

GEORGE KNIGHT'S CONSPIRACY THEORY

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For a number of years certain theologians have questioned the meandering theological line that George Knight has drawn on key issues. Today, those observations seem to have been right because since his retirement, George has strongly taken sides with the dissident voices within the church. The evidence is his attacks on the General Conference in *Spectrum*. This online magazine and its blogs are known for such things as giving support for evolution, women's ordination, LGBTQ+ and its personal attacks on the GC and its leadership.

George has characterized the president of the General Conference as a second Hitler, or as the pope himself. In addition, he attacks the church itself by suggesting that the GC was seeking to return to the methods of the Medieval Church of the Middle Ages or is using the tactics of the Nazi regime. In his conspiratorial vision, he now sees plans for introducing an FBI type of structure into our church.

When I was a boy I heard similar conspiracy theories regarding communism or capitalism. I recall my grandfather saying that foreign missionaries were agents of the CIA (something I could prove to be false after reading in the archives of the GC all the letters of the pioneers who went to Argentina. Nothing regarding the politics of governments can be found in those letters). After becoming a pastor I found several laymen seeing Jesuits throughout the church, whenever their ideas were contradicted by others or in the face of anything that displeased them. But now, we are seeing this in a doctor of theology! Could we not expect to have at this level at least a minimum of objectivity, free from such types of suspicion?

What is Knight's problem? In essence, it can be reduced to one point, his discomfort with any kind of organization that exercises its "right of association" through due process. One of the tenets of religious freedom is the freedom for religious organizations to maintain their unity, mission and values. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a right to expect its adherents, who choose of their own free will to be members, to comply with the teachings and policies of the church family. But, since the 2015 vote didn't go George's way, he sees Nazis, popes, and agents of the FBI in the measures that the General Conference takes. Measures, that I should add, that allow the Seventh-day Adventist Church to remain united according to what the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the body believes. Measures, that have been decided in several world congresses of the General Conference. Measures, voted on by more than two thousand duly elected delegates from all over the world. Now, he tries to arouse fears with his conspiracy theories, to counter the measures that the World Council in October 2018 plans to implement. He does not care that the outcome of loss of ability to supervise and maintain what God designed for His church will be anarchy and self-destruction.

Should we also accuse E. G. White of trying to introduce the tactics of the FBI into our church because she exhorts the leaders of the church to examine both professors and spiritual leaders of the church? Let us read this statement:

"The teachers in our schools are obliged to apply themselves closely to study, that they may be prepared to instruct others. These teachers are not accepted until they have passed a critical examination and their capabilities to teach have been tested by competent judges. No less caution should be used in the examination of ministers; those who are about to enter upon the sacred work of teaching Bible truth to the world should be carefully examined by faithful, experienced persons" (4 T 406). "Ministers should be examined especially to see if they have an intelligent understanding of the truth for this time" (4 T 407).

Why is so hard for our friend and other like-minded leaders to accept the clear testimony of E. G. White on the authority of the church and the control that needs to be exercised to prevent our church from losing her sense of mission? We will include several statements of E. G. White at the end, but notice here a well known statement from the Spirit of Prophecy.

"I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God

has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered. Your error was in persistently maintaining your private judgment of your duty against the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth” (3 T 492).

At the beginning of his document, George intermingles assumptions and accusations into what he calls principles. He considers these so important that he repeats them again at the end. To these accusations, assertions, assumptions and so called “principles”, I give the following answers.

Accusation. “Throughout history the only times churches have had to use force or threats of force to create unity is when they lacked a clear word from the Lord. Such is the unfortunate case in the Adventist Church in 2018.”

Answer. Did the apostle Paul lack a clear word from the Lord when he wrote to the Corinthians, “Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?” (1 Cor 4:18-21).

The apostle Paul foretold troubles for the future: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” (Acts 20:29-31).

“False teachers may appear to be very zealous for the work of God, and may expend means to bring their theories before the world and the church; but as they mingle error with truth, their message is one of deception, and will lead souls into false paths. *They are to be met and opposed*, not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth” (TM 55).

Did Dr. George Knight (a specialist in the history of the church), forget the command of God to E. G. White and to A.G. Daniells, the president of the GC during the Alpha crisis of our church: “Meet it!”? At that time, Kellogg controlled near the 70% of workers (*The Early Elmshaven Years*, 262), who were physicians, and expected to change the image of our church. Do we have to neglect that divine call today, leaving with God the task of stop rebellion?

