Robert Sloan Donnell
From Righteousness by Faith to Sinless Perfection

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Abstract
Robert Sloan Donnell (1846–1937) was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, evangelist and administrator. Donnell was president of the Indiana Conference at the time of the perfectionistic revival (also known as the “holi flesh” movement) which blossomed in that state in 1900. Donnell’s career in the denomination highlights a transformational period in Adventism marked by shifting views on the human nature of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the end of the world, as witnessed in the works of A.T. Jones, A.F. Ballenger, E.J. Waggoner, W.W. Prescott and Ellen G. White. Donnell’s struggle with perfectionism – especially in matters of health – is emblematic not only of the theological currents at work in the denomination at the time, but also of the way many today continue to conflate a particular view of consummated soteriology (sinless perfection) with Adventism’s accelerated eschatology (the imminence of the end) in the form of Last Generation Theology.

1. Introduction
Robert Sloan Donnell (1846–1937) was an early Seventh-day Adventist pastor, evangelist and church administrator, active between 1881–1907. A frequent

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1 Many thanks are due Terrie Aamodt, Gilbert Valentine, Michael Campbell and Jonathan Buttler for reading a draft of this paper and offering helpful suggestions.

Abbreviations: CAR: Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI; EGWE: Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD; GCB: General Conference Bulletin; LB: Willie C. White Letter Book; RH: Review and Herald; SDA
presence in church publications and General Conference (GC) meetings of the period, Donnell served as president of the Missouri, Upper Columbia and Indiana Conferences from 1889 through 1901. A neglected and often misunderstood character in denominational history, Donnell became *persona non grata* in 1901 due to his involvement with what would later be pejoratively termed “the holy flesh movement” in Indiana (1898–1901).

Details of his otherwise obscure life have been illuminated by documents and personal correspondence unveiled in the William H. Grotheer Collection housed at the Center for Adventist Research (Andrews University) and deserve proper treatment. When used in conjunction with the digitized Adventist archives at the SDA headquarters and Ellen G. White Estate, as well as other primary sources, the collection sheds a nuanced, corrective light on his career as well as on the Adventism of his time.

As the first piece dedicated exclusively to Robert S. Donnell, a broad view of his life is offered in which important biographical data is interspersed with discussions of his theological positions and the wider denominational context in order to shed a light on the epochal events of which he was part, especially the “holy flesh movement” and how different iterations of “holy flesh” continue to subsist in the denomination.

2. **Early Life**

Robert Sloan was born in Belfast, Ireland, on February 7, 1846.² His family immigrated to the United States during Ireland’s Great Famine (1845–1855) and settled in the St. Louis, Missouri area. The young couple survived the harrowing voyage in a famine “coffin ship” only to die in a cholera pandemic

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² R. S. Donnell employment files, SDA Archives.
soon thereafter. Baby Robert was placed in an orphanage and adopted by Capt. John Denny Donnell, a veteran of the Civil War, and his wife Anne. The family traded cattle in Bond County, Illinois.\(^3\) The Donnells were part of a long line of Presbyterians hailing from North Carolina, and at the time of Robert’s adoption, John Denny was an elder of the Greenville, Illinois, Presbyterian church (Norton 1879, 104).

Robert married Nannie F. Woods (1852–1919) on December 27, 1868, and the couple adopted a girl, Nellie (1880–1924).\(^4\)

3. **Joining Adventism and the Ministry**

Donnell, his wife and mother-in-law became Adventists in 1875 during an evangelistic campaign led by George I. Butler in Missouri.\(^5\) Donnell became elder of the newly-formed Rolla, Missouri, SDA church in June 1876.\(^6\) Recognizing his potential, the Missouri Conference granted Donnell a ministerial license in 1881.

In November 1884, Donnell debated the Sabbath and soul sleep with renowned Baptist B.T. Taylor, and as a result, a company of ten members was organized in Aullville, Missouri.\(^7\) In that campaign he reported a six-month absence from home, his wife accompanying him as a singer.\(^8\) A successful

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\(^4\) RH, July 8, 1902, 27; Letter, Viola Hopper to William H. Grotheer, 1965, box 5, folder 23, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR.


\(^6\) “M. O. T. & M. Society.” RH, March 9, 1876, 79; RH, June 8, 1876, 182.

\(^7\) Allen, Nelson V. “Missouri.” RH, Nov. 6, 1883, 11; Donnell, Robert S. “Missouri.” RH, Nov. 27, 1883, 13.

evangelist, Donnell would bring between 75 and 125 new converts a year during this time, and as a charismatic leader, he once reported from Missouri: “I left all in harmony, and earnestly desiring to walk in all the light of the message.”

