

1 THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND “GROWING IN CHRIST:”
2 PROPOSAL FOR A NEW FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF

3
4 I. Introduction

5 The purpose of this document is to bring before you an invitation to initiate a
6 formal dialogue that will hopefully reveal whether or not the Spirit is leading the church
7 in the direction suggested here. In Adventist praxis the formulation of a fundamental
8 belief is not something that happens in a particular office under the leadership of a group
9 of individuals, but rather something that is the result of a consensus created by the Holy
10 Spirit in the community of believers. We should see ourselves as facilitators, as channels
11 through which the Spirit can work in the expression of that consensus.

12 Consequently, what we are initiating cannot be pushed on the church, but must be
13 a clear expression of where the church itself stands today. What we bring before you
14 carries a disclaimer: We do not own it, neither do you. It should belong to the church; it
15 should be, as already indicated, an expression of the thinking of the Spirit through the
16 church. We bring this document to you to listen to your counsel as we seek to determine
17 whether the perceived need of a new fundamental belief is real or not. After the
18 discussion you may conclude that there is no need for a new fundamental belief or that it
19 seems pleasing to all of us and to the Spirit to seek His guidance through the *consensus of*
20 *believers*. At the present time some of us feel that this is pleasing to the Spirit, but this
21 perception needs the external witness of the Spirit through the church.

22 This document contains four parts. The first is a summary of the process that
23 brought us here today; the second is a discussion of the nature of the Fundamental
24 Beliefs; the third is an analysis of our existing Fundamental Beliefs in order to see
25 whether a new article is needed; and, finally there is a sample of what the new
26 fundamental belief could look like. If it is concluded that a new statement is needed, then
27 the sample will help in the formulation of the final draft.

28 II. Summary of the Process

29 Seventh-day Adventists have always had a well-defined biblical theology
30 describing God’s greatness and power. Bible study and prayer have always been

1 fundamental Seventh-day Adventist values which facilitate having a relationship with
2 Jesus. These beliefs are not new.

3 Adventism originated from a western culture with deep roots anchored in the
4 reformation. Bible study and prayer as a way of understanding God's greatness and
5 accessing His power were so fundamental that much has been assumed through a verbal
6 understanding.

7 Since the beginning of the church, mission has been seen as a primary
8 responsibility. This message quickly spread across America. By the late 1800s the
9 church's concept of mission extended to all the world. Over the past 120 years the Three
10 Angels' Message has spread to almost every country in the world and certainly to most
11 major people groups. The pioneers met the challenge of establishing a beginning and an
12 infrastructure from which a much larger work could be carried forward.

13 Today, national workers largely carry forward the mission of the church. This
14 resource cannot be overestimated. In most places the church has been able to operate
15 within the culture of the people and appeal to a much wider population. This movement is
16 spreading to the 10/40 window.

17 Over the past 10 years a wide gospel appeal has been made by national workers in
18 many of the 10/40 window countries. The big view of finishing the work and the
19 conversion of Animists, Buddhists, Communists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews has
20 challenged traditional methods of evangelism. National workers having an innate sense
21 for effective methodology have struck the core values of not only the religion but the
22 culture. Here we confront two main areas of great concern for us among non-Christian
23 religions, namely transcendental meditation and the power of demons.

24 Transcendental meditation is a search for contact with spiritual powers in order to
25 enrich the individual. In place of that spiritualistic practice we offer them contact with
26 God through prayer, Bible study, service, and meditation on the Word of God and His
27 providential leadings. These subjects, as will be demonstrated later on, are hardly
28 addressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This deficiency has been pointed out
29 by church members from different parts of the world.

30 All major world religions have borrowed from and have been affected by
31 Animism. More than 70% of the world's population lives in fear of evil powers and

1 regards evil powers as the answer of choice when considering the metaphysical and
2 epistemological question. Often, the first question asked front line workers is, “How does
3 your religion deal with the evil spirits in my life?”

4 While Seventh-day Adventist have a strong Biblical theology on good and evil
5 spirits, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not compile the Biblical evidence but
6 rather relies heavily on an Adventist cultural understanding. Cultural understandings,
7 when at some distance from the process used to establish a biblical truth or practice, can
8 take on dimensions that extend well beyond the Adventist garden of theology.

9 Occasionally when Global Mission Pioneers are asked by interested people how
10 the new religion they proclaim would affect the evil spirits that controlled their lives, the
11 answer has not been what would have been expected. We hear expressions like, "We
12 must be cautious not to offend the evil spirits;" or "We must not anger the evil spirits."
13 The Global Mission Issues Committee has discussed the issues surrounding good and evil
14 powers. The Adventist external look says we have 70% of the world’s population
15 testifying of visible and physical evil spirit evidence in the context of our mission for a
16 lost world. The Adventist internal look says that God will gather a huge harvest from all
17 nations victoriously leading His people through the great end-time deceptions which will
18 include a seemingly miraculous display of evil powers. Spiritualism will take control of
19 the world in a way never seen before. We must do all we can now to prepare the world
20 for that final deception.

