

TITHE TRUTH

“Issues Regarding Tithe”

The Tithe Problem

by Ralph Larson



An Open Letter to the Church

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Dear Brethren:

For several years I have been receiving from many troubled church members questions about their Christian stewardship of tithes and offerings. The central problem in their minds has been whether God required them to give financial support to the preaching of doctrines that they believed to be contrary to our faith.

In response to those questions, I spent much time in research in the Spirit of Prophecy and published a report of my findings on the subject in *Our Firm Foundation*, September, 1991. My conclusions were the same as those that had been reached by Elders Willie White, A. O. Daniells, and W. W. Prescott, who had conducted similar research in the early 1900's.

The reaction to my report on the part of some church officials has been unusual, to say the least. A Union president wrote to me a letter bristling with personal abuse. The president of the Canadian

Union, D. Douglas Devnich, wrote a two- page article in the December, 1991, issue of The Canadian Union Messenger, in which he applied to me and to my article such malicious terms as “half- truths”, “distorts the writings of Ellen White”, “gross misquotations drawn out of context”, “accuses the pastors and leaders of the Church with falsity and apostasy”, “deceptive”, “dishonesty”, “willful intent to mislead”, “unscrupulous”, etc.

With minor changes, this article was reprinted in the Columbia Union Visitor, April, 1992, and described as “important counsel beneficial to members around the world”.

This unprecedented procedure has been very disturbing to many church members who have not previously witnessed our church papers being used for launching personal attacks against the character and integrity of a Seventh- day Adventist minister. And since my conclusions were identical with the conclusions of Willie White, A. O. Daniells, and W. W. Prescott, the question also arises, “Are these former church leaders not being similarly condemned as persons of no integrity?”

And why do church administrators and editors rush such accusations into print without checking them for accuracy, thereby seeming to establish a new low in journalistic irresponsibility?

These questions are lent added significance by the fact that the accusations in the Devnich article can be readily demonstrated to be without foundation. To illustrate this point, I will hereby offer Pastor Devnich a reward of \$1,000 if he will produce from my writings a statement that “accuses the pastors and leaders of the church with falsity and apostasy”, as he charged in the Canadian Union Messenger.

I firmly deny that in my writings there are “gross misquotations drawn out of context”, and I challenge Pastor Devnich and those who have reprinted his article to produce their evidence in support of this charge. I will also offer to Pastor Devnich an additional reward of \$1,000 if he will produce from my writings a “gross misquotation drawn out of context” from the writings of Ellen White or any author.

Pastor Devnich accuses me of distorting a passage in Testimonies, vol. 7, 176- 177 on the grounds that the word “tithe” does not appear there. I made no claim that the word “tithe” does appear there. The word “stewardship” does appear there several times. I see no way that the responsibilities of Christian stewardship can be properly fulfilled without the payment of tithe. Many persons, speaking in behalf of the SDA organization, have invoked the story of the widow and her two mites (Mark 12: 42) as evidence that all tithe should be paid through organizational channels regardless of existing conditions. Yet, the word “tithe” does not appear in that story. Shall we, therefore, accuse these persons as being “deceptive”, “dishonest”, “unscrupulous”, etc.?

Several weeks ago a “leak” was communicated to me from our world headquarters that my name was at or near the top of a “hit list” of persons who were to be disfellowshipped from the church. I was told that the first step in the planned procedure would be the launching of a smear campaign for the purpose of destroying my reputation and character, which would prepare the minds of the church members for the disfellowshipping that would follow.

The first part of the procedure appears to be well under way, but have the results of this action been carefully considered? What will be the reaction of fair-minded church members? When church

members learn that the appalling charges are without foundation in fact, how will this affect their confidence in church leadership? Will this draw them closer to the organization, or will it have the opposite effect?

May I respectfully suggest that all of you have a responsibility in this matter. I believe that since the false accusations have been spread world- wide, there must be an equally world- wide correction.

The church, which by the various articles, has had its attention drawn to this unprecedented personal attack, is watching to see whether there will be fair play and justice. It would seem that a minimal standard of fairness would require that such an accused person should be provided opportunity and space in the papers to respond to the accusations that have been made. I have made this request twice to the editors of The Canadian Union Messenger without results. I am hereby drawing it to your attention and requesting that your influence be exercised in behalf of justice and fair play.

Contrary to what you may have heard, I have never spoken against the church to which I and my wife have given our lives in service. I have spoken out against apostasy in the church, which I understand to be a fulfillment of my ordination vow. In all of my travels and in all of my seminars I urge people to never leave the church but to work for its revival and reformation. My theology is precisely and specifically the theology set forth in the book Seventh- day Adventists Believe. If I am divisive, that book is also divisive.

And one last question, Brethren. If you are the captain of the ship and a crew member warns you that there is a dangerous leak in the hull, what is the wisest procedure? To repair the leak or to throw the crewman overboard?

May the Lord bless and guide you as you consider this matter.

Very sincerely yours,

Ralph Larson

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The Tithe Problem - Part I

Today the question of accountable stewardship is becoming an issue in the minds of many Seventh-day Adventists. The awareness that we all have an individual accountability before the heavenly universe, to administer the trust committed to us of God has, in recent years, raised questions in our minds as to how to best fulfill that responsibility. It is not the purpose of this paper to solicit funds, or to attempt to point out what one's personal responsibility is, but to give our readers information that will help them fulfill their position as God's stewards.

The subject of tithe has come to be an emotional mine field, and so let us proceed with caution. Voices usually calm are likely to become strident when the subject is introduced, and not infrequently, strongly stirred feelings find expression in bitter accusations. Yet the problem is real, and it is here. It shows no sign of diminishing, but rather is steadily increasing. Ignoring it is not likely to be an adequate answer, nor yet is indulging in emotional outbursts which tend to aggravate tensions rather than to relieve them. Is it possible to calmly consider this problem? Let us try.

My own exposure to the problem has been educational. While I was teaching classes of ministers in the Asian Adventist Theological Seminary I sometimes met the question, "Is it ever proper to send tithe anywhere other than through the regular church channels?" I answered the question with a firm and uncompromising "No. Diverting the tithe to other than the regular church channels could never, under any circumstances, be the right thing to do."

I must confess that I did not give this answer because of evidence that I had seen, but because of evidence that I was sure I would find in the Spirit of Prophecy if I looked for it. However, since the question did not seem to be an urgent one at the time, and I was very busy with classes, evangelistic meetings, and other projects, I did not engage in any research on this particular topic.

But upon returning to the States in 1985 I was surprised to find that the question was seriously troubling many church members. With full confidence I set out to find the Spirit of Prophecy evidence that tithe should always go through the regular church channels and never anywhere else. This research brought my second and much greater surprise. I did not find what I was looking for. It just was not in the inspired writings.

