

Growing Healthy Churches? Part 5
Combatting GHC

Is your church immunised against becoming a “healthy” church?

An analysis by Tim Matsis
2010-07-14

<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2010/matt-ghc5.pdf>
<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/rar/matt-ghc5.php>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Before the Storm	2
When GHC Strikes	6
The GHC Toolbox	7
The Lifecycle theory—revival or re-invention?	9
After the Attack	18
Conclusion	23

Presenter: Tim Matsis
Location: Internet
Delivery: 2010-07-14 23:20Z
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2010-07-14 21:01Z
Type: Article

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Tim Matsis, “Growing Healthy Churches? Pt. 5: Combatting GHC”
ONLINE AT: <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2010/matt-ghc5.pdf>. THIS ARTICLE IS
subject to a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses>).

This article examines the environment where GHC finds entrance and provides some suggestions for combating it.

Before the Storm

There is always a mixture of people within a church, all with varying degrees of understanding and faithfulness. However, where the balance lies in a particular church will likely indicate whether or not that church will be the target of an intervention. While congregations drift on, oblivious to their danger, GHC consultants are carefully assessing the viability of erecting the GHC banner in local churches. Paul Borden, the Baptist minister behind the GHC program, writes:

The consultant was to select those congregations believed to have the best chance of turning around. Sometime[s] this choice was based on the current history of the congregation while at other times it might be related to the intense desire for change expressed by the leaders. There was no one criterion used to select congregations.¹

A perception that the church is failing in its mission or dissatisfaction among some members of influence, are key variables that indicate whether a GHC intervention is viable. Unfortunately, this perception of failure and dissatisfaction may be accurate, or manufactured by those agitating for “change”. If your church is failing in any key area, this may be all that is needed to create opportunity for the GHC propaganda machine to go to work.

Here are a few markers that might indicate whether your church is ripe for an intervention:

Is your church active in evangelism? If not, this is clear evidence that the church has forgotten one of its core reasons for existing. Much mileage will be had by GHC consultants over this failure. Borden writes, “We did include growing congregations, of which there were

only a few, because most that were growing were not experiencing growth because they were necessarily healthy but for other reasons”.² That is, churches which predominantly grow by baptising their members’ children, or because other churches have closed, are not usually “healthy” churches.

Is Seventh-day Adventist doctrine practised and taught? Failure to practise and teach Adventist truth sends a message that what one believes is relatively unimportant. Before long, the church is comprised of people who act nicely but are biblically uninformed. When facing a church crisis, biblically uninformed members must, of necessity, use the pastor and/or conference leaders like a crutch.

GHC preys on weak congregations in which strong power structures are easy to implement. However, the “strong” pastoral leadership promoted by GHC is neutralised to some extent, where the members are biblically literate and faithful to truth.

Has the existing leadership dealt faithfully with the erring? Members who have been instructed in a sloppy fashion or who harbour known sins are sometimes admitted to the church. These members are generally forgotten after baptism and struggle to maintain their walk with Christ. Sometimes, if lifestyle issues are presented to them after baptism, they feel offended and do not see the need to change. After all, everyone knew about it before they were baptised and considered them good enough!³

Sometimes leadership is also unfaithful in dealing with existing members. Reasons for this can vary—sometimes it is out of false charity, other times the leaders themselves are at fault and (rightly) feel it would be hypocritical to rebuke a member for doing the same thing. Family or business connections can blur a leader’s judgment. However, in many cases, it is a pure lack

of moral courage. Churches that do not maintain the honour of God in dealing with sin often become more like social clubs than churches and lose their identity and reason for existing.

Is church order maintained? Where the *Church Manual* is regularly overridden or ignored, and where churches are in the habit of engaging in experiments with church organisation, GHC finds easy entrance. In the experience of the writer, proponents of GHC only use the rules of church order in the *Church Manual* when it is advantageous to do so. Therefore, not only must members be familiar with the *Church Manual* enough to recognise departures from proper governance, but the majority of the local church membership must be sufficiently committed to Adventist organisation to insist upon proper order being followed.

Is the leadership qualified to lead? In spite of clear biblical guidelines and boundaries for electing church leaders⁴, the practice has developed in many Adventist circles of choosing leaders much like one makes a fruit salad: some young, some old, some men, some women, one from each of the large families and a spattering of ethnic interest groups, etc. While these people may well represent the diversity of the church and the power groups that exist, these leaders often fail to be the astute, informed, biblically qualified, spiritual leaders necessary to properly guard and govern the church.

The natural consequence of poor spiritual leadership is a lukewarm church. There are fellowship lunches and formalistic meetings that pass as biblical Adventism—but there is no real joy stemming from an active faith. Be warned, if you cannot be faithful in choosing your church leadership, GHC will choose them for you. It is a sad truism that “people get the leaders they deserve”.