4. **Administrative and Theological Development**

The year 1888 would be momentous for Donnell. He accepted the “righteousness by faith” message delivered by Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner in the General Conference session in Minneapolis in October and would later consider Jones a mentor. At that meeting, Donnell was elected to oversee the work in Tennessee and Kentucky, but he declined due to health issues.

In August, 1889, Donnell was elected president of the Missouri Conference and vice-president of the Missouri Tract Society. Shortly thereafter, he was sent by the GC to Tennessee in order to secure legal counsel for several members who had been incarcerated in the wake of Sunday laws. Reporting on the events for the *Review*, Donnell wrote: “the storm cloud is rising.” At the GC session in the spring of 1891, Donnell became part of the GC Executive Board and other committees.

In early 1892, problems with the construction of Walla Walla College led to the removal of the president of the Upper Columbia Conference (which then covered Washington, Oregon, Montana and Idaho) and Donnell was appointed to the post. He took an active part in the dedication Walla Walla College in December, offering the dedicatory prayer and writing a report for

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11 *RH*, Nov. 6, 1888, 10; *RH*, Nov. 13, 1888, 9.
15 *GCB*, March 19, 1891, 163.
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the Review. Donnell would develop a close relationship with the school and built his house next to the college. He often held meetings at the school; at one campaign, twenty-four students were baptized. Concomitant with his duties as Conference president, Donnell was also elected president of the Walla Walla College Board, tasked with overseeing the college’s construction.

The time in the northwest was also formative for Donnell’s theology as he sought to strengthen the connection between righteousness by faith and Adventist eschatology being disseminated by Jones, Albion F. Ballenger and Ellen White. “The loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer,” Ellen White wrote in 1892. Donnell felt that the church was now ready for the “latter rain,” the end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit to prepare the church to meet her Lord.

Jones’ presence as main speaker at the Upper Columbia camp meetings of 1894 and 1896 must have provided an opportunity for him and Donnell to confabulate on all matters theological, bringing him in closer alignment with Jones’ views on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, “translation faith” and “physical righteousness,” although he disagreed with Jones’ views on the sinfulness of Jesus’ human nature. (Donnell had never been convinced to abandon his pre-lapsarian views on the human nature of Christ, which “began when I was a boy,” in Presbyterian church.) Donnell embraced Jones’ “Laodicean” emphasis and delivered it at the Anaconda, Montana, camp meeting, with an exhortation “to greater faithfulness by a full consecration to God.” Jones’ charismatic propensities must also have rubbed off on Donnell.

17 RH, Jan. 10, 1893, 29.
18 The Bible Echo, May 7, 1894, 142.
20 Letter, R.S. Donnell to Ole A. Olsen, June 1896, SDA Archives.
22 The Anaconda Standard, Sep. 5, 1897, 7.
23 Breed, A.J. “The Upper Columbia Camp-Meeting.” RH, July 3, 1894, 9; ibid. RH, July 28, 1896, 13; General Conference Committee Minutes, 1896, 167; 1894, 192, SDA Archives; GCB, Feb. 27, 1895, 368.
In early April, 1898, Donnell was informed by L. A. Hoopes, GC Secretary, that his services would be needed as president of the Indiana Conference. Initially apprehensive about the move due to his wife’s health, after a few days later, he wired Hoopes: “You may count me for Indiana.”

Donnell’s years in the Northwest had been pleasant and fruitful. As the family returned to “the more densely populated districts, and murky atmosphere, of the East,” they would “long for the pure air, mountain scenery, and freedom of the West,” Donnell wrote in his farewell. During his tenure at the Upper Columbia Conference (March 1892–June 1898), church membership more than doubled (600 to 1,500), no financial obligations were left outstanding, and the treasury had a surplus of fifteen hundred dollars. Donnell also made sure that Walla Walla College received $5,000 in pledges from the Conference before departing.

The move to Indiana brought Donnell back to his old mid-western stomping grounds, but would prove to be the unravelling of his career in the SDA church.

5. A.T. Jones and A.F. Ballenger: Developing Adventist Perfectionism
It will be helpful at this point to explore the wider religious and societal context of this period which made significant inroads in Adventism.

Millerism came onto the American religious landscape late into the Second Great Awakening (1795–1835), riding the last wave of its millenialist revivalism and its heightened interest in sanctification (see Mcloughlin 1974). In the wider American Protestant context, famous preacher Charles Finney disseminated the perfectionism of John Wesley. “The perfect control of this preference over all the moral movements of the mind,” Finney admonished his congregation in the 1830s, “brings a man back to where Adam was previous to the fall and constitutes perfect holiness” (Finney 1834, 12). Thus, the Adventism of the 1890s still reflected the way in which “Miller, scaled the heights of ‘holiness’ in pietistic preparation for the second advent,” resulting in an

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26 RH, Jun 21, 1898, 12.
“individualistic perfectionism,” centered on “the millennial desire to eradicate all evil in the preparation of the world’s end,” observes Jonathan Butler (Butler 1986, 53.54).

