Officially Challenged

and

Directed by the Hand of the Lord

Dave Fiedler

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Also by Dave Fiedler

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Officially Challenged

ON the morning of July 4, 2025, the president of the General Conference surprised Adventists around the world by stating that an incorrect version of the "Official Statement" dealing with Immunization had been posted on the church's website[1] for many years.[2] This announcement provided a welcome—but only partial—resolution to a question which had perplexed many since the day before when the president had read into the record a version of the "Official Statement" that differed substantially from what they had read many times.

Because the statement had been the center of much discussion and was well-known to thousands of Adventists, many were stunned and confused that a significantly different statement could be proclaimed "official." An unwelcome dilemma of dishonesty or administrative incompetence swirled in many minds.

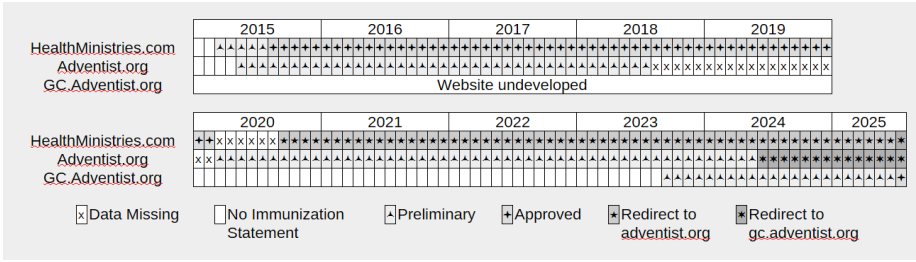
The explanation offered on July 4 was quickly "fact checked," and found to be correct—sort of. The church's flagship website (adventist.org) had indeed for years carried the statement which the president dismissed as "preliminary,"[3]

1. For clarity, a *website* is commonly a collection of multiple *web pages*.
2. "General Conference President Ted Wilson Issues Corrective Statement on Immunization Remark," Adventist News Network, July 4, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20250704161752/https://adventist.news/news/general-conference-president-ted-wilson-issues-corrective-statement-on-immunization-remarks

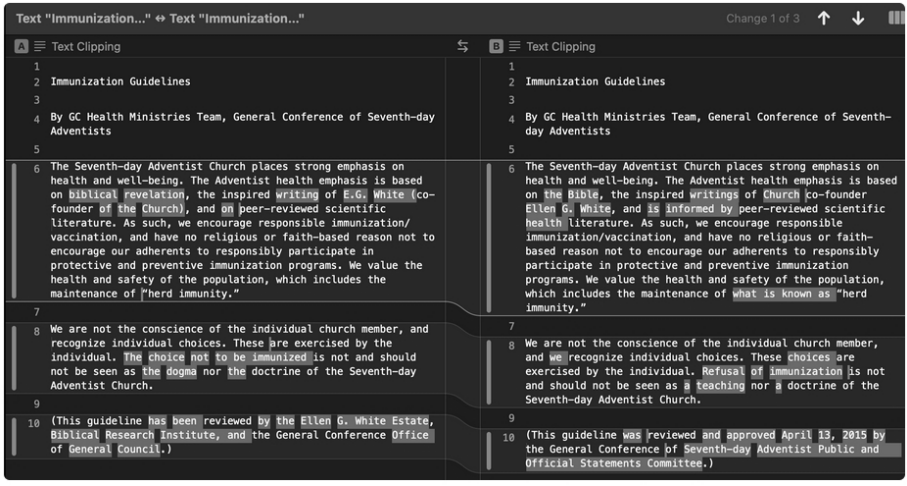
   Please note that all references to "archive.org" are to the Internet Archive, which preserves time-stamped versions of websites. These links make it possible to see what a website looked like on specific dates in the past. Readers are invited to explore these links.
3. https://web.archive.org/web/20150320171154/http://www.adventist.org:80/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/

while evidence for the existence of the "final version" was found posted on the church's Health Ministries website (healthministries.com).

Those content with a good overview of the situation will be happy with this chart. Those who want the full blow-by-blow account, with documentation, can go to the appendix.



The take-away from all that is simply that during the pandemic—the first time much attention had been paid to the statement on immunization—there was only the preliminary version to be found. So, what was the difference?



Comparison of the "preliminary" and "approved" versions of the statement. It is worth noting that the denomination's official website now says that the approved version was "voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee in Silver Spring, Maryland, April 15 (not 13, as on the Health Ministries website), 2015."

Although there are a number of differences between the text of the "preliminary" and the "approved" versions of the statement, the primary point of discussion has centered on the phrasing in regard to the *basis* of the "Adventist health emphasis." The preliminary version says it "is based on biblical revelation, the inspired writing of Ellen G. White,... and on peer-reviewed scientific literature." This parallel grammatical construction—emphasized by the preposi-

tion "on" which describes the church's position in relation to peer-reviewed literature—depicts a quite different scenario than is implied by the "and is informed by" wording of the final, approved statement.

To many minds, the final version is preferable, inasmuch as it does not lock the church into some poorly defined subservient role to the famously fluid whims of "science." While all Adventists would agree that "true science" is in agreement with Inspiration, the endless argumentation over this theory or that evidence, and the strong emphasis on positions which we hold to be erroneous[4] that is perennially seen in the scientific world, holds little appeal for a church that respects Christ's prayer "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You." (John 17:21) Any acceptance of "scientific authority" such as is implied in the preliminary version holds the promise of trouble. After all, the question in Amos is rhetorical, not a suggestion for experimentation![5]

The thought that "peer-reviewed scientific literature" was to be considered a satisfactory basis for any denominational position was deeply disturbing to many. And yet the "preliminary" version proliferated widely and quite famously became a center of debate and—too often—a source of "authority" when it came to the issue of deciding what the denomination did, or did not, condone in regard to the pandemic and the widely promoted therapies which were offered the public.

Indeed, the pandemic was barely beginning when the "approved" version of the statement (that is, the only known correct presentation of the statement prior to July 4, 2025, the one posted on the Health Ministries website) disappeared from the internet. What replaced it, what had usurped its intended role on multiple other web pages, is something of a complex tale, with little but dates and web pages to hint at the world-wide turmoil which was enveloping the lives of thousands, both laity and leadership, in the church.

Like feathers on the wind, the preliminary text spread abroad. Indeed, that never-approved "Official Statement" became ubiquitous within Adventism. In addition to the websites noted, one final example is interesting, not because it is really any different from the rest, but because a quirk in the editorial policy of this particular journal nicely highlights one aspect of the challenge:

The Journal of Adventist Education—

https://www.journalofadventisteducation.org/2019.81.2.2

The unique feature in this case is a notation following the article itself, presumably intended to encourage confidence in the authors' message. It says: "This article has been peer reviewed."

4. The Creation/Evolution debate is the poster child for all the above.
5. "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Amos 3:3

Regrettably, the reviewer was no more able to discern the inaccuracy of the quoted "Official Statement" than were the original authors. The point is simply that "peer review" depends on *peers*, people with a similar background, training, and worldview. It's a great system for identifying *unorthodox* thinking within the peer group, but the chances of it failing to spot *erroneous orthodoxy* are baked right into the methodology. If you really want a system that challenges the basic assumptions of a paper, you need something more akin to the "adversarial system" used in legal proceedings. It's the lack of that sort of vigorous challenge that brands some proceedings as "kangaroo courts."[6]

When it comes to these published lists of the "Official Statements," some of the older ones are among the most interesting because they display "Official Statements" that are not on the current list! We have "Official Statements" about wars in Iraq and Congo, but did you know we once had an "Official Statement" lamenting the "Crisis in Kosovo"?[7]

We used to have an "Official Statement" titled simply "Values,"[8] but it was dropped some years ago. There was also a statement on "Operating Principles for Health-Care Institutions," but it too has passed away.[9]

The prize for the most technical sounding titles of all the statements past or present goes to both "Human Gene Therapy"[10] and "Christian Principles for Genetic Interventions"[11] in a dead heat.

