

Cracking the Whip to Make a Perfect Church: The Purge of the Battle Creek Church on April 6, 1870¹

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Introduction

In 1976 Milton Raymond Hook stated in his M.A. thesis that on April 6, 1870, the membership of the Adventist church in Battle Creek, Michigan, “was reduced to an apostolic twelve.”² Hook thus became the first to note that essentially every person in Seventh-day Adventism’s largest congregation was disfellowshipped. Though Hook published his work in *Flames Over Battle Creek* a year later,³ subsequent scholars did not acknowledge his findings for nearly four decades.⁴ Gary Land was the next

¹ I would like to thank Brian Strayer and Gilbert Valentine for the thoughtful feedback that they provided me prior to the publication of this article.

² Milton Raymond Hook, “George Washington Amadon” (Master’s Thesis, Andrews University, 1976), 78.

³ Milton Raymond Hook, *Flames Over Battle Creek: The Story of George W. Amadon, Review and Herald Printer, Who Shared in the Early Successes and Tragedies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1977), 62.

⁴ Some works that could have included Hook’s findings include: Eugene F. Durand, *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980); Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 2, *The Progressive Years, 1862-1876*, (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 1986); Gary Land, ed., *Adventism in America: A History*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998); Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000); Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer*, [Adventist Pioneer Series], George R. Knight, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald,

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historian to mention the Battle Creek purge in his book, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator*, which appeared in 2014.⁵

Scholars have probably been cautious because Hook glossed over the event in a single paragraph and cited only one source in support. Such limited treatment raised vital questions; namely, did this event occur as claimed or did Hook misread his source? Assuming that Hook was correct, what events led to this purge and why were so many members removed? Though he only cited one source, Hook's brief presentation was essentially accurate. He relied on George Washington Amadon, an Adventist leader who witnessed the event personally and wrote about it in his diary at the time it occurred. When, in 2014, Land readdressed this topic, he relied heavily on Hook's published work (not quoting the diary directly), but also added one more important source (a letter written by Harriet N. Smith to James and Ellen White in 1870)⁶ and attempted to provide relevant background information to the purge in Battle Creek.⁷ Land's assessment

2003); Harry H. Leonard, "The Adventist Rubicon: John N. Andrews and the Mission to Europe," in *Parochialism, Pluralism, and Contextualization: Challenges to Adventist Mission in Europe* (19th-21st Centuries), *Adventistica* 9, David J. B. Trim and Daniel Heinz, eds. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2010), 31-50.

⁵ Gary Land, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator*, Adventist Pioneer Series, George R. Knight, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 80.

⁶ Harriet Smith to James and Ellen White, [cir. April] 1870, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.

⁷ Land suggests that a satirical document crafted by Uriah Smith and George W. Amadon contributed to the controversy between leaders in the late 1860s and the Battle Creek purge of 1870. This original document, titled, "A Record of Some of the Pride and Extravagances of the Battle Creek Church," has not been re-found since the 1940s and Land acknowledged this in his book (Land, *Uriah Smith*, 116n8). Though he had not seen the original publication, Land claimed that it appeared "sometime in 1869" (*ibid.*, 79). This assertion is problematic, however, as is clear from a brief overview of this document's treatment in Adventist historiography. According to Richard J. Hammond, who first referenced this document in his 1944 M.A. thesis, a copy of the "Record" was at that time in the possession of D. E. Robinson and loaned to him for his research. Hammond did not explicitly provide the date for it in his text, but he did place it between a document from 1879 and another from 1882. Since Hammond worked with the original document, it seems probable that the "Record" actually appeared in the late 1870s or early 1880s (Richard Julian Hammond, "The Life and Work of Uriah Smith" (master's thesis, Andrews University, 1944), 67-68). In 1976, Milton Raymond Hook cited Hammond's work (not the "Record" itself) in his own M.A. thesis, but placed it in about 1869 as Land would later do (Hook, "George Washington Amadon," 76-77; cf. Hook, *Flames Over Battle Creek*, 60-61). Three

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was still limited, however, and questions regarding this event remain unanswered.

This article seeks to fill in the gaps. I will address the topic in four primary sections: first, I will briefly describe the type of church trial that Adventists utilized; second, I will provide an overview of details that led to the purge in 1870; third, I will describe the actual event; and fourth, I will provide my analysis of the event and its repercussions. My primary sources include unpublished diaries, letters, and manuscripts and published articles and tracts. Secondary sources by recent historians are cited when, and if, possible. I have also utilized some theoretical sources on Arminian theology and guilt regulation to help explain this event.

Due to the constructs of space, this article is limited to the events in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that led to the purge. This reconstructed exposition could be improved through a detailed analysis of the American context in the 1860s and early 1870s, taking into account economic and political issues that raged in the nation generally, and in the local community of Battle Creek, Michigan, specifically. Furthermore, it would also be beneficial to compare the Battle Creek purge with other church trials that occurred in various denominations during this period. Such

years after this, however, Emmett K. Vande Vere cited Hammond's thesis (not the original document) in his biography of G. I. Butler and suggested that the "Record" was produced in about May 1865 (Emmett K. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart: The Story of George I. Butler* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 18, 24n2). In 1983, Eugene F. Durand (who was Land's source) also referred to the "Record" in an article on Uriah Smith for the *Adventist Review*. Durand did not provide a date or timeframe for this document, however, nor reference his source (Eugene F. Durand, "Uriah's Merry Medicine," *Adventist Review*, February 3, 1983, 4-6). Historians have therefore inconsistently dated the "Record" by placing it at some point between 1865 and 1882. In addition to the foregoing explication, I will say that I have not found any primary sources that support the claim that the "Record" appeared at any time prior to 1870. Furthermore, I know of no primary sources in the 1860s, 1870s, or early 1880s, that suggests that either James or Ellen White were upset by this satirical document, as Land suggested. As a result, I do not believe that the "Record" was part of the story that I tell here and remain skeptical that it ever upset the Whites, even while I remain open to the possibility that it did. For these reasons, I have excluded any treatment of it in this article.

analyses were not excluded from this article because they were deemed unimportant; rather, it was merely for lack of space.⁸

The Laodicean Church Trial

Since the late 1840s, Sabbatarian Adventist ministers held the protocol in Matthew 18:15–17 as a guide for administering most types of church discipline.⁹ In the mid-1850s, a minister named Joseph B. Frisbie explicitly outlined three broad categories of disorderly walking (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6) that could culminate in church trials—personal offenses, incorrect theology, and living in known sin. Though Frisbie provided additional scriptural advice, he asserted that all church trials should follow Matthew 18:15–17 “out to the letter.”¹⁰

This text advised that in a conflict the offended party was to confront the offender privately. If this did not resolve the issue, the offended was to take one or two others along for a second confrontation. If the conflict remained unresolved, then the matter was to be brought to the church. If the offender would not listen to the church, then he or she was to be cast out of the congregation. Sabbatarian Adventists may have, at times, carried this process out “to the letter,” but it was usually altered.¹¹ I refer to one type of

⁸ In his forthcoming biography of John N. Andrews, Gilbert M. Valentine provides some additional helpful analysis of the 1870 purge. He theorizes that Adventists in Battle Creek were experiencing “cabin fever” or “compounditis” because they both lived in close proximity to one another and worked, worshiped, shopped, and socialized in a tight-knit community. This was undoubtedly one of the many factors that contributed to this draconian affair, and I expect that future historians will further enrich our understanding of these events in the coming years. See chapter 13 in Gilbert M. Valentine, *J. N. Andrews: Mission Pioneer, Evangelist and Thought Leader*, Adventist Pioneer Series, George R. Knight, ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2019).

⁹ For example, see J. N. Andrews and Uriah Smith, “Rochester Conference,” *The Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald*, July 4, 1854, 173. *The Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald* is hereafter cited as *RH*.

¹⁰ Frisbie also outlined two other categories that did not involve church trials: voluntary membership withdrawal and committing the unpardonable sin. J. B. Frisbie, “Church Order,” *RH*, December 26, 1854, 147-148; J. B. Frisbie, “Church Order,” *RH*, January 9, 1855, 153.

¹¹ E. S. Lane, “Church Trials,” *RH*, March 1, 1860, 119; cf. F. Morrow, “Speak Evil of No Man,” *RH*, April 5, 1860, 158; Wm. S. Ingraham, “Note from Bro. Ingraham,” *RH*, December 30, 1862, 40; I. Sanborn and B. F. Snook, “Report from Minnesota,” *RH*, July 21, 1863, 62. For example, see the case of Elizabeth Woodruff in Seventh-day Adventist Church of West Monroe, New York, “Church Record Book, December 1861 to August 1874,” pp. 7, 13, WDF 285-d, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI

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church trial that deviated from the Matthew prescription as a Laodicean trial.¹² These trials convened when the entire church found itself to be in a

(hereafter cited as CAR).