The American Holiness Movement, founded in a camp meeting in Vinedale, New Jersey in 1867, gave rise to the Third Great Awakening (1875–1915), spurred on by the Social Gospel and Progressive movements. In its soteriology, the American Holiness Movement was an outgrowth of Wesleyan perfectionism which advocated the complete eradication of the sinful nature at conversion.

Building on European pietism, in the 1880s eradicationists had taken an interest in healing, as seen in A.J. Gordon’s *Ministry of Healing* (1882) and R. Kelso Carter’s *The Atonement for Sin and Sickness, or, A Full Salvation for Soul and Body* (1884), who argued that “ample provision was made upon Calvary for the actual and practical destruction of the works of the devil—sin and sickness” (Carter 1884, 2). This interest in health coalesced around the Divine Healing Movement, championed by Ethan O. Allen and Charles Cullis (1833–1892; see Chappell 1983, 5–26), which, in turn, built on German and Swiss pietism, as seen in the works of Albrecht Bengel (1682–1752), Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880), and Dorothea Trudel (1813–1862). Bengel in particular had a significant influence on John Wesley, who used to describe justification and sanctification as “the ‘double cure’” (Dayton 1987, 119).

During the 1890s Jones and Waggoner – who had introduced the denomination to righteousness by faith in 1888 – had imbibed in American Holiness and veered off into physical healing and bodily perfection as necessary for translation. Jones had been comparing these views with England’s Keswick movement (pronounced “Kezick”), which stressed the suppression of sinfulness at conversion. During the 1893 GC session, Jones endorsed the holiness views of Hannah Whitall Smith’s *Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* as well as the Methodist magazine *The King’s Messenger*, both of which figured prominently in the *Review* during his tenure as editor (cf. Knight 2011, 192).

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27 This third iteration of the Great Awakenings in America meant to address the following question, according to Mcloughlin: “How can Christian people reconcile Scripture and modern science in such a way as to deal adequately with the Industrial Revolution?” (Mcloughlin 1974, 135).

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Although Jones had defended forensic atonement in 1888, even claiming at one point that works had no part to play in salvation, by 1897 he was advocating the notion that the expungement of the sinner’s record was only available for the “new-born believer”; afterwards, the believer had to develop imparted righteousness through the inward presence of the Holy Spirit for the “perfecting of the saints … that, instead of sin, the life may forever bear the fruits of righteousness.”

Jones’ two stages of salvation were in synchrony with Keswick’s “second blessing,” i.e., that at conversion, the indwelling Holy Spirit triggers a process of suppression of the believer’s sinful nature (cf. Dayton 1987, 105–107; Bebbington 1989, 171–173; Knight 2011, 192–196). This imparted righteousness, Jones argued, had a direct connection with health: “Perfect holiness embraces the flesh as well as the spirit; it includes the body as well as the soul. Therefore, as perfect holiness can not be attained without holiness of body, and as holiness of body is expressed in the word ‘health,’ so perfect holiness can not be attained without health.” Waggoner developed similar views, stating in 1889: “All the power which Christ had dwelling in Him by nature, we may have dwelling in us by grace, for He freely bestows it upon us,” which could manifest itself in “faith healing.”

As a Millerite convert from Methodism, Ellen White still held to Wesleyan views of Christian perfection and its heavy eradicationist emphasis, as several of her published statements demonstrate. In 1882, she had warned: “Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement.” In 1894–1895, she argued that Christ had come to show that believers can become “the manifestation of His divine perfection,” and that “[e]ach must obtain a character purified from every stain of sin.” Five years later, she contended that “through belief in him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin,

32 Testimony for the Church 31, 210, quoted by Donnell 1907, 25.
33 Manuscript 95, 1894; “Special Testimony.” Sep. 1, 1895, EGWE.
all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity.”  

In September of 1900, she echoed Ballenger’s camp meeting views on sinless perfection: “To be redeemed means to cease from sin,” and as late as March 1903, she continue to contend that “[n]o part of the diseased life of sin is to remain.”

As Jones studied these statements by Ellen White, with an ear to holiness authors, he wove a uniquely Adventist cord of three strands made up of the Holiness Movement’s atonement of the body, Ellen White’s teachings on perfection and health, and Adventist eschatology. Thus, he would claim in 1893 that “health reform was given to the people of God … to fit the people for translation.”