Since there seems to be no policy to announce the discarding of "Official Statements," we are left with nothing but speculation as to why any of them

6. As applied to scientific discourse, such a system might work like this: For every paper contending the universal, unvarying speed of light, the reviewer would be chosen from among the advocates of a variable definition of "C." But doesn't everyone *know* that "C" is a constant? Turns out, the answer to that is an emphatic "No." The danger, of course, is giving credibility to "pseudo science." But who do you trust to decide what the ultimate truth is? Given the potential for political, economic, and military influence arising from "science," the idea that no one would try to manipulate it is patently naive.
7. https://web.archive.org/web/20130928010858/http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat40.html
   War is lamentable… but lamenting wars on an individual basis seems… odd. What does it mean that we've dropped Kosovo? Is there a time limit on such things? Does it depend on the lives lost or the monetary damage inflicted? And what about the wars we've missed? Don't we risk offending both Ukrainians and Russians because we passed on that conflict? There's a lot to be said for trying to stay out of hostilities that have gone on for thousands of years with no sign of resolution, but what about the whole thing with (listed alphabetically so as not to show favoritism) Gaza, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and Israel? Did we just miss the news on that one?
8. https://web.archive.org/web/20130928011349/http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat56.html
9. https://web.archive.org/web/20130928012239/http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat31.html
10. https://web.archive.org/web/20240221181818/https://www.adventist.org/documents/human-gene-therapy/
11. https://web.archive.org/web/20231207204242/https://www.adventist.org/documents/christian-principles-for-genetic-interventions/

have been dropped from the list.[12] Given the issues of the time, those last two, in particular, might have found more application than ever before!

Other "Official Statements" have been retained, but modified over the years. Such has been the case with the "Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." Mission statements are not universally popular. Plenty of people tend to think of them as an embellishment, a pretty ribbon tied on top of whatever the organization is actually doing. Others, of course, take them quite seriously, working from the premise that if you don't really know what you're trying to get done, there's a good chance you never will. Perhaps you can use the present situation as a diagnostic test to see which camp you fit into. Did you even notice that the church's mission statement has undergone one major overhaul, and a second minor "tweaking" since it was first announced in 2003?[13]

Finally, it should perhaps be pointed out that, while all of these have been published under the banner of "Official Statements," there is some in-

12. Other no-longer-current "Official Statements" include:
Trademark—https://web.archive.org/web/20141019053841/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/trademark/
A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music—https://web.archive.org/web/20141019053341/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/a-seventh-day-adventist-philosophy-of-music/
Seventh-day Adventist Church Web Sites—https://web.archive.org/web/20150724184923/http://www.adventist.org:80/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/seventh-day-adventist-church-web-sites/
Employer and Employee Relationships—https://web.archive.org/web/20141019194224/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/employer-and-employee-relationships/
Harassment—https://web.archive.org/web/20131016045733/http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/harassment/6/
Sexual Harassment—https://web.archive.org/web/20131016045913/http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/sexual-harassment/6/
Use of Tithe—https://web.archive.org/web/20131016050108/http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/use-of-tithe/6/
Abortion—https://web.archive.org/web/20131016033542/http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/abortion/6/
Sabbath Observance—https://web.archive.org/web/20150811034543/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/sabbath-observance/12/
Total Commitment to God—https://web.archive.org/web/20150811034524/http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/total-commitment-to-god/12/
13. Three versions of the Mission Statement:
2003—https://web.archive.org/web/20040514060500/http://www.adventist.org:80/beliefs/statements/main_stat1.html
2009—https://web.archive.org/web/20100706070444/http://adventist.org:80/beliefs/statements/main-stat1.html
2014—https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/

dication that they were not all viewed in the same light. There is a 300-page book published in 2010, for instance, which was described as presenting "all of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statements on various issues,"[14] but it then divides them into "Position Statements, Guidelines, and Other Documents."[15]

But enough general background on the "Official Statements." The focus of the world church has been directed to the now-corrected version of the "Immunization" statement on the General Conference's website. Why? Because during the height of the pandemic, the voice of the church uniformly declared that peer-reviewed scientific literature was one of the foundations for our "Health Emphasis," and there were those who didn't believe that to be true.

Yes, they were a minority. Yes, some of them held "pseudo-scientific" ideas. Yes, some of them were abrasive and even disrespectful at times. But according to the "approved" version of the "Official Statement"—they were *correct!*[16]

No matter that no one at any level of administrative authority or academic expertise recognized the confusion and, occasionally, suffering released on the church by the "preliminary" rather than the "approved" statement, it turned out that those who objected to classing "peer-reviewed scientific literature" as a basis for Adventist belief were correct. Of course, there may be those who think "peer-reviewed scientific literature" *is* an appropriate foundation for religious beliefs. That's fair. And they should have opportunity to present their reasons before the General Conference in session, should they wish, so that the decision might be made by those appropriately delegated to decide matters of belief.

If it was a simple oversight failure that resulted in the widespread promulgation of the "preliminary" statement, it was one of epic proportions. The presentation of the "preliminary" statement was repeated many, many times in General Conference departmental publications, and echoed and re-echoed in Union Conference magazines, local Conference newsletters, and special purpose websites like the "Global Campmeeting Adventist Collective." Adventist hospitals and universities released frequent public service announcements and distributed informational flyers which quoted the statement, ministries such as the Adventist Medical Evangelistic Network endorsed the position, and some Adventist medical personnel gained a degree of notoriety with the same message.

14. https://web.archive.org/web/20160201032804/https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/
15. https://web.archive.org/web/20151016192656/http://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/Statements-2010-english.pdf
16. That the specific point of the relationship was considered is obvious from the fact that that the wording was eliminated from the preliminary version before the final statement was approved. That said, let the record show that being factually correct is no excuse for unChristlike behavior and attitudes.

Perhaps the most consequential of those who noted both the statement and its 2021 "reaffirmation" were governments around the world. Not all governments care about one's religious beliefs in the first place, but to have one's religious belief wrongly defined in an "Official Statement" was a detriment that fell heavily on church members around the world.

On the whole—with only the exception of that "very small minority" who objected to the implied equivalence of Scripture and science, or who opposed the various shots and boosters for one reason or another—the church united on a philosophical platform that was never approved by either the unidentified "General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Public and Official Statements Committee"[17] or the "General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee,"[18] let alone by the General Conference session delegates.

Under the considerable pressures of the pandemic, when church members' jobs—in both secular and church employment—came into question, this issue became a flash point. The minority of church members who were uncomfortable with the statement were increasingly seen as "out of step" with the mainstream of the church. It is a well developed human tendency to allow our expressions to creep toward the negative when describing someone with whom we disagree, so it's no surprise that things were said and done "on both sides of the aisle" which sounded demeaning to the other side.

Christian charity was challenged; sometimes it carried the day, sometimes it did not. It's hard to speak kindly of someone when you see them as advocates of a foolish course of action which runs great risk of harming not only themselves, but others as well. And don't think that such perspectives were only held on one side of the issue! Within the "official" church, however, the prevailing narrative was solidly "pro-vaccine."

Consider, for example, the February 2021 release from the Pacific Union Conference's Church State Council. Presumably addressed to pastors, the memo presents "information which we think will be helpful for you when dealing with this issue." The first point of this helpful information was probably obvious to those requesting help from the pastors, but the Council is to be commended for speaking honestly: "Please do inform church members that the teaching and policy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is 'pro' vaccine."

17. https://web.archive.org/web/20150816074559/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines

18. https://web.archive.org/web/20250704183936/https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/immunization/

That's fair. There will be a variety of opinions as to whether or not that position is wise, but if you believe something is beneficial, go ahead and promote it. Just don't try to deny later on that that's what you were doing![19]

Skipping down to point number four: "We encourage those who screen these requests to ascertain the basis of one's religious objection. In many cases, the objection is not religious at all, but is based on health—the belief that the vaccine has a significant risk of harm."[20]

That fourth point is fairly typical of a line of thought which began to emerge during the pandemic. The argument took a variety of forms, but the central point was the establishment of some hitherto unrecognized separation between "health" and "religion," or between "religious liberty" and "freedom of conscience." The technical language was applauded by some, and simply rejected by others. After all, isn't it the "risk of significant harm" to the Christian's health that lies at the base of Biblical temperance? Wouldn't "significant harm" to one's health rob God of His rightful service? Is there no "religion" in that?

