used for all candidates seeking admission to membership in the church.

More than that, the unequivocal Spirit of Prophecy declarations on the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ were actually being contradicted through retention of conflicting statements in such standard books. These productions must therefore be brought into harmony with the now declared Faith of the Church. The first and

most conspicuous of these involved certain erroneous *theological* concepts that had long appeared in *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* by Uriah Smith, who had died in 1903.

This treatise, esteemed as a whole, first appeared, as we learned, in the late 1860's and early 1870's. It had therefore been in print for more than seventy years, and had been accorded an honored place throughout those years—and still is. Moreover, its unique place was recognized by Ellen White. (Ms 174, 1899.) But she also said that errors in our older literature "call for careful study and correction" (E. G. White, Ms 11, 1910; ISM, p. 165). That was now applied.

2. UNWARRANTED TRADITION HAD DEVELOPED.—Such an undertaking meant treading on delicate ground. To some—still of personal semi-Arian persuasion—*Daniel and the Revelation* was holy ground, as it were. Some, particularly in one geographical area, sincerely felt that this book was virtually "inspired."

According to the memory of A. C. BOURDEAU,\* Mrs. White was reported to have declared, many years before, that an angel stood by Smith's side and guided his hand as he penned its pages. This far-back recollection had developed into an almost sacred tradition with this group. But it was, in fact, only a remembrance—*written many years after the stated episode*. It was never, however, an E. G. White testimony.

So in 1944—soon after the adoption of the uniform Baptismal Covenant, Vow, and Certificate of 1941—the revision of "D&R" (as it was familiarly known), was undertaken. A representative committee was set up that included the book editors of the three main North American publishing houses. W. E. HOWELL,† secretary to the president of the General Conference—with extensive service background—was named chairman. Merwin R. Thurber, book editor of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, served as secretary, from whose records the full facts have been secured.

3. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF REVISION.—The fundamental assign-

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\* AUGUSTIN CORNELIUS BOURDEAU (1834-1916), of French descent, was formerly a Baptist preacher. Accepted Advent Message in 1856. As a self-supporting preacher raised up churches in Vermont. Was president of Vermont Conference (1858-1866), then of our first Canadian Conference in 1875. Next labored in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Missouri. From 1884-1888 served in Italy, Romania, Switzerland, and France.

† WARREN E. HOWELL (1869-1943), trained at Battle Creek College. Specialized in Greek, history, and Biblical interpretation. Taught at Healdsburg College (1894-'97). Was principal of mission school, Hawaii. Taught at Emmanuel Missionary College (1901-'03). Was president of Healdsburg College (1904-'06), and first president of Loma Linda College of Medical Evangelists. Was missionary to Greece, then principal of Home Study Institute (1909-'13). After serving as assistant secretary in General Conference Department of Education, was general secretary of the department for 12 years (1918-'30), as well as editor of *Christian Education* (1918-'30). Was chairman of committee to revise *Daniel and the Revelation*. From 1930 until his death in 1943 was secretary to president of General Conference.

ment of the committee was to bring the facts, statistics, and quotations of D&R up to date, without materially altering the *prophetic exposition* of the author of the volume. When the committee's work was completed, the committee made its final report to the Spring Council of 1944, held in New York City. W. H. Branson, general vice-president of the General Conference at the time, was asked to make a covering statement in behalf of the committee.

This was because any revision of D&R was still a highly sensitive matter, with a relatively small group still personally holding the semi-Arian view. This writer was present at the council in New York, and personally heard the report, and observed what followed.

Branson's remarks were to the effect that the book *Daniel and the Revelation* would of course retain Uriah Smith's name as author. The revision committee could not therefore rightly change any distinctive Uriah Smith *interpretation of prophecy*—such as on the "daily," the "king of the north," or the Huns as one of the ten divisions of Rome. Smith's interpretative views must be respected and retained in his own book.

But where the author's variant personal *theological views* on certain points appeared—such as his Arian concept of the nature of Christ—these had been eliminated because they were (1) not an interpretation of prophecy, and (2) were in conflict with our accepted statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" of 1931, and its extension in the uniform Baptism Certificate of 1941. But most serious of all, they were (3) still in direct conflict with numerous statements in the Spirit of Prophecy writings that were clearly on record in periodical article and book form.

These statements were all written in the decades following the writing of Smith's book—and especially in the decade after his death. He was therefore not acquainted with them.

**4. STRONG REACTION OF SMITH ADHERENTS.**—The reaction of the minority who still held personally to the Arian view—and who regarded D&R as virtually inspired and therefore not to be touched or in any way altered—was rather vehement. Reference was made to the aforementioned floating A. C. Bourdeau statement to the effect that Mrs. White had said that an angel had guided his pen in the writing of D&R.