The influence of the American Holiness Movement on Adventism was not limited to Christian perfection; Ellen White’s views on health reform too reflected a general movement in American society – both religious and secular – towards health and healing, as explored by Ronald Numbers in his seminal book *Prophetess of Health* (Numbers 2008, 127–155; cf. also Blake 1974, 30–50). This interest was due an epidemic of dyspepsia in the United States due to poor dietary habits, as well as society’s curiosity for alternative medical treatments, such as the “water cure” developed by Vincent Priessnitz of Gräfenberg, (Austrian Silesia), which had been growing in acceptance America since the 1840s.

Moreover, the Holiness Movement also played a part in the denomination’s acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity. For most of its initial decades, Adventists did not accept the personhood of the Holy Spirit. In 1877, Joseph H. Waggoner described it as “that awful and mysterious power which proceeds from the throne of the universe” (J. H. Waggoner 1877, 9). In 1891, Ellen White had warned: “The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery not clearly revealed,” and added that, on this matter, “silence is golden.”

During the 1890s, however, Ellen White’s understanding of the personhood of the Holy Spirit would undergo a shift, helped by her connection with Herbert C. Lacey, Willie White’s brother-in-law. Lacey’s family had left the Anglican church in Tasmania to join the Adventist church in 1887, and, like

34 “Christian Perfection.” *RH*, April 24, 1897, 1, quoted by Donnell 1907, 12.
36 *Signs of the Times*, March 11, 1903.
37 GCB, 1893, 88.
38 Letter, Ellen White to Bro. Chapman, June 11, 1891 (Letter 7, 1891), EGWE.
others “brought their orthodox Christian beliefs with them into Adventism,” including Trinitarian beliefs, writes Valentine (Valentine 2017, 225 and 231 with fn. 68; ibid. 2014, 444–445). Lacey’s decisive encounter with the Holy Spirit happened under the influence of Holiness preachers at a convention in Detroit in March 1894, while he was attending Battle Creek College. Lacey had the occasion to study the works of holiness authors such as Gordon, Pierson and Andrew Murray on the long trip to Australia in September 1895 and was soon enlisted by Marian Davis who was putting together The Desire of Ages. Lacey’s holiness connections played a part in the book’s defense of the deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit (see Valentine 2017, 221; Burt 2012, 18).

Back in America, the newfound Christian doctrine of the personhood of the Holy Spirit made a significant impact on Adventism, and by the Summer of 1897, Jones and Ballenger teamed up to launch the “Receive Ye the Holy Ghost” revival, a crusade that emphasized sanctification and physical healing by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As Ballenger preached it in camp meetings across North America, Jones would drive it home through the pages of the Review.39

For a time, Ballenger was the denomination’s foremost revivalist; in early 1898, he reported 240 baptisms in Battle Creek alone. That productive winter was followed by a busy summer of camp meeting engagements where his revival was accompanied by cases of healing. “The time has now come,” he later concluded, “for healing power to be manifested among the remnant people of God.”40 Ballenger was elated that at the 1898 Logansport camp meeting “between thirty and forty people from the city arose for prayer. … Cleanse the Seventh-day Adventist Church of all uncleanness, and I will promise the loudest cry of the loud cry the same day.”41 The loud cry had sounded triggering “the sealing-time, the time of the latter rain. Stop sinning. ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’”42 Writing to Ellen White in October of 1898, GC president

39 Logansport Pharos, Sep. 6, 1898, 21.
41 Ballenger, A. F. “Camp-Meeting Notes.” RH, Nov. 8, 1898, 12.
George A. Irwin rejoiced that the 1898 camp meetings had experienced “an unusual degree of the Spirit and blessing of the Lord.”

Ellen White cheered the renewed interest in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit towards sanctification. “The Laodicean message,” she would write in late summer 1900, “must be proclaimed with power; for now it is especially applicable.”

Self-proclaimed Laodicea was beginning to shake off its slumber, but it would soon experience a rude awakening.

6. Indiana’s “Laodicean” Condition

If the charismatic revival sweeping the denomination in North America at the turn of the century did not rise in a vacuum, but reflected dynamics at work in the larger American religious landscape, neither did the perfectionism about to erupt in Indiana rise ex nihilo within Adventism, but merely echoed contemporary denominational currents.

It was at the height of the church’s revival that Donnell arrived in Indiana, in time for the camp meeting at Spencer Park in Logansport (Sep. 1–11, 1898). Before Ballenger’s arrival as guest speaker, Donnell preached on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a sermon titled “The Future Home: or Where Will God’s People Spend Eternity.” Donnell’s gifts as a speaker did not go unnoticed by local reporters who described him as “a man of pleasing address and well-liked by the entire population of the camp,” and “a forcible speaker... a gentleman of pleasing personality.”