But time passed. The pandemic waned. Boosters multiplied to the point that almost no one kept up to date. Opinions—including *legal* opinions[21]—began to shift as some of the claims for the vaccine fell back to earth. No, vaccination didn't prevent the spread of the virus. No, the risk of the disease to young children was so low that vaccination simply was not indicated. And the idea of exposing women of child bearing age to a medical agent which did, in fact, affect the reproductive organs has been increasingly seen as an unwarranted risk.

The "COVID-19 mRNA vaccine harms research collection,"[22] for instance, lists more than 750 peer-reviewed studies which found significant harms associated with the mRNA vaccinations. Given that these studies are the result of human scholarship, it's likely that some of them are inaccurate. It's even possible that some of them are intentionally dishonest, but that has been a common enough feature of science for the last few hundred years as to be no particular surprise.

Still, there are some who can easily dismiss 750 peer-reviewed studies, because they believe *other* studies. Are they "anti-science" or even "conspiracy theorists" because they hold a different opinion? And those who might be alarmed at these particular studies, and feel that the balance of evidence favors a wait-and-see approach before accepting the bribes (everything from free pizza to lottery tickets to college

19. Some church leaders have, unfortunately and unsuccessfully, tried to deny this. The saddest example of this is here: https://youtu.be/DrjVeAF2onA
20. https://tinyurl.com/ynx8bym9
21. This to the chagrin of those who had accepted point number six of the Church State Council's memo: "We believe these mandates will be upheld in the courts." In fact, in many countries, they have not been upheld, and in many cases significant sums have been awarded to litigants who have sued employers.
22. https://web.archive.org/web/20250716220533/https://zenodo.org/records/15787612_

tuition discounts), or acquiescing to the pressure, threats, restrictions, and ridicule—are these people to be labeled idiots? Have they no right to believe they can render God better service through depending on His gifts and instruction rather than the ingenious creations of massive (and historically dishonest[23]) corporations?

Considerations of this sort, blended with concerns about the church's reluctance—some would say, "absolute refusal"—to engage in open discussion about members' concerns, fueled exasperation and distrust on both sides. Elder Ted Wilson, still the president of the General Conference at the time, put it this way in speaking to the delegates at the 2025 General Conference session:

"We attempted to try to answer some of those questions back in 2022. In fact, questions and answers were provided, et cetera, for people. Unfortunately, people like to twist and misuse anything you say. In fact, it might even happen with what I'm saying now.

"So, we stopped trying to explain. We instead focused on the mission of the church, on evangelism, on gaining everyone towards a particular goal that would enhance our magnificent message and not engage in debate with those—and I have to tell you, in my opinion, it is a very small minority of the Church."[24]

Surely all parties can understand the frustration of trying to reason with someone who seems to be only focused on "winning the argument." What's harder to understand is that "the other guy" may be just as frustrated as you are. In fact, the odds are very good that he thinks you're just about as frustrating as you think he is![25]

For a church, for members bound by ties of allegiance to God and His cause, this kind of frustration is dangerous. No matter how justified your frustration

23. https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-largest-health-care-fraud-settlement-its-history is one example of many.

24. https://web.archive.org/web/20250716215936/https://session.adventistreview.org/session-business/transcripts-will-be-posted-here/.

25. This was, unfortunately, well illustrated in the 2025 General Conference session. On the first day of proceedings, when Elder Wilson advised against including the Immunization statement on the agenda, he spoke with commendable self-control. He was, remember, dealing with people, and with a whole situation, which was extremely frustrating. We might well each ask ourselves if we would have been as restrained, dealing with a situation we honestly believed was characterized by: "a tremendous amount of misinformation," "a highly misinformed view," assertions that appeared "unequivocally false," critics who "twisted the wording, twisted the intent of the General Conference," "information that has been shared by some people has been erroneous," people who "like to twist and misuse anything you say," "conspiracy approaches," and a "complete fallacy" promoted by "a very small minority of people within the 23-plus million church members who have continued to agitate about erroneous and misleading information."

    Those who have found themselves on "the other side" of this discussion might be quick to conclude that church leadership was either dishonest or incompetent. But surely dishonest leaders would never have drawn attention to the glaring failure of the church website. And, as to incompetence, we would do well to recall that leaders, too, can be mislead. No less of an Adventist role model than William Miller rejected the Sabbath, but Ellen White tells us that "others led him to this; others must account for it." (*Early Writings*, 258)

may be, those ties of membership are not dependent on your frustration level! There are many topics on which we must agree to disagree, and there are some topics on which we are called to stand unflinchingly for truth, even reproving error if need be.

Every difference of opinion, every source of frustration, fits in some way into one or the other of these two categories, and any confusion as to which, is a disaster in the making. This is exactly why matters of church discipline, from admonition, to censure and loss of church office, to loss of membership, are entrusted entirely to the local church, to those who best know the individual and the circumstances.

Elder Wilson spoke of 2022 as a time when church administration "stopped trying to explain." One might assume that this happened before the 2022 General Conference session. This seems like a reasonable conclusion, given the cancellation of Pastor Conrad Vine's delegate status, and the strong and coordinated appeal Elder Wilson made on behalf of the three top administrators of the church when a motion—backed by more than 25,000 members' signatures—was made to discuss the 2015 "Official Statement" and the 2021 "Reaffirmation Statement." His encouragement that the statements *not* be discussed won the vote, but his position that such matters were inappropriate for a General Conference session left many unanswered questions and failed to satisfy many church members' concerns.[26]

Following that General Conference session, pressures brought to bear upon both the board of Adventist Frontier Missions (of which Pastor Vine was the president) and the Berrien Springs Village Church (of which he was a member), and the continued dismissal of issues without explanation, have led to an increased level of scrutiny. What, for instance, is the motivation behind the strong commitment to the 2015 "Official Statement" on Immunization?

Or, put another way, what would be the negative impact of simply dropping the statement? If no detriment can be identified, then the statement serves no positive purpose, and should be removed as a simple matter of de-cluttering church policy. Other "Official Statements" have been.

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26. The idea he shared at that time was that it was inappropriate for General Conference session time to be spent on such matters. But matters of denominational belief are the highest concern of the General Conference session. Indeed, they can only be decided by General Conference session delegates. As to whether or not "Official Statements" fall into the category of "Beliefs," see the URL's given in footnotes 7, 8, and 9. Currently, the Adventist.org website locates the "Official Statements" link in a drop-down menu under the Heading, "What We Believe."

    How can anyone speak authoritatively for the church as a whole, without allowing the specific mechanism established to represent the church as a whole to have its say? Even those who feel that such a role has been granted to the General Conference Administrative Committee would have a difficult time denying the full church the right to review such pronouncements. Such a concentration of unchallengable power is precisely the kind of excess the Spirit of Prophecy has warned against over and over again. For more on this topic, you may wish to consider my booklet, *For Such a Time*.

In the vacuum created when church administration "stopped trying to explain," others have looked for explanations in the denomination's own records. Elder Wilson referred to this, July 3, 2025, when he once again appealed to the delegates to *not* discuss the "Official Statements":

"I would urge us not to be involved in conspiracy approaches, even to the point that somehow the General Conference and the world Church are receiving instructions and are under the thumb or the direction of the United Nations. That, to me, is a complete fallacy. We have no instructions from the United Nations. We have no directives. We have nothing. We are not in contact with the United Nations, except we have a representative that works with other non-government organizations to help in humanitarian areas, to help in health challenges, and to help in religious liberty aspects."[27]

This is a factual matter that might be conclusively resolved by the presentation of the appropriate facts. Unfortunately, the facts available to the average church member (and General Conference session delegates, as well) are meager, confusing, and inconclusive. Bear in mind that "facts" are not exactly the same as administrative assertions. Even administrators can be mistaken.

Elder Wilson's denial that the United Nations issues "instructions" and "directives" to the church is reassuring, but far from completely so. There is no record that the nations surrounding Israel pressed them to establish a monarchy. No, it appears from the Biblical account that it was their own desire and determination which led them to be "like all the nations." Which leads back to the unanswered question of motivation.

