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The President's Page: The New Constitution and Bylaws of the Adventist Theological Society, and Other Issues

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ATS President

During its November 2003 meeting, the ATS Executive Committee voted that the editor of *JATS* should be a trained theologian. Unfortunately, finding trained theologians with the time to devote to *JATS* is difficult, but Dr. Randall W. Younker, Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, fills this criteria and has kindly agreed to serve as interim Executive Editor of *JATS*. Professor Younker has done graduate work in theology at Andrews University and in 1997 received his doctorate in Near Eastern Studies and Anthropology from the University of Arizona. We warmly welcome him to this new responsibility. Yet, this type of work is not new for him, because for many years he has been and still is the ATS Vice President for Publications.

Meanwhile, Ed Christian, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English and Biblical Literature at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, who has served faithfully for six years as the editor of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, will shift into new areas of responsibility. Dr. Christian has enthusiastically and tirelessly given to *JATS* his professional skills and has placed the journal back on a timely publication schedule. Ed, we really appreciate your tremendous and excellent editorial work and a million thanks for what you have accomplished, for your dedication, time, and expertise! We look forward to further cooperation with you.

In this issue of *JATS* we introduce an updated layout for our journal. The new ATS logo visually summarizes our mission. As a society we want to be centered in Jesus Christ, and our theology must always be cross-focused. We are also a society with an international scope, because the good news of the Gospel needs to be proclaimed to the whole world. Thus, we include in the logo the symbol of the world. In that symbol, the biblical texts expressed in Hebrew and

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Greek (Isa 66:2 and 2 Tim 3:16) point to our resolution to engage in a serious encounter with the Word of God and—in joyful apprehension of God’s revelation, with humility and trembling—our willingness to learn and be corrected. We need the constant help of the Holy Spirit, because we are totally dependent on God’s guidance in interpreting the Scriptures. My special thanks for the work of designing the new ATS logo and *JATS* layout goes to Larry Lichtenwalter (the prime initiator for this change), Randall Younker, and Brenda Mendez, a graphic designer, who together, with great effort, made sure that this project succeeded.

It is my privilege and great joy to announce that we, the Adventist Theological Society, have now a new Constitution and Bylaws which was, after a lengthy discussion and some editorial changes, accepted by unanimous vote on Saturday evening, November 22, 2003, at the ATS Annual Business Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. It means that from that date on this new ATS Constitution and Bylaws is in effect (published now in this current issue of the *Journal of Adventist Theological Society*).

This is a very important step forward for the Society. The updating has occurred after fifteen years of ATS existence—an excellent sign of an energetic organization. Two years ago at the ATS Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, November 23, 2001, it was voted to reformulate the Constitution and Bylaws, including the Mission Statement, Goals, and Membership Form of the Adventist Theological Society, in order to be sensitive to the current needs and contemporary situation. We felt that some changes were necessary because we wanted to express the truth better in a rapidly changing world in order to clearly state what we stand for. The ATS Executive Committee devoted many days to discussing the new ATS Constitution and Bylaws and unanimously recommended on April 20, 2003, that the new Constitution and Bylaws be accepted.

We desire to be an open Society, but still firm on principles; on one side confirming faith and on the other enhancing truth by being a positive voice in our Church and beyond. I am convinced that our mission statement, core values, and goals speak for themselves. The beginning of the 21st century is the right time to rethink, reshape, and reformulate our attitude and position in order to make our objectives and goals clearer and more transparent to others. We understand that to a certain degree, we are responsible for the image others perceive of us.

Our position is crystal clear—we stand for the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and the Rio de Janeiro “Methods of the Bible Study” document on hermeneutics (see Section 1 in Article III: Core Values). Our basic philosophy and approach in formulating the new Constitution and Bylaws can be summarized in the following way:

1. To be faithful to the original intent of the ATS Constitution and Bylaws;
2. To be clear in what we stand for;

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3. To have essential agreement on our core values without trying to express all details of what we believe; and
4. Not to go beyond the intention of the "27 Fundamental Beliefs" of our Church or the "Methods of Bible Study" document on biblical hermeneutics.