Ballenger – who had just been at the Arkansas, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois camp meetings – arrived on Sep. 5, 1898 and preached his famous “Receive Ye the Holy Ghost” sermon that same evening and at least two more times later in the week. Ballenger had preached it the previous year in Logansport and his return added fuel to Indiana’s revival.

43 G. A. Irwin to Ellen G. White, Oct. 3, 1898, EGWE.
46 Logansport Pharos, Sep. 5, 1898, 5.
48 “Camp-Meetings for 1898.” RH, July 12, 1898, 14; Logansport Pharos, Sep. 6, 1898, 21; Logansport Daily Reporter, Sep. 8, 1898, 5.
49 Logansport Pharos, Sep. 6, 1898, 21.
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Donnell was no doubt happy to see Ballenger again in Indiana. Just a few weeks earlier, Ballenger had preached on the Holy Spirit at the Upper Columbia Conference camp meeting in College Place (May 2–12), where Donnell had announced his departure to Indiana. Almond J. Breed reported that Ballenger’s revival in College Place ushered in “one of the most touching spiritual efforts met with in the history of some of the oldest brethren in attendance.”

“Experiences mentioned in ‘Early Writings’... were actually seen,” wrote Breed, referring to Ellen White’s call for “primitive faith and practice” as prelude for the “latter rain.” Particularly impressive had been the Salem, Oregon, camp meeting (May 19–29), where “for over an hour the shouts of victory went up in rapid succession from those who had been delivered from the bondage of sin,” and thirty people were healed, Ballenger reported in the Review. All North Pacific Conference officials had jumped on Ballenger’s holiness train.

At this juncture, the denomination was still absorbing the shockwaves of the righteousness by faith message delivered in 1888, and law-keeping still made Adventism “dry as the hills of Gilboa,” noted Ellen White. Donnell found a similar state of apathy in Indiana, where Sabbath-keeping was the sole concern. The Conference’s finances were in disarray and Donnell—who had sold his home in Washington at a loss of $700.00, not an insignificant sum—paid workers out of his own pocket and loaned money to the Conference.

For some time, Ballenger had decried “the lack of power among us” and longed that “apostolic power in preaching and healing shall be restored to the remnant people.” The problem, he thought, was “the sinning of the people of God” which had “long deferred the ‘latter rain’, but ... a remnant within the

51 Ibid. “The North Pacific Camp-Meeting.” RH, June 28, 1898, 10; Early Writings, 134.
52 Ballenger, A.F. “Notes from the Salem, Ore., Camp-Meeting.” RH, July 12, 1898, 12.
53 RH, Jun 21, 1898, 16.
54 Manuscript 10, 1890, EGWE.
55 Letter, Joseph M. Davis to William H. Grotheer, Feb. 20, 1959; Jan. 21, 1965, box 5, folder 23, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR. A church member offered to break up his land into parcels and hand them for free to anyone who agreed to keep the Sabbath. One man took him up the offer only to change his mind about the Sabbath once he had the deed.
56 Letter, R.S. Donnell to Willie C. White, April 24, 1902, EGWE.
church are gaining the victory over ‘every besetting sin’ – not for a few days or weeks, but forever. There is no excuse for sinning.”

The mixture of Ballenger’s perfectionism and Jones’ “gospel of health” proved to be an irresistible recipe to Donnell. An avid believer in the Testimonies – who had joined the SDA church precisely because it had a “prophet” – Donnell had embraced health reform since joining the church in 1875, and believed it was connected to sanctification, a belief that often led to excesses in diet and recurring health issues. “In Elnora,” Indiana (1901–1904), a friend wrote, “we felt he was extreme on the subject of health reform because he tried to live and work without eating meat, milk, butter, cheese or eggs and was soon looking thin, weak and old.” At the time of his retirement in 1907, Donnell looked “haggard and weak,” G. I. Butler wrote to Willie White.

The Indiana leadership thought Ballenger’s revival meant “death to the formality that has long reigned among us.” In late summer 1898, Davis reported to the Review: “We have reached the time of the message, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost’ and we are actually having pentecostal [sic] times and apostolic experiences.” In his invitation to speak at the Alexandria camp meeting in 1899, Donnell wrote to Ballenger: “I am quite anxious for you to be with us, and I hope that if it can be arranged, you will say nothing that would militate against your coming.” When the GC could not send Ballenger, Donnell asked for Jones, but that request too was turned down.