Do the members “Watch and Pray”? It is a confronting reality of spiritual life that God’s people are often found sleeping at their post and unprepared for the conflict before them. This reality defies the plain warnings of Scripture. Peter warns us that Satan is a wily foe who “walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”.⁵ John warns the Remnant that, “the dragon is wroth with the woman and [comes] to make war with the remnant of her seed who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”.⁶ Jesus’ himself counselled those living at the end of time to “watch and pray”.⁷

When churches are confronted with GHC, or schemes like it, the character of the church is revealed. The outcome of the conflict, is only partly determined by the actions of the moment, but largely decided by the habits of a lifetime.⁸

For example, in one church, prior to the implementation of GHC, any visiting observer would have admitted that the church seemed like a traditional Adventist Church. However, at a meeting called to vote on the implementation of GHC, some disturbing truths surfaced. Some of those that voted on the issue had not attended regularly for years, some were not keeping the Sabbath, others consumed and even sold alcohol. Some voters were mere children who had been admitted to church membership out of false charity. Still others, who appeared to be faithful church members, were simply confused at the thought that a pastor could be incorrect! The obvious lesson: churches that become complacent and satisfy themselves that there will be church lunches until Jesus comes, are prime targets for GHC.

Ellen White makes a dire warning to churches that have fallen into lukewarm contentment:

God will arouse His people; if other means fail, heresies will come in among them, which will sift them, separating the chaff from the wheat. The Lord calls upon all who believe His word to awake out of sleep.⁹

While there is no guarantee that your church will not face GHC at some point, the greatest deterrent to GHC hitting your church is astoundingly simple: Make sure your church is running properly as an Adventist Church!

When GHC Strikes

Despite the noise and propaganda of GHC, thinking church members must take time to unmask the substance of what GHC proposes. Ellen White warns:

My message to you is: No longer consent to listen without protest to the perversion of truth. Unmask the pretentious sophistries which, if received, will lead . . . workers to ignore the truth. Every one is now to stand on his guard. God calls upon men and women to take their stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Emmanuel. I have been instructed to warn our people; for many are in danger of receiving theories and sophistries that undermine the foundation pillars of the faith.¹⁰

Church members have a duty both to know the Bible well enough to recognise unbiblical programs like GHC, and to object when such schemes threaten the church. Little do many members realise that their objections may stay a strong tide of evil. Borden admits:

Congregations were avoided if they were resistant to the new direction the region was taking, resistant to change, did not think they needed to change, or had pastors who were too threatened to discuss change. After all we could only work with those congregations that invited us to do so.¹¹

Similarly, in Adventism, GHC cannot be forced on a church, they must embrace it. Sure, there may be plenty of pressure—for example, you may have to share a pastor with four other churches and you may not receive evangelism funding. At the same time you may see GHC

churches riding a gravy train, but unless your church embraces GHC, the Conference cannot force you to use it. Over time, your church will pull together and learn to function despite this pressure. When those pushing GHC are removed from the Conference leadership, your church will emerge stronger from the experience.¹²

The GHC Toolbox

Being aware of the techniques that zealots of Bordenism employ to manipulate unwary churches is a key part of fending off a GHC invasion. Church members should actively agitate questions that will expose the assumptions and techniques used to engineer GHC in a church, such as:¹³

Is “fruitfulness” (growing the church) really as important as faithfulness? While one cannot deny that God wants to save as many people as possible, should we put growth at the top of the list? After all, what use is a larger church if few of them are actually going to heaven?¹⁴

The cornerstone of Borden’s theory is that “all healthy churches are growing churches”.¹⁵ This sounds reasonable, until one examines the biblical record. What about Noah’s church? What if you had taken a statistical snapshot of Jesus’ new church about the time of his crucifixion? What about Abraham’s church, the man to whom God had promised offspring like the stars in the night sky? What about the true church during the dark ages?

Of course lazy, inactive, ministers and churches will also lack growth. However, looking to statistics alone to measure a church fails to properly uphold faithfulness as the Christian’s highest duty. It also woefully discounts God’s promises to ultimately bless those who are true to their trust. Furthermore, one should not forget that before the ultimate destruction of Babylon,

vividly portrayed in Revelation 18 (of which Borden's church is a part), it will be a great, thriving metropolis, filled with an abundance of luxury, wealth and people.

Should we believe the surveys? Often changes are suggested on the basis of surveys. Questions such as: "If you came to church—what would you like to hear for the sermon?" or "What would make you feel more comfortable in our church?" or "Did you feel accepted when you attended our church?"

While surveys can be useful to find out generic information or to introduce you to the community you live in, they can also be very dangerous in deciding how to run a church! One Adventist church running GHC even hired "mystery church shoppers" to evaluate whether they were keeping up with fashionable church practices!

