

## **Hope International and Associated Groups**

### *General Conference Administrative Committee*

#### **Introduction**

As a result of concerns raised by then General Conference President, Robert S Folkenberg and several world division presidents, the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), in early 1998, established an ad hoc committee to interview the leadership of Hope International, publishers of "Our Firm Foundation," and two other private groups, Hartland Institute, headquartered in the United States, and Remnant Ministries, based in Australia.

The committee, comprised of General Conference Biblical Research Institute scholars, General Conference administrators, and Andrews University Seminary instructors, developed a 20-question instrument that was the basis of their inquiry and appraisal. The leaders of Hope International and its associated groups accepted the committee's invitation to answer the questions. They met with the General Conference appointed group on two occasions for a total of three and one-half days. The following report constitutes the committee's assessment of their responses, both written and verbal, and its evaluation of results of research done by individuals contracted specifically to study the theology and methodology of Hope International and associates.

ADCOM received the ad hoc committee's conclusions on April 25, 2000 and, in light of the questions raised by church membership in general over the years, voted to share this information with the world Church.

## Report

All of us would agree that Christ is the Head of the Church. As Ellen G White wrote, "Nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church. Nothing is guarded by Him with such jealous care" (TM 42). But the Church is made up of mortals in constant need of His presence and guidance.

For these reasons there is great need for revival and reformation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it faces the final chapter in the great controversy. No one will question the importance for church administrators, pastors, teachers, and laypersons to be personally involved in the task of calling the whole Church back to the purity of faith and Christian living as found in the Scriptures. Such revival is simply indispensable for the effective fulfillment of the mission of the Church. Our message and mission should be constantly reaffirmed through voice and action until the glory of the Lord is revealed throughout the world by a people who are totally committed to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Therefore the emphasis on revival and reformation we found in the message of Hope International, Hartland Institute, and Remnant Ministries (hereafter referred to as Hope International and associates) is welcomed. Further, we observed in conversations with Hope International and associates that they affirmed agreement on many of the major elements of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

However, the method they have used to express their concern has resulted in what is perceived by many to be a spirit of constant criticism directed against the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is the body of Christ, the Remnant Church. The effect of this methodology is the discouraging portrayal of the Church as steeped in a state of apostasy. After studying their materials and meeting with their leaders, we have some serious concerns with respect to the nature and purpose of Hope International and associates.

## **Areas of Serious Concern**

### 1. Charge of Apostasy Against the Seventh-day Adventist Church

According to Hope International and associates, it is an understatement to say that there is apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The *Church itself* is in apostasy! Therefore the condition of the Church is worse than that of any other Christian religious body that forms the end-time Babylon. They are not willing to refer openly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Babylon because of the occasions in which Ellen G White opposed those who made such accusations. Yet they have found a way to bypass her counsel by accusing the Church of being in apostasy. We have not found a single case where Ellen G White or the book of Revelation accuses God's remnant people of being in apostasy. It is this charge of apostasy against the Church that keeps Hope International and associates alive.

If the Church is in apostasy, it has no reason to exist and the Lord must raise up a new church as His instrument for these last days. Hope International and associates see themselves as spokespersons for those who perceive that the Church is in apostasy, and they believe that they have a divine mandate to catalogue and publicize this apostasy and to call the Church to repentance. Although we acknowledge that there is apostasy in the Church—Jesus Himself acknowledged the co-existence of wheat and tares in the Church—we reject the blatant and irresponsible accusation that God's Remnant Church is *in* apostasy. Their definition of apostasy as "any deviation from God's truth or mandated Christian practice" is not found in the Bible or in the writings of Ellen G White.

### 2. Distorted View of the Nature of the Church

It is our clear impression that Hope International and associates believe that the Church is composed of both an organized system of administration and a parallel self-supporting

ministry independent of the organized system. We understand their position to be that, as divinely-appointed self-supporting ministries, they are not ultimately bound by the decisions of the world Church. This model of church organization is used by them to justify their activities. Such understanding of the Church lacks any biblical support and is not found in the writings of Ellen G White. Although we acknowledge the need for supportive ministries within the Church, we perceive Hope International and associates as having parallel organizational structures separate to, and critical of, the official Church organization. Support for this perception is found in the following characteristics of their organizations:

a. Diverse Understanding of Doctrinal Positions

Though strongly affirming their support for the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, Hope International and associates seem to have some reservations with respect to several of them. One such reservation concerns "The Son" (#4). In this particular case they have taken a position different from that of the Church by making their particular understanding of the human nature of Christ part of the doctrine. On the topic of the Church (#11 and #13) their understanding of its nature and authority does not seem to reflect the doctrine of ecclesiology as held by the Church (see below). The same applies to the statement on "Stewardship" (#20).

b. Reluctance to Accept the Authority of the Church

Although acknowledging that the Church has a God-given authority, Hope International and associates do not consider the authority of the Church to be final in the community of believers. It is the Seventh-day Adventist position that the Church was formed when a group of believers voluntarily, and under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, accepted a common gospel, a common lifestyle, and a common mission, understood to be based on the authority of the Scriptures. This community was vested with authority by Christ (Matt 18:15-

18). Decisions made by the properly appointed representatives of the Church community are binding on all members who, in order to preserve the unity of the Church and to facilitate the fulfillment of its mission, are willing to set aside personal opinions and/or practices to follow the decisions of the body. But if elements of that community break the common bond that unites it, by developing a judgmental attitude against the authority of the community, the result is confusion and insubordination. Hope International and associates appear to have taken the position that their interpretation of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy is the final arbiter over the Church, to determine whether its decisions are correct or not. If, in their judgment, a decision is not correct, they reject it and proceed to believe and act as they think best, while at the same time claiming to be loyal members of the Church. That attitude is consistent with the spirit of schism and, at the present time, contributes to undermining the authority of the Church.