¹² The Matthew prescription was also complicated when state law violations were involved. In such cases Adventists added the Pauline prescription outlined in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. This prescription had two stipulations: first, Christians were not take one another to court; and second, Christian conflicts were not to be settled in the courts of unbelievers. Therefore, if all involved persons were church members, then Adventists took the law into their own hands—when possible.

The case of John Martin, Alonzo Sherman, and John Saxby opened during a business meeting at the Bordoville, Vermont, church on December 18, 1865. These men were involved in a lumber dispute, in which Martin and Sherman were accused of cutting down trees on Saxby's land. In order to settle the dispute, Saxby first took the matter before a "secular" court, to which the church heartily disapproved. On the first day of the church trial the men were asked to confess their wrongs and apologize to one another. The men refused, which led the church to "take action in the case of these Brethren." At this point a three-person committee was appointed "to examine the difficulties existing between the parties, and to decide in regard to the same." After looking into the case of each man (apparently on this occasion), the committee submitted a report to the church body, which influenced Saxby to withdraw his lawsuit against Martin and Sherman. With the matter now in its control, the church proceeded toward resolving the case.

The trial resumed on January 17, 1866. After the report from the previous meeting was read, Martin, Sherman, and Saxby "were then invited to make acknowledgments and confessions." Though Martin and Sherman did not comply, Saxby admitted to perjury in court, stating, "I spoke hastily, I am sorry for it, and [I] beg Brn. Martin, Sherman, and the church to forgive me." Martin accepted Saxby's confession, but Sherman did not. Nevertheless, all three were invited to remain in church fellowship. The final day of the church trial was held on May 6, 1866. On this occasion Martin and Sherman had one more opportunity to confess. Martin did and remained in the church, but Sherman refused and was disfellowshipped. Since Saxby had withdrawn his charges and confessed, no further action was taken (Bordoville, Vermont, Church Record Book, 1861-1881, pgs. 13-23, Bordoville [Enosburgh], Vermont Church Records, Collection 175, Box 1, CAR). In other cases, however, the church pronounced verdict and sentence. When the "mitten scandal" was raging in Battle Creek in the early 1870s, the church found Henry Gardner guilty of infringing upon Othniel F. Tripp's double-knitted mitten patent and fined him (George I. Butler to James White, April 2, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; George W. Amadon, diary entries December 1-2, 1873, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 31, CAR; George W. Amadon, diary entry March 26, 1874, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 32, CAR; Ellen G. White to Lucinda Hall, November 27, 1873, LT 027, 1873; Ellen G. White to Lucinda Hall, December 17, 1873, LT 028, 1873; George I. Butler to James White, January 2, [1874], Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; Harmon Lindsay to James White, January 13, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate

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spiritually apathetic, Laodicean state (cf. Rev. 3:14–22). These trials were unique because every member of the church was investigated. In such cases an itinerant minister (or perhaps two) came to the church to interrogate each member in the meetinghouse individually in the presence of the congregation, asking questions like: Do you have any personal difficulties with other church members? Are you in harmony with the Adventist teachings and do you keep the Sabbath day holy? Have you adopted the health reform message and agreed to abstain from tea and coffee? Are you fervent in your personal devotions and “secret” prayer? Do you have confidence in the *Testimonies for the Church*? As the inquisitive minister(s) asked these questions, a scribe typically wrote down the individual’s responses in the church record book. After all the members were directly examined, the congregation decided who was retained and who was disfellowshipped. The remnant then proceeded to reorganize the church, usually by adopting a new covenant or series of resolutions.¹³

Church trials of various types occurred frequently in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church and an Arminian perspective colored these events. By rejecting the Lutheran and Reformed concepts of predestination, Arminian Christians have historically been faced with a tantalizing

Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; George I. Butler to James White, February 15, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; Harmon Lindsay to James White, March 8, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; Harmon Lindsay to James White, March 20, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; Rhoda B. Abbey to Lucinda Hall, April 2, 1874, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 18, EGWE-GC; Harmon Lindsay to James White, April 3, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; Ira Abbey and Rhoda B. Abbey to Lucinda Hall, May 10, 1874, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 18, EGWE-GC; Ira Abbey and [Rhoda B.] Abbey to Lucinda Hall, May 13, 1874, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 18, EGWE-GC). In legal cases such as these, it was virtually impossible to follow the Matthew prescription “out to the letter.”

¹³ Questions derived from the Laodicean trial held in Monterey, Michigan, in May 1870. Seventh-day Adventist Church of Monterey, Michigan, “Record Book, 1860-1880,” 77-106, ASC 001862, CAR. It should be noted that James and Ellen White heartily disapproved of Ellen White’s visions being made a test of fellowship. Though they fought against this throughout their lives, the matter was beyond their control, and certain congregations acted against their wishes during church trials. Cf. J[ames] W[hite], “A Test,” *RH*, October 16, 1855, 61; J[ames] W[hite], “The Review ‘Sectarian,’” *RH*, December 4, 1855, 80; R. F. Cottrell, “Testimony,” *RH*, December 18, 1855, 96; Asa Hart and John D. Morton, “Other Testimonies,” *RH*, December 18, 1855, 96.

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paradox: how are people redeemed by grace alone if they can accept or reject salvation on the basis of their free will? Roger E. Olson states, “[Jacob] Arminius’s solution to this thorny problem lay in the key concept of ‘prevenient grace’ . . . It is the grace God offers and extends to everyone in some degree, and it is absolutely necessary for fallen sinners—dead in sins and in bondage of the will—to believe and be saved.”¹⁴ Humans are therefore saved by grace alone because it is considered a prevenient gift from God. This theological outlook creates a razor-sharp line between faith and works that is difficult to balance: if someone leans too hard to the left, grace is cheapened; if they go off to the right, grace is crowded out by human effort.

Arminian Christians have tried to balance faith and works in day-to-day life through guilt regulation. Methodist minister, Zachariah Taft, explained the conversion (and reconversion) process as follows: “the work . . . is always one;—always originating in conviction,—and compromising repentance, faith, and conscious freedom from guilt and thralldom of sin.”¹⁵ In other words, a person is converted once they are convicted of their sins and find freedom from this guilt through faith-filled repentance. Theorist of emotions Fraser Watts unpacks the concept of guilt, stating, “It is tempting to assume that guilt is an unpleasant emotion with psychologically harmful effects.” The confusion is cleared up, however, “by distinguishing between different kinds of guilt.” Though guilt can be excessive and neurotic, “there can also be guilt that is realistic in the sense that it is a proper response to inappropriate or maladaptive conduct.” In relation to Christianity, Watts explains, “Religious teaching on guilt sometimes draws attention to problematic conduct, but it does so in the context of also emphasizing that there is a solution to the guilt to which it leads.”¹⁶ Ministers therefore sought to prick the consciences of the members, convicting them of their guilt and bringing about thorough repentance from sin for the purification and edification of the individual and the church.

¹⁴ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 469.

¹⁵ Zachariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women . . .*, 2nd vol., (Leeds: H. Cullingworth, 1828), 140.

¹⁶ Fraser Watts, “Emotion Regulation and Religion,” in *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, ed. James J. Gross (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2007), 512-513.

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Arminian Christian ministers, including Adventists, have historically drawn attention to problematic conduct through jeremiad sermons. The term “jeremiad” is derived from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, in which the prophet exhorted the Israelites to escape the loom of doom through recognition of their sin, repentance of guilt, and reconciliation to Jehovah. Throughout history jeremiads have been used as a type of rhetoric to condemn wrong and call for reformation and revival. Sacvan Bercovitch states, “The American jeremiad was a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting ‘signs of the times’ to certain traditional metaphors, themes, and symbols.”¹⁷ In short, the jeremiad was (and still is) a device utilized for guilt regulation, often in, but not limited to, the Christian context. Early Adventist ministers, as will be seen in this article, relied on jeremiads heavily during the investigation that led to the Laodicean trial that occurred in April 1870.

Jeremiads were particularly common during the years surrounding the Civil War. The war was a major shifting point in American history and many Christians observed its demoralizing effect on people. One citizen lamented in 1864 that “every kind of iniquity is on the increase,”¹⁸ while another reported in 1866, “Vice and immorality of almost every kind have been rapidly on the increase during the last five years, and, what is still worse, public sentiment has become so much demoralized that many things are now thought right, or at least admissible, which formerly all men agreed in pronouncing wrong.”¹⁹ Christians in general were deeply impacted by perceived shifts in moral standards²⁰ and, as in times past, ministers relied on jeremiads to regulate guilt and inspire hopeful conversions.²¹

¹⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), xi.

¹⁸ R. F. Cottrell, “Iniquity Abounds,” *RH*, June 14, 1864, 17.

¹⁹ L. L. V., “Drunkenness Increasing,” *The Christian Index*, August 30, 1866, 137.