21 While prayer, Bible study, service, meditation and God’s great power over evil
22 are not new truths, a large growing church amid people traditionally controlled by evil
23 powers is a growing reality for which we have long prayed. What brings us to this
24 agenda? Mission—that every person might come to know Jesus and claim His victory
25 over sin and evil.

26 III. The Fundamental Beliefs

27 The Fundamental Beliefs play a vital role in the life and mission of the worldwide
28 Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are a rapidly growing movement with a presence in
29 more than 200 countries, and the Fundamental Beliefs describe what Seventh-day
30 Adventists believe. Thus, they establish our doctrinal identity and help to keep us united.

1 As currently stated, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs dates from the 1980
2 General Conference Session held in Dallas, Texas. However, the Statement of
3 Fundamental Beliefs voted on that occasion was not intended to necessarily be the last
4 word on the matter. The Fundamental Beliefs are a *living* document, not a creed.

5 A. The Fundamental Beliefs: A Living Document

6 The preamble to the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs states:

7 “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold
8 certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.
9 These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and
10 expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may
11 be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the
12 Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language
13 in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”
14

15 This view of the *living* character of the Fundamental Beliefs really stems from the
16 conviction of the pioneers that we are a people of “present truth” (2 Peter 1:12) who seek
17 always to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit into deeper understanding of truth.
18 Ellen White encouraged us to guard against the tendency to fossilize our beliefs into a
19 creed. Among her many counsels calling upon us to be receptive to new insights, while
20 maintaining the foundations, we find the following:

21 “Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly
22 obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and
23 beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all
24 ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has
25 ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men
26 rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word, and discourage any
27 further investigation of Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid
28 discussion” (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 297, 298).
29

30 “New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living
31 connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that
32 there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will
33 find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems
34 are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the
35 remnant people of God” (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 34).
36

37 The history of development of doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church
38 shows growth in understanding and formulation.

1 1. The earliest list of doctrines appeared in the masthead of the *Sabbath Review*
2 *and Advent Herald* in five successive issues, August 15-December 19, 1854. The
3 “leading doctrines” were just five: The Bible alone, the law of God, the Second Coming,
4 the new earth, and immortality alone through Christ.

5 2. In 1872 Uriah Smith wrote “A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles
6 Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists.” The list had 25 doctrines.

7 3. In 1889 the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for the first time published a list
8 of “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists.” This list, based on Uriah
9 Smith’s list from 1872, contained 28 articles.

10 4. In 1894 the 1,521-member Battle Creek Church issued its own statement of
11 faith. It had 31 elements.

12 5. The statement of faith that first appeared in the 1889 *Yearbook* was also
13 included in the yearbooks for 1905, and from 1907 to 1914. According to Leroy Edwin
14 Froom, the statement was not included in the yearbooks 1890-1904, 1906, and 1915-1930
15 because of conflicting views over the Trinity and the Atonement (*Movement of Destiny*,
16 pp. 412, 413).

17 6. In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith on behalf of a committee of
18 four authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. This statement, titled
19 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” had 22 articles. Although it was never
20 formally adopted, it appeared in the 1931 *Yearbook* and in all subsequent yearbooks. In
21 1932 it was printed in tract form. This was the statement that remained in place (with
22 slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980.

23 7. The 1941 Annual Council approved a uniform “Baptismal Vow” and
24 “Baptismal Covenant” based on the 1931 statement.

25 8. The General Conference Session of 1946 voted that no revision of the
26 Fundamental Beliefs shall be made at any time except by approval of a General
27 Conference Session.

28 9. In 1980 the General Conference Session made major revisions of the
29 Fundamental Beliefs. Completely new articles were added on: Creation; The Great
30 Controversy; The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ; The Church; Unity in the Body

1 of Christ; The Lord’s Supper; The Gift of Prophecy; and Marriage and the Family. Some
2 existing articles were rephrased.

3 B. Observations Concerning the Fundamental Beliefs

4 Seventh-day Adventists throughout our history have formulated our doctrines
5 without giving emphasis to a particular number. The number has varied greatly: from 5 to
6 31. We have simply designated our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs,” never as the “22
7 Fundamental Beliefs” or “25 Fundamental Beliefs,” and so on. This is still the case: the
8 *Yearbook* simply lists our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs.” Only in more recent years
9 has the tendency arisen to attach a number, as in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*
10 *. . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (General Conference Ministerial
11 Association, 1988).