There were also signs that all was not well with Indiana’s revival. Reporting about the Alexandria camp meeting in the Review, A.J. Breed mentioned “some features of the meeting that I was sorry to see, but before it closed, a victory was gained and these were overcome.” Other such negative reports

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58 GCB, Feb. 22, 1899, 50.
59 Letter, Viola Hopper to Jesse Dunn, Feb. 9, 1959, box 5, folder 23, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR.
60 April 11, 1907, EGWE.
63 Letter, R. S. Donnell to A. F. Ballenger, June 27.
64 Letter, R. S. Donnell to L. A. Hoopes, June 26; July 6, 17, 1899.
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from Indiana must have reached Battle Creek in 1899–1900, and at the Spring council of the GC Committee, a motion was made to transfer Donnell to Utah as superintendent (the reason given was his wife’s health), but Donnell saw “no light in the move” and the motion was rescinded.66

In preparation for the 1900 camp meetings, the Indiana leadership called for a two-week workers’ meeting in May in Indianapolis in order to “receive the Holy Ghost.”67 At the meeting, however, a public disagreement arose between Donnell and the more ardent revivalists, and the meetings soon came to a close.68 Writing about the meetings to Ellen White in June 1900, Indiana pastor O.S. Hadley and his wife, both of whom opposed the perfectionistic revival, reported that “new light” on the human nature of Christ as sinless as that of the pre-fall Adam (pre-lapsarian), and perfectionism were being preached with zeal in the state.69 Up to this point, the Adventist view of the human nature of Christ had been consistently post-lapsarian, i.e., fallen.

In the meantime, opposition to the holiness push in Indiana increased, despite a large influx of new converts under Donnell’s leadership.70 Seasoned members were uncomfortable with the “new light” on the human nature of Christ, an unbalanced view of sanctification and the quasi-Pentecostal style of worship.71 Isolated reports of physical demonstrations in worship circulated, including accounts of a “garden of Gethsemane experience” in which a fainting during worship indicated that the individual in question had received the “Holy Spirit.”72 (This phenomenon was a resurgence of the early Adventist practice of being “slain in the Spirit”, i.e., fainting in worship. Ellen White appears to have experienced this during a meeting in Maine in 1845 in which she would lie on the floor, rise, speak and lie down again for most of the meeting. She would later frown upon such expressions.) Some began calling the

66 General Conference Committee Minutes, 1900, 105.
67 “Plans of the Adventists.” Indianapolis Journal, May 16, 1900, 8; May 19, 1900, 3; May 20, 1900, 8; May 21, 1900, 12; Indianapolis News, May 17, 1900, 10.
69 Letter, O.S. Hadley to Ellen White; Ida V. Hadley to Ellen White, June 1, 1900, EGWE.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
revival “the holy flesh movement,” although none of the Indiana ministers used the terminology.

Grant A. Roberts, a young man at the time who later became Conference and Division president, knew Donnell as “a man of earnestness and positiveness [sic]” and sought him in private. After listening to Roberts, Donnell assured him that he would not have anyone “going over this Conference preaching any such doctrine.” But Donnell would not be able to contain the faux “latter rain” that was about to fall in Indiana under his watch.

The increase in new converts must have been a sign to Donnell and his team that their revival was working, despite the occasional excesses. In response to the prophetess’s calls in February 1900, instead of one state-wide camp meeting as in previous years, Donnell planned three that year, ten days each: in Sullivan, Lafayette and Muncie. In Lafayette, chartered electric street cars were decorated with banners and staffed with musicians to promote the camp meeting. Special guest Prof. Salisbury from Battle Creek spoke on Christian education and Indiana pastor J.M. Ellis preached on “Christian Temperance,” stating: “Christ took up the work of salvation at the place where Adam failed; that he carried the work out successfully, and now all who trust him can overcome every evil propensity.” During emotional altar calls in Lafayette, “people would get so enthused … that some would collapse at the altar,” an observer later recalled. Prof. Salisbury was “disgusted” with what he saw, wrote a conference worker.

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74 Roberts, G.A. “The Holy Flesh Fanaticism.” D. F. 190, June 11, 1923, EGWE. G.A. Roberts’s statement – written almost 25 years after the fact – contains some inaccuracies, thus, only the most plausible lines of evidence from his statement are quoted here.


79 Statement, Jesse Dunn to William H. Grotheer, n.d., box 5, folder 36, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR.
The camp meeting in Muncie (Sep. 13–22) was attended by GC officers A.J. Breed, Stephen Haskell and wife, and briefly by GC president George A. Irwin. On the first Sabbath Donnell preached “The Cleansing Message.” The service closed with a protracted altar call and an emotional testimony by a certain brother Hill about a “prophetic” dream he had recently about the worldwide reach of the Adventist message.