It should be noted that "motivation" is an element in the decision making process which is particularly difficult to assess. It is appropriate, then, that no one assert that of which they cannot be certain. But the questions remain, until someone will answer them by way of factual evidence.

Why, for instance is the United Nations explicitly mentioned eleven times, in nine of the fifty-nine "Official Statements"? Were the statements on "Drugs," "Ban on Sales of Assault Weapons to Civilians," "Caring for the Environment," "Gambling," and "Global Poverty" designed to help our church members, or to impress others looking on? Did our second and third statements on "peace" move the world any closer to that unattainable goal than the first statement did? Or did "Environment" add anything of importance to the earlier "Caring for the Environment" statement?

And is there a reason that many of the topics look more like progressive political hot button items than the kind of thing church members might actually

27. https://web.archive.org/web/20250716215936/https://session.adventistreview.org/session-business/transcripts-will-be-posted-here/

discuss over potluck? There may be good and worthy responses for all such questions... but without someone going to the trouble of providing them, the odds that church members will understand look very slim.

Elder Sam Neves—formerly in the General Conference Communications department but recently elected to serve in the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department—said it well in a press conference at the recent General Conference session: "Sometimes you do need to have some serious conversations in your family."[28]

In his short speech announcing the correction of the Immunization statement, Elder Wilson noted the incongruity of the wrong wording having persisted on the church's website for ten years. He acknowledged that, "How could that have happened?" is a good question. His next sentence contained a gem of truth that we might consider. He said, "We just have to take the responsibility."

Too often we think of "taking the responsibility" as receiving some form of punishment. The world does that, quite a lot; the church, hopefully not as much.

But there is a gem there. Often overlooked, but there nonetheless. It is this: the basic element of responsibility is providing an appropriate response. God's people are not quick to punish, but they do want to be heard, and an appropriate response to concerns expressed—while often time consuming—is the basis for mutual trust and co-operation. It is important that we *not* stop trying to explain, and to do that effectively, we must first listen enough to understand the questions and concerns. This is the groundwork of "responsibility." It is not unreasonable, and it is certainly attainable within God's church.

It would be pleasant to end on that happy note, but history has a cautionary tale that might serve us well just now. The saying is that events never repeat exactly, but history does rhyme, and barely a century ago there was a situation, a crisis, that was arguably more dire than what we see today, and yet sufficiently parallel that it has lessons to teach.

When Germany entered World War I, the need for soldiers was a given. In response to that call, church leaders of the European Division, the East German Union, and the Saxon Conference capitulated. The Union president wrote to the flock: "We have bound ourselves together in the defense of the Fatherland, and under these circumstances we will also bear arms on Saturday (Sabbath)."[29]

The majority of church members apparently found good sense in that, while about two thousand objected. For this, they were disfellowshiped. Of these, an

28. https://youtu.be/VmhTVKLaJPo

29. https://web.archive.org/web/20250716220144/https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=9HBV, footnote 11

unknown number of young men (eighty?) were executed by army firing squad. From this, the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement was born.

Regrettably, but quite understandably from a human point of view, those who had lost loved ones felt a great wrong had been done. Those who had tolerated the action preferred not to talk about it.

The situation was… *awkward*. Neither side was perfectly Christlike in their handling of the situation, and there was blame enough to spread around.[30]

A century later, it's hard to say how much it all matters anymore. Jesus has not returned, but there are two denominations, still today.

May God bless His people now, in the hour of their need.

Appendix

The situation with the publication of the "Official Statement" on Immunization is complicated since both the Health Ministries web page ("Church Health Guidelines") and the Adventist.org web page (Official Statements Guidelines) first carried the "preliminary" version of the 2015 Statement; by March 4 for the former[31] and March 20 for the latter.[32] In both cases it was dated March 2, well before its final approval in April. On the Health Ministries site the statement was said to have been "reviewed by the Ellen G. White Estate, Biblical Research Institute, and the General Conference Office of General Council." On the main church website, there was no attribution.

This version was soon replaced with the "approved" statement on the Health Ministries site, no later than August 16, 2015.[33] At that point the statement was described as "reviewed and approved April 13, 2015 by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Public and Official Statements Committee."

But apparently the memo didn't get passed around. The authoritative listing of these "Official Statements" on the church's main website continued to display the preliminary version until at least May 9, 2019.[34] Then, for some un-

30. https://assets.eud.adventist.org/response-materials/guilt-and-failure-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church-regarding-the-outbreak-of-the-fi

31. https://web.archive.org/web/20150816074559/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines

    Please remember that the exact dates for most of the website changes considered here are impossible to determine from the Internet Archive. In most cases, it is only possible to establish "boundary dates," from the first and last times the web page or some particular piece of content was saved by the Archive's "web crawler."

32. https://web.archive.org/web/20150320171154/http://www.adventist.org:80/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/

33. https://web.archive.org/web/20150816074559/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines

34. https://web.archive.org/web/20190509161112/https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/immunization/

known reason the adventist.org website's listing of "Official Statements" failed to include "Immunization" until sometime between October 20 and 30, 2021,[35] despite featuring other, later, statements.[36] And yet, more than six years after the statement was "reviewed and approved," it was still the incorrect preliminary version which went up on the official denominational website.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministries' "Church Health Statements and Guidelines" page was removed from their website sometime after February 19, 2020.[37] A new "Resources > Links" page appeared by September 2020. It featured "teaser" portions of each statement, but had a "Read More" button that took the reader to the adventist.org website for the full statement. But that was still the preliminary version of the statement, and now dated April 15, 2015.

In September 2023, when the statement finally appeared on the gc.adventist.org website, it was the wrong one,[38] and it remained that way for the next thirty-three months. In June of 2024, the Health Ministries' redirect was switched over to gc.adventist.org. For thirteen months that was still the preliminary version. Only after Elder Wilson made his public correction, on the night of July 3, 2025, was the "approved" text displayed on the General Conference website. Since then, this means that the reader sees "on peer-reviewed scientific literature" in the teaser text on the Health Ministries page, but "is informed by" on gc.adventist.org.[39]

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35. https://web.archive.org/web/20211020014239/https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/
https://web.archive.org/web/20211030032121/https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/immunization/
36. Four such subsequent statements were included:
Statement on Transgenderism—2017
Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—2018
Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and Its Implications for Abortion—2019
One Humanity: A Human Relations Statement Addressing Racism, Casteism, Tribalism, and Ethnocentrism—2020
https://web.archive.org/web/20211020014239/https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/
37. https://web.archive.org/web/20200219020113/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines
https://web.archive.org/web/20200216133650/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines
The "Church Health Guidelines" page (with the correct statement) was removed from the Health Ministries website in early 2020. Its general function was eventually taken up by a new page, with a similar title. The Health Ministries website included the "GC Health Statements and Guidelines" web page on or before the fifth of March, 2020.
https://web.archive.org/web/20240305223800/https://www.healthministries.com/gc-health-statements-and-guidelines/
Ironically, this new web page did not retain the correct text of the previous "Church Health Guidelines" page. Instead, it used just a portion of the incorrect "preliminary" version of the statement that was current on the General Conference website at the time.
38. https://web.archive.org/web/20230928084139/https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/immunization/
39. As of July 17, 2025

Directed by the Hand of the Lord

THERE is a story from the days of the Millerite movement that is common knowledge (at a superficial level) among Seventh-day Adventists, but one to which we give little attention. This is evident, among other ways, from our tendency to explain a key element of the story with a casual comment that makes absolutely no sense. Looking back at the recent 2025 General Conference session, I'm tempted to believe the story from the 1840s needs revisiting.

Cutting straight to the heart of the detail we so commonly get wrong, let's all please stop invoking some crazy, nonexistent "zero year" as any sort of explanation for the shift from William Miller's message pointing to the second coming of Christ "about the Jewish year 1843," to the date of "the passing of the time," October 22, 1844.

Miller arrived at his figure through straight forward math: 2300 – 457 = 1843. You can try it yourself; the math is simple. But when tracking 2300 years from the "going forth of the decree" in the fall of 457 B.C., it's just a bit more complicated.