There are some good reasons to heavily discount surveys and opinion polls when it comes to running a church. If you asked my three year old son to complete a survey about what his parents could do to improve his time living in our home, one probably doesn't need to imagine how it would read: "No broccoli, more dessert, later bedtimes, more playtime, less jobs, no soap in the bath—please". The fundamental error is obvious: my son doesn't have a clue what he needs to make his life happy!

The same is true for the unconverted. The Bible says that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be".¹⁶ First Corinthians 1:18 warns that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God". Adventist ministers must especially be on guard given Paul's warning that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their

ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”.¹⁷ Catering to the tastes of the unconverted is a poor substitute for faithfulness to God.

Paul admonishes us not to listen to the critics, but to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”.¹⁸

The same principles also apply to the “expert” opinions garnered from outside Seventh-day Adventism about the way we should do our work. Seriously, are we foolish enough to believe that other denominations want us to succeed in giving the three angel’s messages to the world? Do we really believe they want to help us to succeed in preaching the truth about the Sabbath being the seventh day, the truth about the identity of Babylon and her daughters, or the truth about what really happens when you die? Are we so totally deprived of common sense that we would swallow the notion that they are here to help us in giving the solemn warning: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues”?¹⁹

On the contrary—for us to succeed in our mission would be for them to fail!

The Lifecycle theory—revival or re-invention?

Borden observes that:

We live in a time when many people say there isn’t much hope for mainline Protestant denominations. The evidence seems to indicate that such predictions are correct. As congregations, memberships, attendance and mission dollars decline in relation to former levels, a lack of hope and low morale constrain leaders in many denominations.²⁰

Such circumstances are a call to prayerful, heartfelt revival and reformation. Churches trapped in the lethargy of Laodicean living, long for the Nehemiahs and Elijahs of today, who will rebuild

the altar of the Lord and revive the cause of present truth. Churches are starving for the want of hearing the preaching of the Word and the right example of Godly leaders.

Borden's evaluation of such dire circumstances is a little less grand but no less revolutionary. According to Borden, all churches sit somewhere on a natural "lifecycle" of growth, plateau and decline.²¹ Following the model, churches in "plateau" or "decline" must be "redeveloped" in order to remarket themselves to meet the changing demands of the church attendee market. In this way, a church may be brought back from the certainty of "death" and be placed back on the "growth track".

However, while church members trust themselves to the "consultant" who has come to "fix" their broken church, little do they realise how much is at stake. For the consultant, nothing is too sacred to place on the negotiating table in order to "save" the church and achieve the new "mission" and "vision".

More importantly, sin, as a cause of church failure, is largely ignored in favour of more measurable markers of success. Spiritual matters are too subjective and intangible, while objective, tangible plans for connecting with the community, building attractive worship centres and recreating power structures in the church are brought centre stage. Thus, in getting themselves back on the "growth track" churches may find themselves systemically reinvented rather than spiritually revived.

Consequently, in an Adventist setting, "plateaued" churches may not be reminded of why Adventism exists, nor counselled to recommit themselves to Jesus through a prayerful reading of the Bible or the *Spirit of Prophecy*.²² Rather, members who may hold but a scant understanding of, or commitment to Adventism, are encouraged by the consultant to cast their *own* "vision" and

“mission”, setting out why they exist and how they plan to make their local church large and financially successful. Such intellectual adventures, especially if led by those not as committed to Adventism as might be expected, can lead churches well away from Adventist reasons for existing, even if they actually get more people to attend church in the meantime.

While honest Adventists will be quick to admit that there is a great need of revival in our churches today, Adventism needs no re-invention to achieve it. While local Adventist churches, conferences or institutions may lose their way, Adventism, at its core, is rock solid. Rediscovery and recommitment to Adventist principles, as well as to the God who inspired them, would soon revive any waning congregation.

On the other hand, congregations anchored to the shifting sands of popular Christianity, built to respond to consumer tastes or “felt needs”, will naturally rise and fall if they do not reinvent themselves with each passing phase of worshipper demands.²³ The reader may not be aware that many “mainline” Protestant denominations have “moved with the times”. While there is a plethora of divergent beliefs, to a casual attendee, churches vary but little in their public presentation of Christian belief or in their worship methodologies. Rather than fighting over doctrine and methodology, the ecumenical spirit has led to an astounding homogeneity. Most Christian doctrine on subjects such as “end time events” has been gleaned from popular news media, “Christian” movies and fairy tales.²⁴ While some differences between churches remain, these differences are not considered fatal to the fundamental desire for Christian unity, required to fight evils such as “gay marriage” and “secularism”.

