

When the Alternate Baptismal Vow Was Enacted at St. Louis

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: SPIRIT OF PROPHECY STATEMENTS ABOUT THE BAPTISMAL VOW

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What happened when this astounding Alternative Baptismal Vow was presented to the delegates at the 2005 St. Louis General Conference Session? Here is nearly everything that occurred. In spite of good reasons for rejecting it, the delegates (92% of which were either church leaders or their employees) meekly approved this apostate “Baptismal Vow,” in spite of objections by a few.

Thirteenth Business Meeting

58th General Conference Session [St. Louis, Missouri], July 7, 2005, 2:00 p.m.

VERNON B. PARMENTER [General Conference officer; formerly an officer in the South Pacific Division]: **Mr. Chairman, if we could go to item 402, which has to do with the baptismal vows and baptism.** Page 44 of the agenda. Before I present this specific item, I would like to give a little rationale for bringing this to you. **The South Pacific Division sent us the recommendation from their executive committee . . .**

What is important is that we as a church need to reaffirm the need for public affirmation of faith prior to baptism. And second, **the public affirmation of faith needs to contain three essential elements: First, the acceptance of the saving grace of God. Second, the acceptance of the teachings of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. And third, a desire for baptism and a demonstration of commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.** So now I bring you, Mr. Chairman, to page 45, where we introduce an alternative vow.

And I will read from line 27 [of the proposed Alternate Baptismal Vow]: “1. Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, and do you desire to live your life in a saving relationship with Him? 2. Do you accept the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and do you pledge by God’s grace to live your life in harmony with these teachings? 3. Do you desire to be baptized as a public expression of your belief in Jesus Christ, to be accepted into the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and to support the church and its mission as a faithful steward by

your personal influence, tithes and offerings, and a life of service?” Mr. Chairman, I move that we add this section to the *Church Manual*.

LOWELL C. COOPER: I’ve heard support for it.

ARMANDO MIRANDA: Thank you very much. In the *Church Manual* we find room for this kind of alternative vote. Page 30 says: “In churches where frequent baptism may reduce the significance of a public examination, an alternative plan should be observed.” There is room for this aspect.

GARY WEBSTER: I support the motion, because it allows for flexibility so that the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to move appropriately . . . **The three vows present a biblical foundation that we have. They are Adventist. People have to be exposed to our fundamentals.** They are practical. They are mission-focused and very relational. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JAY GALLIMORE [President of the Michigan Conference]: I appreciate the input from the other divisions, but the rest of us have not had a chance to see this. **Changing the baptismal vows should have the same courtesy as changing a fundamental belief. I would like to have this dissipated throughout the world field to conferences and unions, for them to be able to give input, before bringing this to a General Conference Session.**

The abbreviated form doesn’t even mention the Sabbath, for instance. This needs a lot of discussion; it is very sensitive. Mr. Chairman, I move that we refer this back to the Church Manual Committee for input from the world field, from conferences, unions, and divisions, including frontline workers, before bringing this kind of major change before a General Conference Session.

LOWELL C. COOPER: Thank you very much. We have a motion before us of referral and the purpose of the referral outlined. Brother Gallimore, could you, if you have a written motion, share that with the folks here at the table? This motion requires a second. It is debatable and amendable and requires a simple majority. Is there support for the motion? Yes, we see that. **Now the motion to refer is open for discussion. Anyone wish to speak to**

that point?

VERNON B. PARMENTER: Mr. Chairman, could I just make a comment while some folks are coming to the microphone? I understand that my comment does not address exactly what Elder Gallimore is suggesting, and that is that it be shared with all the conferences and frontline workers. But I do understand that some months ago our under-secretary sent to all the delegates the materials that we are considering here. It was available also on the Internet for people to view and see. So this should not be the first time that at least our delegation has seen the documents.

DUNCAN O. MUMBO: I think it would be wise for us to refer it, because we have 28 fundamental beliefs and only 13 baptismal vows. And number 11, for example, is basically not a doctrine, and not all of them are fundamental beliefs. Other numbers are merged together.

ONAOLAPO AJIBADE: **I believe that if we adopt the alternative, we will begin a very dangerous trend in the church. The public affirmation is to assure the church that the person joining the church really believes our fundamental beliefs.** Therefore, we are to give the church that this person is joining the greater consideration. I have heard it said that we have adopted this alternative because of non-Adventists, but I would like to say that to the church, the prospective joining is more important. I will support the fact that we should refer it back.