That decree was made in the fall, when 457 was about three quarters gone. So the 457 "calendar year" only counts for about a fourth of a year. Then there were 456 complete years prior to the B.C./A.D. boundary. So Miller's math was good, but he was solving the wrong problem. It should be written as 2300 – 456 ¼ = 1843 ¾.

If you count out 1,843 years from the boundary, that gets you to the end of 1843. Nothing tricky there. Then add three quarters of the next year, and you end up in October, 1844. Historians who work with time periods are used to

this, which is why it was so remarkable that from August 1831 when Miller started preaching, until August 1844 when Samuel Sheffield Snow lit up the Exeter Campmeeting with the beginning of the Midnight Cry—for thirteen years, *no one noticed the error!*

Particularly odd is the fact that a well known, highly respected "Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Literature" by the name of George Bush (no kidding) who was probably Miller's most persistent opponent, never noticed! He should have! That was his area of expertise! But he had never criticized Miller's chronology; he just took exception with the idea that the cleansing of the sanctuary had anything to do with the second coming. I've always kind of hoped that he was suitably embarrassed when he finally caught on to his mess up.

But all that is simply background info, so we have enough understanding to see what Ellen White was talking about when she wrote:

> I have seen that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; that His hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures, so that none could see it, until His hand was removed.[40]

That comment is inspired; it carries the authority of heaven. My comments are not inspired, and do not carry that authority. But having admitted that (which should have been obvious, already) let me engage in a little hypothetical analysis. Why? Because even though I'm not a prophet, I'm also not stupid, and some events just cry out for consideration and comprehension.

One such event was the surprising announcement made the morning of July 4, 2025, by Elder Ted Wilson, the president of the General Conference. He explained to the world church that the "Official Statement" on Immunization, which had appeared on church websites and had been published in church magazines for ten years, was wrong. It didn't say what had been voted. It was a "preliminary" version, not the "approved" version... and there was a major difference between the two.

So suppose, just suppose, that the presentation to the world, on just about every Adventist web site known to man,[41] of a faulty "Official Statement" for

40. *Early Writings*, 74

41. Here's just a partial list of currently "live" Adventist web pages that quote the faulty "preliminary" statement:
Adventist Review—https://adventistreview.org/news/adventist-church-adopts-stance-on-vaccines/
Adventist News Network—https://adventist.news/news/adventist-church-adopts-stance-on-vaccines
Adventist Health Ministries—https://www.healthministries.com/gc-health-statements-and-guidelines/
South Pacific Division—https://health.adventistchurch.com/mission/
Trans-European Division—https://ted.adventist.org/news/adventist-church-adopts-stance-on-vaccines/
North American Division—https://www.nadadventist.org/news/covid-19-vaccines-addressing-concerns-offering-counsel

nearly ten years... just suppose that this was as God wanted it to be, that the whole thing was "directed by the hand of the Lord." Yes, it's a stretch. God doesn't usually want inaccuracy in His work. But just suppose, hypothetically speaking.

It's possible, of course, to imagine all sorts of nonsense, so it's perfectly fair and appropriate to ask why such an idea would even be suggested. Fortunately, there's a readily available answer: maybe God wanted it for the same sort of reason He wanted 1843 before 1844. Again, an inspired source fills us in on the issues going on behind the big headlines:

> God tested and proved His people by the passing of the time in 1843. The mistake made in reckoning the prophetic periods was not at once discovered even by learned men who opposed the views of those who were looking for Christ's coming. Scholars declared that Mr. Miller was right in his calculation of the time, though they disputed him in regard to the event that would crown that period. But they, and the waiting people of God, were in a common error on the question of time.
>
> We fully believe that God, in His wisdom, designed that His people should meet with a disappointment, which was well calculated to reveal hearts and develop the true characters of those who had professed to look for and rejoice in the coming of the Lord. Those who embraced the first angel's message (see Revelation 14:6, 7) through fear of the wrath of God's judgments, not because they loved the truth and desired an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, now appeared in their true light. They were among the first to ridicule the disappointed ones who sincerely longed for and loved the appearing of Jesus.[42]

So, why did God want an "1843 chart"?

It was a test, one that was "well calculated to reveal hearts and develop... true characters." Now, character is not always an easy thing to judge. Ultimately, it's Christ's work alone. Which is why it took a special set of circumstances to "reveal" character to the point that human beings could see the situation in the "true light."

So it's in that light that I invite you to consider the possibility that the "Official Statement" glitch may have been used by God for purposes that we might not normally consider.

Adventist Medical Evangelistic Network (AMEN)—https://amensda.org/covid/
Global Campmeeting—https://www.campmeeting.com/home/covid-19-vaccines-and-your-health/
Elders' Digest—https://www.eldersdigest.org/en/2015/4/choices-for-life
Adventist Youth Ministries—https://www.gcyouthministries.org/wp-content/uploads/AYLM-Issue-1-2021.pdf

No slight is intended to church entities not included here. To this short list might be added just about every Division, Union Conference, and local Conference in the world. The faulty message made a pretty good run at "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

42. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, 52–53

Again, to be clear, I don't *know* that God had any special purpose in any of this. And I certainly don't have the authority to say that He did. But that possibility gives us a way to do something we should do under any circumstance.

> Trials come to us all to lead us to investigate our hearts, to see if they are purified from all that defiles. Constantly the Lord is working for our present and eternal good. Things occur which seem inexplainable; but if we trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, humbling our hearts before Him, He will not permit the enemy to triumph.[43]

With that assurance of the Lord's "working for our present and eternal good," let's consider the experience through which we have collectively passed in recent years. As we have already seen, the "approved" version *was* available for about four years and seven months on the Health Ministries website (possibly as much as five years and one month, but data is missing). Unfortunately, the "preliminary" version was accidentally posted on the main Adventist Church website for more than ten years, and then echoed on the Health Ministries website for five years, and on the newer GC.Adventist website for more than two years.

The importance of this is that when Covid came along, and the issue of vaccines began to attract attention, the preliminary version was all that was to be found. As already mentioned, it was Elder Wilson's speech to the delegates on July 3, 2025, that first alerted anyone to the fact that there were two different versions.

But… does all this *reveal* anything? Has *true character* been developed? Is there anything to be learned here, anything of value? Again, I'm not a prophet, but I think the answer is, "Yes."

So I invite you to consider a few points. And I invite you to consider them in all honesty, in fairness, without personal bias.

OK, come on, let's get real. *No one* is as pure as the new blown snow when it comes to personal bias. And the more an issue has impacted us, or the more potential an issue has to impact us in the future, the stronger the bias is going to be. This is, I think, a far more self-evident truth than the assertion of human equality or the idea that we have a right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[44] Face it: many people, including Adventists, have been deeply scarred by the experience of the last several years. And that company includes far more than those whose physical health has been impacted, or those who lost loved ones to either the disease or to an "adverse reaction" to the vaccine. That's traumatic, to be sure, but there have been other kinds of trauma as well.

There are those who lost employment due to sincerely held religious conviction, sometimes with drastic financial impact. Compounding the experience, in

43. E.G. White, "The Burning of the Sanitarium," Manuscript 76, 1903

44. For anyone who doesn't recognize the line, it comes from the *Declaration of Independence* which led in time to the United States.

some cases, was the sense of betrayal by the church, when the only measure that seemed possible to help them (a religious exemption request) was ruled out as inappropriate, and church employees followed "orders" not to assist them.

Think as well of those who have lost friends, not to death or disease, but to the division that developed in their local church. That hurts, too. Think of those who actually wanted to see God's church push forward with effective, world-wide evangelism, those who had devoted their whole lives working toward that goal, those whom the world church had elected to official position for that exact purpose, who then found that the devil's latest disease, and the devil's latest division, left the church hampered at every level. That's a different kind of trauma, but that hurts, too.

Think of pastors who were left trying to walk a tightrope of different members' opinions on everything from hand sanitizer, to "social distancing," to the closing of churches while bars and casinos remained open. In most cases, they were the ones asked first for a letter supporting a member's exemption request. And they were the ones instructed not to supply such a letter. Obviously enough, there was a whole range of possible reactions to that situation—but none were "good."