²⁰ Cf. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, *Religion in America Series*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 123.

²¹ Cf. Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2006), xx.

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The Rise of Controversy: 1865–1869

The Civil War deeply impacted Sabbatarian Adventists. James White prodded Adventists throughout the 1850s and early 1860s to officially organize. This venture was completed in May 1863 (the midst of the war) when the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was established with John Byington as president. In the midst of this struggle White also faced two more challenges: growing contention with a congregation in Marion, Iowa, and the military draft. In 1865–1866 the conflict in Iowa climaxed with a schism and the “Marion party” eventually became the Church of God (Seventh Day). In regard to the draft, White helped Adventists gain non-combatant status in late 1864, but complications with conscription persisted until the war ended. Ellen White explained that these issues kept her husband’s “mind constantly strained” and that his “physical energies were utterly exhausted.”²² This led to physical collapse, and on August 16, 1865, James White suffered a major stroke, his first of many.²³

Though White survived this stroke, it took him years to recover. Difficulties arose in the church during this time in part because other leaders were unprepared for the responsibilities thrust upon them by White’s sudden collapse. Since White had been the foremost leader of the church from the late 1840s,²⁴ his removal caused a major jolt in church governance. Ellen White was also inactive during this period because she took care of her husband. Though she carried no formal authority within the church, her visions and writings deeply impacted the spiritual life of the community.²⁵ As a result, the church operated without two of its key leaders for more than a year, and when the Whites returned, they perceived that problems had developed at the Adventist headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, during their absence.

²² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, No. 12* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1867), 30.

²³ Ellen G. White, “Our Late Experience,” *RH*, February 20, 1866, 90.

²⁴ Kevin M. Burton, “Centralized for Protection: George I. Butler and His Philosophy of One-Person Leadership,” (Master’s Thesis, Andrews University, 2015), 1.

²⁵ Although Ellen White published *Testimonies for the Church, No. 10* in January 1864 (“[Editorial Note],” *RH*, January 19, 1864, 64), *Testimony No. 11* did not appear until February 1867 (“[Editorial Note],” *RH*, February 19, 1867, 132). Furthermore, while she received a vision on December 25, 1865, she did not have another major vision until June 12, 1868 (James White, “Monterey and Battle Creek,” *RH*, June 16, 1868, 409).

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A primary source of contention arose during this time: the attempted construction of a large new building for the Western Health Reform Institute. The Institute opened its doors on September 5, 1866, and before the end of the year—long before the new business was firmly established—the directors planned for extensive expansions, calling specifically for \$25,000 to erect a sizeable new building in early January 1867.²⁶ Construction began during the summer of 1867, but due to inadequate funding the elaborate project was abandoned on June 2, 1868.²⁷

This issue became very problematic for Adventists because they were all aware that building had commenced, and many had seen the site personally when they came to Battle Creek for the 1867 General Conference session. When church members throughout the States found out that the project had been abandoned, some felt defrauded—it was their money that had been poorly managed. This led some non-Battle Creek Adventists to lose confidence in the leaders at headquarters.²⁸ In order to save face, some of the directors blamed James White for the embarrassment, even though he had not been a part of the enterprise.²⁹

In 1867 and 1868 the Whites actively addressed the problem of fiscal mismanagement and general “worldliness” in the church.³⁰ As they fought against this rise in immorality, however, other leaders countered the Whites’ efforts by casting doubt on their own moral authority. As a result, many Adventists began to interpret White’s stroke as a judgment from God for being too strict and overbearing in his management of church affairs. Furthermore, a number claimed that White had actually utilized church monies for personal gain.³¹ Similarly, some Adventists belittled Ellen White’s visions by mocking their contents and discrediting their importance.³² The Whites’ influence was therefore hindered, which created

²⁶ H. S. Lay, “What Shall Be Done?,” *RH*, January 8, 1867, 54.

²⁷ Western Health Reform Institute, “Records of the Board of Directors of the Health Reform Institute at Battle Creek, MI, April 25, 1867-October 8, 1876,” 21-30, 46.

²⁸ Cf. White, “The Health Institute,” *RH*, June 16, 1868, 408.

²⁹ Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 24; cf. White, *13T*, 55-56.

³¹ Burton, “Centralized for Protection,” 18.

³² Kevin M. Burton, “An Adventist Gentleman in Battle Creek: The Leadership of Jotham M. Aldrich, 1866-1868.” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 16.2 (2013): 149. In 1867 Cornelia Cornell wrote that, “The Testimonies of Sr. W. [do] not have weight with us

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tension between them and other denominational leaders that would continue, off and on, for several years.

Though some Adventists began to distrust the leadership in Battle Creek, others viewed the town as a Promised Land. According to Ellen White, “There [was] a strong inclination with many of our brethren and sisters to live in Battle Creek” and by the summer of 1868 many families had already come “to reside there from all directions, and many more ha[d] their faces set that way.” The Whites viewed this as problematic primarily for missiological reasons. After her June 12, 1868, vision, Ellen White stated:

Missionaries are wanted to go into towns and villages and raise the standard of truth, that God may have his witness scattered all over the land, that the light of truth may penetrate where it has not yet reached . . . The brethren should not flock together [in Battle Creek] because it is more agreeable to them, but seek to fulfill their high calling to do others good, to be instrumental in the salvation of at least one soul.

Unlike other new religious groups in the nineteenth-century, such as Mormons or the Oneida Community, the Whites did not want Adventists to gather in one location. Rather, they wanted Adventists to disperse and follow the “great commission” by taking their message out to the ends of the earth (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 8:1).³³

[in Battle Creek].” Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 43.

³³ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 16* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 3-5. It is worthwhile to point out two things in reference to moving in/out of Battle Creek. First, these statements were also precipitated by the death of Hannah More. During the summer of 1867, More had traveled to Battle Creek seeking a position in the work. The leaders there (the Whites were not there at the time) shunned her, however, and More was forced to seek refuge in Leelanau, Michigan, during the winter of 1867–1868. Cut off from civilization by deep snow, and cramped in an unheated attic, More became sick and died on March 2, 1868. She was precisely the type of leader the Whites wanted at headquarters; unlike other Adventists at the time, More had years of overseas missionary experience in Africa. The leaders in Battle Creek could have learned from her experience, but since More was cast aside, Ellen White publicly lamented, “She has died a martyr to the selfishness and covetousness of professed commandment-keepers.” Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 14* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 55; William M. Knott, “Foot Soldier of the Empire: Hannah More and the Politics of Service,” (PhD dissertation, George

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In the midst of this dilemma, Ellen White received another vision in October 1868. The key component found in the subsequent *Testimony* read: “There are needed faithful and picked men at the head of the work. Those who have not had an experience in bearing burdens, and do not wish to have that experience, should not, on any account, live there.”³⁴ As more Adventists moved to Battle Creek, White suggested a two-fold solution for problems in the Adventist sector of town: first, some Adventists who resided there were needed in other localities so the message could spread while others (particularly those who were responsible for fiscal mismanagement at headquarters) needed to move away so that their influence would no longer keep the Adventist institutions from working effectively; and second, talented and responsible Adventists were encouraged to move to Battle Creek so that ministerial and missionary labor could be more effectively organized and managed and so that confidence could be restored in Adventist leadership at headquarters through the influence of trustworthy representatives specifically selected from different states. In the months following this vision, however, Adventists began to interpret White’s suggestive, “should not,” as an imperative, “could not.” During the summer of 1869, events transpired that jolted Adventists, allowing them to admit that problems existed. Re-impassioned with missionary zeal and an eschatological sense of urgency, key leaders latched

Washington University, 2006). Second, it is important to note that the Whites followed their own advice even before they gave it to others. Beginning in early 1867, the Whites purchased a few homes in other locations over the years and spent long periods of time in Colorado or California, primarily to avoid Battle Creek and fulfill their perceived mission. Stanley D. Hickerson, “The Homes of James and Ellen White,” *Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium 5* (2009): 109-138.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 18* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 166; Ellen White considered the issue of Adventists centralizing in one location to be a perennial problem. It seemingly arose in the 1850s when Adventists were headquartered in Rochester, New York—“a central place” (Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159] [Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872], 175-177, 179). After the incidents in Battle Creek in the 1860s and 1870s, White continued to speak out against centralizing in one place during the next two decades (cf. E. G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 31* [Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1882], 178-183; E. G. White, “Co-Operation with Christ,” *RH*, January 20, 1891, 33). The situation finally improved, from White’s perspective, when Adventists began to move their primary institutions away from Battle Creek in the early twentieth-century.

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onto this component of the vision and sought to use it to correct the situation and push the work forward through unbalanced guilt regulation.