BRIAN BULL: **I am very uncomfortable with this proposal, for the following reasons. The Adventist Church has claimed since its inception that it has no creed, except the Bible.**

One of our founders, John Loughborough, said, "The first step of apostasy is to get a creed telling us what to believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. The fifth is to commence persecution against such." I strongly support the motion to refer.

BASIL HALL: **The material we use to give Bible studies does not necessarily cover the 28 or 27 fundamental beliefs. So for you now to ask baptismal candidates to swear before the church that they will abide by the 27 when they have been taught only 24, or even 12, is not honest.** So I would like this to be referred.

GEORGE BAXEN: I wish to speak in favor of the motion to refer, because I think that as a church we have become sensitized to the fact that many of

our members are leaving through the back door. We assume that all fundamental beliefs have been presented to newcomers of the church. So **I think that as a church we need to think very soberly before we tamper with the baptismal vows. We should be thorough in preparing candidates for baptism.**

ROSCOE J. HOWARD: Mr. Chairman, I would rise to speak against the motion to refer. First, I think the operative word is alternative. Those who do not particularly like this vow do not have to use it. Second, it puts the onus on the individuals who are preparing candidates for baptism to make sure they have been thoroughly indoctrinated with the fundamental beliefs. And I think that would also add enticement to those non-Adventists who may be relatives or friends who are there to ask, "Well, what is it that you believe?" So I rise to speak against the referral.

STEPHEN GUPTILL: I also oppose the referral. As was mentioned earlier, the *Church Manual* does give flexibility for the baptismal vows, and I would like to see that flexibility remain here. If the church is uncomfortable with the alternative, we can use the one that's already suggested.

KENAOPE KENAOPE: I stand to oppose the referral. As the previous speakers have said, this is an alternative.

TOR E. TJERANSEN: I stand to speak against the motion to refer. **The grounds for referral were that it was not widely disseminated in the church. But this was discussed at Annual Council in October 2004 with all the union presidents present.**

DARREN CROFT: I am a church pastor with many young people in my church, and this new alternative does not replace the original baptismal vow. **We need to keep this relevant in its wording, understandable in its wording, and this gives me an alternative in my church that the youth will clearly understand, but it is supportive of us as an Adventist Church and all that we stand for. [No!]**

LOWELL C. COOPER: Do you wish to close the discussion? **[The body voted to close the discussion.]**

We will now vote on the motion that is on the floor, which is **a motion to refer this item back to the Church Manual Committee. [The motion to refer was lost.]**

The main motion is now before us, to adopt the wording that is on page 45. **[The main motion, with the wording on page 45, was voted.]**

Importance of the Baptismal Vow

SPIRIT OF PROPHECY ON THE BAPTISMAL VOW

It is significant that the very brief discussion, quoted in full on the previous two pages, of this groundbreaking achievement in accelerating the downward trend in our denomination—contained not one mention of or quotation to the Inspired statements on the importance of baptism and the baptismal vow.

But, my brethren and sisters, that is the method of the apostate church of the Dark Ages. Men plan in secret, decide on policies, and then announce them; all irrespective of what God's Word permits or commands.

For those of us who love the Inspired, historic beliefs of our denomination, this latest General Conference action is a tragedy that surely must have caused some weeping among the angels, even if men down here were too accustomed to a life of backsliding to care.

However, God's Word has very important statements which we should consider. Here are but a few:

"At the time of their conversion and baptism the Colossian believers pledged themselves to put away beliefs and practices that had hitherto been a part of their lives, and to be true to their allegiance to Christ. In his letter, Paul reminded them of this, and entreated them not to forget that in order to keep their pledge they must put forth constant effort against the evils that would seek for mastery over them."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 475-476.

"All who have taken the baptismal vow have solemnly consecrated themselves to the service of God; they are under covenant obligation to place themselves and their children where they may obtain all possible incentives and encouragement in the Christian life."—*Child Guidance*, 530-531.

"Great care should be exercised in accepting members into the church; for Satan has his specious devices through which he purposes to crowd false brethren into the church, through whom he can work more successfully to weaken the cause of God."—*Evangelism*, 313.