Similarly, churches organised congregationally rather than denominationally depend very much on their own performance to survive. Their ability to increase membership, collect money

from worshippers and pay a skilled pastor or competent staff, rest largely on the local church. These churches will naturally suffer from local economic and societal conditions.

In contrast, Adventist churches are neither congregational nor market driven. Rather, Adventism has some key distinctives which, if revived in the local church, neutralise the lifecycle phenomenon:

i. **Our message.** Adventism has a clearly defined mission. Because of this, we are not a church in the traditional sense, we are a movement. While many churches focus on having modern church buildings with plush facilities to make people feel comfortable, or try to attract and entertain a congregation with gospel gimmicks or pop psychology, Adventism is based on an urgent message to herald the coming of Jesus and the end of the world.

Adventist churches base their membership upon spiritual commitment to the God who sent the message, rather than, “Did you enjoy the worship service?”, “Do you support the pastor’s vision?”, “Can you play a guitar or sing?” or “Will you contribute to the financial needs of the church and help out when asked?” This may sound trite to some, but in order to be admitted to membership in an Adventist church, a person must be converted!²⁶

We must rediscover and revive our message, not sideline it in order to reinvent ourselves and attract attendees!

ii. **Worldwide organisation.** Becoming a Seventh-day Adventist is not about joining a local congregation, it is about joining the body of Christ, a worldwide movement. This representative form of governance and worldwide unity is a strong protection from the “lifecycle” omens. Local Adventist churches are part of a global army of churches that are steadily marching towards eternity. When a local church falls, its banner is picked up by other faithful workers and the worldwide church marches on. Consequently, when an Adventist goes to a new area, he does not just shop around for any church that suits his felt needs, he looks for an Adventist church! Perhaps the reader can readily understand why GHC targets our church structure as it tries to recreate Adventism?²⁷

iii. **Prophecy.** We have a “more sure word of prophecy” which clearly delineates the flow of history and the Church’s future. Scripture, and the writings of Ellen White, tell us that the Adventist Church—past, present and future, is guided by divine providence.

Tracing the prophetic history set out in the book of Daniel, the pioneers marked the prophetic rise of Adventism detailed in Revelation 10 and 14. The current lukewarmness of the church, and the war that Satan is making with the remnant who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” are but further prophetic waymarks. Yet we are promised by the word of God that one day soon, God will purify the Church, pour out his Spirit and lighten the earth with his glory. Then, probation will close and, after a time of trouble such as the world has never seen, He will return.

Now, having reminded ourselves of the prophetic rise, progress, final conflict and victory of the remnant church, would the GHC consultants please tell us, “Where is the lifecycle”?

Why try to apply the “lifecycle” theory to Adventist churches? Noting that Adventism is a heavy weight to shift, the GHC consultants know that unless you believe that your church is about to die, you will not feel sufficiently compelled to adopt radical changes to Adventist church organisation or to mute distinct Adventist beliefs in order to reach the “target worshipper market”. Dr. Borden acknowledges:

George Bullard . . . was brought in to teach the concept of lifecycles in congregations and demonstrate how this tool can be used to leverage change.²⁸

However, Adventists have the assurance that “[w]e have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history”.²⁹ We don’t need a reinvention, we need a revival.

Is “change” necessarily good? Closely connected to the lifecycle theory is the notion of “change”. “Change” is a keyword in leadership lingo, and can be a good thing. However, if your employer notified you that the new pay rates were being announced tomorrow, I am sure you would hold back the celebration until you found out whether the rate was an increase or a decrease!

Church congregations can be hard to change. In the Adventist context, we have historically maintained a theme of “it is written” to establish every practice and belief. The comprehensive writings of Ellen White and the worldwide adherence to the *Church Manual* make us even more apparently immovable. Likewise, the close connection between belief and practice taught in Adventism, the idea that salvation affects every aspect of life, means that Adventism is a difficult movement to redirect.

Ellen White warns:

We are in continual danger of getting above the simplicity of the gospel. There is an intense desire on the part of many to startle the world with something original, that shall lift the people into a state of spiritual ecstasy, and change the present order of experience. There is certainly great need of a change in the present order of experience; for the sacredness of present truth is not realized as it should be, but the change we need is a change of heart, and can only be obtained by seeking God individually for His blessing, by pleading with Him for His power, by fervently praying that His grace may come upon us, and that our characters may be transformed. This is the change we need today, and for the attainment of this experience we should exercise persevering energy and manifest heartfelt earnestness. We should ask with true sincerity, “What shall I do to be saved?” We should know just what steps we are taking heavenward.³⁰

If there is change to be made in our beliefs, practices, rules of order or organisational structure, the proper place for this to occur is through the General Conference Session, not by some local heroes heading out on their own, on the advice of some so-called “expert”!