During the summer of 1869, the interpersonal struggles between Seventh-day Adventist leaders became public knowledge. On July 27, 1869, the *Voice of the West* began to publish a long article by T. M. Preble, titled, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions!” This front page exclusive ran for six weeks, ending on August 31.³⁵ While the title does indicate that Ellen White was the central focus, James White was also denounced, along with all Seventh-day Adventists in general. In particular, the Battle Creek church and prominent ministers were vilified, including J. N. Loughborough, M. E. Cornell, D. T. Bourdeau, and especially, J. H. Waggoner.

The leaders in Battle Creek were shocked by the article and anxious to respond.³⁶ This screed gave leaders undeniable proof that the conflict that transpired between 1867 and 1869 had damaged the reputation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Significantly, all of Preble’s sources for his article were taken from *Testimonies* and confessions published during these years, and Adventist leaders now realized that they needed to fight for respect and address the key issues in Battle Creek so that Adventism could spread throughout the world.

The 1869–1870 Investigation of James and Ellen White

In early October 1869, the Battle Creek church decided to hold an investigation to address various concerns that Preble’s article had raised.³⁷ The precise day that this began is unknown, but before the end of the month it was in full swing and continued with increasing intensity until the end of

³⁵ T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, July 27, 1869, p. 201, col. 4-6, CAR; T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, August 3, 1869, p. 1, col. 3-4, CAR; T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, August 10, 1869, p. 5, col. 1-2, CAR; T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, August 17, 1869, p. 9, col. 1-2, CAR; T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, August 24, 1869, p. 16, col. 1-2, CAR; T. M. Preble, “Ellen G. White and Her Visions,” Buchanan (MI) *Voice of the West*, August 31, 1869, 20, col. 1-4, CAR.

³⁶ Cf. Andrews, Bell, and Smith, “Defense of Eld. James White,” *RH*, October 26, 144.

³⁷ Cf. U. Smith and W. H. Littlejohn, “Note from Brn. Smith and Littlejohn,” *RH*, October 26, 1869, 144.

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April 1870.³⁸ James and Ellen White were both active participants throughout this process, beginning with James White's sermon on Sabbath, October 16, when he preached from 1 Peter 4:18, which states, "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (KJV). This unpublished jeremiad was probably directed at the backsliding members in Battle Creek and apparently had a humbling effect.³⁹

From the Whites' perspective, the investigation began well. Ellen White wrote to a friend on October 25, "A great work is going forward in this church at the present time, a work of humiliation and confession. This work should have been done years ago . . . The work is ahead of anything that has ever yet been in Battle Creek. May the Lord pity and save His people."⁴⁰ This comment was made shortly after the church decided to re-investigate the business career of James White.⁴¹ On October 26, the *Review* carried an appeal requesting that "every one who can speak of any unjust transaction [made by White] of which he has personal knowledge, to report the same to this Office." While the primary purpose of this examination was to vindicate the course of James White, the article also stated: "We also believe that God has given to Sr. White what the New Testament calls the gift of prophecy. The importance of her position in this

³⁸ It should be noted that Waggoner and Andrews had both been heavily involved in the exposure, trial, and disfellowshipping of Nathan Fuller, president of the New York and Pennsylvania Conference from 1866 to 1868. Fuller's trial elapsed throughout the summer of 1869 and Waggoner and Andrews kept up a steady campaign against his sinful course in the *Review* and among the Wellsville, New York, community in which Fuller worked. Their combative spirit exhibited in this case may have also influenced their course of action during the Battle Creek purge in April 1870. Significantly, Waggoner and Andrews (as well as James and Ellen White) were present at the New York and Pennsylvania annual conference, which convened in mid-September 1869. During these meetings, the delegates voted to expel the recently disfellowshipped Fuller from the conference. The investigation of James and Ellen White in Battle Creek began just one month later. For more information, see Brian Strayer, "The Triumph and Tragedy of Nathan Fuller," *Adventist Heritage* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1977): 3-12; Brian E. Strayer, "Fuller, Nathan," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 383-384.

³⁹ Three days after his sermon James White stated, "There are some reasons to hope for a better state of things here [in Battle Creek]." White, "[Note]," *RH*, October 19, 1869, 136.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White to Unknown Lockwood, October 25, 1869, LT 018, 1869.

⁴¹ Similar investigations took place in 1854 and 1863. Wheeler, *James White*, 147-151.

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work is, therefore, very great.”⁴² Preble’s article had touched a nerve and Adventist leaders sought to defend Ellen White through an investigatory process as well.⁴³

The committee elected to lead this investigation included three prominent leaders: J. N. Andrews, Goodloe Harper Bell, and Uriah Smith. Though Smith proved to be ineffective throughout this long investigation, J. H. Waggoner became highly involved. Though he certainly desired to vindicate the Whites he was also motivated by personal reasons. Ellen White was the feature of Preble’s attack, but Waggoner was condemned more than any other minister. That Waggoner took this defense personally may help explain his harshness during the Laodicean trial in April 1870. While the Whites and the church needed vindication, Waggoner also had cause to regain self-respect within his community.

J. H. Waggoner and J. N. Andrews began crafting a response to Preble in late October or early November. By December their article was finished and ready for publication.⁴⁴ They had been in communication with Joshua V. Himes, editor of the *Advent-Christian Times* (the *Voice of the West* took this new name in September 1869), hoping that their response would be printed in the same paper that featured Preble’s article.⁴⁵ On January 4, 1870, Waggoner and Andrews traveled to Buchanan, Michigan, to deliver their rejoinder to Himes personally and on January 11 it was published in the *Advent-Christian Times*.⁴⁶

⁴² J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and Uriah Smith, “Defense of Eld. James White,” *RH*, October 26, 144.

⁴³ It is important to note that at previous investigations, such as the one in 1863, only James White was defended. Cf. U. Smith, G. W. Amadon, and E. S. Walker, *Vindication of the Business Career of Elder James White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1863).

⁴⁴ J. N. Andrews and J. H. Waggoner, “The Articles of Eld. T. M. Preble,” *RH*, February 15, 1870, 63.

⁴⁵ George W. Amadon, diary entry January 4, 1870, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 29, CAR.

⁴⁶ Joshua V. Himes, “My Journal,” *Advent-Christian Times*, January 11, 1870, p. 90, col. 3; J. N. Andrews and J. H. Waggoner, “The Articles of Eld. T. M. Preble,” *Advent-Christian Times*, January 11, 1870, p. 92, cols. 5-6; J. N. Andrews and J. H. Waggoner, “The Articles of Eld. T. M. Preble,” *RH*, February 15, 1870, 60-63; Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 118-137.

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This published response was significant, but Waggoner and Andrews had not yet finished their work of vindication. By the end of January a new tract, to be titled, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: Vindication of Their Moral and Christian Character*, was in progress and in late March it was published at the close of the 1870 General Conference.⁴⁷ Shortly before this, in early December 1869, Ellen White had published *Testimony for the Church, No. 18*, which included her October 1868 vision about “picked men” and her suggestion that certain people move from Battle Creek.⁴⁸ This publication contributed a key component in the investigation, because, as Adventists at headquarters read the work, they presumably wondered if they should or should not remain in Battle Creek. Growing discomfort was felt as numerous meetings and church trials were held between January and April 1870. By the beginning of March, meetings were held almost daily (morning, afternoon, and evening) until the end of April.

On February 18, James White stated that he wanted to hold “a ‘revival’ in the [Battle Creek] church”⁴⁹ the week before the General Conference as “a special season of seeking God, and in putting away the sins and faults that have grieved the Spirit of God at Battle Creek.” It would not be a public affair, however—people had to be invited.⁵⁰ In total about one hundred selected Adventists “from Maine to Iowa” attended the revival.⁵¹ They began to arrive on Friday, March 4, and most were in Battle Creek by the next day. On Sabbath, after the afternoon service, James White called for a preparatory meeting to convene that evening, beginning at 6 p.m. During this time White spoke plainly and “dwelt on former wrongs & the present duty” of the Battle Creek church “in view of the [General] Conference.”⁵²

The revival officially began on March 6, with meetings in the afternoon and evening. People were hopeful and excited, and it seems that the first

⁴⁷ George W. Amadon, diary entries February 9, 17 and March 7-10, 16, 1870; J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and Uriah Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: Vindication of Their Moral and Christian Character* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 77.

⁴⁸ James White, “Testimony to the Church, No. 18,” *RH*, December 7, 1869, 192.

⁴⁹ George W. Amadon, diary entry February 18, 1870.

⁵⁰ “The Coming General Conference,” *RH*, March 1, 1870, 88.

⁵¹ “Our Preliminary Meetings in Battle Creek,” *RH*, March 15, 1870, 104.

⁵² George W. Amadon, diary entries March 4-5, 1870.