Think of probably every church board (at least in "first world" countries), trying to decide how to relate to members who didn't wear masks to church! Think of members whose financial resources or technical know-how weren't up to the challenges of "Zoom Church."

Think of hospital administrators, of educational institution board members, confronted with the ever-changing demands of government, and knowing that somewhere, back in that faceless bureaucracy, there was someone who could turn off the tap of government funding if they didn't approve of the "level of compliance" displayed. Nobody wants a whole system of hospitals or universities to blow up "on their watch." That's a lot of pressure… and it's traumatic, too.

What have I missed? Probably about a hundred more categories! There was trauma enough for all, which makes it a hard experience to examine in an unbiased way. If you think you're an exception to the risk of bias, I'm going to say you're wrong. And you might as well stop reading, because that level of what I would call blindness is not going to find anything of value in the rest of this booklet. If you can't empathize enough to see someone else's trauma, you're probably not ready to work in the ER. And that's where God's church is right now.

To take that ER metaphor one step further, God's church is both the patient on the gurney, and the ER Doc trying to make a proper diagnosis and settle on the best treatment. And, to point out the obvious, amputation is a drastic measure. Surgery is hopefully a little less so. Medications can range from a placebo

to a fatal dose of whatever. You can even kill a patient with the wrong or a poorly administered "natural remedy."

So... what is the church going to do? What are *you* going to do?

It's in this general setting that I think we can find some help by paying attention to the mysterious mistake of the "Official Statement." There's a good chance we won't solve all the challenges, but even one or two would be a welcome victory. In that frame of reference, I'm going to limit the discussion to the single most debated element of the statement: the role of "peer-reviewed scientific health literature" as a source of belief. To keep that focus sharp, and to save column inches, I'll abbreviate that as "PR." When used without explanation or qualifier, PR will mean the inclusion of those materials as a source of belief.

Given that the range of situations, positions, experiences, and traumas is functionally unlimited, we can't address each one individually (but never forget that God can!). Acknowledging that human limitation, let's try a categorical classification that relates directly to the mysteriously mistaken "Official Statement." I suggest the following divisions:

1. Those who included PR.
2. Those who deleted PR.
3. Those who published PR.
4. Those who defended PR.
5. Those who accepted PR.
6. Those who disliked PR.
7. Those who rejected PR.
8. Those who repudiated PR.

Since I have previously written critically of PR (yes, I have a bias, just like everyone else), I'm going to take up these eight points in reverse order. That's just for psychological reasons, but I'm hoping it does something to demonstrate that I'm doing my best to be even-handed in my analysis. So let's get started.

8. Those who repudiated PR

By far the strongest repudiation of PR came from Elder Wilson on both July 3 and 4. True, others may have said harsher things about PR, but Elder Wilson spoke with the authority of the church's highest office, and he left no doubt. Responding to a motion made from the floor, which he felt "insinuates that the General Conference has now put science above or equal to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy," he said, "I have to tell you that is unequivocally false. We

have never done that." He classed the idea as "a tremendous amount of misinformation" and "a highly misinformed view."

> In no way does the Seventh-day Adventist Church put scientific information, peer-reviewed scientific information, above the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy or even equal to those; absolutely not.[45]

For those watching live, this was either reassuring, or confusing. For those who knew nothing but their belief in Inspiration, this was what they would expect to hear, and they were happy to hear a clear statement. For those who were familiar with the church's "Official Statement" on the subject, however, this much was confusing at best or infuriating at worst. They knew what the statement said. The delegate who made the motion had read the statement! And the statement included PR as a basis of belief, in parallel grammatical structure with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The statement made them equal! And they *knew* what the statement said.

But Elder Wilson continued, reading the statement verbatim from a paper in hand. *But what he read was mysteriously different!*

What Elder Wilson read stipulated the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as the basis of Adventist belief on health, and clearly assigned PR to a subservient "informing" role. That was different... was it real? Elder Wilson gave no indication that it was anything but fact. To him, it was unquestionable truth.

Oh! That life should be so simple!

It would be fun to know how many thousand Google searches for that Immunization statement were done in the minutes following his speech. And, in fact, no matter where church members found it (and it could be found in dozens of locations), it *wasn't* what Elder Wilson had read. This was the mystery. But how to explain it?

Fortunately, the next morning, Elder Wilson himself offered a resolution to that part of the mystery. In a special announcement at the very beginning of the day, he told the world church:

> The website that has the official statements of the General Conference, for the last number of years the particular statement that was about vaccinations, issued back in April of 2015, did not represent what was actually voted.

Elder Wilson explained that "some advanced information," in other words, a "preliminary version" of the statement, had been posted to the website instead of what was actually voted in 2015. He shared the approved version of the statement—what he had read the day before—and requested that it be displayed on the screen for all to see. In closing he repudiated PR once again:

45. https://web.archive.org/web/20250716215936/session.adventistreview.org/session-business/transcripts-will-be-posted-here/

> So I hope, brothers and sisters, that no one anywhere around this globe will bring up again that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not place the Bible and the spirit of prophecy at the highest level of authority. Yes, we value scientific input. And in fact, I could read you quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy that help us to understand that—when understood correctly—science and the Bible agree. But never do we put scientific information above, or even equal to, the Bible and the spirit of prophecy.[46]

He couldn't have said it more clearly. This is an absolute repudiation of PR as a basis of belief. It should, I believe, be accepted as Elder Wilson's honest sentiment. Had his position—the position *intended* in 2015—been clearly articulated from the beginning, much would be different in the church today.

But the mystery has many tentacles, and one of them was so obvious that Elder Wilson addressed it directly:

> Now, you might say, "But Pastor Wilson, why didn't you catch that for 10 years?" Now, that's a good question, and we just have to take the responsibility.
>
> So, I apologize to you on behalf of the General Conference that the actual wording has not been available to you on the website. It now is available and that's what it reads.

Anyone who has ever had a major mistake exposed publicly for all to see has to have some sympathy here. Elder Wilson is no fool. He knew the situation looked bad. An overnight correction of the website to make it agree with what he had read to the delegates was such an obviously awkward turn of events that he just had to "take the responsibility." Right or wrong, the idea of that "the buck stops here" sign sitting on the president's desk is a powerful mental concept.[47]

Fortunately for both Elder Wilson and the church, evidence corroborating the existence of the "approved" version of the statement was quickly found; it had appeared on the church's Health Ministries website as early as August 16, 2015.[48] That took the unwelcome concern of dishonesty off the table. The statement as he had read it, *did* exist, and it dated from April 2015.

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46. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0R_cB7qE9bc&list=PL7QHoSK_c_Kk_yDOKYmplvVC5h1MgUFnX&index=24 starting at 1:40:35

    Because Elder Wilson's comment was made at the very beginning of the day, in the announcements period, it is not included in the official transcript available at https://session.adventistreview.org/session-business/transcripts-will-be-posted-here-2/

47. Elder Wilson is mentioned quite commonly in this little booklet. So much so that I fear it may strike some minds as "picking on" him. Please allow me to flip that idea on its head! Elder Wilson is mentioned because he was man enough, and leader enough, to actually address the issue. He is on record. We have words from him that we can take to heart. True, we might not see every issue in the same light, but he was willing to address the issue, so God bless him.

48. The most readily available means of documenting old web pages is the Internet Archive, archive.org. In this particular instance, the link is https://web.archive.org/web/20150816074559/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines

That was the good news. The bad news was that the "approved" statement had not appeared on the Health Ministries website for more than five years, and the faulty, "preliminary" version had been featured on the main Adventist.org website for more than ten years. Even the more administratively focused GC.Adventist.org had carried the "preliminary" statement for almost two years.

And therein lies a question which will come up repeatedly. As Elder Wilson put it in his speech to the delegates: "Why didn't you catch that for 10 years?" He even said, "Now, that's a good question," and I think it would be monumentally foolish to fail to ask that kind of question. When something goes wrong, there are lessons to be learned for the future.