Changing our language. Language is an important part of the GHC get-up. The bottom line is this: To sell the program and to change the church culture we need to change the language. Changing the language will change your thinking, and by changing the way you think, we change the way you act. Borden writes:

“If I can shape the metaphors of a culture, I can then change that culture”.³¹

Therefore, GHC selects labels like “consultant, leader, growth, health, church” because the connotations we attach to those words invoke positive feelings of “success”, “life” and “prosperity”. At the same time, churches that do not opt for GHC are termed in staid language like “tradition”, “family”, “shepherd”.³²

Borden recommends that the pastor be renamed “leader”. This new title gets away from the caring, soft, nice guy who is more concerned about church ministries than bringing about effective change and inspiring church members to multiply.³³

This manipulation of language is dangerous in two ways. Firstly, those who are experienced in the work of the church have a pretty clear idea what is meant when we talk about church activities and roles. Many of these things are defined in the Bible. For example, if I am a “pastor”, you know what parts of the Bible talk about my qualifications to be a pastor and my responsibilities as a pastor. If I say that I am the “leader” what do I mean, and what will you expect from me as a result?

At the same time, other churches using GHC have adopted roles like “pastoral care leaders” Are they elders or are they caring church members who keep in touch with the membership?

Further, if the pastor were to call a church board meeting, most Adventists would know what was meant, however, if under GHC, he called a “leaders meeting”, what does he mean? The board? Those who run the church service on Sabbath? That group of leaders that the pastor chooses to consult with? The answer is, that under GHC, the pastor will decide!

Secondly, there is a danger that by adopting terms like “leader” and “consultant”, in place of well understood titles, I can change your ideas about what you expect of a pastor or even

conference president without having to have you consciously change your beliefs. I don't even have to open my Bible and prove to you what the person should be doing. If you accept using the new title, the connotations come with it.

Not long ago, a young friend called me to get my thoughts on his call to be an elder on the board in his church. His church has run many programs similar to GHC. I tried, sensitively, to remind him of the passages in the Bible that talk about the role and responsibilities of elders, then, I asked him how he saw himself in those areas. His response was that the pastor had told him he wouldn't need to worry about all of that. In their new organisational structure, he was just a "board elder", there to make administrative decisions!

Leveraging loyalty. Traditionally, Adventists have had significant loyalty to the Adventist Church and respect for the ministers that bear its message. Borden recommends using this loyalty and respect to leverage change in a church.³⁴ Notice Borden's use of pastoral credibility to leverage change:

[T]hese retired pastors knew that their responsibility was not to come in and hold the fort. . . they were to come in and trade on their wisdom and grey hair and use it to leverage change. . . We were asking them to take all the arrows in the back that they could stand and then leave. . . These pastors are "velvet covered bricks."³⁵

Borden even admits to using the good cop/ bad cop routine:

In some cases where there was severe conflict, consultants switched so that the consultant coming in could function as the Prophet and the consultant who would work with the congregation on a monthly basis would be seen as the leader bringing up good change strategies.³⁶

Borden indicates that he is not above using the denominational name to leverage change, he writes:

As local congregational leaders began to risk in leading their local congregations from dysfunction to health, those resisting the change often contacted [conference] leaders. It was at this point we assured those resisters that their congregational leaders were on track and needed their support even when the change produced deep pain. For some of the critics our support was enough. When that occurred the change happened more quickly, because the [conference] had thrown its support and credibility behind the congregational leaders.³⁷

Despite the glaring defects in Bordenism, proponents of GHC hope that by having well respected pastors and conference leaders in their parade, faithful Adventists will be led to believe that the program is perfectly compatible with Adventism. In one Adventist church enduring an “intervention” the writer witnessed no less than four pastors, including the conference president, monopolise the pulpit for the entire weekend to leverage “change” in the church.

The reality is quite the opposite—many denominational leaders are quite concerned at the plethora of erroneous programs and structures being introduced under the guise of “church growth”.³⁸ Assurances from GHC leaders, whether they be pastors or conference administrators, are not necessarily a guarantee that GHC will not infringe against Adventist beliefs and practices.

Stories. One of the most effective means of communicating a message is to tell a story with which people can identify. Jesus himself used stories to illustrate spiritual truths. Borden, recognising the effectiveness of storytelling, encourages his disciples to use this technique to effect change. He writes:

A third tactic was to tell stories to congregations wrestling with change about how other congregations dealing with similar issues had fared.³⁹

These stories are designed to create emotional imbalance and to put before the congregation a picture of certain disaster if they remain as they are, or one of hope, if they embrace GHC. Borden writes “if the congregation was headed for closure we often laid out a

timeline of what that might look like... On Sunday morning the best preacher among the consultants preached a message of hope and vision, encouraging the congregation to embrace change".⁴⁰

In one Adventist church where this was tried, the conference president shared a number of "church failure" stories at the business meeting, then proceeded to preach a Sabbath sermon calling for "change" based on the city slogan "[name of church] . . . where dreams are possible".⁴¹

Just like the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah, today's Israel must not be intimidated by stories of churches closing, losing their pastor or going bankrupt. If the members of a church are faithfully doing the work God has given them to do, isn't that the perfect time to trust God rather than trusting the wisdom of those who are not obeying Him?

