

Report on Seventh Day Adventist-Presbyterian Church (USA) Conversations

On November 1, 2006, delegations from the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) met at SDA world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. This date marked the first time that representatives from these churches had gathered for an officially sponsored, bilateral conversation. The purpose of this conversation was to foster mutual understanding of the respective traditions, remove stereotypes, and to explore areas of possible cooperation. After an opening worship service, a member of each delegation presented a paper to the group: one outlining biblical and historical foundations of the SDA church, another presenting the analogous heritage of the PC(USA). Both papers attended to contemporary issues and challenges facing the respective churches and included ample time for questions and further substantive discussion. Members of the Presbyterian delegation were also given a tour of the headquarters building, including significant exposure to the work of the SDA Biblical Research Institute and the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department. The conversations were noted for their warmth, theological depth, and frankness. At the conclusion of the gathering, the delegations agreed to meet again during the summer of 2007, with select representatives from each church agreeing to present papers on Scripture and the use of the law.

From August 22-24, 2007, the delegations met again for further conversations at the national offices of the PC(USA) in Louisville, Kentucky. Each morning, again, began with worship. The slightly lengthier format of this meeting allowed for more papers to be presented. The sessions began with presentations relating to the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* in the writings of two “founding figures” of the respective churches, Ellen G. White for Adventists, and John Calvin for Presbyterians. Each paper also focused on the contemporary significance of each author as the church reads and is formed by Scripture in the life of faith. The papers displayed a significant correspondence in the degree to which each tradition upholds the Bible as the foundational and primary rule to faith and practice. Another set of papers grappled with respective understandings of law in relation to the gospel, and as a guide to living in light of God’s grace given in Jesus Christ. Both traditions seek to uphold the law not only in terms of its negative function (convicting us of sin), but also in terms of its positive function (as a guide to Christian living). Conversations again were marked by collegiality and warmth, even when differences between our understandings of *sola Scriptura* and law emerged. The SDA representatives also received a tour of the PC(USA) offices, including attention to some of the theological considerations involved in the design of the building itself. At the conclusion of the meeting, the delegations agreed to approach their respective governing bodies, in the hopes of continuing these productive conversations.

Delegations

SDA
John Graz
Bert Beach
William Johnson

PC(USA)
Carlos Malavé
Eunice McGarrahan
David Jensen

Ángel Rodríguez
Kwabena Donkor
Ekkehart Mueller
Hal Thomsen
Merlin Burt

Aurelio García
Sheldon Sorge