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day was very successful.⁵³ The revival began with a tone of vindication. On March 8, “Bro. White spoke of the want of confidence in the visions, [and] that but few believed that God was speaking to them.”⁵⁴ On March 10, an investigation ensued regarding “business matters.” Once again, James White’s management was found to be ethical and aboveboard. The defense committee concluded that “after much patient investigation, it was made apparent that the cause had not been well sustained, and its interests had not been properly guarded by those who bore the responsibilities of the work in Battle Creek during the period of Bro. White’s absence on account of his sickness.” In response, those present confessed and unanimously adopted several resolutions, promising to support White in his leadership.⁵⁵

By Friday, March 11, the meetings gained a more typical revival tone and were “of remarkable interest.” James and Ellen White both spoke in the morning. It was reported that “[t]hose who heard Sr. White during the forenoon and afternoon meetings” were stirred by her solemn words. She dealt harshly with sin and error, but spoke with “tender pity and compassion toward the erring and the sinful.” In response, “deep confessions were made through the day.”⁵⁶

Though Ellen White’s jeremiad was reportedly balanced with “pity and compassion,” those preached on Sabbath, March 12, centered exclusively, it would seem, on holiness and perfection. In the morning, G. I. Butler preached a solemn sermon on Hebrews 12:14. A glimpse of his tone can be observed from the passage itself: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (KJV). W. H. Littlejohn gave another grave discourse in the afternoon on Revelation 22:14, which reads, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (KJV).⁵⁷ It seems that Butler and Littlejohn both emphasized the same point in their

⁵³ George W. Amadon, diary entry March 6, 1870.

⁵⁴ George W. Amadon, diary entries March 7-9, 1870; John Byington, diary entries March 8-9, 1870, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 1, Envelope 5, CAR.

⁵⁵ John Byington, diary entry March 10, 1870; Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 116-117.

⁵⁶ “Our Preliminary Meetings in Battle Creek,” *RH*, March 15, 1870, 104; John Byington, diary entry March 11, 1870; George W. Amadon, diary entry March 11, 1870.

⁵⁷ John Byington, diary entry March 12, 1870.

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sermons—that salvation is dependent upon holiness and that entrance into Heaven is made possible by obedience to the Law of God. These sermons received mixed reviews. While the *Review* reported ambiguously that these sermons were “memorable in the experience of those who attended them,”⁵⁸ others privately felt that “not much of the Spirit” was present and that the meetings were downright “awful, awful.”⁵⁹ More importantly, these sermons were preached at a pivotal time—at the end of the revival. Laden with guilt and fear, Adventists now sought to achieve unity and perfection by human effort, no matter the cost. It seems that grace, the necessary companion to religious guilt, was essentially forgotten.

James White had preached liberally on grace prior to these final sermons, however. Between the first of January through March 12, White delivered the majority of the Sabbath sermons (morning or afternoon) in Battle Creek by a wide margin: White preached six, W. H. Littlejohn three, J. H. Waggoner one, and G. I. Butler one.⁶⁰ Though White defended himself and his wife, his sermons reflected the Arminian balance. In fact, his primary emphasis throughout his discourses was grace. On February 5, James White “preached on ‘The Kingdom’ [and] took some new positions on several texts: Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:5; Rom. 14:17” and Matt. 13:33, “applying them all to the ‘Kingdom of grace.’”⁶¹ Unlike the isolated passages selected by other ministers, such as Butler and Littlejohn, these texts all reflect a message of redemption through Christ, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and especially the love and grace of God the Father. On the next Sabbath (February 12), White preached “a rehearsal of his new light on the Kingdom” and those who heard it considered it “most excellent.”⁶² The day before the revival began (March 5), White preached another

⁵⁸ “Our Preliminary Meetings in Battle Creek,” *RH*, March 15, 1870, 104.

⁵⁹ George W. Amadon, diary entry March 12, 1870.

⁶⁰ White spoke in the morning or afternoon on January 1 and 8, February 5, 12, and 26, and March 5. Littlejohn spoke in the morning or afternoon on January 8 and 29, and March 12. His texts, in chronological order, included: Jam. 1:26; 2 Cor. 13:5; and Rev. 22:14—all of these isolated texts lean in a “tough” direction. Waggoner spoke on the morning of January 22 (his text or topic is unknown) and Butler spoke in the morning on March 12 from Heb. 12:14. “Social meetings” were held on some Sabbaths as well, which were usually filled with personal testimonies. George W. Amadon, diary entries [see dates in this footnote], 1870.

⁶¹ Emphasis is in original. George W. Amadon, diary entry February 5, 1870.

⁶² George W. Amadon, diary entry February 12, 1870.

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Sabbath morning sermon. He chose to speak from Hebrews 4:16, which states, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (KJV). This was a message that was “very clear & encouraging” and helped to set a positive tone as the revival commenced.⁶³

Adventists failed, however, to incorporate the concept of grace into the present investigation. Other sermons, such as those preached by Butler and Littlejohn, were instrumental in causing the Arminian equilibrium to be thrown off balance and the message of grace that had been preached by White was essentially forgotten. After Butler and Littlejohn’s sermons on March 12, the congregation held a business meeting that was “terrible

⁶³ Cf. George W. Amadon, diary entries February 5, 12, and March 5, 1870. White also preached from Matt. 1:25 and Phil. 1:9-11, both of which are consistent with the theme of grace through Jesus Christ. See, diary entries for January 8, February 26, and March 26 and 31 in *ibid.* Also, see John Byington, diary entry March 18, 1870. The significance of White’s sermons should not be missed. James White first addressed the topic of the kingdom of grace in 1854 (and later in 1857) and stated that it had existed since the fall of mankind. From this point White transitioned from grace to the kingdom itself—now referred to as the “kingdom of God.” After analyzing the statue of Daniel 2, White asked, “But when will the kingdom of God be set up? See Matt. xxv, 31–34. ‘When the Son of man shall come in his glory,’ . . . not till then, will the kingdom of God be set up” ([James White], “Exposition of Daniel II, 31–44: Or Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” *RH*, October 31, 1854, 93-94; cf. [James White], “Exposition of Daniel II, 31–44, or Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” *RH*, April 9, 1857, 178. James White borrowed, practically word-for-word, much of his argument on the kingdom of grace from George Storrs. Geo. Storrs, “Exposition of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” *RH*, December 23, 1852, 126). In 1870—in the midst of the trials of investigation—White changed his emphasis. Though he addressed the topic of the kingdom of God in Daniel 2 as he had done previously, he now stressed the topic of grace. After repeating his statement about the kingdom of grace from 1854 and 1857 verbatim, White proceeded to unpack the concept of grace itself. Since mankind had always been saved by grace, White argued that the kingdom of grace referred to two conditions concurrently: first, God’s plan to save mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve; and second, “God’s arrangement in the future glory and eternal reward of the saved.” Though this distinction was not clearly outlined in Scripture, White argued that “[t]he Holy Spirit employ[ed] the terms, ‘kingdom of Heaven’ and ‘kingdom of God’” in both of these ways throughout the Bible. In conclusion, then, “the word kingdom [can] refer[] to both the means of grace necessary to prepare men for the future life, and to the future kingdom itself.” White’s emphasis on the means of grace leading to sanctification was a concept not found in his treatment from 1854 or 1857—this emphasis enabled his sermons to be branded as “new light” (James White, “Our Faith and Hope; Or, Reasons Why We Believe as We Do: Number Ten.—The Kingdom,” *RH*, February 1, 1870, 42).

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important.” The meetings continued throughout Sunday and Monday and, as G. W. Amadon stated, they were “awful solemn” and “very important.” In a similar fashion, John Byington wrote in his diary that the “labour with the church [was a] great trial” and even though “the ‘powers’ of hell seem[ed] determined to hinder” he believed that “some victory” was gained.⁶⁴ Similarly, it was publicly announced, “We have good reason to hope that these meetings [on March 12–13] will mark a new era in the experience of the Battle Creek church.”⁶⁵

Convicted with guilt, the Battle Creek church drafted and adopted a series of thirteen resolutions that reflected an extreme emphasis on perfection. The first four resolutions stressed that salvific assurance was obtained by bearing good fruit (cf. Matt. 7:17); that is, by human works. A clear distinction was also drawn between *authentic* Christians and *unauthentic* Christians. After outlining these tenets, resolution five stated, “That those who are *not* accepted of God are *not* his children, and should *not* belong to the church.” Resolutions six through nine stated that the Battle Creek church was in a “backslidden state, fitly described by the message to the Laodiceans [c.f. Rev. 3:14-18]” and that through their condition of “blindness and waywardness,” they had all “committed great and grievous sins” and “brought dishonor upon the cause of God.” The document further admitted that “the principal cause” of their “wicked and reckless course” was disregard, indifference, and even contempt by some for “the testimonies given through the gift of prophecy.” Resolution nine then made it clear that the church believed there was only one “way of escape” from their “deplorable condition.” They needed “a heartfelt confession” of their “wickedness in the past” and “a strict compliance” from that “time forward.” This all led to the most important statements, found in resolutions ten through thirteen.