Such protestors likewise cited the E. G. White statement pronouncing a "woe" upon those who moved a peg or stirred a pin of our foundations (EW 258, 259)—but which statement actually had reference to the historical sequence of the First, Second, and Third Messages.

The Council proceeded to approve the report of the Committee. And the several Arian statements in *Daniel and Revelation* were accordingly eliminated. Thus the volume was brought into theological harmony with our "Fundamental Beliefs" statement in the *Yearbook* and *Church Manual*, the Baptismal Covenant and Vow, as well as the declarations of the Spirit of Prophecy on these points. The revised *Daniel and Revelation* continues to be circulated in this form.

5. BOURDEAU RECOLLECTION NOT A "TESTIMONY."—As to the contention concerning Mrs. White's alleged statement, there is no such testimony in the E. G. White Publications vault. It is merely a memory statement appearing in a floating letter by A. C. Bourdeau, and written many years after the occurrence.

Bourdeau there stated that the Whites visited their home in Enosburg, Vermont, at the time the proof pages of *Daniel and Revelation* arrived. It was then, he alleged, that Mrs. White made her statement. Fortunately, the Whites kept a diary of their travels. And according to historical fact this visit occurred in 1867, when only *Thoughts on the Revelation* had appeared. (*Thoughts on Daniel* did not come out until 1872.)

So the crucial "Daniel" part of the volume had not yet been written. Hence the Bourdeau assertion could not possibly apply to what had not yet been produced. But as this was only a memory statement—written many years after the occurrence—such an inaccuracy can be overlooked. But it does jeopardize the accuracy of the Bourdeau statement as a whole.

6. ANGELS STAND BY ALL CHAMPIONS OF TRUTH.—As to the protective angel-guidance feature, Mrs. White says that angels stood by the side of Martin Luther in his stalwart championship of truth. (GC, p. 122.) And a similar statement is made about John Wesley (p. 258). But that by no means indicates that everything these men said or wrote was without error.

Ellen White similarly says that God sent angels to move upon the heart of William Miller—and even states that an angel guards his dust, and that he will come up in the first resurrection. (EW, pp. 229, 258.) But again, that does not imply that Miller was inerrant, or semi-inspired in all the positions that he set forth—though he was mightily used of the Lord in connection with heralding the main thrust of the First Angel's Message. God constantly uses faulty men to His glory.

Angels stand by the side of those proclaiming God's truth. They have done so in every age, and assuredly do so today. But that does

not mean that they were inspired or that every view held or put forth by such is inerrant.\*

### III. Detailed Statement for the Record

1. REPRESENTATIVE REVISION COMMITTEE APPOINTED.—Because of sensitiveness over this item, particulars for the record are here given. It was early in 1942 that a committee of eleven was set up to revise the Smith volume and bring it up to date. The committee was comprised of:

W. E. Howell, chairman; F. M. Wilcox (editor, *Review and Herald*); H. M. Blunden (secretary, Publishing Department, General Conference); A. W. Cormack (associate secretary, General Conference); and W. E. Read (field secretary, General Conference); together with the managers—W. P. Elliott, H. G. Childs, and G. A. Huse, respectively—of our three North American publishing houses; and the book editors—M. R. Thurber of the *Review and Herald*, Merlin Neff of the Pacific Press, and James Schultz of the Southern Publishing Association.

The committee had power to act within the designated guidelines. And the resultant revised edition was to be issued jointly by the three publishing houses. This was carried through.

M. R. Thurber was secretary, and placed the "true story" of it all on record through the columns of *The Ministry* for April and May, 1945. This revision entailed long, laborious work—ten months of it—on the part of the revisers, that is, of a subcommittee of seven. But it was duly completed and the new editions were available by the end of 1944. (M. R. Thurber, "New Edition of 'Daniel and the Revelation,'" *The Ministry*, April, 1945, pp. 13-15.)

2. DOCTRINE NOT ESTABLISHED BY DICTUM.—It was recognized that care must be taken to avoid anything like an official dictum or pronouncement as to our major interpretations of prophecy. As former General Conference President J. Lamar McElhany wisely stated, "We do not establish our doctrines by vote of a committee, however official it may be" (quoted in *The Ministry*, May, 1945, p. 3). That abiding principle was recognized and followed.

It was restated by Chairman Howell that the book *Daniel and Revelation* remained the work of its original author, carrying his name, and hence could not rightly be made to teach interpretative views that Smith did not personally hold. For this reason his individual views on the "daily," "king of the north," the Huns as one of the ten kingdoms,

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\* The full facts regarding the A. C. Bourdeau letter are found in the E. G. White Publications mimeographed document entitled, "Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation." Secretary Arthur White's key statement is:

"Nowhere in Mrs. White's writings, published or unpublished, do we find reference to an angel standing by the side of Uriah Smith while he wrote." (P. 1.)

Armageddon, et cetera, remained as in his original writing—despite the fact that these were disputed points, with some of them already largely abandoned.