Was I failing to properly understand what I had read? Apparently not. I did find a statement regarding the question that had been prepared by Willie White (Ellen White's son and secretary), Elder A. G. Daniells, and Elder W. W. Prescott, which indicated that neither had they found such evidence in Ellen White's writings. The historical context of their statement is as follows:

On May 9, 1907, a Charles E. Stewart of Battle Creek sent to Ellen White's office at Sanitarium, California, a 49- page compilation of questions and charges intended to cast doubt on the Spirit of Prophecy as manifested in her ministry. In October of the same year, the material was bound into a small book and published, apparently in Battle Creek. At some later date it was republished by another of Ellen White's critics, E. S. Baflenger, of Riverside, California. Document WDF 213, in the White Estate Office in Loma Linda, is a record of the plans made by Willie White, Daniells, and Prescott to deal with the charges in the book, one of which was that Ellen White's counsels and practice in regard to the tithe were not consistent, in that she did not always follow her own recommendations. Paragraph six on page two of the document is a clear statement of how these brethren understood the totality of Ellen White's teachings in regard to the paying of tithe. " 6. As to the proper use of the tithe: The outline of a statement on this subject which was agreed upon was briefly this: To give extracts from Sister White's writings as to the tithe and its use; to show that her testimony and her own usual practice was in favor of paying the tithe into the regularly designated treasury, to be used under the counsel of the committees appointed for such purposes; to show further from her writings that when those who have charge of the expenditure of the tithe so far fail in the discharge of their duty that the

regularly organized channels for the distribution of tithe become hindrances to its proper use, then in order to carry out the divine plan that the tithe should be expended in the wisest manner for the furtherance of the work, individuals have the right to pay their tithes direct to the needy fields; but that this involves a considerable degree of personal responsibility, which must be assumed by those who decide to follow this plan. It was thought that this matter could be handled in a way to show that the departure from the regular plans was authorized only when the regular plans failed to be carried out by those in positions of responsibility.”

This statement appeared to be strong evidence that I had not misunderstood the materials I had examined. The conclusions of these brethren were not different from my conclusions, after my study.

As indicated in the quotation, their purpose was to enlarge the outline into a tract or paper on the subject. We would, no doubt, find it helpful if we could read the paper itself, but I have not yet been able to locate a copy.

Certain basic points in regard to tithe paying stand out very clearly in Ellen White's writings. She had no doubt that returning tithe to the Lord is a Christian duty, and that a failure to perform this duty is tantamount to stealing from God (see Malachi 3). She is equally clear and firm in her conviction that the tithe has only one proper use, the support of the ministry of the Word of God. Although she includes those who minister with pen as well as with voice, she specifically excludes other forms of Christian endeavor, such as “school purposes” and “canvassers and colporteurs” (See Testimonies, vol. 9, 248- 249), a poor fund or church expense. See Counsels on Stewardship, 103, and other references.

According to the testimony of God's inspired messenger, tithe should always be faithfully returned to the Lord, and all of the tithe should be used for the support of the ministry. But which ministry or what ministry? This is the question that is troubling us now. What if a ministry strays from the path of sacred duty? What if a ministry becomes so theologically confused as to depart from the truths of God's Word and begins preaching a false gospel? What if church leaders begin to use tithe funds for purposes other than the ministry of the Word, such as those listed above, or even to pay the fees of non-Adventist lawyers? What, then, is our Christian duty? We may seek to escape from these troubling questions by shrugging them off and saying, “There is no need for us to concern ourselves about things like that. They could not happen in our church.” But in view of Ellen White's predictions of a great Adventist apostasy, is this a realistic attitude? Willie White, Daniells, and Prescott took no such position. They did not deny the possibility of a malfeasance, as indicated by these words: “. . . when those who have charge of the expenditure of the tithe shall so far fail in the discharge of their duty that the regular organized channels for the distribution of the tithe become hindrances to its proper use . . .

“When the regular plans failed to be carried out by those in positions of responsibility” Document WDF, 213

Let us remind ourselves that these brethren were not expressing their own opinions. They were setting forth what they understood to be the totality of the teachings of Ellen White. They had before them the example of Ellen White. In the year 1905, two years before their meeting, Ellen White had written a

letter to the president of the Colorado conference in which she had revealed that “for years” she had been using her tithe to assist needy ministers who were being neglected by the organization. When this statement was first called to my attention, I dismissed it very easily (I thought) by saying, “She was a prophet, and I am not a prophet. God often gives instructions to His prophets that do not apply to other people.”

But the matter is not quite that simple. The letter also revealed that when other persons offered her their tithe to use as she thought best, she accepted it and used it as indicated above, in support of needy ministers. Perhaps we could still say that she was exercising the prerogatives of a prophet, since the money passed through her hands.

But that would not be true of the third type of tithepayers who are mentioned in her letter: “If there have been cases where our sisters have appropriated their tithe to the support of the ministers working for the colored people in the south, let every man, if he is wise, hold his peace.”

There is no suggestion that this money passed through her hands, or that she was consulted about it. The money was apparently sent directly to needy ministers whose condition had become known to the tithepayers. Ellen White obviously did not disapprove of the actions of these persons, much less accuse them of “stealing” the tithe.

We must recognize that Willie White, Daniells, and Prescott, who were charged with the responsibility of setting forth a comprehensive statement regarding Ellen White's counsel and practice regarding tithe paying, were faithful to the evidence that was before them. They frankly reported their findings to the people, with neither understatement nor overstatement. They felt that there was no self-contradiction between Ellen White's writings and her practice. In neither her writings nor her practice was there any- thing to support the view that all tithe, regardless of circumstances, must be paid through regular church channels.

It is probable that they did not anticipate any great trouble for the church organization as the result of the publishing their frank statement. The conditions that they described as making it permissible, according to Ellen White's writings, for a church member to exercise individual judgment in deciding where to send tithe, (the failure of persons in places of responsibility to use the tithe for its proper purpose) hardly existed in their time, if they existed at all. These leaders could not have been expected to foresee the conditions that have now developed in the church as a result of the great Adventist apostasy that has been the subject of this series of studies.

But church members in our time could hardly be expected not to see these conditions. Many have recoiled in horror from the revelation that hundreds of thousands of dollars of sacred tithe funds have been used to employ Catholic and other non- Adventist lawyers to sue and prosecute persons for calling themselves Seventh- day Adventists, and in at least one case assessing huge fines and putting the person in jail.

Some members may not be aware of such specific incidents as this, but it would be difficult for any member in the North American Division to be unaware of the great theological apostasy which is the very heart of the tithe problem. He or she is likely to encounter it in church on any Sabbath morning.

It is an undeniable fact that there are pastors in Seventh-day Adventist churches, teachers in Seventh-day Adventist colleges, and persons at all levels of church administration who are persistently presenting as truth the devil's great lie, that Christians cannot stop sinning even by the power of God. Ellen White has identified this assertion no fewer than 35 times as a lie that originated in the heart of Satan, and that was proved to be false by our Lord Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly the strongest of her statements is this:

“Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the Lawgiver. Men who are under the control of Satan repeat these accusations against God, in asserting that men can not keep the law of God. Jesus humbled Himself, clothing His divinity with humanity, in order that He might stand as the head and representative of the human family, and by both precept and example condemn sin in the flesh, and give the lie to Satan's charges.” Signs of the Times, vol. 3, 264

May we suggest a second thoughtful reading of the above inspired statement? Its implications are staggering. Can it be possible that there are ministers, teachers, and administrators all through our ranks who are under the control of Satan? If the writings of Ellen White are inspired, we have no choice but to believe it.

Here is the heart of the tithe problem. Here is the answer to our question, Who is responsible? Would it not be the ministers who present poison from the pulpits, the teachers who present poison in the classrooms, and the administrators who support and defend them, ignoring desperate appeals from church members?

To blame the tithe problem on independent ministries is as illogical and unjust as to blame the historic Adventists for divisions being created in the church by the preaching of the false doctrines of Calvinism among us. May we here earnestly appeal for clear thinking and fair judgment on this matter?