In resolution ten the congregation affirmed: “That the salvation of this church depends upon *immediate and decisive action*, to the end that each of its members give good evidence of conversion, or be *promptly disfellowshipped*.” Resolutions eleven through thirteen expressed an eisegetical reading of Ellen White’s vision about “picked men” and

⁶⁴ John Byington, diary entries March 12-14, 1870; George W. Amadon, diary entries March 12-14, 1870.

⁶⁵ “Our Preliminary Meetings in Battle Creek,” *RH*, March 15, 1870, 104.

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recommendation that certain people move away from Battle Creek. Though White had suggested that certain people relocate for missionary advancement, those in Battle Creek read into her statements that “all such persons as are not qualified in both mind and heart to bear the responsibilities peculiar to the post” of leadership should be removed by church mandate. No one, it seems, anticipated the drastic results that would come from this interpretation, and so the people freely surrendered their cases to the General Conference executive committee. The final resolution stated, “we do hereby severally pledge ourselves to *cheerfully* submit to the action of the General Conference, in our individual cases, whether it be decided that we ought to remain in, or remove from, this place.”⁶⁶

Not only did these resolutions specify that the General Conference should have the authority to determine whether or not each person could remain in the church, but also the congregation gave this small group the power to determine whether or not each person would be allowed to live in the town of Battle Creek. It should be noted, however, that the Battle Creek church did not have the authority to surrender their fate to the General Conference. Since this matter fell outside of General Conference jurisdiction, it needed to be voted by the General Conference in session. The General Conference voted to approve this request (including the eisegetical reading of Ellen White’s vision about “picked men”) on March 15.⁶⁷ Though this was “unanimously adopted” by the General Conference in session, it still needed to be ratified by the Michigan State Conference, which took place the following day.⁶⁸ After going through this system of checks and balances, the General Conference now had control over the situation.

The 1870 General Conference reelected James White (president), J. N. Andrews, and J. H. Waggoner as the General Conference executive committee.⁶⁹ Since the current investigation in Battle Creek involved James

⁶⁶ Emphasis is mine. Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 112-113.

⁶⁷ Jas. White and Uriah Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, March 22, 1870, 109.

⁶⁸ H. S. Gurney and Wm. C. Gage, “Michigan State Conference: Tenth Annual Session,” *RH*, March 22, 1870, 110.

⁶⁹ White and Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” 109.

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White, he did not participate in the final weeks of the church trial. Therefore, the situation was left entirely with J. H. Waggoner and J. N. Andrews. The trial had been on hold during the General Conference, and this hiatus continued during the ministerial training course that took place between March 27 and April 2.⁷⁰ The transition back to the investigation was marked by the “solemn . . . judgment discourse” J. N. Andrews preached on Saturday evening, April 2. The trial resumed the next day.

As indicated by the resolutions crafted by the Battle Creek church, this was a Laodicean church trial, yet since the General Conference handled it exclusively, standard procedures were modified. Unlike other Laodicean trials in which the congregation voted the outcome of each individual, this responsibility was put into the hands of only two people. Beginning on April 3, Waggoner and Andrews sat in the meetinghouse as each member came forward one by one to be interrogated. Ellen White seems to suggest that Waggoner was the prime inquisitor, and, as he and Andrews interviewed each member, John Harvey Kellogg wrote down each person’s response, as well as the verdict, into the church record book. Kellogg, who was only 18 at the time, later stated with disgust:

I had to sit there and make a record as they [Waggoner and Andrews] brought the cases up—“Well, Sister So-and So, we have heard that you are not as strict in the discipline of Will as a mother ought to be; and Willie sometimes disobeys you and is not punished as he ought to be. Etc. etc.” “And now, Brother Jones, we have heard that you are not as careful as you ought to be on the question of health reform.” I had to take this all down and write it out.⁷¹

At this time the Battle Creek church had approximately 250 to 300 members,⁷² and it took four days for the members to be interrogated. If

⁷⁰ “[Note],” *RH*, March 22, 1870, 112; John Byington, diary entries March 26–April 1, 1870.

⁷¹ “Interview at Dr. J. H. Kellogg’s Home, October 7, 1907, Between Geo. W. Amadon, Eld. A. C. Bourdeau and Dr. J. H. Kellogg,” 6, Vande Vere Collection (004), Box 17, CAR.

⁷² Milton Raymond Hook initially estimated that the Battle Creek church had an “official membership of about four hundred.” Hook, *Flames Over Battle Creek*, 62. Gary Land was a little more conservative in his estimation, stating that the church had “about 300 to 400 members.” Land, *Uriah Smith*, 80. I have derived a more precise estimate from the following information. In 1864, the Battle Creek church only had 117 members (E. S.

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every member appeared for their hearing, and if the process was perfectly streamlined, then Waggoner and Andrews would have had to interview about 70 people per day. If they worked ten hours per day at this rate with no breaks, each interview would have been less than ten minutes in duration—a remarkably short period for such decisions. If the church record book had survived, then these speculations could be verified. It burned in a fire in December 1902, however, and G. W. Amadon later stated, “I am glad of it.”⁷³

On April 3, only “6 were cut off” while more were likely disfellowshipped over the next two days as well. The purge concluded on April 6 during a “‘Last Call’ meet[in]g of [the] ch[urch]” in which “[a]ll were cut off but 12.” G. W. Amadon lamented in his diary, “Oh Lord, what times are these[!]”⁷⁴ Since the church record books were destroyed, only six of the “apostolic twelve” are currently identified: James, Ellen, and William White (the Whites oldest surviving and sporadically rebellious son, James Edson, was apparently disfellowshipped);⁷⁵ John Harvey Kellogg, Goodloe Harper Bell (and probably his wife, Harriet E. Bell), and

Walker, “The Cause in Michigan,” *RH*, May 31, 1864, 2). At this time Adventists in Battle Creek were using a meetinghouse that was “28’ x 44’ (8.5 meters x 13.5 meters)” that could “comfortably seat[]” at least 250 people (Stanley D. Hickerson, “Battle Creek Congregation,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Fortin and Moon, eds., 638); James White, “Conference,” *RH*, November 12, 1857, 4). In 1866-1867 Adventists constructed a new meetinghouse in Battle Creek because the former one was “insufficient for . . . ordinary Sabbath meetings” ([Uriah Smith], “The Fast in Battle Creek,” *RH*, May 14, 1867, 270). This new meetinghouse, which could, “when closely seated, [hold] . . . about seven hundred persons,” was “40’ x 65’ (12 meters x 20 meters) and contain[ed] a gallery” (Ibid; Hickerson, “Battle Creek Congregation,” 638). In 1868, the membership was estimated to be “about three hundred” (Washington Gardner, “History of Calhoun County Michigan: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests,” vol. 1 [Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing Company, 1913], 404), about a year later it was calculated precisely at 242 members (E. G. Rust, Compiler, Calhoun County Business Directory [Battle Creek, MI: E. G. Rust, 1869], 105). As a result, there were at least 250 members in April 1870, but the number could have conceivably risen (since 1868–1869) to as many as 300 with baptisms and membership transfers.

⁷³ “Interview at Dr. J. H. Kellogg’s Home,” 6.

⁷⁴ George W. Amadon, diary entries April 3-6, 1870; cf. John Byington, diary entry April 5, 1870. Of these twelve, only nine of them actually resided in Battle Creek. The other three lived outside of the city and could only attend services sporadically. J. H. Waggoner, “Keep Your Covenant,” *RH*, April 19, 1870, 144.

⁷⁵ “Interview at Dr. J. H. Kellogg’s Home,” 6.

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Nellie Richmond (and probably her husband, G. F. Richmond). The Whites were retained because the trial was primarily held for their vindication; Kellogg, as he later stated, was retained not because he “was so good, but because they [Waggoner and Andrews] wanted somebody for a clerk”;⁷⁶ Bell was retained because he fought alongside Waggoner and Andrews to make the church perfect (he was ordained as the new church elder on April 23);⁷⁷ Richmond was apparently retained because she falsely testified against other church members, which gave Waggoner and Andrews the impression that she was a very pious Christian.⁷⁸

Waggoner was pleased with the outcome and publically reported, “Discipline is necessary to the life and growth of a church, and members who disregard correct rules of a church are no benefit to it, but rather a detriment.”⁷⁹ He was unabashedly determined to make the church perfect. Since denominational headquarters were located in Battle Creek, Waggoner fought hard to end all conflict and make Adventism great again. Shortly after the Laodicean trial concluded, he proudly proclaimed in the *Review* that the Battle Creek church was “now in working order” and that “Union prevails.”⁸⁰ By the end of the month, the *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife* was revised, updated, and republished with a new subtitle: *The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*.⁸¹ Though the new version of this tract did not provide details of the trial itself, it did include the Battle Creek church’s list of thirteen resolutions, which helped

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ellen White wrote to Bell, “There was a serious error in holding so many meetings with the view to perfect the different branches of interest in the Sabbath-school and in the church . . . Many felt that the burden of these meetings was too wearing to the physical strength, and expressed their fears; but Bro. Bell’s mind was so concentrated upon the object of bringing up the church into working order that he did not regard the laws of health and life. With a martyr-like spirit, he considered it a virtue, irrespective of weariness and failing health, to press the matter to the desired end.” Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed., PH 123] (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 14-15; J. H. W., “A Profitable Day,” *RH*, April 26, 1870, 152.