12 In considering the new articles added in 1980, not one represented a new
13 departure in doctrine. Each simply articulated beliefs already held and practiced by
14 Seventh-day Adventists. It was felt that the time had come to incorporate these beliefs
15 into the statement of Fundamental Beliefs.

16 The needs of mission have played a role in formulating our Fundamental Beliefs.
17 We see this clearly as a factor driving the statement of Fundamental Beliefs that emerged
18 in 1931. The General Conference Committee minutes of December 29, 1930 record the
19 following action:

20 “STATEMENT OF OUR FAITH FOR YEAR BOOK.

21
22 A request was presented from the African Division that a statement of what
23 Seventh-day Adventists believe should be printed in the *Year Book*, since they
24 feel that such a statement would help government officials and others to a better
25 understanding of our work.

26 VOTED: That the chair appoint a committee of which he shall be a member, to
27 prepare such a statement for publication in the *Year Book*.”
28

29 C. Conclusion

30 Perhaps the time has come again when the needs of our global mission should
31 cause us to revisit the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This is not to alter what we
32 already have in place since 1980, and which continues to serve us well, but to add an
33 article that will enable us better to fulfill the mission. Billions of people live their lives in
34 daily awareness, fear, and apprehension of spiritual powers. Large numbers view the

1 religious life in quietistic terms, with transcendental meditation playing a key role. The
2 Fundamental Beliefs in their present formulation do not seem to address these ideas.

3 Although the demands of Global Mission point to a possible addition to our
4 Fundamental Beliefs, it seems likely that the entire church might benefit from the
5 addition. Many people today, even in “developed” societies, feel threatened by evil
6 which seems all pervasive and all powerful. For many, life is essentially meaningless.

7 At various times since 1980, some members have expressed surprise that the
8 Fundamental Beliefs contain no reference to prayer, devotional life, and service. It may
9 be possible to formulate a new article on Christian growth that meets the needs which
10 have arisen from Global Mission and also to address the above lack. Significantly, the
11 1941 summary of Fundamental Beliefs did have a statement that highlighted the study of
12 the Word, prayer, and the development of Christian character.

13 Any new article will not introduce new theology. As in the formulation of the
14 Fundamental Beliefs voted in 1980, the new material will be merely an articulation of
15 what we already believe as Seventh-day Adventists. Any addition to the Fundamental
16 Beliefs will require widespread input, with dissemination well in advance of the 2005
17 General Conference Session. The whole church must “own” the Fundamental Beliefs.

18 Given the obvious need driven by mission, the question now becomes: Do the
19 Fundamental Beliefs as currently formulated already address this need, so that we do not
20 need a new article?

21 Back of that question is a more important one: Is the Holy Spirit leading His
22 people today to revisit the Fundamental Beliefs formulated in Dallas, 1980?

23 IV. Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief 24 and the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

25 The proposed new fundamental belief has two main purposes. First it explicitly
26 addresses Christian growth in order to exclude eastern transcendental meditation as a
27 spiritual exercise that is incompatible with the gospel of salvation through Christ. Second,
28 it proclaims freedom through Christ from demonic powers to demonstrate that seeking
29 help and guidance from them in our spiritual growth is not only unnecessary but totally
30 incompatible with the work of Jesus on our behalf.

1 The present Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not explicitly address those
2 doctrinal concerns. Some of the basic theological elements presupposed in the proposed
3 new statement are briefly touched in some of the doctrinal statements, thus providing a
4 link between this one and the rest of the body of beliefs. We will briefly look at the
5 fundamental beliefs in which this link is found.

6 A. Statements Addressing Demonic Power

7 We read in Statement number 8, ("The Great Controversy"): "To assist His people
8 in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and
9 sustain them in the way of salvation." The new proposed statement will reaffirm the
10 content of this sentence but will go beyond it by developing its thought in the context of a
11 call to Christian growth in freedom from the controlling power of demons.

12 In Statement number 9 ("The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ") we find a
13 sentence that comes very close to one of the main thoughts of the proposed new
14 statement: "The resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil,
15 and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death."
16 However, it does not clearly state the present freedom Christians enjoy from the
17 enslaving power of demons and neither does it set God's triumph over the forces of evil
18 within the context of a constant Christian growth in Christ.

19 B. Statements Addressing Character Development

20 The Statement on "The Holy Spirit" establishes that, "He [the Holy Spirit] draws
21 and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the
22 image of God." The sentence describes a fundamental biblical truth but it does not
23 develop the thought. In any case, it is not the purpose of that specific fundamental belief
24 to deal with the phenomenon of Christian growth but to describe in a general way the
25 work of the Holy Spirit not only in our sanctification but also in several other areas.