After the Attack

Even though you may have done your best to educate church members about the issues and the dangers that attend GHC, your church may still plunge headlong into a GHC revolution. If so, it is not unlikely that, having done your part, you have been accused of being power hungry, disloyal, or maybe even an "extremist".

Even if the church did not follow your advice, it is important not to underestimate the importance of your witness. God's way is entirely opposite to the GHC way—he doesn't care a whit about "consequences", he cares about your faithfulness! Your faithfulness to duty, allows God to work in a way that he would not have, had you not spoken up. After all, it is pure presumption for us to ask for God to work a miracle if we have not done our part.

Time to find another church? It is hoped by GHC leaders, that once you are removed from leadership, you will leave. Borden writes, "Eventually those who were dissenting to the

changes were asked to leave the congregation”.⁴² Every revolution knows that the continuing influence of a dissenter is dangerous to the success of the new regime. Consequently, abandoning the field is just what GHC leaders hope you will do.

However, if, having done all, it is your prayerful conviction to go and work elsewhere, do not feel that you are responsible for what is left behind. Remember, we are responsible for our faithfulness, not the consequences!

Similarly, you may have children that you do not think should be exposed to the various teachings and entertainments which flourish under GHC. The family that God has entrusted to us is our first priority as far as missionary work is concerned and must always take precedence over one’s desire to reform the church.

On the other hand, if you are deserting your post of duty because you want to return to comfortable Sabbath lunches and comfortable Adventist sermons, you certainly should reconsider. We are in the end time of the shaking, and if there ever was a time for comfortable Adventism, that time has passed. Our religious experience should not stand or fall based purely on what sermon is preached, or what music is played, in church on a particular Sabbath. “All who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”.⁴³

If you leave to attend somewhere that appears more pleasant, who can say what problems might come to that church? Soon the world will be beating upon us because of what we believe—what church will we run to then? Jeremiah asks, “If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how shall you contend with horses?”⁴⁴

Being independent. You may be tempted to join a home church or independent group. This group may seem to be very zealous in doctrine and in the lifestyle matters which biblical Adventists take seriously. Unfortunately, independent groups are not without their complications.

Groups separated from the organised church do not have a good survival rate. Splinter groups lack the organisation and accountability found in the denomination and even risk becoming worse than the churches they abandon. Just think, if the independent group goes off the rails, who then do you turn to for help?⁴⁵ Independent groups become easy targets for destructive “ministries” who peddle their anti-church doctrines for financial gain.

Members of independent groups are often drawn together by their bad experiences with the church. This can create an internal loyalty that prevents them from seeing glaring wrongs in each other. At the same time, unresolved bitterness towards the church and those who did them wrong, can overtake any noble cause they once professed.

Lastly, the moment that you separate yourself from the organised church, you lose credibility with those members who were open to your influence and who were not as convinced of GHC as you perhaps thought. Even if they don't lose respect for you, how can you influence them now that you have gone?

[Continuing to] Stand up for Jesus. Standing up for right is much more than just unleashing your opinion and then leaving because people don't appear to listen. “Standing” also requires patience and endurance. Remember, the third angel's message in Revelation 14 says, “here is the patience of the saints, here are those that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus”! Of course this does not mean obstinately and impolitely forcing your views

on those that don't want to hear it. It would be foolish to provide others with an excuse to cast you out of the church!

“Standing”, might mean being disliked and shunned by many for a time, with no recognition or responsibilities in the church. It might mean, being *humble*, and showing others that you will serve God faithfully as a leader *or* as a follower. Although you may be tempted to think that the decision to revolutionise the church was final, it is vital to remember that many of those who supported the changes were probably deceived by the GHC propaganda. Your continuing witness to these ones is just as important as your stand for truth.

One large oversight of the GHC peddlers, is the fact that if you were in leadership before the intervention removed you—there was probably a reason for you being there! The spiritual gifts and talents that you had then, you have still. There are many opportunities to use these gifts and talents to minister and influence others for good, without church responsibility. Be hospitable to those who are open to your influence, attend and contribute to Sabbath school class, continue to pray for the church and its leaders, and continue to return your tithe.⁴⁶

How you behave in time of trial says much more about you, than how you behave while you are honoured and accepted. In summer, all the trees have leaves, but only some can keep them in the blast of winter! I am certain that the memory of how Stephen acted while being stoned made a lasting impression upon Saul. Like Saul, the people deceived by GHC in your church, will still be watching and thinking, and may respond positively when they better understand the issues at stake. You may not be able to turn the entire church around, but your influence might lead others to accept the truth whom God might use for that very purpose!