“I am receiving light from the Lord that there should be *wise generalship at this time more than at any former period of our history*” (Letter 27a, 1892). “As we near the final crisis, instead of feeling that there is less need of order and harmony of action, we should be *more systematic than heretofore*. All our work should be conducted according to well-defined plans (MR 311 14.3).

Assertion. “Ellen White had it right historically when she wrote that ‘the very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church’” (GC 289-290).

Answer: Here we see once more in George Knight, his frequent extrapolation of history from one context to another one that has nothing to do with what he intends to represent. As a matter of fact, our friend doesn’t quote the whole statement of E. G. White here. Here is the complete statement.

“The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. **Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined**” (GC 289-290).

Our question is: In contrast to Rome, does the vote of the three sessions of the GC forbid what God in Scripture has forbidden? Yes. When the GC in session reflects Scripture and forbids what God has said no to, does it not represent the voice of God? Is the GC forbidding today what God has explicitly commanded or enjoined? Of course not! Where in the Bible, in the Spirit of Prophecy, and in the history of the church, has God indicated that women should be ordained to oversee the church?

Again, Does the church not have authority when God expresses Himself through the congress of the General Conference? Who now is representing the authority of God, the rebellious ones or the whole body of believers? Who is representing the “great apostasy” today? Is it the representative body of believers, or those who don’t want to comply with the free decision taken by the whole body of believers?

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight” (Isa 5:20-21). “They do not see but that it is right to believe good of all evil, and as the inevitable result they will finally believe evil of all good” (GC 571).

Accusation. “It is with sadness that I feel compelled to write yet another article on the current crisis in Adventism. As a church we need to not only admit the seriousness of the issues that the denomination is facing, but our leaders will need the courage of the prophets and apostles to face them firmly.”

Answer. We agree that “our leaders will need the courage of the prophets and apostles to face them firmly,” but to face those who are introducing that crisis by their rebellion. Let us be clear, this crisis is not being introduced by the General Conference, but by those such as George Knight, who want to oppose gospel order and common respect in the church (1 Cor 14:40). This rebellion must not be permitted to take the control of the church. The principle of interpreting the Bible through the culture of a modern and corrupt society is dangerous. Already, the influence of culture is leading some church and school leaders to modify their position on the LGBTQ+ agenda. Some western leadership is inviting successful non-Adventist speakers who promote homosexual care without reparative or conversion therapy, that is, without calls to conversion. In that way, our religious institutions will be no more a refuge for our students.

Assertion. “Unity and compliance are not the same thing. Compliance may be forced but genuine unity can never be forced.”

Answer. Right but wrong application! In the church, no one is forcing anyone. The church is a volunteer organization. No one has to join or remain. When you volunteer, you volunteer to comply. If you don’t want to comply any longer, you are free to leave. But the majority has a right to expect the minority to comply. But if the minority insists on not complying, the same body has a right to exclude them from membership. Church discipline is necessary, both for the growth and protection of the church. Without it, pluralism takes over and nothing really matters. Organization becomes meaningless. So sometimes, measures are needed to keep the flock safe from those who want to impose their will upon the church, producing chaos, insubordination, and disorder.

We should not let people to bring disunity and disharmony into the whole body of the church. Our friend brings into consideration good statements of James White to support his views concerning unity. But he forgets the occasions when James White and his wife had to intervene boldly to stop rebellion.

Assertion. “The only basis for Christian unity is the clear teaching of the Bible, mutual trust, and the love of God.”

Answer. We agree but that is not the whole picture. Trust and love are not indulgence. Both are built by complying and obeying God’s teachings in Scripture. They are also maintained by being submissive to due process. Giving legitimacy to rebellion in the name of love and trust is a cunning twist. Of course, the obligation of WO is not a “clear teaching of the Bible.” And concerning unity, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Am 3:3). Must the church accept the introduction of the great Babylon into it? Do we look for an “inclusive” church like the liberal Protestants? Or like that which pope Francis seems to want now, so that many evangelicals are following him, fascinated with him because they feel themselves included? Or, do we prefer to separate from the practices of the world to call God’s people who are still in Babylon, to come out from there?