⁷⁸ White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159], 130-131; cf. Western Health Reform Institute, “Records of the Board of Directors of the Health Reform Institute at Battle Creek, MI, April 25, 1867-October 8, 1876,” 55-56.

⁷⁹ J. H. Waggoner, “Keep Your Covenant,” *RH*, April 19, 1870, 144.

⁸⁰ J. H. W., “A Profitable Day,” *RH*, April 26, 1870, 152.

⁸¹ Cf. Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 154-155.

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other Adventists make sense of the bizarre event. As a result, this second edition was more than a defense of the Whites—it was an implicit defense and explanation of Waggoner and Andrews’ draconian judgment of the Battle Creek church.

All did not share Waggoner’s optimistic outlook, however. On April 9, the Battle Creek church began to reorganize. Though a few members were reaccepted, most waited months—even up to a year—if they were readmitted at all.⁸² G. W. Amadon stated in his diary, “Oh, how careful the Brn. seem 2 move in taking in members. I handed in my name but it was not accepted.” Amadon was not alone, and on April 10 a large group of former members moved out West. Amadon rented out his house the same day and moved to Ceresco village in Newtown Township, Michigan, on April 11.⁸³ Since Adventists interpreted Ellen White’s October 1868 vision through a coercive lens and gave the General Conference the authority to determine who could live in Battle Creek and who could not, this mass exodus is not surprising. Nevertheless, it added insult to injury and this two-fold judgment—the disfellowshipping and the eviction—was very painful for those on the receiving end. According to Ellen White, the extreme stress of these events caused Addie James to lose her sanity.⁸⁴ Though others did not suffer to this degree, the situation was still exceptionally distressing. G. W. Amadon lost his job at the *Review* Office when he was disfellowshipped.⁸⁵ Similarly, after Dr. Horatio S. Lay was cut off, he was subsequently fired from the Western Health Reform Institute on May 1, 1870.⁸⁶ By contrast, and for reasons presently unknown, Uriah Smith retained his church positions of *Review and Herald* editor, General Conference secretary and Michigan Conference president after being

⁸² For example, G. W. Amadon was not reaccepted until January 28, 1871, and his wife, Martha, was not readmitted until February 3, 1871. George W. Amadon, diary entries January 28 and February 3, 1871, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 30, CAR.

⁸³ George W. Amadon, diary entries April 9-11, 1870.

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White to J. H. Waggoner, February 1, 1872, LT 003, 1872.

⁸⁵ George W. Amadon, diary entries April 3-6, 1870.

⁸⁶ Western Health Reform Institute, “Records of the Board of Directors of the Health Reform Institute,” 56-59.

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disfellowshipped.⁸⁷ In light of these responses, Amadon perhaps summed it up best when he stated coolly, “The tail-board of the cart was pulled out and the contents were dumped.”⁸⁸

Though they were retained, James and Ellen White were quite displeased with the outcome of the Laodicean trial. Though they supported the trial, they did not expect the harsh results. In fact, this draconian affair strained James White’s relationship with J. H. Waggoner and J. N. Andrews. White was particularly frustrated with Waggoner, who was primarily in charge and “cautioned and held [him] back from engaging in church difficulties.” Waggoner was offended by this, however, and interpreted “the cautions, advice, and reproof of Bro. White” as a way of “restricting his liberties, and controlling his labors.” According to Ellen White, “Brn. Andrews and Waggoner sympathized together in reference to these things,”⁸⁹ and by the end of the year James White accused them both of the dereliction of their duties.⁹⁰

Equally frustrated, Ellen White also spoke against this unwarrantable raid. She wrote, “In the work done for the church at Battle Creek in the spring of 1870, there was not all that dependence upon God that the important occasion demanded. Brn. Andrews and Waggoner did not fully make God their trust, and move in his strength, and with his grace, as they should.”⁹¹ She warned that Waggoner and Andrews “had too much of a spirit of cold criticism in the examination of individuals who presented themselves to be received into the church.”⁹² Devoid of love and sympathy, “[t]he investigation of cases in Battle Creek was very much after the order that a lawyer criticises a witness, and there was a decided absence of the Spirit of God.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Uriah’s wife, Harriet, was also disfellowshipped. Harriet N. Smith to James and Ellen White, [April 1870], Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence; White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed., PH 123], 37ff; Though Uriah Smith was a member of the defense committee selected to defend the Whites, he played a passive role (if he played a role at all). In reality, Smith was quite discouraged and seeking an opportunity to end his work for the Adventist Church. Burton, “Centralized for Protection,” 33-39.

⁸⁸ “Interview at Dr. J. H. Kellogg’s Home,” 6.

⁸⁹ White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159], 137, 192.

⁹⁰ Cf. Burton, “Centralized for Protection,” 10-69.

⁹¹ White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159], 129.

⁹² White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed., PH 123], 11.

⁹³ White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159], 130.

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White was particularly direct with Waggoner. “When Bro. Waggoner thinks a person is wrong,” she wrote, “he is frequently too severe.” Since he lacked an adequate portion of compassion and had erred in judgment, she believed that “Bro. Waggoner should shun church trials, and should have nothing to do in settling difficulties.” In spite of this, White affirmed that Waggoner had “a valuable gift” that was “needed in the work of God.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this did not excuse the situation. In a sobering turn of phrase, White wrote, “Bro. Waggoner has held aloft the gospel whip, and his own words have frequently been the snap to that whip, which has not had the influence to spur others to greater zeal, and provoke to good works; but has aroused their combativeness to repel his severity.”⁹⁵ In this statement, White contrasted Waggoner’s cleansing of the Battle Creek church to Jesus’ cleansing of the Jerusalem temple in the New Testament. The point was clear: at the cleansing in Jerusalem, Jesus only removed hypocritical Jewish leaders; at the cleansing in Battle Creek, Waggoner evicted the innocent and the guilty. The former was motivated by holy anger, the latter by severity devoid of the Holy Spirit.

Analysis and Conclusion

Though church trials took place frequently in early Adventist history, no one enjoyed them.⁹⁶ Two years prior to the purge in Battle Creek, R. M. Kilgore stated that church trials often resulted in “[c]oldness, formality, and a lack of brotherly love . . . [and] consequently division in the churches.”⁹⁷ Brotherly love was apparently lacking in Battle Creek in April 1870, yet surprisingly, this Laodicean trial did not result in a schism and it was never reported in the public press. Nevertheless, it took years for the Battle Creek church to recover. Though it had regained its status as “a large church” by

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁹⁶ Cf. J[ames] W[hite], “Eastern Tour,” *RH*, July 16, 1857, 88; A. S. Hutchins, “From Bro. Hutchins,” *RH*, July 30, 1857, 101; Jos. Clarke, “Brevities,” *RH*, August 20, 1861, 93.

⁹⁷ R. M. Kilgore, “The Enemy Thwarted,” *RH*, January 7, 1868, 58.

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1871,⁹⁸ the congregation did not reach its former size (275 members) until about 1877.⁹⁹

The events that transpired in Battle Creek, Michigan, between October 1869 and April 1870 are complex, but there are two interpretations located in surviving documentation that are helpful—perspectives from John Harvey Kellogg and Ellen White. Kellogg recounted these events in a private interview held on October 7, 1907, in which he stated that this trial “was purely machine politics.” According to Kellogg, “Brother White had a little campaign against Brother Amadon, Brother Smith, and others.” The twelve that remained were nothing but “a few old standbys to hold the fort, who were ready to do whatever the Elder [i.e., White] asked them to do.”¹⁰⁰

Though some might interpret this Laodicean trial as James White’s “machine politics,” it is important to note the context of Kellogg’s statement. First, at this time Kellogg was on trial for heresy and currently running his own political machine by attempting to wrest the Battle Creek Sanitarium from denominational control. Earlier in 1907, the Battle Creek church had asked Kellogg voluntarily leave the congregation and on November 10 he was disfellowshipped.¹⁰¹ Simply put, Kellogg was very antagonistic toward the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time, willing to discredit its historical and current fidelity.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ [James White], “Battle Creek,” *RH*, August 8, 1871, 60; cf. J. N. A. “Recent Meetings in Battle Creek,” *RH*, February 28, 1871.

⁹⁹ *History of Calhoun County, Michigan . . .* (Philadelphia, PA: L. H. Everts, 1877), 84.