Consider the problem of a church member who understands our message, is devoted to the truth as it is in Jesus, and has always been a faithful tithepayer. During the years he has built up a small library of Ellen White's writings and has studied them with care. Then he is confronted with a series of shocks.

On Sabbath he hears his pastor proclaim that our Lord came to earth in the human nature of the unfallen Adam, making Him very different from ourselves. He finds it puzzling, and so spends some time on Sabbath afternoon looking through his copy of *The Desire of Ages*. He finds the opposite affirmed to be true on pages 25, 49, 112, 117, 174- 175, and 311- 312. Soon after, he hears his pastor preach that it is impossible for Christians, by any means, to stop sinning and that it is impossible for anyone to obey the law of God. In his *The Desire of Ages* the church member finds this statement described as Satan's lie on pages 24,29, 117, and 761, and he finds in that volume a total of 78 statements that it is possible, through the power of Christ for Christians to obey God's law. He then turns to *The Great Controversy* and reads on page 489 that “[Satan] is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome.”

As this heart- wrenching experience continues, the church member is eventually forced to recognize that Ellen White's predictions about the great Adventist apostasy are being fulfilled before his eyes. Then comes the agonizing question, "Does God require me to pay my tithe to support the great apostasy?"

Like many others before him, he decides that this line of reasoning just doesn't make sense. He then turns to an independent ministry holding the Seventh- day Adventist historic faith, preaching the message that he accepted when he joined the church. He now begins to send his tithe to that ministry.

Now the question for every fair- minded person to consider is, Who is responsible? Has the church member's problem been created by the independent ministry, or by the preaching of the false doctrines of Calvinism in his own church?

And will this problem be solved by crushing independent ministries and letting the false preaching continue? The answer is self- evident. To destroy the independent ministries will not solve the church member's problem, nor will it be solved by cracking whips of church authority over his head, excluding him from church office, or by any other means of coercion.

Tragically, this obvious truth seems to be lost on some church administrators who continue to condemn and rail at independent ministries as if they were the cause of all the difficulty, and that the solution is simply to put them out of existence. It appears that some of these ministries are now being threatened with church discipline as a first step in that direction.

I have been invited to several meetings ostensibly called for the purpose of resolving tensions between independent ministries and the church organization. At none of these meetings did I discern the slightest recognition that the preaching of false doctrines in our churches was the real problem, or even any part of the problem. At none of them did I hear the slightest hint that any attempt would be made to correct this evil. Rather, the message delivered to the independent ministries is simple, "You, and only you, are the problem, and if you do not stop what your are doing, in particular if you do not stop accepting tithe, you are going to suffer the consequences."

Some are already suffering the consequences. Members of independent ministries have in some places been denied the right to transfer their membership either into or out of the churches where they live. It should be remembered that transfers are a right of church membership and may be denied, according to the church manual, only by properly conducted church disciplinary actions. See pages 162- 163 of the Church Manual.

For that matter, the Church Manual also recognizes the right of independent ministries to exist (see page 158), and also provides that no church member's standing should be called in question because of his failure to give financial support to the church. See page 165

But strong emotion is the enemy of reason, and as we noted at the beginning of this study, emotions tend to run high when the tithe problem is mentioned- so high that in some cases neither appeals to the Church Manual, to the Spirit of Prophecy, or even to the Bible itself bring any result.

Emotional tensions also contribute to the mishandling of evidence found in various public statements about tithe, and the accusations accompanying them. Possibly the outstanding example of mishandled evidence is a variety of Ellen White statements, written to show that tithe should be used only for the ministry of the Word and not for other Christian endeavors, are misconstrued to mean that tithe should be paid only to one ministry of the Word and not to the other ministries of the Word. An oft-quoted example of this misconception is on page 247 of Testimonies, vol. 9:

“Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work.” Emphasis supplied

What Ellen White meant by the clause “what they may regard as the Lord's work,” is made clear on the following pages by these lines:

“One reasons that the tithe may be applied to school purposes. Still others reason that canvassers and colporteurs should be supported from the tithe. But a great mistake is made when the tithe is drawn from the object for which it is to be used— the support of the ministers.” 248- 249

In view of the general frailty of human nature, and the specific predictions by Ellen White that there would be many apostates in the Seventh- day Adventist ministry in the last days, (see Testimonies to Ministers, 409- 410; Testimonies, vol. 5, 80- 81, 707) it would have been hazardous indeed for the messenger of the Lord to have singled out any particular group of ministers as the only ones who should ever be supported by tithe, and even more hazardous to maintain that they must be supported by tithe regardless of what they might be teaching or doing.

“It would be poor policy to support from the treasury of God those who really mar and injure His work, and who are constantly lowering the standard of Christianity.” Testimonies, vol. 3, 553

“There are fearful woes for those who preach the truth, but are not sanctified by it, and also for those who consent to receive and maintain the unsanctified to minister to them in word and doctrine.” Ibid., vol. 1, 261- 262

“As there are woes for those who preach the truth while they are unsanctified in heart and life, so there are woes for those who receive and maintain the unsanctified in the position which they cannot fill.” Ibid., vol. 2, 552

Let us take note, also, of Ellen White's use of the expression, “the treasury of God.” In her letter to the Conference president to which we have already referred, she first tells of her practice and then adds, “The money is not withheld from the Lord's treasury.” Obviously she did not have the limited view of “the Lord's treasury” that some have today.

Some independent ministries have pointed out Ellen White's statements that it is not necessary for all “funds” or “means” to flow through the same channels, and since no exception is stated in regard to tithe, they have concluded, not unreasonably, that these general terms include both tithes and offerings. But some writers have seized upon this conclusion and made it the basis for accusations of

dishonesty. Surely this accusation could be termed uncontrolled emotionalism. We certainly want to have much stronger evidence before we accuse any persons of being dishonest.

You and I cannot solve the problems of the church nor the problems of the independent ministries, but we can and must resolve our own personal and individual problem in regard to the type of ministry that we support with our tithe. This problem is best solved by each one of us on his knees before the Lord, with the inspired writings before him. Probably none of us should presume to instruct others as to their duty.

Some may think of the widow and her two mites upon whom the Lord pronounced a blessing in spite of the corruption among church leaders at that time.

Others may reflect that we have no evidence that the widow was aware of the corruption, and that in any case there was no representative church government such as we have now. Some will be influenced by Ellen White's statement:

“God desires to bring men into direct relation with Every man has been made a steward of sacred trusts; each is to discharge his trust according to the direction of the Giver; and by each an account of his stewardship must be rendered to God We are responsible to invest this means ourselves.” Testimonies, vol. 7, 176- 177

“Do we individually realize our true position, that as God's hired servants we are not to bargain away our stewardship? We have an individual accountability before the heavenly universe, to administer the trust committed us of God.” Testimonies to Ministers, 361- 362

And we must not overlook the warnings previously quoted that there are woes upon those who consent to receive and maintain ministers whose unsanctified attitudes injure the work of God.

It has not been the purpose of this study to give directions to any person as to his individual responsibility. It has been our purpose to prove the following points:

There is no biblical or Spirit of Prophecy evidence to support the view that all tithe must, regardless of circumstances, be paid through organizational channels. Such a position might in some cases require that outright apostasy be supported by tithe, which is far beyond the boundaries of reason.