We can now move forward to be a society with better-formulated statements in order to serve others more efficiently with well-balanced biblical theology. Our deep desire is to live to the glory of God. Our mission is to be "a resource for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to foster biblical, theological, and historical studies supportive of the Church's message and mission" (see our Mission Statement). Study also for yourself our eight "Core Values" and eight specific "Goals" which speak unambiguously and distinctly to where we put emphasis and for what we really strive.

As ATS, in our theological orientation, we deliberately avoid liberal views on Creation, the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, ethics, diet, etc. At the same time we stand against the right-wing positions concerning legalism, perfectionism, or the literalistic interpretation of the Bible. As a society, we deny making issues such as the human nature of Christ or the ordination of women a test of orthodoxy. We thus refuse all kinds of destructive criticism, extremism, right or left theology, and rather aim for biblically centered, exegetically and theologically balanced views. We stand for the straightforward, intended meaning of Scripture. We as members of that society want to actively promote sound theology for the benefit of the church in close cooperation with the leadership of our church. Therefore, all changes are in line with the original spirit and intent of the mission and theological/hermeneutic convictions of the society. They are made with a great passion for God's truth. Our main task is to present to both the scholarly world and the general audience the value and beauty of Seventh-day Adventist biblical truth. Our goal is that our members will be active supporters and proclaimers of this mission of the ATS.

It is my conviction that theology can be done only within the church and for the church—otherwise it's only an intellectual enterprise. Christian and particularly Adventist theology cannot be done in a vacuum. In that sense theology and theologians are in the service of the church. At the same time, I want to stress that theology has to also be a critical voice within the church, because to serve well does not mean to conserve the status quo. Both elements are crucial and important. We need to advance in the understanding of God's truth, never to stop. After the Reformation, our forefathers proclaimed with the deep and true slogan: "Church reformed and always reforming by the Word of God." May God help us put into practice this crucial motto.

Let me stress also that in my view our Society should not be only a forum or a discussion club, where different views are presented, discussed, and it's finished! For me the ATS is a group of people devoted to a specific mission and

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activities, people who want to be a resource for the church. Deep convictions, concerns, and service draw us together.

We are not a “missionary” society in the sense that we need to get as many members as possible. We do not need to try to gain all our scholars and theologians, but let’s do our work thoroughly and in such a way that they can really see the value in what we are doing and be attracted to becoming part of the ATS. I am glad that we have many respected scholars as our members, as well as top leadership in our church. Praise the Lord for that!

We are open with membership because our members can be any educated Church member and not just trained theologians, even though we have now introduced two kinds of membership—“professional” and “associate.” This was done primarily in regard to those who are not Bible scholars or theologians but are profoundly interested in solid biblical and theological studies—thus they can be members without feeling ill at ease (see Article V, Sections 1 and 2). The stress is on membership and not on its kind; this is only a technical matter. From the very beginning, one of the characteristic features of our Society was to be open to all educated Church members, because of our strong conviction that theology is not owned by a few trained experts, does not belong only to them, and is not a matter which is in the hands of an elite group. We believe in the priesthood of all believers.

We need to embrace all by love! Our love or fellowship circle must be much larger than our theological circle (including not only Adventists, but other Christians and non-Christians). Right doctrine teaches us to love all, even our enemies. Love is the highest quality of life and extremely important, but love without truth ceases to be love! We need to remind ourselves that it is impossible to please everybody.

I pray that this newly formulated ATS Constitution and Bylaws will help us focus on the most essential: on uplifting Christ, proclaiming the three angels’ messages with urgency and deep convictions, living God’s truth, and serving others. May this new Constitution and Bylaws unite us even more and help us to avoid the temptation to give priority to peripheral issues not crucial to the Gospel ministry.

It is my deep conviction that we as a society can look with full confidence to the future because our Creator, Redeemer, Lord, and Master encourages us with following promises: “I am the Lord, your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you: ‘Do not fear, I will help you’” (Isa 41:13)! “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jer 33:3). May our gracious, loving, holy, and just God lead us and give full assurance of His Presence. May we serve Him and His Church faithfully with passion for His truth and with joy under the leadership of His Word and Spirit. Soli Deo Gloria!

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