Our focus at the moment is Elder Wilson, the one who most dramatically repudiated PR. Why didn't he catch that?

I can't speak authoritatively here, but there is one answer that I might offer that I think others might not. Perhaps Elder Wilson failed to catch that mistake because God held His hand over it.

Why did William Miller (and George Bush) miss the 1843 thing? God held His hand over it. That didn't make the mistake correct; instead it set up circumstances to reveal something that would ultimately help God's people. Could it be the same today?

If so, what is the revelation? What can we learn? This isn't rocket science, so let me make a few suggestions. Some might be off target, so just dismiss those. But be careful not to let your bias affect your thinking.

Perhaps we keep our General Conference presidents running wild with so many details and committees and pro forma responsibilities that they can't focus on what really matters. Perhaps we have allowed a bubble culture to develop within General Conference circles, the kind of mindset that sees importance only in what those around us see as important. Perhaps we have a General Conference which is too caught up in a *just do something!* mentality, churning out rules, regulations, guidelines, official statements, policy revisions, and the like—all with the best of intentions—hoping to quell problems with words and paper, but which is then too busy to see to it that all their words and paper actually mean something in practice.

I say none of this as accusation. I've never worked at the General Conference, so I certainly can't claim any insider or whistle blower status. But these are common problems in the corporate world, and they deserve consideration. Nearly one hundred forty years ago, Ellen White wrote to her good friend and General Conference president, George Butler: "Your very many resolutions need to be reduced to one-third their number, and great care should be taken as to what resolutions are framed."[49]

49. E.G. White, Letter to George Butler, October 15, 1888; Letter 21a, 1888

For those who may be interested, General Conference Committee minutes are available back to 1889.[50] You can check for yourself the actual number of resolutions they were making back then! Then, divide by three.

In a somewhat similar vein, although addressing more of a school setting, she commented that "Rules should be few and well considered; and when once made, they should be enforced."[51] Perhaps it's a stretch, but it seems like the same principle would apply to "Official Statements." Many would suggest that the "well considered" aspect would be best accomplished by the delegates at a General Conference session. At the very least, it seems that the "enforcement" idea for something labeled "Official" ought to mean enough respect so that a counterfeit version would be recognized on sight.

Elder Wilson didn't attempt to evade the embarrassing responsibility for what I presume he knew had caused a great deal of confusion and discord. He said, "We just have to take the responsibility." It might be debated as to whether or not he meant that to be a "royal we" or not, but some consideration of "responsibility" is certainly in order. And here lies a basic truth—perhaps so basic as to be self evident: the root reality of *"responsibility"* is the ability to *respond*.

When we hold someone responsible for this, that, or the other, we want them to understand and be able to explain whatever they are responsible for. That's the minimum; that's where responsibility starts. At this level, the mystery mistake takes on something of a tragic element, because there were many repeated efforts made to call General Conference administrative attention to the problematic inclusion of PR as a source of belief. There were personal visits to the General Conference headquarters; there were phone calls, emails, and letters. Eventually there were YouTube videos and podcasts, and dozens of official rejections of the statement carried out through formal church business meetings.[52] There was even a request from a full Union Conference that petitioned the General Conference to reconsider that statement.[53]

Those who sought responsibility, got little to no response.[54] It is unfortunate that these voices were not listened to. If they had been, much might now be different in God's church.

50. https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC
51. *Education*, 290
52. See https://sdapearl.com/
53. https://record.adventistchurch.com/2025/06/25/auc-requests-review-of-immunisation-statement/
54. The simplest measure of this is the glaring fact that the primary element of the statement to which they were robjecting, wasn't even supposed to be in the statement. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that no one had listened enough to even know what they were concerned about.

7. Those who rejected PR

As was just mentioned, there were many church members who rejected PR as inappropriate for a basis of belief. It's hard to claim *Sola Scriptura* and then clearly say otherwise. Elder Wilson and all who voted the "approved" statement must surely agree with those who have rejected PR, for they did so themselves in the editorial process. PR was there in the preliminary version, and gone in the final version. It got eliminated. It was rejected.

But the experience of the committee was very different from that of individual church members who rejected the statement. The former simply published as position statement that should have been—at least on that one point—as vanilla as can be. We had always claimed *Sola Scriptura*; surely there would have been no excitement in doing so once again.

Church members who rejected the statement, however, found the issue anything but vanilla. For those who can stomach an ice cream metaphor, it was a lot more like "rocky road." Adventists simply *don't* reject what the General Conference says! Yes, the church is full of *disingenuous inattention*, but *rejection* is a different thing. It escalates rapidly. Rejection is seen as a dangerous contagion. After all, if one member is free to reject *this*, what's to stop someone else from rejecting *that*?

Now, this is not to imply that all such members, and all such acts of rejection, were pure, holy, and above reproach. For one thing, the concerns of the rejecters came too late. The statement came out in 2015, but it wasn't until Covid disrupted things almost five years later that it became an issue. There's a lesson in this: church members should pay attention to what their church is doing. By August of 2015 there was already a discrepancy between the Health Ministries website and the Adventist.org website. The former had the "approved" statement, the latter had the "preliminary" statement. If anyone had noticed at that stage, it seems likely that a simple phone call could have had the whole mess straightened up quickly.

The probable reality is that no one was paying much attention to either version. Let's just say it wasn't "present truth" at the moment. That sort of inattention prevailed until well after the "approved" version had been dropped from the website and the only thing to be seen was the "preliminary" statement.

Aside from timing, though, there have been efforts to reject the statement that have been flawed—in my opinion—by the display of unChristlike elements and attitudes. That will never be a winning combination.[55] The name *"Chris-*

55. With the exception of ginning up support for a YouTube channel or a podcast. Sadly, there seems to be a booming market for "clickbait indignation" aimed at every mistake (real or imagined) of the church.

tian" should mean something as Christlike as is humanly possible. To the degree that we fall short of that, we take the name of Christ in vain.

Perhaps on the other end of the spectrum, there are those who "rejected" the statement, but couldn't be bothered to help the church they professed to love. There is a time, there is a place, there is a way, to speak up. If it happened on a more regular basis, perhaps it could come to resemble a friendly conversation rather than something akin to Armageddon.

6. Those who disliked PR

We brushed up against one manifestation of this group a moment ago—those who privately rejected PR, but couldn't bring themselves to do anything to help others dealing with the question. True enough, not everyone is called to fight every battle, and we need to choose our battles wisely. I get all that. But on something as foundational as *Sola Scriptura*, I'm going to argue that most well-established, well-grounded church members should have found some means of registering concern.

Human behavior is most often a spectrum, a continuum, and this issue is right in there with the rest. You'll be able to picture all manner of gradations across the range of "dislike." For brevity's sake, let's jump down the scale a ways.

I want to be as sensitive as possible on this, because this tends to be the arena in which some of the greatest tragedies tug at our hearts. But there is a lesson here, which might serve to guide us all in the future.

There were people who disliked the practical effect of including PR in our church's "Official Statement." With a religious exemption ruled out—often because their employer or their government had located the Immunization statement and/or the Reaffirmation Statement of 2021—they faced the loss of their job. They didn't like that. I can't blame them.

But they chose to accept vaccination rather than risk the loss of employment. As a simple risk/benefit analysis, it's easy to see how they might have come to that conclusion. There's a certain amount of gamble in everything we do, from walking down the street to getting on an airplane, so why not play the odds of a hopefully rare adverse event as compared to the seeming certainty of losing their job? I understand. I sympathize. And fortunately, most came through reasonably well.

Those cases where such calculations back-fired are among the most disturbing aspects of the whole venture. We should—even as a corporate church, I would argue—treat them with compassion. We should seek to help them in their affliction. Even if the lawyers tell us we must not accept any responsibility

for urging that which did them harm, we could at least "weep with those who weep."[56] Job set a good example in this kind of thing:

> I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.... I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth.[57]

In short, we should be Christians, and not hide ourselves from our own flesh. I believe God would approve.

5. Those who accepted PR

You might think the last scenario is what I mean by this heading, but I have a slightly different, more philosophical, kind of acceptance in mind.