We have been given through God's appointed messenger an abundance of clear warnings that there would be a time when apostate ministers would be preaching in many Seventh- day Adventist pulpits, and that the apostasy would sweep through the ranks of our ministers and our members.

If we are to take Ellen White's words at their face value, that time has at least partially arrived, in that many ministers are now occupying Seventh- day Adventist pulpits who are preaching as truth the devil's great lie- that Christians cannot stop sinning even through the power of Christ. By unmistakably clear Spirit of Prophecy definition, such ministers are “under the control of Satan.”

Therefore, as Christian stewards under God, we have a solemn responsibility to fulfill in regard to our tithes and our offerings.

May the Lord help each one of us to prayerfully, carefully, and conscientiously return the sacred tithe,

as the Lord has directed, for the support of the ministry. May we never be confused and uncertain as to what kind of ministry the Lord deems worthy to receive the tithe. And may we never be confused or uncertain as to who is responsible for the present tithe problem. The responsibility must be placed squarely at the doors of those who are preaching among us the false doctrines of Calvinism and the administrators who are supporting and maintaining them in their positions.

The messenger of the lord counseled parents, guardians of youth, and those who minister in the service of God:

“When existing evils are not met and checked, because men have too little courage to reprove wrong, or because they have too little interest or are too indolent to tax their own powers in putting forth earnest efforts to purify the family or the church of God, they are accountable for the evil which may result in consequence of neglect to do their duty. We are just as accountable for evils that we might have checked in others, by reproof, by warning, by exercise of parental or pastoral authority, as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves.” Testimonies, vol. 4, 516

May God give us faith, courage, and power in these troubled times to know and do the will of the Lord.

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The Tithe Problem - Part 2

The editors of the Adventist Review have taken notice of the questions about tithe that are troubling an increasing number of our church members and have published in their edition of September 7, 1991, a supplement in the form of an inserted tract dealing with the subject.

This development is most welcome. It is hoped that the Review editors will continue this enlightened policy, and that they will apply it to the other areas of concern that are as troubling to our members as the tithe question, if not more troubling.

We suggest that every church member who has a sincere desire to know and to do God's will, will do well to save this special insert and compare it with the article on tithe in the September issue of Our Firm Foundation, as well as with this article.

We are confident that only good can come from such a comparison. Let every church member examine the evidence and draw his or her own conclusions. Here the matter must ultimately rest, as was recognized by Ellen White in a thought-provoking statement on page 616 of *The Desire of Ages*:

“The Jewish rulers recognized the obligation of tithing, and this was right; but they did not leave the people to carry out their own convictions of duty.”

It is to be hoped that all concerned parties will remember that church members cannot be forced to pay tithe. They must act out their own convictions in the matter, and these convictions will grow out of their satisfaction with the scriptural and the Spirit of Prophecy evidences placed before them. Scoldings and

threatenings will not suffice, and church discipline on this point is specifically forbidden in the church Manual. See page 240 in the 1971 edition and page 165 in the 1986 edition

We, therefore, welcome the decision of the Review editors to bring the subject out into the open, so that church members may be provided with the opportunity to weigh evidence, evaluate arguments, and develop their own convictions of duty.

Basic Principles Before considering the specifics of the situation, let us identify some landmarks and fixed boundaries, basic principles that must apply to any and all of the details. The most important and relevant truth that must be kept in mind throughout all of our study is:

“It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.” - Selected Messages, book 1,67 The experience of the Israelites, who were once the chosen people of God but were eventually rejected as a people by God, testifies eloquently to the truth of this statement. The opinion that prevailed among the Jews of Christ's time was that regardless of how far they departed from the express will of God, they nevertheless retained their position as the chosen people of God, with all of the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. This conviction was in spite of such clear warnings as had been given in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, Jeremiah 18, and elsewhere.

Here is the crux of the matter. The questions that we must consider are these: Could it be possible that the error of the Jews might have, to some degree, crept into our thinking? Are we beginning to believe that we are unconditionally the true church of God? Are we presuming that the rights and privileges of a true and faithful church are ours unconditionally? That the promises of God are without condition?

Are we supposing that the rights and privileges of a true and faithful ministry can be claimed by our ministry unconditionally? That they have a right to collect tithe regardless of what they teach and do?

Doubtless we would find these questions easier to answer if they were expressed in terms of totality—total rejection of all of the will of God by all of the ministers of our church. We would quickly agree that such is not the case. But does that resolve our problem? Was there not always a faithful remnant in Israel? And do we know of any church today that rejects all of God's truth? Yet, God rejected Israel, and we know God is calling His people out of the popular churches of our time.

Is it not apparent that there is a line beyond which infidelity may not pass with impunity? A line beyond which neither a church nor a ministry can claim for itself the rights and privileges that God has guaranteed to a faithful church and to a faithful ministry? We must remember the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.

We come now to the question, How should we see our church and its ministry today? The Review tract writer suggests that there is a significant difference between saying there is apostasy in a church and saying a church, speaking of the entire body of believers, is in apostasy. This point is well taken. I know of only one independent ministry leader who has a conviction that the church is in apostasy. The rest would say, like the Review tract writer, that there is apostasy in the church, although they would not minimize it as he does.

I have received a letter from a Union Conference president which opens with this sentence: "I despair with you over the fact that so many of our church members are finding it necessary to turn to independent ministries in order to hear basic Adventist teaching." And I would recommend for thoughtful study the Annual Council 1973/ 1974 Appeals for reform as published in Our Firm Foundation in December 1991.

The precise point in increasing apostasy at which it would be appropriate to stop saying there is apostasy in the church and start saying the church is in apostasy is a difficult problem. It is doubtful that human wisdom is sufficient for the question. Probably it would be best to let that point be defined by the Divine Mind that never errs in judgment.

But the questions that are coming to me from all across the country are from church members who are facing an immediate, practical problem. They are being forced to recognize that some of the doctrines being presented in their particular churches are very different from the doctrines they were taught when they joined the church or when they attended Adventist schools. Many recognize the strange doctrines as the very errors they left behind when they withdrew from other churches in order to become Seventh- day Adventists.

These members do not wish to return to those errors, nor have them taught to their children. Many have made fruitless appeals to church pastors and administrators. These are the kind of people who are turning in despair to ministries which are teaching the unchanged Seventh- day Adventist faith. These are the kind of people who are asking the urgent question, "Does God require me to pay tithe to support the teaching of false doctrines? Would it be wrong to pay tithe to a ministry that teaches the faith that I believe?"

I sympathize with them, although I do not presently share their problem. The church where I hold membership is served by a pastor who preaches the historic Seventh- day Adventist message, and so I am comfortable paying tithe and offerings to this church. If this pastor were transferred and a Calvinistic Adventist pastor put into his place, I do not know what I would do. I hope that I never have to face the problem. But others are facing the problem.

These questions are what caused me to do the research that was reported in Our Firm Foundation, September 1991. I set forth my conclusion in this statement:

"In neither Ellen White's writings nor her practice was there anything to support the view that all tithe, regardless of circumstances, must be paid through regular channels."

The writer of the Review tract article challenges this conclusion and sets forth a series of arguments in support of the view that all tithe must be paid through the regular church channels, apparently regardless of circumstances. He sees it as the correct understanding of Ellen White's writings on the subject.