"The vows which we take upon ourselves in baptism embrace much. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we are buried in

the likeness of Christ's death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection, and we are to live a new life. Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ. Henceforth the believer is to bear in mind that he is dedicated to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. He is to make all worldly considerations secondary to this new relation. Publicly he has declared that he will no longer live in pride and self-indulgence.

"He is no longer to live a careless, indifferent life. He has made a covenant with God. He has died to the world. He is to live to the Lord, to use for Him all his entrusted capabilities, never losing the realization that he bears God's signature, that he is a subject of Christ's kingdom, a partaker of the divine nature. He is to surrender to God all that he is and all that he has, employing all his gifts to His name's glory.

"The obligations in the spiritual agreement entered into at baptism are mutual. As human beings act their part with wholehearted obedience, they have a right to pray: 'Let it be known, Lord, that Thou art God in Israel.' The fact that you have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is an assurance that, if you will claim Their help, these powers will help you in every emergency. The Lord will hear and answer the prayers of His sincere followers who wear Christ's yoke and learn in His school His meekness and lowliness.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' Colossians 3:1-3."—*6 Testimonies*, 98-99.

"In baptism we are given to the Lord as a vessel to be used. Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Self is by profession dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the candidate, and in the presence of the whole heavenly universe the mutual pledge is made. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism, and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present."—*6 Bible*

Commentary, 1074.

“The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. . . . When they give evidence that they fully understand their position, they are to be accepted.”—*Testimonies to Ministers, 128.*

“Faithfulness to our baptismal vows gives the heart preparation needful for saving souls.”—6 *Bible Commentary, 1074. (RH May 26, 1904). 6 Bible Commentary, 1074.*

“Christ made baptism the entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wish to be acknowledged as under the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Those who receive the ordinance of baptism thereby make a public declaration that they have renounced the world, and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King.”—6 *Bible Commentary, 1075.*

“The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. It should be understood whether they are simply taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, or whether they are taking their stand on the Lord’s side, to come out from the world and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Before baptism, there should be a thorough inquiry as to the experience of the candidates . . . Bring the requirements of the gospel to bear upon the candidates for baptism.

One of the points upon which those newly come to the faith will need instruction is the subject of dress. Let the new converts be faithfully dealt with. Are they vain in dress? Do they cherish pride of heart?”—*Evangelism, 311-312.*

“Those who do this are to make all worldly considerations secondary to their new relations. Publicly they have declared that they will no longer live in pride and self-indulgence. Christ enjoins those who receive this ordinance to remember that they are bound by a solemn covenant to live to the Lord. They are to use for Him all their entrusted capabilities, never losing the realization that they bear God’s sign of obedience to the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, that they are subjects of Christ’s kingdom, partakers of the divine nature. They are to surrender all they have and are to God, employing all their gifts to His name’s glory.”—6 *Bible Commentary,*

1075.

“As Christians submit to the solemn rite of baptism, He registers the vow that they make to be true to Him. This vow is their oath of allegiance. They are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus they are united with the three great powers of heaven. **They pledge themselves to renounce the world and to observe the laws of the kingdom of God. Henceforth they are to walk in newness of life. No longer are they to follow the traditions of men. No longer are they to follow dishonest methods. They are to obey the statutes of the kingdom of heaven. They are to seek God’s honor.** If they will be true to their vow, they will be furnished with grace and power that will enable them to fulfill all righteousness. ‘As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.’ ”—*Evangelism, 307-308.*

“The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, powers infinite and omniscient, receive those who truly enter into covenant relation with God. They are present at every baptism, to receive the candidates who have renounced the world and have received Christ into the soul temple. These candidates have entered into the family of God, and their names are inscribed in the Lamb’s book of life.”—6 *Bible Commentary, 1075.*

“All who enter upon the new life should understand, prior to their baptism, that the Lord requires the undivided affections. . . . The practicing of the truth is essential. The bearing of fruit testifies to the character of the tree. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. **The line of demarcation will be plain and distinct between those who love God and keep His commandments and those who love Him not and disregard His precepts. There is need of a thorough conversion to the truth.”—*Evangelism, 308.***

“At our baptism we pledged ourselves to break all connection with Satan and his agencies, and to put heart and mind and soul into the work of extending the kingdom of God. All heaven is working for this object. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are pledged to cooperate with sanctified human instrumentalities. **If we are true to our vow, there is opened to us a door of communication with heaven—a door that no human hand or satanic agency can close.”—6 *Bible Commentary, 1075.***