¹⁰⁰ “Interview at Dr. J. H. Kellogg’s Home,” 6.

¹⁰¹ Brian C. Wilson, *John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 110; Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 271.

¹⁰² Kellogg’s comments in 1907 regarding this trial were brief and passing because the primary concern of that interview was the crisis he then faced. Even at this late date it seems that he remained somewhat baffled by the event. Though he stated that it was “was purely machine politics,” he also admitted that “[i]t was a funny job.” This latter comment seems to indicate that he found the entire affair somewhat odd or confusing (he did not find it humorous). Additionally, George W. Amadon’s responses to Kellogg in this interview are frustratingly concealed. Though he corrected Kellogg on some minor points regarding the event, he did not challenge Kellogg’s characterization of it as “machine politics.” Historians will therefore likely wrestle with Amadon’s silence: does this indicate that he agreed with Kellogg’s characterization or is it merely indicative of a lack of opportunity (or even desire) to defend the Whites or the Battle Creek church? Since Kellogg quickly diverted the

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Second, Kellogg's interpretation failed to capture White's missiological motivations. White did believe that it was best for certain individuals to move from Battle Creek and for other leaders, who possessed the leadership skills needed at headquarters, to move to the town.¹⁰³ At this time, he wanted the Adventist message to spread outside of the United States, beginning with Europe, and then to the ends of the earth.¹⁰⁴ Driven by an eschatological sense of urgency, White believed that if Adventists continued to centralize in Battle Creek, the work would suffer. He did attempt to control the situation in Battle Creek for missiological reasons, but Kellogg's interpretation of "machine politics" suggests that White simply wanted more power and prestige. Evidence to support Kellogg's claim is lacking, and to the contrary, when the General Conference gave White supreme authority over the church in 1873, White fought against it persistently until the policy was revoked.¹⁰⁵

Though Kellogg's perspective is misleading, James White was actively involved in the events that led to the Laodicean trial. White supported the unanimous decision to put the fate of the Battle Creek church in the hands of the General Conference, yet he did not expect the draconian outcome. Though White was partially responsible, it was Waggoner and Andrews that rendered harsh judgment; James White was uninvolved in the actual trial. Nevertheless, White preached numerous jeremiads during this period, and though they were balanced with the grace, he failed to relate this message to Waggoner and Andrews in such a way that would have prompted them to extend mercy in their judgments. White also failed to consistently practice what he preached. He had a strong personality and was a forceful leader and Adventists in Battle Creek oftentimes fell short of his unachievable expectations and were the victims of his mood swings.

conversation to a different subject either interpretation is possible.

¹⁰³ James White, "The New Building," *RH*, July 12, 1870, 32; [James White], "Mutual Obligation," *RH*, June 20, 1871, 4; [James White], "Western Tour," *RH*, June 27, 1871, 12; [James White], "Battle Creek," *RH*, August 8, 1871, 60; James White, "Statements and Suggestions," *RH*, July 23, 1872, 44-45; James White, "Denominational School," *RH*, August 6, 1872, 60-61; James White, "Permanency of the Cause," *RH*, July 8, 1873, 28; James White, "Organization," *RH*, August 5, 1873, 60; James White, "What We See in the Review," *RH*, November 5, 1873, 164-165.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. "European Mission," *RH*, July 12, 1870, 32.

¹⁰⁵ See Burton, "Centralized for Protection," 129-177.

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Similarly, Ellen White also failed to relate this message of grace to Waggoner and Andrews in the heat of the moment. On April 8, 1870, two days after the purge, yet one day before the Battle Creek church began to reorganize and reinstate its former members, Ellen White wrote a private letter to Waggoner, which began, “Dear Brother Waggoner, I have felt for two weeks that I had ought to write to you or talk with you. I will do so now if I can put upon paper that which have burdened my mind.” After prefacing her letter in this fashion, White then expressed her dissatisfaction with current events, the purge foremost in her mind: “You are sympathetic, and yet when you are upon the track of a person you believe to be in the wrong, you are in danger of being too severe and overbearing.”¹⁰⁶ Ellen White evidently observed a problem with Waggoner’s judgment at least two weeks before the trial began, but she did not raise her concerns in time to prevent the draconian outcome. Though she recognized a problem, she apparently delayed her confrontation because she was unable to foresee precisely how severe Waggoner could be in church trials. In this manner, both of the Whites struggled to relate their message of grace to the people; in their exchanges, something was lost in translation. As a result, Kellogg had some cause to cast blame in their direction, yet it does not appear that they operated a political machine, and other leaders were certainly culpable as well.

The leaders most obviously at fault were Waggoner and Andrews. According to Ellen White, the trial was handled poorly because grace was subverted to human works. She exhorted Waggoner and Andrews:

There is such a thing as overdoing the matter in doing strict duty to individuals. Duty, stern duty has a twin sister, which is kindness. If duty and kindness are blended, there will be decided advantage gained; but if duty is separated from kindness, and there is not mingled with duty tender love, there will be a failure, and much harm will be the result. Men and women cannot be driven. Many can be won by kindness and love.¹⁰⁷

She also explained, “The perfection of Christian character depends wholly upon the grace and strength found alone in God. Without the power of grace upon the heart, assisting our efforts, and sanctifying our labors, we

¹⁰⁶ Ellen G. White to J. H. Waggoner, April 8, 1870, LT 006, 1870.

¹⁰⁷ White, *Testimony to the Church*, [PH 159], 135.

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shall fail of saving our own souls, and in saving the souls of others.”¹⁰⁸ According to White, Waggoner and Andrews failed to maintain a balanced theology, which led to their severe judgments. Though they were not always imbalanced, they failed to show mercy and compassion at this crucial juncture. Others did contribute to the spirit that led to the trial, but Waggoner and Andrews were the only two responsible for its final outcome.

It should also be noted that Laodicean trials could be carried out with more equanimity if a proper balance were maintained. Though the defense of James and Ellen White was centered in Battle Creek, two other churches in Michigan were inclined to followed suit.¹⁰⁹ The cause for these Laodicean trials was similar to that in Battle Creek, yet a different minister was in charge and the church handled its own affairs. Beginning on May 3, 1870, W. H. Littlejohn led out (with H. M. Kenyon serving as clerk) in a Laodicean trial in Monterey, Michigan. Notably, this church was much smaller than the one in Battle Creek, yet with 96 members it was much larger than most other churches at the time. Between early May and the end of August, a total of twelve members were disfellowshipped.¹¹⁰ Whereas in Battle Creek about 96% of the congregation was cut off, only about 12% of the congregation in Monterey was disfellowshipped. Many factors contributed to this difference, particularly the length of the trial and the protocols that were taken. Whereas the larger trial in Battle Creek lasted only four consecutive days, the smaller trial in Monterey continued for seventeen days over a four-month period; whereas two men were given absolute authority over the congregation in Battle Creek, the church collectively voted on each individual case in Monterey. Though other differences existed, this comparison highlights an important point: Laodicean trials could be handled with a greater degree of justice.

Though only two men rendered the judgments in Battle Creek, the church also played an important role in determining its own fate. It was, after the all, the entire congregation that voted to turn the case over to the General Conference executive committee. Furthermore, this request was

¹⁰⁸ White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed., PH 123], 16.

¹⁰⁹ See also Seventh-day Adventist Church of Allegan, Michigan, “Record Book, 1861-1879,” 55-56, 59, VT 000213 1861-1879, CAR.

¹¹⁰ Seventh-day Adventist Church of Monterey, Michigan, “Record Book, 1860-1880,” 77-110.

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approved by the General Conference in session and ratified by the Michigan State Conference. As a result, the representative bodies of the Adventist Church were also culpable for the Laodicean trial to a significant degree. The events that led to this decision indicate that denominational representatives voted for the trial primarily because of their desire to defend Ellen White and her visions. It is evident that once Seventh-day Adventists recognized that the visions were not being taken seriously in 1869, they became determined to defend the authority of the visions no matter the cost. When unity was threatened, the representatives added to Ellen White's recommendation that certain people voluntarily leave Battle Creek the notion that the General Conference should carry this out with an injunction.

All Adventists present in Battle Creek between October 1869 and April 1870, from the common layperson to the General Conference president, were responsible for the Laodicean trial and its extreme outcome in one way or another. At its foundation, the Battle Creek purge of 1870 was motivated by the desire for missionary growth. People were centralizing in one place for convenience and Adventist leaders sought to correct this problem through guilt regulation. Grace and forgiveness, the balance to guilt and fear, were crowded out by a desire for perfection that was fueled with an eschatological sense of urgency. In the end, Adventists sought to control the mission of the church through means of coercion. Such measures, in turn, proved ineffective for missionary expansion, and denominational membership plummeted by sixteen percent in 1870–1871—the lowest period of “growth” in Seventh-day Adventist history.¹¹¹

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¹¹¹ Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 138-139.