For purposes of analysis, we will group his arguments as follows:

Argument from the Scriptures

Arguments from the Spirit of Prophecy

Arguments regarding Document File 213
Arguments based on supernatural powers
Arguments ad hominem, against the man
Theological questions
Argument From the Scriptures

We use “argument” in the singular form because there is only one scriptural argument presented:

“The Old Testament gives clear instruction for the return and use of the tithe. The New Testament does not elaborate further, except to endorse the necessity of tithe paying.” Page 2

Let us compare this statement with 1 Corinthians 9, in which the apostle Paul responds to questions about his credentials and his right to the financial support of the people. The general principles set forth in the first twelve verses are brought to a specific conclusion in verses 13 and 14:

“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

Verse 13 is an obvious reference to the tithing system, by which the Levites were supported. Verse 14 specifically applies the same principle to another group. And who are they? “They which preach the gospel.”

Their credentials are the gospel which they preach. And was Paul a pluralist? Was he saying that preachers of any gospel and all gospels are to be supported by the tithe? We will find the answer in Galatians 1: 8- 9:

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

Does “let him be accursed” equate with “Let him be supported by the tithe?” And notice that Paul includes even himself in the warning, saying “Though we preach any other gospel unto you....” Is he not putting the test of truth above all other tests? Is he not telling them that the true gospel is the highest of all credentials? So much so that they should refuse to listen to even Paul himself if he came back to them preaching a different gospel, a new theology? How, then, can it be argued that if a minister is a member of a certain church and carries credentials from that church, he is entitled to be supported by the tithes of God's people regardless of what gospel he preaches?

Arguments From the Spirit of Prophecy Unfortunately, much of the material in this area is wasted, because it does not deal with the question before us. The longest series of Spirit of Prophecy quotations presented are warnings against withholding tithe, a practice which no one is defending. All of the parties involved in the present discussion believe that tithe paying is a sacred duty. None would approve of withholding it.

Similarly, much attention is given to the Spirit of Prophecy counsels regarding the proper use of the

tithe to support the ministers of the gospel, a matter concerning which there is no significant disagreement. All of the parties involved are committed to following these inspired counsels, although in his list of the proper uses of the tithe, the writer might have included this instruction: "But while some go forth to preach, He calls upon others to answer to His claims upon them for tithes and offerings with which to support the ministry, and to spread the printed truth all over the land" Testimonies, vol. 4, 472; emphasis supplied in all quotations

Emphasis in the Review tract is placed upon a caution against any person "gathering up tithes," which I would understand to mean solicitation. I do not know of any independent ministry that solicits tithe. Tithe comes to the independent ministries voluntarily from church members who are weary of false teachings being presented in their particular churches. Most of these church members have been faithful tithe payers for many years. Their devotion and fidelity to this Bible truth is not different from their devotion and fidelity to the other truths of our faith which they cannot bear to see changed. Where truth is taught, tithe is paid. That is the bottom line.

A strong attempt is made to apply Ellen White's warnings against withholding tithe to the payment of tithe through other than the regular church channels. Two lines of reasoning are set forth in support of this proposition.

First, it is argued that for Ellen White the expression "the Lord's treasury" meant only church and conference treasuries. This statement is in spite of the fact that when she herself sent tithe directly to needy ministers, and not through church or conference treasuries, she wrote, "The money is not withheld from the Lord's treasury." (The Watson letter, quoted in Review tract, page 13.) How, then, can it be maintained that for her "the lord's treasury" meant only church and conference treasuries?

The Review tract writer apparently anticipated this question and offered what is, to my mind' a very unsatisfactory explanation. After having admonished us that for Ellen White "the lord's treasury" meant always and only the church and conference treasuries, he then tells us that when Ellen White's tithe was sent directly to needy ministers, bypassing church and conference treasuries, it was not withheld from the lord's treasury because they were Seventhday Adventist ministers.

Readers may decide for themselves whether this attempt to walk on both sides of the street at once is persuasive. Would not this interpretation open the door for all of us to bypass church and conference treasuries and send our tithe directly to needy ministers of our choice?

The second line of reasoning advanced in support of the claim that for Ellen White "the Lord's treasury" meant only church and conference treasuries is that for Ellen White the word "means" does not generally include tithe but is applied only to offerings. Since only this argument was new to me, I checked it out carefully, and quickly discovered that the claim does not bear up well under investigation.

I went to that marvelous invention, the "CD Rom," as produced by the White Estate, and asked it to report whether in Ellen White's writings the words tithe, tithes, tithing, and tenth, were ever used in connection with the word means. It promptly supplied 168 references in which these words were used

in such a manner as to make it impossible to separate them from the word means, which obviously included them. In some passages tithes and offerings together are referred to as means, and in other passages tithe alone is referred to as means. For the sake of brevity, we will provide here a sampling of those statements that do not include offerings: "Every soul who is honored in being a steward of God is to carefully guard the tithe money. This is sacred means." Manuscript Releases. vol. 1, 185

"There are a large number of names on our church books; and if all would be prompt in paying an honest tithe to the lord, which is His portion, the treasury would not lack for means." Counsels on Stewardship, 95

"Of the means which is entrusted to man, God claims a certain portion- a tithe." Testimonies, vol. 5, 149 "God has given special direction as to the use of the tithe. He does not design that His work shall be crippled for want of means." Gospel Workers, 224

"Should means flow into the treasury exactly according to God's plan- a tenth of all the increase, there would be abundance to carry forward His work." Evangelism, 252

"And in view of this the Lord commands us, 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house; ' that is, a surplus of means in the treasury.'" Review and Herald, vol. 2, 18

"If all of our people paid a faithful tithe, there would be more means in the treasury." Ibid., vol. 4, 507

"With an increase of numbers would have come an increase of tithe, providing means to carry the message to other places." Pamphlet No. 67,9

"If all, both rich and poor, would bring their tithes into the storehouse, there would be a sufficient supply of means." Testimonies, vol. 4, 475

Since Ellen White went into print 168 times with statements clearly identifying tithes as means, (sometimes using duplicate words), it is difficult to understand how the Review tract writer could have reached an opposite conclusion. And since his representation that for Ellen White the expression "the lord's treasury" means only church and conference treasuries is not supported by either of the two evidences he offers, it collapses of its own weight. It deprives of all validity the attempt to apply Ellen White's warnings against "withholding tithe" to those who do not withhold tithe but, rather, send it to ministers that they feel are faithful to our message. And it gives particular force to her statement:

"All the means is not to be handled by one agency or organization." Spalding- Magan Collection, 421

Arguments Regarding Document File 213 As was stated in my article in Our Firm Foundation, September 1991, this file contains a record of the plans that were made by Willie White, Ellen White's son and secretary; General Conference President A. O. Daniells; Elder W. W. Prescott; and others to deal with criticisms of Ellen White that had been published by a Dr. Stewart in the year 1907. Stewart had charged Ellen White with inconsistency in that she recommended paying tithe through organizational channels, yet did not always follow her own counsel. Their proposal for dealing with the challenge was set forth in these words:

“As to the proper use of the tithe: the outline of a statement upon this subject which was agreed upon was briefly this: to give extracts from Sister White's writings as to the tithe and its use; to show that her testimony and her own usual practice was in favor of paying the tithe into the regularly designated treasury, to be used under the counsel of the committees appointed for such purposes; to show further from her writings that when those who have charge of the expenditure of the tithe so far fail in the discharge of their duty that the regularly organized channels for the distribution of the tithe become hindrances to its proper use, then in order to carry out the divine plan that the tithe should be expended in the wisest manner for the furtherance of the work, individuals have the right to pay their tithes direct to needy fields; but that this involves a considerable degree of personal responsibility, which must be assumed by those who decide to follow this plan. It was thought that this matter could be handled in a way to show that the departure from the regular plans was authorized only when the regular plans failed to be carried out by those in positions of responsibility.”