Again, we agree that the clear teaching of the Bible is basic for Christian unity, unless some introduce different hermeneutics! This is the reason why a certain kind of supervision is necessary, so that

unbiblical elements are not introduced to lead the members away from the “teaching of the Bible”, which would destroy “that mutual trust and the love of God”. Jesus affirmed the way the church of Ephesus protected the believers, when He told them: “I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false” (Rev 2:2). But He reproached the church of Thyatira saying: “I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants...” (Rev 2:20).

Assertion. “A true Christian church is a voluntary society. People join it, and even work for it, because they desire to and feel called of God.”

Answer: Right! But if you feel that your presumable call of God is not the same call of God felt by the whole body of believers, be respectful or leave it! Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church “is a voluntary society” of believers who want not to be disturbed by those who want to introduce disunity by invoking different feelings and allegations of conscience.

Assertion. “Commitment to mission is very, very strong among those asserted to be noncompliant on WO.”

Answer. What mission? Can you have a common mission without common theology and hermeneutic? No! We agree that the WO rebellion seems to have a strong mission. It appears to be going to the world church to tell them: “we don’t believe what you believe.” Again, is it the mission of giving a bad example of disunity as to say, We don’t care about what you believe (voted by the three General Conference Congresses)? Wasn’t the 2017 WO rally in London a call to support discordant people that exists everywhere? Can we call this a “very, very strong mission” of getting the three angels’ messages to the world by those who rebel against what God has decided through His church, in agreement with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy?

Accusation. “He [Ted Wilson] failed to mention that a super majority (62 for and 32 opposed) of the TOSC committee and nearly all of the world division reports favored permitting divisions the option of ordaining women. One result has been ongoing turbulence in the denomination and the three-year search for the proper way to punish noncompliance.”

Answer. First of this is duplicitous. Elder Wilson never made a speech at the GC Session pro or con on WO. He only urged everyone to unity by abiding by the decision of the delegates. In addition, a summary of the three positions were read to the delegates before the vote. And, all the information and papers from TOSC were made available electronically to all the delegates.

George wants us to believe that there were only two positions in the TOSC committee. No! There were three positions, and the vast majority favored the biblical view of male ordination. Let me share with you the third proposition given to every delegate of the General Conference in San Antonio: “None of the three Positions on their own achieved even a majority of votes. But a super-majority of delegates, more than two-thirds, did agree on ... [this fact]: The world church should affirm the special role the Bible assigns to men as spiritual leaders, both as spiritual leaders of their homes..., and in the role of ordained minister in the church.”

That third position, however, opened the way for exceptional cases, and liberals like George Knight gathered that group to those who favored WO. But the third position emphasized again: “We affirm the biblical principle of male headship in the home, and the Scriptural pattern of male leadership in institutional spiritual leadership, including the office of the ordained elder/ministry” (1 Tim 2:12-14; 3:1-5; Titus 1:5-6). But then, in a contradictory way, said let everybody do their own thing.

So, the assertion that president Wilson failed to mention the truth to the delegates of the GC Congress about the percentage of votes in the TOSC committee is absolutely untrue. In addition, the purpose of the TOSC committee was not to resolve the problem because it was not a representative body of the church. It was to define the issues, which it did. The decision was to be made by the congress of the GC, not by a consultative committee.

My own testimony: I had serious problems of conscience as a pastor, when I had to ordain a lady as elder, at a time when I had not yet carefully studied the subject. As a matter of fact, I didn't know how to read aloud the words of the apostle Paul that are included in the ceremony of ordination: "Therefore an elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife..." (1 Tim 3:2). Should I change it to say, "the wife of one husband"? Far from it for me to change the words of the Scripture to accommodate them to my own opinions!

Accusation. "One only has to wonder how the denomination has managed to get along in relative unity without it for more than 150 years."

Answer: Is George Knight not wondering how in 150 years the denomination has managed to get along in relative unity without WO? Is he not wondering how in 150 years practically all leaders of the church accepted the vote taken by the congresses of the world church? Who is affecting a change? Is it the church or George Knight and some union presidents?

Accusation. George quotes the statement of E. G. White to give the impression that "many, very many matters have been taken up and carried by vote, that have involved far more than was anticipated and far more than those who voted would have been willing to assent to had they taken time to consider the question from all sides."