Tensions between Indiana and GC officials escalated. Haskell had been hearing similar “cleansing” messages around Battle Creek since he arrived from an overseas stay in 1899. “Some of the strangest doctrines I have heard,” he wrote to Ellen White in 1899, “is the Seal of God cannot be placed on any person of Grey Hairs [sic], or any deformed person, for in the closing work we would reach a state of perfection, both physically and spiritual, where we would be healed from all physical deformity and then could not die.” W.W. Prescott and E.J. Waggoner were the source of “physical righteousness,” namely, that “if a man eats right, he will never die … he eats his way into heaven.”

Haskell also thought that Ballenger’s charismatic revivals in the North Pacific in early 1900 would create a shallow experience by focusing on physical healing. What Haskell saw in Indiana was another iteration of these problematic views on health and salvation competing for the church’s attention at the turn of the century. The denomination’s own brand of the “gospel of health” streaming out of Battle Creek, and not entirely without Ellen White’s support, would soon bifurcate into at least two theological currents in the denomination: Kellogg’s pantheism and Indiana’s perfectionism (see Valentine 2005, 166–172).

During Donnell’s emotional altar call on the first Sabbath in Muncie, Haskell showed his disapproval by going back to his own tent, followed by many who opposed the revival. There was “strong opposition to his [Donnell’s] re-election by the delegates from some of the other churches,” reported

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81 “Adventists on Sabbath Day.” *Muncie Daily Herald*, Sep. 15, 1900, 5; Hattie Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 22, 1900, EGWE.
82 Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, Oct. 3, 1899, EGWE.
83 Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, Nov. 23, 1899; *ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1900, EGWE.
84 Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, May 28, 1900, EGWE.
85 “Adventists on Sabbath Day.” *The Muncie Morning Star*, Sep. 16, 1900, 4; Hattie Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 22, 1900, EGWE.
Scattered groups could be seen arguing throughout the camp, and exertion during worship would cause some to tremble as they rushed to the cafeteria. Reports of physical healings were also circulating.

In the afternoon, pastor F.M. Roberts preached on the 144,000 and took a swipe at the GC folks for stirring “dissension.” The following morning, Donnell warned that the camp meeting was the “Minnesota Conference [1888] all over again,” and would have to be discussed. At another meeting, frustrated by the GC leaders’ meddling and their copious use of the Testimonies, Conference evangelist S.S. Davis – a former Campbellite – stated that the gift of the Holy Spirit was not exclusive to one person. Despite these disagreements, other sermons during the camp meeting were fairly orthodox.

On the last Sabbath, Haskell preached a two-hour sermon on the early experiences of SDAs in relation to perfectionism which “fell like a thunder” on the congregation according to his wife. Donnell then stood up and justified the revival and the meeting was dismissed. At the 3 o’clock meeting, Donnell’s topic was “Was Christ of Sinful Flesh?” in which he argued that “that He was born without sin.” At a later meeting with the ministers, Haskell and Breed explained that “even if they were right, they had gotten ahead of the message, for the rank and file of our people would not endorse it.”

The battle lines had been drawn. Upon returning to Battle Creek, Haskell and his wife sent Ellen White (just arrived from Australia) a negative account of the camp meeting, describing a mix of theological error and excitement. The main issue to him seemed to be the human nature of Christ which the Indiana leaders stated was “sinless” while Haskell argued was “fallen.”

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87 Statement, Irvin Metzger to William H. Grotheer, Aug 4, 1965, box 5, folder 35, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR; Statement, Burton Wade, D.F. 190, EGWE.
89 The Muncie Morning Star, Sep. 16, 1900, 4; Letter, Hattie Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 22, 1900, EGWE.
90 Letter, Hattie Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 22, 1900, EGWE.
91 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Letter, Hattie Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 22, 1900; ibid., Sep. 10, 1900; Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 25, 1900, EGWE.
thought this view was akin to previous iterations of “holy flesh,” only now it was based on Christ’s “holy flesh” which was promised to the believer in preparation for translation. Writing to GC president Irwin, A.J. Breed saw “nothing especially in it more than simply Justification by Faith, put in another way. It is not so much of what they are preaching as the way they are doing it.”

Not only was Indiana’s revival based on a novel view of the humanity of Christ interspersed with perfectionism, but Donnell had introduced a new worship style and music which shocked the Haskells. “There is a great power that goes with the movement,” he alerted Ellen White, “because of the music that is brought to play in the ceremony.” The main musical influence appears to have been Donnell’s son-in-law Robert Fuller, director of the Conference’s Lighthouse Mission, where he had been using music in evangelism. Fuller, a violinist and former Captain in Salvation Army, had just married Nellie and was now contemplating joining the SDA ministry. In Muncie, the band included trumpets, flutes, strings, an organ, tambourines, cymbals, a big bass drum, and a small choir. The hymnal used was Garden of Spices (Nelson, Nelson and Birdsall 1899) – a new, non-Adventist anthology of traditional hymns – alongside the SDA hymnal Christ in Tunes. Sermons ended with long, emotional altar calls accompanied by extensive shouting – a common practice in early Adventism – and instrumental music (see Graybill 1991a and 1991b). Haskell thought the style was “a complete copy of the Salvation Army method, and when they get on a high key, you cannot hear a word from the congregation in their singing, nor hear anything, unless it be shrieks of those who are half insane.”