The Review tract writer tries to offset this evidence by the following methods: First, doubt is cast upon the authorship and dating of the document. I see no reason for such doubts. The file contains four letters from Dr. Stewart on the subject, all addressed to Willie White. There is also a letter of response from Willie White to Dr. Stewart. The notes, or “memoranda,” contain ten references to Willie White as the one who should answer certain questions. The most significant of the ten for the purposes of our inquiry is

“Tithe— to whom it should be paid: “Refer this to W. C. White. Very important.” In the light of this evidence it appears that to question Willie White's involvement in the proceedings is hardly reasonable. And to question the date is not more reasonable. The four letters if of Dr. Stewart to Willie White are dated October 22, 1906; May 8, 1907; June 10, 1907; and June 24, 1907. Willie White's letter to Dr. Stewart is dated June 9, 1907. The book by Dr. Stewart was published in mid- October, 1907, and a copy was sent to Willie White on October 27, 1907. The “memoranda” which includes the statement about tithe makes specific reference to this book. These facts seem to adequately establish the date for all practical purposes.

Second, the Review tract writer proposes that these men did not properly understand Ellen White's thinking regarding the tithe, and supports this proposal with a most unhelpful comparison. He refers to a vision of heavenly planets given to Ellen White in 1846 in the presence of James White and Joseph Bates, who assumed that she was seeing Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus. Then, we are told:

“Closeness to a prophet does not guarantee correctness.” We are asked to accept this as evidence that Ellen White's son Willie, who had been her personal secretary and companion for twenty- six years, did not understand her thinking regarding the tithe, a matter concerning which she had gone into print well over a thousand times. The Review tract writer, viewing the situation from a distance of more than 80 years, seems to feel he has a better understanding of her thinking than Willie White did.

This reasoning strains the credulity to the breaking point.

Another attempt to discredit Document File 213 will be commented on in section 4. Before leaving this section we must mention a puzzling question and answer found on page 5 of the tract:

Q. "I've heard it said that other women who joined Mrs. White in her 'tithe project' for the Southern ministers didn't send their tithe through Mrs. White but sent it directly to needy ministers, and that she must have approved of such actions. Is this so?"

A. "No." (Followed by a lengthy explanation.) I do not understand how the writer proposes to harmonize this statement with the following lines in the Watson letter, which appears on page 13 of the Review tract:

"If there have been cases where our sisters have appropriated their tithe to the support of the ministers working for the colored people in the South, let every man, if he is wise, hold his peace...."

"I commend those sisters who have placed their tithe where it is most needed to help do a work that is being left undone."

Especially puzzling is the writer's recommendation that "the only safe course to follow, as regards Mrs. White's position on the tithe question, is to let her speak for herself." Page 6

Why, then, should the writer pose two questions about Ellen White's writings (on pages 5 and 6) and refer us to two interpreters of Ellen White's writings for the answers? We are reminded of her own words:

"My Instructor said to me, Tell these men that God has not committed to them the work of measuring, classifying, and defining the character of the testimonies." Selected Messages, book 1,49

I intend no disrespect to anyone, but I prefer to look at Ellen White's writings with my own eyes and not through the eyes of another.

Arguments Based on Supernatural Knowledge On page six of the tract we find two statements that go far beyond human knowledge and could only be made by persons who are writing with supernatural wisdom of some kind.

In the first, a White Estate archivist makes reference to the Document File 213 and writes: "The Watson letter is the only Ellen White statement from which they formed their conclusions." Compare this with some lines from the statement itself: "To give extracts from Sister White's writings.... To show that her testimony and her own usual practice..... To show further from her writings."

We see here no indication that they considered nothing but the Watson letter In the absence of such an indication, to state what they did or did not consider would require supernatural knowledge.

On page 6 of the tract we find this bold statement: "And it is an undeniable fact that Mrs. White never counseled anyone to place his or her tithes anywhere except in the denominational 'treasury.'" '

This is breathtaking. How could any human being know with such certainty what Ellen White never did? Only by supernatural knowledge. A logician would point out that nothing can be proved by the absence of evidence. It would be more accurate and more modest for a writer to state that he had found no evidence of such counsel in the written records. But, to firmly state as an "undeniable fact"

that she never gave any such counsel would surely require godlike powers.

Similar in nature is the bold statement on page 9 of the tract: "Ellen White never even considered such an option." How can any human being state with such assurance what another person has or has not considered? Would not this require supernatural knowledge?

On page 10 the Review tract writer does not hesitate to tell us what Ellen White intended and on page 15 he explains to us what Ellen White had in mind on a certain occasion. All of this requires powers that are not possessed by ordinary humans. Most of us would have to admit that we are not able to read the minds of our contemporaries, much less the minds of persons who died long before we were born. Surely such statements should be regarded with extreme caution.

Arguments Ad Hominem A long established principle of discussion is that those who have evidence will present their evidence, whereas those who do not have evidence will attack the man. This is called the argument ad hominem, against the man, also expressed in the statement:

"As evidence decreases, vehemence increases." It is to be regretted that the Review tract writer makes several references to those who "solicit or accept" tithe. As stated earlier, I have never heard of any ministry that solicits tithe. Also as stated before, tithe comes to independent ministries unbidden from distressed and disenchanted church members. Ellen White herself did not reject such tithe. (See the Watson letter.)

Neither have I ever heard of anyone who accuses the church of being in apostasy simply because of a different view regarding the human nature of Christ. See "Theological Questions" below. For the evidence which causes most historic Adventists to reject the author's reasoning about the human nature of Christ, we refer the reader to our 365- page research report, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, available from Hope International.

When a writer proposes that he will present to us a "fair reading" of Ellen White's writings (page 11), he is alleging that only an unfair person could understand the matter differently than he does.

And to suggest or imply that persons who quote a portion of a long statement have sinister purposes in mind is again to lay claim to supernatural abilities to read minds and to judge motives.

Since Ellen White strongly indicated in the Watson letter that she preferred that her personal handling of tithe funds not be widely advertised, it is alleged that persons like myself who have made reference to the letter are at fault. This allegation overlooks the fact that the entire letter has been published twice by the White Estate itself, in 1987 in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 11, pages 99- 100, and in 1981 in Elder Arthur White's *Ellen O. White: The Early Elmshaven Years*, pages 395-396. To fault those who now make reference to it is hardly candid.

The tendency to use the argument against the man reaches its climax on page 7, where it is proposed that it may eventually be discovered that

(1) "Those who now take the position that the church has apostatized were themselves guilty of apostasy."

We respond again that the vast majority of the thousands of members who are calling for the church to return to its pure teachings are not saying that the church has apostatized. They are saying there is apostasy in the church, which the Review tract writer himself concedes (page 3). And we take exception to the writer's definition of these people's views about God's storehouse:

(2)... "teaching others that God's 'storehouse' today is the treasury of any place where Sabbath-keeping religious work for Christ is being performed."

I have never heard of any person who would so describe the storehouse. To so characterize those who are pleading for the church to hold to all of the doctrines of our historic faith, including the sanctuary, the three angel's messages, and so on, is not appropriate.