Answer: I don't know of any other issue that was given such a long period of time for consideration than the discussions on WO, and on which so much information was given to take a wise decision. How much time does he want the discussions to take?

Accusation. "The big effort the last three years has been largely to discipline those union presidents who have been noncompliant on the single issue of women's ordination. And some folks can get quite worked up on the topic." Our friend concludes: "we are looking at the signs of a failed presidency."

Answer. So, this dissension is all Elder Wilson's fault for doing his job. Just for the record, it is the president's job to carry out and defend the actions of a GC Session. That is what they elected him to do. I supposed that if he rebelled against the Session that elected him then he would be a successful president in your eyes. So, what is your solution? Is it to open the way for everyone in the church to take whatever course of action he desires, without caring for what the church decides? Chaos would be the result.

Instead of spending his time the last three years "looking at the signs of a failed presidency (like Korah, Dathan and Abiram did with Moses), why doesn't George Knight follow the following advice of the Spirit of Prophecy?

"In the place of turning the weapons of warfare within our own ranks, let them be turned against the enemies of God and the truth. [I paraphrase it with the words of George: in the place of "looking at the signs of a failed presidency" (which our friend wants to pull down, disregarding again the vote taken by the world church which chose Ted Wilson as president), let them be turned against the enemies of God and the truth]. Echo the prayer of Christ with your whole heart: 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are'" (MR 311 13.1).

Accusation. The plan of the GC is a potential danger for the organization of the church in the future.

Answer. We can spend a lot of time dealing with possible scenarios for our church in the future. As a matter of fact, we cannot know up to what point will the foretold Omega apostasy be able to reach within our church. But we know one thing. Measures are to be taken now, and quickly, or the consequences will be worse. The divisiveness being urged by George Knight will disintegrate the church, giving to the world a divisive, confusing, and contradictory message.

“Unbelief suggests that individual independence increases our importance, that it is weak to yield our own ideas of what is right and proper to the verdict of the church. But to yield to such feelings and views is unsafe, and will bring us to anarchy and confusion. Christ saw that unity and Christian fellowship were necessary to the cause of God, therefore He enjoined it upon His disciples. And the history of Christianity from that time until now proves conclusively that in union only is there strength. Let individual judgment submit to the authority of the church” (4 T 17-19).

We must stand for the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy as the foundation for every decision. And we believe that God will work to protect His church for that future eventuality. The following well known words were given to us that we should not fear what will happen to our church in the future.

“In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (LS 196).

Conclusion

It will be useful to take into account what happened in the Southern Baptist Convention, the biggest evangelical church in the USA. About a quarter century ago they were divided in three factions: one liberal, another conservative, and another one moderate. The discordant points were, in essence, five:

1. Nature of Bible inspiration (which affects its hermeneutic principles).
2. Women ordination.
3. Local church autonomy (trend to congregationalism).
4. Priesthood of all believers.
5. Freedom of the soul.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Baptist_Convention_conservative_resurgence]

What is the background of the problem in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, and in some places in Europe and Australia? It was well summarized by a theologian friend who reacted to what I have shared by saying: “Alberto, we are seeing the organized appearance of the non-biblical Post-Modernist Adventism, which is taking possession of the administration of several Divisions and Unions. It is not only WO or Homosexuality. It is a completely altered system of thought which operates not only outside biblical Adventism, but also outside of conservative biblical Protestantism. It is not simply a question of distinctive truths. What is at stake is the very essence of Christianity. The dissident administrations are turning back to Babylon. What is operating behind and underground is the evolutionism and pantheism of the Omega apostasy.”

Under those issues, the *Manual of the Church* and the *Working Policy* bother more and more, even the *Testimonies of Jesus* and the prophetic legacy of our pioneers, because they are considered obsolete and restraining for the new moment the post-modern world is living. However, without an operating system which was developed under the clear principles of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, it is impossible to keep ourselves united in the whole world.

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ But you said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jer 6:16).

Statements of E. G. White

Since George Knight concludes his messages with statements of E. G. White that he shifts to a different context, it will be useful to include some additional warnings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

“When any are drawing apart from the organized body of God’s commandment keeping people, they begin to weigh the church in their human scales and begin to pronounce judgment against them. Then you may know that God is not leading them. They are on the wrong track...” (MR 311 13.3).