At the recent General Conference session, data was shared showing that nearly one third of Adventist church members hold to a non-Adventist position on the state of the dead. That was rightly noted as alarming, especially inasmuch as we have been specifically warned that that issue is to play a prominent role in closing events. We have been warned, but many haven't taken warning.

Now, just imagine the percentage of the church that was content to hold to a non-Adventist—in reality, a non-Protestant—position on Inspiration. Let's make a mental adjustment, and toss out the admittedly large percentage of church membership that was insufficiently engaged to even be aware of the faulty statement. I don't know how many that leaves, but just try to do a hip-shot projection of the percentage that knew of the statement, and thought it was fine. Those are the ones who genuinely accepted the PR argument that the committee deliberately edited out, and that Elder Wilson was pleading with the church to never repeat again.

What is revealed here? What can we learn?

The most obvious lesson is that complacency is dangerous. While no one wants a church in which every sermon or article is relentlessly scoured for something that can be construed as error, surely we can see reason to wake up and recognize that we are in the middle of a war zone.

4. Those who defended PR

It's very common that, when you feel attacked, you seek to defend yourself. This is true on an institutional or corporate basis as well. And so, when people

56. Romans 12:15
57. Job 29:12–17

started complaining about the Immunization statement, when they said they rejected it outright, it was natural that those with a sense of loyalty to the church switched to defensive mode. That's good... sort of.

We want a loyal church. We want the sense that if someone attacks us, our brothers and sisters will have our backs. That much is good. What isn't good, is defending something you don't know doesn't deserve defending!

Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of this defensiveness was the tendency to "tune out" anything that sounded like criticism. Elder Wilson spoke of this in his talk on July 3:

> We attempted to try to answer some of those questions back in 2022. In fact, questions and answers were provided, et cetera, for people. Unfortunately, people like to twist and misuse anything you say. In fact, it might even happen with what I'm saying now. So, we stopped trying to explain.

That "we" there, it seems, included many, many people in denominational administration. Those who were, in fact, arguing for the concept the "Official Statement" was *meant* to express, were left many times feeling like no one would listen to them. There were occasions when church employees were directed not to cooperate in any way with those who objected to the statement as it was published to the world. Legitimate defensiveness had crossed the line to the point that so little hearing was given to the concerns, that denominational leaders failed to understand the mix up on their own website.

Something was clearly out of hand. Of course, if the ones objecting to PR had known that the committee who had approved the statement *actually agreed* with them, they could have said, "Hey! Your website is messed up! You don't even believe what it says! That's what we want to talk with you about!" But, perhaps, God had His hand over that mistake, so that something could be revealed.

In this case, I'd say that the revelation likely had a lot to do with blindly assuming we as a church always have our ducks in a row. And, add to that, a lesson in patiently listening. There's a place for it. In fact, in my humble opinion, the failure to remain open to discussion was the single most regrettable mistake of the whole episode.

Fortunately, the principle of the foot washing service can fit into larger vistas than one-on-one. Humility, repentance, confession, and restoration are realities in the Christian life! There is guilt and need enough all around, I suspect, such that we have the makings of a "*What Might Have Been*" moment,[58] if we care to take advantage of the opportunity. Who, I wonder, will take the lead in such a movement?

58. The reference is to an account Ellen White wrote out in *Testimonies*, vol. 8, starting on page 104. A video presentation based on that passage was prepared by the church some years ago. You may find it at https://youtu.be/G9FhqIOVv3E

3. Those who published PR

Under this heading I would include people much like the previous group, but I'm specifically thinking of those who were content to echo and amplify the message of the faulty "preliminary" version. Something approaching "countless" Adventist websites and publications copied the unintended "Official Statement," I suppose without ever thinking, "Hmm… how does that fit with *Sola Scriptura*?"

I wouldn't accuse them of intentional heresy, but the case for negligent misleading is strong. What strange blindness could overshadow so many editors, conference officers, web managers, article authors, ministry heads, and pretty much every other known position in the Adventist church, that so few would take the time to critically read what they so readily quoted? Or was it reluctance to speak, rather than blindness of mind? Either is a very real concern in the circle of Adventist "leading lights."

2. Those who deleted PR

The "approved" version of the Immunization statement came with two different attributions (and two different dates, though I suspect that was an irrelevant clerical issue). From August 2016, until February 2020, the Health Ministries website read: "This guideline was reviewed and approved April 13, 2015, by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Public and Official Statements Committee."[59]

When the statement reappeared July 4, 2025, on the GC.Adventist website, the attribution read: "This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee in Silver Spring, Maryland, April 15, 2015."[60]

I haven't made any special effort to determine if the two committees are in fact one and the same, but I suspect they are. Nor have I gone looking to determine exactly who sat on the committee that day. In any case, this is the group to whom the honor of "getting it right" goes. They're the ones who took PR back down to its proper place. Kudos to them!

But what might this whole mystery of the hidden mistake reveal to this group? Maybe something like, "Follow through is important, too." It shouldn't be a common occurrence, but just because you've deliberated and voted, doesn't mean the conclusion of your work is going to be handled properly. Mis-

59. https://web.archive.org/web/20150816074559/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines

60. https://web.archive.org/web/20250704183936/https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/immunization/

takes happen. So if it's worth fussing out the details on statements of belief, you might want to follow through and keep track of it all down the road.

If that had been done by just one committee member... but, perhaps God had His hand over the mistake. I wouldn't fault anyone here. They did their part, and somehow something slipped up down the line. But what can it hurt to follow through? Maybe we could call it a "Pro Tip," I guess, even though I'm not a pro.

1. Those who included PR

The very first time the "preliminary" statement was published to the world, it carried the attribution: "This guideline has been reviewed by the Ellen G. White Estate, Biblical Research Institute, and the General Conference Office of General Council."[61]

This list is of interest since it seems to be quite a different group than produced the "approved" version. As much as I dislike the inclusion of PR in this version of the statement, I have to admit that I know so little of the circumstances of its origin that I see no value in casting blame on this group.

If it were the case that these three entities were well represented, and had lots of time to work on the statement, let's just say that I would be seriously disappointed in the product of their effort. But I don't know that to be the case. Maybe the initial statement was scribbled down by a summer intern, who showed it to a librarian, a preacher, and a lawyer over lunch and then handed it off to others to refine. I can hope so, at least.

What's to be revealed here? I honestly don't know what to say. I'm not even going to try, since there are simply too many possibilities to deal with. I'm absolutely confident that the Lord can reveal whatever He may wish, to those who were included in this process.

What can we learn?

Many things, no doubt. But the short list is simple. This is what I would say. You might add or subtract a lesson or two. That's OK.

1. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."[62]
2. "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression."[63]

61. https://web.archive.org/web/20150304063456/http://healthministries.com/articles/church-health-guidelines/immunization-guidelines
62. James 1:19–20
63. Proverbs 19:11

3. "Test all things; hold fast what is good."[64]
4. "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."[65]
5. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."[66]
6. "For a bishop must be blameless,... holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."[67]
7. "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality."[68]



64. 1 Thessalonians 5:21
65. Acts 17:11
66. Hebrews 10:23
67. Titus 1:7–9
68. 1 Timothy 5:19–21

"Committed" church members care what happens to their world-wide Adventist family. When the unexpected happens, when tragedy strikes, they take an interest. And part of that interest is a determination to learn from each new event God allows.

In all our history, there's been nothing else quite like the turmoil that came with Covid. Jolted from their "normal lives," many church members began looking for answers to questions they had never asked before. These two short essays are an effort to consolidate some of those lessons.



Dave Fiedler has bucked logs, farmed carrots, tomato seed, and hay, run a print shop, designed and milled dental crowns, been an editor, classroom teacher (elementary to college), boys' dean, school principal, vegan restaurant manager, and written five "real" books. (Plus a few little ones like this... hardly big enough to count.)

At heart, he's something of a social-systems analyst, and the most fascinating social-system of all is the government of heaven and its remote operations here on earth. He believes making sense out of that is an obviously good move for the work of the gospel. For him, it's what makes getting out of bed worth the trouble.

Currently, he lives in "Beautiful British Columbia" with his wife, Clarissa.