I must commend the Review tract writer, however, for not indulging in the type of argument "against the man" that some others are employing. The allegation is that those who are appealing for the church to heed and follow God's counsels are setting themselves up as "more holy," "holy ones," "pious critics," "the only ones who are right." These allegations constitute the nadir, in my opinion, of the arguments against the man.

It is left to the considered judgment of the reader how well the cause of truth is served by such allegations as these. As for the Review tract writer's attempt to apply the principle of Matthew 18: 15 to the present problem in the church, I refer the reader to Testimonies, Volume 2, page 15, where it is emphasized that Matthew 18: 15 applies to personal injuries, not church problems.

The Review tract writer does not seem to allow for an independent ministry to be legitimate and loyal unless it is to some degree under the supervision and/ or control of the church organization. This is similar to the views expressed in the eleven demands that were made upon independent ministries some time ago. According to P. T. Magan, who with E. A. Sutherland was a co- founder of Madison College, Ellen White's views were a bit different. From Magan's copious diaries we excerpt a few lines:

August 8, 1904: "He [E. A. Sutherland?] says that he worked with W. C. White during the forenoon getting articles and plans ready regarding the incorporation of the school at Nashville. In the afternoon he met with Daniels,(the General Conference president,) Prescott, (field secretary of the General Conference,) Griggs, Washburn, Byrd, and W. C. White to consider our plan of organization. Daniels did not like it."

As later entries in the diary indicate, the Spirit of the Lord was giving instructions through Ellen White to the founders of Madison College which the General Conference president did not like. August 9, 1904: "Talk with Mrs. E. G. White and W. C. White regarding our plans for organization. She said we were not to go under the dominion of the Southern Union Conference."

August 14, 1906: "Spent forenoon with Daniels. Told him why our school was independent and would have to eat showbread." May 7, 1907: "Talked with Sister White regarding attitude of General Conference toward us. Mrs. Sara McEnterfer and Lillian present. Told Sister White about the administration view that we had no right to go and get money unless we were owned by the

conference. She replied: "You are doing double what they are. Take all the donations you can get. The money belongs to the Lord and not to these men. The position they take is not of God. The Southern Union Conference is not to own or control you. You cannot turn things over to them."

May 14, 1907: "I talked to her [E. G. White] about the General Conference position that concerns non-conference owned should have no money. She answered: 'Daniels and those with him are taking a position on this matter that is not of God. '"

May 23, 1907: "Spent the forenoon with W. C. White. He gave me Sister White's letters to Daniels regarding us. He told me he did not agree with the administration at Washington in insisting that all monies pass through their hands. Said that he would not agree to our going under conference domination."

As is noted by the Review tract writer, Ellen White served as a board member of Madison College. This would seem to indicate that in her view an institution and/ or a ministry could be totally independent from the church organization and still be approved by the Lord. But, as in Ellen White's time, this view is still not appreciated by some of our church administrators.

Theological Questions Although we have already pointed out that the heart of the present tithe issue is a theological problem, the theological points raised by the Review tract writer have been purposely deferred to this section for comment.

After conceding that there is apostasy in the church, the Review tract writer strangely takes no notice at all of the fact that this apostasy is the immediate and urgent concern of probably 95 percent of the people whom he is trying to correct. This apostasy is the specific reason for the redirection of their tithe.

Instead of dealing with this problem, the writer addresses his remarks toward a minuscule group who may be guilty of various charges that he directs at them. This tactic is not helpful to the thousands of church members who are not doing the things that he deplors, but who are deeply concerned about the increasing apostasy in the church. Their question is, Why does he not address our problem? Why doesn't he talk to us?

And I wish to address to the Review tract writer, as well as to all others who have expressed similar concerns, the same question: Why don't you talk to us? Why do you tilt at windmills? Why do you flog dead horses? Why do you focus on the symptoms and ignore the disease? Why do you set up straw men and then beat them to pieces while we can only look on in wonderment?

The vast majority of church members who are variously known as "historic Adventists," "Independents," and so forth, do not recognize themselves at all in the pictures often painted. The Review tract writer sets out to fault and hopefully correct certain persons whom he apparently suspects of evil purposes toward the church. He identifies these persons by three characteristics which he vigorously condemns:

Solicitation of tithe,

Saying that the church is in apostasy, and

Basing the above accusation on a view of the nature of Christ. When the writer repeatedly describes the offenders as persons who solicit tithe, we can only respond that we do not know of whom he is speaking. I, personally, have never heard of any person who solicits tithe.

When the writer faults persons who say the church is in apostasy, we wonder, "To whom is he referring?"

And when the Review tract writer takes aim at persons who allegedly set forth a different view of the nature of Christ as the basis of their accusation that the church is in apostasy, we ask again, "Of whom is he speaking?" I have never heard of such persons.

The people to whom I minister have enormously larger concerns. They are witnessing, for example, rejection of our sanctuary doctrine, the introduction into our church of false Calvinistic doctrines of justification and sanctification, rejection of the Spirit of Prophecy, and a general lowering of the church standards. They are not helped by the singling out of the nature of Christ as if that were the only issue.

We pause to point out that the true doctrine of the nature of Christ is set forth in the new Seventh-day Adventists Believe, pages 37- 56. Check and see. The Review tract writer places before us an unhelpful comparison of the present apostasy with the pantheistic apostasy of Dr. J. H. Kellogg. We must remember that Kellogg's apostasy was met head-on. It was not ignored until apostasy had spread through a large portion of the church, as is happening today. A. O. Daniels, General Conference president at the time, used the power and influence of his office to defend the truth and to oppose the error. We look in vain for such decisive action today, in spite of clear Spirit of Prophecy counsels that apply to both apostasies.

There is a crying need for communication on the part of our church leaders, a communication that includes some attentive, open-minded listening. There are mountains of misunderstanding.

I am finding it more and more difficult to persuade the historic Adventists to whom I minister that the misinformation that is being constantly circulated about them is done in ignorance and not with malice. It is not easy to explain to those who want only to believe and practice the faith that they accepted when they joined our church why they should now be called divisive, controversial, troublemakers, legalists, rightwingers, destructive critics, attackers of the church, and so forth. They see these epithets as grossly unfair, untrue allegations. I believe that any impartial court would agree with them. Surely any fair-minded person would agree that those who are promoting theological changes are the ones who produce division, and those who resist theological changes should not be so accused. To represent those people as attacking the church is absurd. To call for a church to be true to the counsels of the Lord is surely not attacking the church.

We now come to my strongest point of disagreement with the Review tract writer. He presents the following question and answer:

Q. "I recently read that the SDA church leadership is out to resolve its 'tithe-problem' by 'crushing' and 'destroying' independent ministries that are doing a lot of good. Is this so?"

A. "The answer is No." (It is followed by a lengthy explanation.) I do not question the sincerity of the writer, but I do not find it possible to accept this answer. At a camp meeting in the Northwest in 1991, a speaker who represents our church administration at its highest level unburdened himself of some opinions about independent ministries. When audio tapes of his messages were sent to me, I listened in deep sadness to language that was inaccurate, intemperate, and highly inflammatory. When copied to typewriter paper, the tirade filled two pages single-spaced, and ended with an appeal to his hearers to "deal with" the offenders in their local churches.