Self-supporting ministries are to work harmoniously with the Church. Paul, who is often referred to as a self-supporting worker was, after his conversion, brought by the Lord into a permanent connection with the Church. In that context we are told:

"God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness . . . .

"There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially

of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.

"Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril."—AA 163, 164.

c. Rewriting of the Baptismal Vow

A Baptismal Vow was put together by Colin Standish using the 1932 *Church Manual* and other sources. An examination of this baptismal vow reveals that it is significantly different from what is found in the current *Church Manual* as approved by the world Church. Among the differences are the following:

1) A new fundamental belief added as a requirement for joining the Church: that "Jesus took upon Himself our fallen nature." Such statement has never been part of the Seventh-day Adventist Baptismal Vow or of official statements of fundamental beliefs. Such change illustrates an independence from the Church in doctrinal matters as they constitute their own particular views into tests of faith, independent from the remainder of the Church.

2) The vow dealing with tithing does not identify the Church as the repository of tithe, as does the official Baptismal Vow.

3) In the rewritten Baptismal Vow, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not receive a mention. The Remnant Church is mentioned, but it is never identified with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The fundamental question here is one of the nature and authority of the Church and where that authority resides. Those who promote the use of this

reworded Baptismal Vow demonstrate that they do not recognize the authority of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church.

d. Redefinition of the Tithe "Storehouse"

The financial support of their organizations comes, not only from their own earnings, nor only from the offerings of church members, but also from tithes. Some of their publications redefine the "storehouse" to be any instrument of God that is proclaiming "unadulterated present truth." Whether intended or not, the influence of such literature is to encourage members to redirect their tithe away from the Church "storehouse," and to invest it instead with these independent ministries.

e. Conducting Their Own Camp Meetings

Every year they conduct their own camp meetings, usually without the concurrence of the conference administration. They express that the need for such camp meetings arises from their perception that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in apostasy, and is therefore incapable of meeting the spiritual needs of its members through the regular conference camp meetings.

f. Operating Their Own Publishing Enterprises

Hope International and associates have their own publishing program for the production of materials promoting their views on different doctrines and lifestyle issues. While much of this material is Adventist in character, there are numerous examples of a judgmental attitude against the organized Church and its leaders and, from time to time, assertions that the Church is in apostasy. Whatever truths these periodicals contain are more than discounted by a recurring critical refrain.

### 3. Supporting Dissident Movements

Hope International and associates have supported, and continue to support, dissident movements who turn against the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its organization. They have been supporting Norberto Restrepo in Columbia and Venezuela, a former Seventh-day Adventist minister who is no longer an Adventist, and is rather one of the most severe enemies of the Church in the Inter-American Division. In 1997 they supported a group of church elders in Guatemala who rebelled against the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and they sent one of their representatives to Guatemala to support them. Recently they supported, in a court of law, a non-Adventist who was attempting to use the name of the Church for his own organization. Their encouragement of breakaway activities in the following countries, and others besides, is well documented: Australia, Bolivia, England, Fiji, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, New Zealand, Macedonia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sweden, United States of America, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe. These associations do nothing to build confidence in the professed loyalty of Hope International and associates to the Church. Rather, it is a powerful evidence of their disregard for the carefully considered decisions of the Church, and it amounts to disloyalty to the Church itself. Their misdirected support interferes with the regular organization's attempts to deal with, and hopefully redeem, such dissident individuals, and makes the task of the Church more difficult.

### 4. Selectively Using Ellen G White Writings

Hope International and associates pride themselves in their profuse use of the writings of Ellen G White to support their teachings. But they select statements that seem to support themselves, while disregarding other statements in which activities such as theirs are clearly condemned by Ellen G White. Her overriding support of the organized Seventh-day Adventist



Church is intentionally minimized or ignored by Hope International and associates, or explained away as irrelevant for us today.

### **Conclusion**

The accumulative effect of the above information results in the perception of many Church members that Hope International and associates are offshoot organizations. They have not taken the decisive step of officially separating themselves from the Seventh-day Adventist organization, and they claim that they never will. However, by rejecting the authority of the world Church in session when their interpretation of Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy differs from that of the Church, they have set their authority above that of the world Church and operate in a manner that is consistent with offshoot movements.

### **An Appeal**

We appeal, in all sincerity and Christian love, to Hope International and associates to hear the counsel of the Church they claim to love. It is time for the spirit of condemnation and rebellion to be set aside, allowing the reconciling blood of Christ to bring unity among His people.

All agree that there is serious need for revival and reformation in God's Remnant Church, but the methods used by Hope International and associates have produced dissonance instead of reform. When assessed by their fruits, it is seen that the movement of reform promoted by Hope International and associates has failed to bring about either reformation or increased unity. The Church is not perfect, but there is wisdom in listening to its advice. We appeal, in Christian love, for a turn of heart and purpose that will bring Hope International and associates into full unity with the body of Christ, the Remnant Church.

If Hope International and associates cannot bring themselves into harmony with the body of the world Church, clearly evidenced within twelve months, the Seventh-day Adventist Church may need to consider whether there exists a "persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church" (*Church Manual* p 169).