“Many do not realize the sacredness of church relationship, and are loath to submit to restraint and discipline. Their course of action shows that they exalt their own judgment above that of the united church; and they are not careful to guard themselves, lest they encourage a spirit of opposition to its voice” (*MR 311 10.1*).

“Those who hold responsible positions in the church may have faults in common with other people, and may err in their decisions; but notwithstanding this, the church of Christ on earth has given to them an authority that cannot be lightly esteemed. Christ, after His resurrection, delegated power unto His church, saying, ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained’” (*MR 311 10.2*)

“The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds, who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these cannot be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The word of inspiration is not yea and nay, but yea and amen in Christ Jesus” (*3 T 428-429*).

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself, and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God had invested His church with special authority and power, which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for he who does this despises the voice of God” (*MR 311 11.1*).

“There has been altogether too much reliance placed upon independent, uninspired judgment. Self-sufficiency and self-esteem lie at the foundation of the greatest trials and discords that have ever existed among the people of God. The angel of God has said to me again and again, “Press together! Press together! Be of one mind, of one judgment, that God may be your leader. Follow His footsteps, and you will walk safely. The clean heart and the right spirit are the gifts of His Son, purchased with infinite cost” (*MR 311 8.1*)

“God is teaching, leading, and guiding His people, that they may teach, lead and guide others. There will be, among the remnant of these last days, as there were with ancient Israel, those who wish to move independently, who are not willing to submit to the teachings of the Spirit of God, and who will not listen to advice or counsel. Let such ever bear in mind that God has a church upon the earth, to which He has delegated power. Men will want to follow their own independent judgment, despising counsel and reproof; but just as surely as they do this, they will depart from the faith, and disaster and the ruin of souls will follow. Those who rally now to support and build up the truth of God, are ranging themselves on one side, standing united in heart, mind, and voice, in defense of the truth; while those who do not labor in harmony of purpose and action, who choose their own unsanctified human judgment as perfection of action, are ranging themselves on the side of Satan, and are defending his cause” (*MR 311 8.2*)

“Satan will become their leader, and they will join him in his constant endeavors to tear down that which God is building up. None of these discordant elements will be able eventually to thwart the purposes of God in the preparation of a people to stand in the great day, and in the final completion of the plan of salvation...” (*MR 311 9.1*).

“It is a delusion of the enemy for anyone to feel that he can disconnect from agencies which God has appointed, and work on an independent line of his own, in his own supposed wisdom, and yet be successful. Although he may flatter himself that he is doing God’s work, he will not prosper in the end. We are one body, and every member is to be united to the body, each person working in his respective capacity. Men must be like-minded with God,—pure, holy, sincere; not one is to be shut up to himself, to live for himself” (*Letter 104, 1894*).

“God is leading out a people to stand in perfect unity upon the platform of eternal truth. Christ gave Himself to the world, “that He might purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” This refining process is designed to purge the church from all unrighteousness and the spirit of discord and

contention, that they may build up instead of tearing down, and concentrate their energies on the great work before them. God designs that His people should all come into the unity of faith..." (MR 311 9.3).

"Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme, are in grave peril. It is Satan's studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth. To neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibilities of leadership in connection with the advancement of the truth, is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people. For any worker in the Lords' cause to pass these by, and to think that his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, is to place himself in a position where he is liable to be deceived by the enemy, and overthrown. The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian, and church to church. Thus the human instrumentality will be enabled to cooperate with the divine. Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God" (*Gospel Workers*, 443-444; MR 311 11.2).

"Well I knew the meaning of this representation. I had my orders. I had heard the words, like a voice from our Captain, "Meet it!" I knew what my duty was, and that there was not a moment to lose. The time for decided action had come. I must without delay obey the command, "Meet it! That night I was up at one o'clock, writing as fast as my hand could pass over the paper. For the next few days I worked early and late, preparing for our people the instruction given me regarding the errors that were coming in among us" (1 MS 206).

"Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people, and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential, and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings, and to refute claims not endorsed by the word of God! We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor. License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time" (MR 311 14.1)

"Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such things as every man's being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And in order that the Lord's work may advance, healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together" (May 30, 1909; *Testimonies for the Church* 9:257-258).