The speaker apparently was not even aware of his inappropriate use of the word "new" to describe the views regarding the nature of Christ that are held by most of the historic Adventists. There are 1200 statements from pre-1950 Seventh-day Adventist writers, including 400 from Ellen White, to support the position that the historic Adventist view is the "old" and the Calvinistic view is the "new." Sadly, the speaker seems to regard these 1200 statements as "snake-oil."

I know of no independent ministry whose books are not audited. I know of no independent ministry that pays anyone a yearly salary of \$100,000 or more. Far, far from it. All of the independent ministries of my acquaintance are legally registered as nonprofit corporations and can provide donors with full accountability in the form of tax-deductible receipts. I know of no independent ministry that is trying to divide or destroy the church. Many independent workers are former denominational workers, intensely loyal to the church, who feel called to the work they are doing.

When a church administrator compares certain Seventh-day Adventists to the butchers of Auschwitz and Dachau who exterminated millions of Jews, I feel that we are forced to recognize that it is an attempt to fan the flames of passion against those church members, preparatory to disfellowshipping them. Already it seems that some other church leaders are taking the cue and are adding fuel to the flames.

But will this injustice crush and destroy the faith of those who do not wish to change their theology? I doubt it. It might even cause that faith to grow and to multiply. It has happened before in the history of religion.

A retired Union Conference president said to me recently, "I hope the brethren will not forget that our conservative members are the financial backbone of our church." This point is worthy of reflection.

To summarize and to state the problem in simple terms: The Seventh-day Adventist church today contains three groups of church members. At one end of the spectrum is a group who know very well what they are doing. They are working vigorously to change the doctrines of our church and with the flexibility of method provided by their theological principle that God does not expect anyone to stop sinning. Hence, the misrepresentations, false allegations, and so on.

At the other end of the spectrum is another group who know very well what they are doing trying to preserve in their purity the doctrines of our church and to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. In spite of bitter opposition and misrepresentation, this group is growing very rapidly.

In the center of the spectrum is a third and larger group who apparently have not yet comprehended

what the tensions are about, or who lack the courage of their convictions.

Over all preside our church administrators, most of whom seem to be looking on, either benignly or indifferently, while attempts are being made to change our theology, from time to time issuing piteous pleas for unity which can only remind us of the Ellen White warning:

“We are to unify, but not upon a platform of error.” Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 2, article “Freedom in Christ,” 47

And we are presently witnessing what appears to be an orchestrated propaganda campaign, conducted for the purpose of fanning the flames of prejudice against historic/ independent church members, preparatory to disfellowshipping them from the church.

So— the historic Adventists continue to ask, “Why will nobody talk to us? Why can we not even be granted a fair hearing? Why are we being so continuously misrepresented and falsely accused? And why do those who thus deal with us yet think they have a right to demand our tithes and offerings?”

I submit that these are valid questions. Since this article began with questions about tithe, let me conclude it with some final thoughts on that subject. Recently I sat in a meeting with a thousand other church members and listened to a General Conference representative repeatedly denounce “the independent ministries who are draining off the church's money.”

I listened in silence, but the language of my heart was, “Get real, Brother. Get real.” I had heard in my own church a pastor say that televangelist Jerry Falwell counts Seventhday Adventists as his second largest group of financial supporters. It was stated that the source of this information was a Union Conference secretary. I telephoned' the secretary, and he verified the report. He had heard it from Falwell's own lips.

The Union secretary added that an Adventist Church member who had spent some time working with televangelist Pat Robertson's organization reported the same was true there. When we remember that these men count their receipts in many millions of dollars per year, we have to recognize that the portion they receive from Seventh- day Adventists, their second highest donor group, must also be measured in millions. It is doubtful that the combined budgets of all the Adventist independent ministries would equal what even one of these televangelists is collecting from Seventh- day Adventists each year.

Why is nobody asking why? Why do so many of our leaders seem to be unaware of the malaise that is affecting so many of our churches, where so few messages from the pulpit reflect any sense of the urgency of our task? Is it any wonder that church members, who have never doubted that our Creator is a loving, caring God, (a message they could hear in most nonSeventh- day Adventist Christian churches) grow weary of hearing this truth endlessly repeated, and turn to preaching that seems to have more immediate significance?

Preaching the wonderful love of God we must do, but not leave the other undone. Let us remember that if Noah had done nothing but preach about a loving, caring God, there would have been no ark

and his family would have perished in the Flood. If Moses had done nothing but preach about a loving, caring God there would have been no deliverance of God's people from the land of bondage. If we do no more than preach about a loving, caring God, it will be necessary for God to raise up another people to take the three angels' messages to the world. Our loving, caring God is a God of action, and His saving action for this world is in its final stages. The last warning message must go to the world. Will it be carried by a faithful Adventist ministry and people, or by those whom God calls to take their places?

And now a thought question. There are two distinct series of Ellen White predictions about the Adventist ministry of the end- time. One series describes how unfaithful ministers will arise among us, and is expressed in such shockingly clear statements as these:

“Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan.” Testimonies to Ministers, 409- 410

“In the very midst of us will arise false teachers, giving heed to seducing spirits whose doctrines are of satanic origin. These teachers will draw away disciples after themselves.” Review and Herald, vol. 5, 9

The other series of predictions emphasizes that in the closing work God will pass by many ministers who have been trained in “literary institutions,” and will call men from their regular employment to finish the preaching of our message. See The Great Controversy, 608, and Testimonies, vol. 5, page 80 Two classes of ministers are thus placed before us. One group are highly educated but selfconfident, self-dependent, and in some cases unfaithful. The other group, though having less formal education, place their confidence in God, in His Word, and in the Spirit of Prophecy.

Which of these two groups of ministers, according to your convictions, should be supported by our tithes? And are we safe in assuming that this description is a faraway scenario that will probably not occur in our time?

Two very powerful forces within the Seventh- day Adventist Church are now on a collision course and seem to be moving inexorably toward what may well be a major confrontation. One force is represented by the rapidly increasing number of church members who are reacting against changes in our theology and are making firm decisions that, come what may, by God's grace, they will be true to the Scriptures and to the Spirit of Prophecy.

The other force is represented in what appears to be a heedless, headstrong authoritarianism in which there is an equally firm determination that regardless of circumstances, all church members must be required to submit to the authority of the church. Theological questions, the heart of the problem, are being brushed aside as irrelevant, or are themselves being subordinated to church authority in an echo of the papal policy that the Scriptures mean whatever the church says they mean.

We cannot but view the scene with apprehension as we reflect about similar confrontations in the past. It was headstrong authoritarianism that divided Israel from Judah in the days of Rehoboam. It was similar authoritarianism that divided the followers of Christ from Israel in New Testament times and that divided Protestants from Catholics in Reformation times. Will it be the same with us? Is the remnant

church foredoomed to also founder in the shoals of authoritarianism? Or might we yet be able to turn the church back from disaster by joining the apostle Paul in placing the test of truth above all other tests?

As we ponder such matters, we find ourselves struggling with two concepts. On the one hand we have a hope, to which we cling desperately, that the church we love so ardently will recover and complete our God-given task.

On the other hand, we have before us the Spirit of Prophecy predictions that our church will experience an enormous convulsion as we near the end of time, a shaking and a purging that will take many of our leaders and more than half of our members out of the church.

Which experience are we now entering? Will we be granted a respite? Or must we brace ourselves for the shaking time?

In any case, let us remember that the greatest hours of our message, the loud cry and the latter rain, are after the shaking time. Let us take to our hearts the words of the Lord to Joshua:

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong.” Joshua 1: 9

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