However, in adopting this course of action you must also be careful not to legitimise wrongdoing by taking part in plans that God would not approve. This is a matter requiring caution and prayerful judgement.

Continue your protest. If your church is still holding business meetings, continue to attend and insist on church order being followed. If it is not, let those in administration of the Conference (or Union etc.) know about it! Seventh-day Adventism has a church structure and your local church cannot act independently. Furthermore, rather than giving others the impression that you are out to tell the pastor how to do his job, there are many times when it is best to let the Conference administration handle it—after all, they are responsible for him.⁴⁷

Borden admits that the protesting of disaffected members was a serious obstacle to GHC. He writes:

Other congregational critics however, were frustrated with our support of their leaders. They in turn went around the [conference] and complained to [union/division/general conference]. These [union/division/general conference] leaders by and large did not support the leaders at either the congregational level or the [conference] level. When this occurred the change process was slowed down considerably. These critics created havoc. . . .⁴⁸

Ellen White in similar terms enjoins us to protest solemnly. She writes: “Make your complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right”.⁴⁹

Do what you can, wherever you are called to be, and then wait on the Lord. God’s servants have often worked more effectively without the praise of others and when confined to prison cells and maligned.

Remember to Pray. Amidst the turmoil, our walk with Jesus must remain constant. It would be a great tragedy if, having stood so firmly for the right, your subsequent failure to walk closely with Jesus led people to disregard your testimony. Jude counsels us, “Keep yourself in the love of God”.⁵⁰ Then we will have the wisdom to know how to be and what to do.

Those who surrender their lives to His guidance and to His service will never be placed in a position for which He has not made provision. Whatever our situation, if we are doers of His word, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexity, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend.⁵¹

Practise humility. “The most useful men are seldom appreciated. Those who have labored most actively and unselfishly for their fellow man, and who have been instrumental in achieving the greatest results, are often repaid with ingratitude and neglect. When such men find themselves set aside, their counsels slighted and despised, they may feel that they are suffering great injustice. But let them learn from the example of Samuel not to justify or vindicate themselves, unless the Spirit of God unmistakably prompts to such a course”.⁵²

Conclusion

The warfare of the church has not ceased. Errors like GHC and its kind will continue to plague the church until probation closes. While we are often struggling for answers and lacking in wisdom, God calls on us to place ourselves at his feet and trust in his leading. “All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose”.⁵³

Not one cloud has fallen upon the church that God has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork the work of God but He has foreseen. All has taken place as He has predicted through His prophets. He has not left His church in darkness, forsaken, but has traced in prophetic declarations what would occur, and through His providence, acting in its appointed place in the world’s history, He has brought about

that which His Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to foretell. All His purposes will be fulfilled and established. His law is linked with His throne, and satanic agencies combined with human agencies cannot destroy it. Truth is inspired and guarded by God; it will live, and will succeed, although it may appear at times to be overshadowed. The gospel of Christ is the law exemplified in character. The deceptions practiced against it, every device for vindicating falsehood, every error forged by satanic agencies, will eventually be eternally broken, and the triumph of truth will be like the appearing of the sun at noonday. The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth with healing in His wings, and the whole earth shall be filled with His glory.⁵⁴

Biographical note: Tim Matsis is a lawyer who lectures in law, leadership and business at the Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill, New Zealand. In addition to serving in his local church, he has also been involved as a lay member at conference and division levels. He is currently doing further study in the field of Theology and Ministry. He is married to Leslea and is the father of two children Samuel, age three, and newborn son Benjamin.

ENDNOTES

¹ Paul D. Borden, *Hit the Bullseye—How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation at the Mission Field*, Abingdon Press, 2003, p. 82.

² *Ibid.*

³ Ellen White writes in the *Signs of the Times* (February 1, 1883) “The accession of members who have not been renewed in heart and reformed in life is a source of weakness to the church. This fact is often ignored. Some ministers and churches are so desirous of securing an increase of numbers that they do not bear faithful testimony against unchristian habits and practices. Those who accept the truth are not taught that they cannot safely be worldlings in conduct while they are Christians in name. Heretofore they were Satan's subjects; henceforth they are to be subjects of Christ. The life must testify to the change of leaders. Public opinion favors a profession of Christianity. Little self-denial or self-sacrifice is required in order to put on a form of godliness, and to have one's name enrolled upon the church book. Hence many join the church without first becoming united to Christ. In this Satan triumphs. Such converts are his most efficient agents. They serve as decoys to other souls. They are false lights, luring the unwary to perdition. It is in vain that men seek to make the Christian's path broad and pleasant for worldlings. God has not smoothed or widened the rugged, narrow way. If we would enter into life, we must follow the same path which Jesus and his disciples trod,—the path of humility, self-denial, and sacrifice.”