3. **PROBLEM OF ETERNITY OF CHRIST.**—In reporting on the progress of the revision committee to the Cincinnati Autumn Council, on October 22, 1942, Professor Howell made this succinct statement:

“‘In dealing with matters of fundamental doctrine in our work, we found only one instance in which it seemed advisable to make a change, namely, in the teaching on the eternity of Christ. It is a matter of record that Uriah Smith once believed that Christ was a created being. [*Thoughts on the Revelation* (1865), p. 91.] But later he revised his belief and teaching to the effect that Christ was begotten sometime back in eternity before the creation of the world. Since his day, later books of the Spirit of Prophecy, such as *Desire of Ages*, came out in the nineties and later on, making clear with the support of the Scriptures that Christ is coeternal with the Father. Since there is some difference of view among us on this point, it seemed to the committee wise to omit this teaching without comment. This was easy to do, because it had no direct bearing on the interpretation of prophecy.’”—*The Ministry*, May, 1945, p. 4.

4. **NO CHANGE IN SMITH'S EXPOSITIONAL VIEWS.**—As to Smith's personal views on prophecy, Howell further stated pointedly:

“‘In regard to such subjects as the daily, the passing of the Turk, the 144,000, and the seven heads of Revelation, on which there has been some difference of opinion, the author's teachings are left substantially as they were. It is pertinent to remark in this connection that on some points of secondary importance, such as Armageddon, the number of the beast, some parts of Daniel 11 and Revelation 17, and the lake of fire, Uriah Smith was not so dogmatic as some have thought, nor as some have chosen to be on their own.’” (*Review and Herald*, Oct. 29, 1942; *The Ministry*, May, 1945, p. 4.)

On all these points and procedures of revision, it should be added that the committee of eleven was in unanimous agreement.

5. **ELLEN WHITE DECLARATIONS GUIDED COMMITTEE.**—In the same issue of *The Ministry* (May, 1945), a compilation of E. G. White guiding statements on the “Pre-existence of Christ” appeared on pages 14 and 18—about the first compilation of its kind on the subject. These comprised thirteen periodical article and book extracts that were unequivocal in their declarations on the eternal pre-existence and complete Deity of Christ. These guided and confirmed the work of the committee.

#### IV. Elimination of Erroneous Note in *Bible Readings*

1. **ERRONEOUS POSITION INJECTED BY COLCORD.**—Cognizance must also be taken of the correction, in 1949, of a definite error appearing in a note on the nature of Christ during the Incarnation. For years it



had appeared, unchallenged, in the standard *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. It was in the section on "A Sinless Life." Apparently it was first written in by W. A. Colcord,\* in 1914. It likewise involved one of those questions upon which there had been variance of view through the years. Colcord had declared that during His incarnate earthly life Christ "partook† of our sinful, fallen nature" (p. 174).

This was another of those issues upon which there had been definitely divided opinion, although the witness of the Spirit of Prophecy was most explicit thereon. But no general position-stand had been taken, and the involvements of the note had not been brought to issue. It had not been considered of sufficient import to be touched upon in our statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" of 1931.

Latitude had therefore been the accepted attitude on the question. As a result, Adventists had long been censured by theologians not of our faith for tolerating this erroneous minority position, and this particular printed statement.

2. ERRONEOUS NOTE DELETED.—In 1949, Prof. D. E. Rebok, then president of our Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, when it was still in Washington, D.C., was requested by the Review and Herald to revise *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. Coming upon this unfortunate note on page 174, in the study on the "Sinless Life," he recognized that this was not true. But in eliminating the note he found that some still held with Colcord in his position.

However, a growing number of explicit statements by Ellen White had appeared confirming the true position that there was no "bent" to sin, or "taint" of sin, or "evil propensity" in Christ. He was like Adam before his fall, who was similarly without any inherent sinful "propensities." (See compilation of E.G.W. Statements, *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 650-660.)

So the inaccurate note was deleted, and has remained out in all subsequent printings. Thus another error was removed through these revisions of the 1940's, as concerned some of our standard and otherwise helpful books.

\* WILLIAM A. COLCORD (1860-1935), trained at Battle Creek College. Engaged in editorial work for the General Conference (1888-'93). Then served in administrative and editorial work in Australia (1893-1902). Returning to the States, taught at Union College (1902-04). Next became secretary of Religious Liberty Department of General Conference (1904-'10). Was on book committee of Review and Herald (1907-'14). In 1914, about the time his note on Christ's nature appeared in *Bible Readings*, he regrettably lost faith in the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But in 1934 a retraction was published in the *Review and Herald*, and he was received back into church membership.

† This was vastly different from His taking, receiving, accepting, having our sins laid upon, or imputed to, Him—which was wondrously true. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). It was a case of complete exchange—our sins were imputed to Him that His righteousness might be imputed to us. This apparently had not been thought through by some.