26 Concerning the "Experience of Salvation" we read, "Through the Spirit we are
27 born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our
28 hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become
29 partakers of the divine nature." The sentence deals very briefly with Christian renewal
30 and spiritual growth but it does not address the indispensable elements in that growth.
31 That is not the primary purpose of that fundamental belief.

1 We read in the Statement on "Christian Behaviour," "For the Spirit to recreate in
2 us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce
3 Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives." This sentence, like the previous ones, is
4 quite general and does not include the importance of prayer, the study of the Word,
5 meditation, and involvement in mission as God's instruments for character development.
6 Neither this fundamental belief nor any of the others can be edited to include the
7 concerns of the proposed new one without distracting from their primary purpose and
8 making them excessively large and cumbersome. Our Fundamental Beliefs are usually
9 short, dealing with a particular issue in a very concise form, summarizing a significant
10 biblical teaching in a clear way. We should preserve that format.

11 C. Conclusion

12 We may need a new statement that will bring together the main ideas expressed in
13 the statements we quoted and that at the same time will put the emphasis on a daily walk
14 with the Lord characterized by freedom from evil powers and on a devotional life
15 characterized by prayer, Bible study, meditation on God's Word and His providence in
16 our lives, and participation in the gospel commission. This new statement will sharpen
17 the Adventist understanding of the nature of a constant growth in Christ. This is
18 indispensable at a time when some church members are more interested in theological
19 discussion than in the spiritual impact of those doctrines in their daily lives.

20 V. Possible Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief

21 **Growing in Christ**

22 By His cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the
23 demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their
24 ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control
25 us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Instead of evil forces,
26 the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us. Committed to Jesus as our Savior
27 and Lord, we are set free from the burden of past deeds and our former life with its
28 darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness. In this new freedom in
29 Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, as we commune with Him
30 daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His
31 praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As

1 we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation,
2 His constant presence with us sanctifies every moment and every task. (Ps 1:1-2; 23:4;
3 Col. 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18, 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Phil. 3:7-14; 1
4 Thess. 5:16-18; Matt. 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal. 5:22-25; 1 John 4:4.).

5 VI. Comments on the Statement

6 1. The proposed statement combines two inseparable facts of the Christian
7 experience, namely, freedom from demonic powers through the death of Jesus, followed
8 by empowerment through the Holy Spirit to grow in Christ. The reality of the first one
9 leads into the other.

10 2. The first two sentences establish the fact that throughout His ministry Christ
11 was constantly confronting and subjugating evil spirits, but that it was at the cross that He
12 defeated them once and for all. The second sentence recognizes the reality of the
13 existence of evil powers by referring to them as "evil spirits." That designation includes
14 any of its particular expressions though occultism, spiritism, animism, and the
15 spiritualism of the New Age.

16 3. The third sentence addresses our victory over those forces by grounding it in
17 the previous victory of Jesus. The sentence implies that such victory is not limited to our
18 personal struggles with sin but that it also includes the casting out of demons through the
19 power of Jesus. Besides, the sentence expresses the thought that Christians can be
20 victorious over evil powers in spite of the fact that the spirits constantly attempt to
21 control or influence them. The implication is that we live in a world in which demons are
22 still active.

23 4. The fourth sentence states that when the enslaving power of evil spirits is
24 broken, the Holy Spirit comes and fills that spiritual vacuum enabling us to overcome
25 them whenever they attempt to regain control over us. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit
26 excludes the need for the role of the internal voice of spiritual guides in human
27 experience, as taught for instance in the New Age Movement.

28 5. Sentence number 5 prepares the way for the second main element in the
29 statement. Once we enter into a covenant with Jesus we are free from the "burden of past
30 deeds." These include freedom from *karma*, from our sense of guilt, meaninglessness and
31 emptiness of life, and from the painful stigma of the past. This freedom brings true

1 knowledge of salvation and dispels darkness and the ignorance that often led to
2 superstitious beliefs.

3 6. Freedom *from* leads to freedom *to*. The sixth sentence attempts to define the
4 indispensable elements in Christian growth. Instead of submission to demons and
5 transcendental meditation, the Bible offers prayer, Bible study and a meditation whose
6 content is the Scripture and God's providential leadings in our lives. Besides, praising the
7 Lord through singing and involvement in the mission of the church are considered
8 indispensable in Christian growth. Participation in the mission of the church is not
9 optional for those who are growing in Christ.

10 7. The Christian life is dynamic and does not require a constant withdrawal from
11 the world and our daily activities. This is emphasized in the last sentence. Our loving
12 service to others takes place in the working place, the school, the street, the shopping
13 centers, etc., as we take our Christian experience with us everywhere we go. Our
14 awareness of the fact that God is always with us contributes and makes possible the
15 sanctification of all we do according to His will. We should be constantly growing in
16 Christ.

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18 Silver Spring, MD