⁴ See Part 4 of this series *GHC and Leadership*. The *Church Manual* also has detailed analysis on the subject.

⁵ 1 Peter 5:8.

⁶ Revelation 12:17.

⁷ E.g., Luke 21:36.

⁸ Ellen White also noted that development of the character is not instantaneous but rather, is the work of a lifetime. See *Child Guidance*, p. 162.

⁹ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 707. One must keep in mind that God often uses trial and tragedy to bring his chosen people back to him. Often he even uses the unconverted to bring the trial! After all, didn't God use Nebuchadnezzar to cure the Jews of their idolatry? Or when the disciples were quarrelling, didn't he allow a storm to threaten their lives?

¹⁰ *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 196.

¹¹ Borden, p. 82.

¹² This has already occurred in the Rocky Mountain Conference and South New Zealand Conference.

¹³ The foregoing articles in this series have considered some of these points in greater detail.

¹⁴ See *Growing Healthy Churches? Part 2: Counting Sheep* for a more complete analysis of this issue.

¹⁵ Borden, p. 16.

¹⁶ Romans 8:7.

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 2:3, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vs. 2.

¹⁹ Revelation 18:4.

²⁰ Borden, p. 13.

²¹ The lifecycle theory along with other ideas presented are largely adaptations of secular business models. For example, board governance principles have been adapted from the work of John Carver. See Borden, p. 129. The “lifecycle” model is predominantly the work of George Bullard (See <http://www.bullardjournal.org/>), another Baptist church growth expert. His observations of congregations led him to the conclusion that like products manufactured for consumption, all churches go through a natural series of steps from the time they a “born” until the time they “die”.

²² In the days of King Josiah, the discovery of the book of the law was the catalyst for a the leaders and the nation to return to the path of faith and obedience and become the recipients of God's mercy and blessing. See 1 Kings 22.

²³ The catchy phrase for this is to become an “outward focussed” church rather than the negative “inward focussed” church.

²⁴ For example, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkin's “Left Behind” series.

²⁵ Note the following comments from the *Church Manual* (p. 13): “13. Remnant and Its Mission

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and

reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)”

²⁶ Note the following from the *Church Manual* (p. 29):“Membership on a Spiritual Basis.

The serious, solemn obligations of church membership should be impressed on everyone who applies for admittance to the church. All should be faithfully taught what it means to become a member of the body of Christ. Only those giving evidence of having experienced the new birth, and who are enjoying a spiritual experience in the Lord Jesus, are prepared for acceptance into church membership. Thorough instruction in the fundamental teachings and related practices of the church should be given to every candidate for church membership before being baptized and received into church fellowship. Each person seeking admittance to the church should be informed of the principles for which the church stands.

This is a spiritual relationship. It can be entered into only by those who are converted. Only in this way can the purity and spiritual caliber of the church be maintained. It is the duty of every minister to instruct those who accept the principles of the truth, that they may enter the church on a sound, spiritual basis.”

²⁷ *Growing Healthy Churches? Part 3: Denominational Loyalty* reveals the manner in which GHC is, in reality, a blatant attack on our denominational structure and unity.

²⁸ Borden, p. 43.

²⁹ *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

³⁰ *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, pp. 187, 188.

³¹ Borden, p. 20, 23.

³² See Growth track vs traditional, Borden, p. 115.

³³ Borden, p. 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁸ For example, listen to the appeals from Elder Ted N. C. Wilson at the 2010 General Conference session (available on <http://www.greatcontroversy.org>).

³⁹ Borden, p. 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴¹ Incidentally, this slogan had been lifted from a Hollywood movie “*The World’s Fastest Indian*” filmed in the city.

⁴² Borden, p. 79.

⁴³ 2 Timothy 3:12.

⁴⁴ Jeremiah 12:5.

⁴⁵ In some of my communications with non Adventists who have read these articles on GHC, one of the weaknesses they have had in being able to correct the situation has been that they are congregational in organisation and have no larger denomination to call upon for support.

⁴⁶ See below note 45 from *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 249.

⁴⁷ The *Church Manual* (p. 147) says “**Churches Do Not Elect Pastor**—Pastors or assistant pastors are not nominated or elected to such positions by the church. Their connection with the church is by the appointment of the conference/mission/field committee, and such appointments may be changed at any time. (See pp. 50-52.)”

⁴⁸ Borden, p. 80.

⁴⁹ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 249.

⁵⁰ Jude 21.

⁵¹ *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 114.

⁵² *Conflict and Courage*, p. 147.

⁵³ Romans 8:28.

⁵⁴ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 10.