Haskell took the opportunity to order “a testimony, a fresh one” by Ellen White to address the controversy. The loud outbursts in worship had been “distressing” to them and they obviously did not like the music; Hattie Haskell even used the misnomer “dance tunes” to describe the music, which may explain Ellen White’s reference to “shouting, with drums, music and dancing” in her letter to the Haskells. But this was an overreaction on their

95 Letter, A. J. Breed to George A. Irwin, July 22, 1900, Record Group 9, SDA Archives.
96 Letter, S.N. Haskell to Ellen White, Sep. 25, 1900, EGWE.
97 Cf. Indianapolis News, June 20, 1900, 8.
98 Letter, Hattie Haskell to Sarah McEnterfer, Sep. 17, 1900, EGWE; cf. Letter 132, 1900, EGWE.
Robert Sloan Donnell

part; no recorded witness mentions dancing in the camp meetings and Indiana locals present in the Sullivan camp meeting thought that the music was “a very interesting feature,”99 and “pleasing” in Muncie.100 It is more likely that the Haskells’ objections to instrumental music and shouting in worship reflected a critical spirit. Just the year before, Ellen White had harsh words for both: “Your [Hattie] power of criticism and Elder Haskell’s power of imagination are both under the condemnation of God. ... Sister Haskell’s way toward all who do not see things as she does is not the way of the Lord.”101

Ellen White, however, did have some concerns about camp meetings for some time and Haskell’s reports about “holy flesh” and “excitement” in Indiana raised a red flag in her mind. It seemed Donnell had moved “ahead of the brethren” in embracing Jones’ perfectionism and his penchant for the charismatic. She had warned Jones and Prescott in 1894: “If we work to create an excitement of feeling, we shall have all we want, and more than we can possibly know how to manage.”102

Indiana’s Rubicon had been crossed and the effects of the tension in Muncie were palpable. In a salvo towards Battle Creek, Donnell wrote in the Review, “[t]he manifestation of the Spirit of God was marked at all these meetings, but not so fully at Muncie as at the others.”103

Despite the initial opposition to his re-election and a stressful camp meeting, Donnell was re-elected in Muncie, but this new mandate would be short-lived.104

7. Summoned to Battle Creek

For several weeks after returning from Indiana, Haskell continued to agitate against Donnell and the movement afoot there, and the case was brought up during the Fall Council of the GC Executive Committee in Battle Creek (October 11–30, 1900).105 On the morning of October 24 before the GC Committee, Haskell presented a Bible study on the authority of the Testimonies and the

100 “Saturday as Sabbath.” Muncie Daily Herald, Sep. 17, 1900, 8.
101 Letter 1, 1899; cf. Letter 14 a, 1898.
102 Letter 68, April 16, 1894.
104 “With the Adventists.” Muncie Daily Herald, Sep. 20, 1900, 8.
105 General Conference Committee Minutes, 1900, 182.
human nature of Christ. He then asked for comments because “he feared that unless something was done, the brethren would be greatly discouraged, and perhaps some lost.”

Donnell was then called before the Committee on Oct. 25 and met privately with Irwin first. He heard attentively as Irwin read Ellen White’s letter to Haskell (Letter 132, 1900) but said that the testimony “had no bearing upon the work in Indiana, because they did not do any such things,” i.e., the excesses mentioned in the letter.\textsuperscript{106} Irwin, who had been present in Muncie, while acknowledging that the revival “had not gone to the extreme,” thought it could get there eventually if changes were not made.\textsuperscript{107}

Donnell felt blindsided; Indiana had not been brought up for nearly two weeks and the GC Committee waited until he left town to discuss the matter. The Committee asked him if those who had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost were now beyond the grip of temptation, to which Donnell replied: “not a man in Indiana teaches it … we shall never reach that point in this life.”\textsuperscript{108} The Committee also expressed concern about the use of musical instruments, something that some opposed as “innovations not sanctioned in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{109} In Muncie, Donnell defended them explaining that “only instruments mentioned in the Bible were used,” but before the Committee, he agreed to drop them.

In addition, articles published in the \textit{Indiana Reporter} (the Conference’s weekly leaflet) appeared to criticize church organization. When asked about any divergent theology he had, Donnell answered: “Only that Christ was in holy flesh.”\textsuperscript{110} While Donnell repudiated infallible “holy flesh” he appeared to have difficulty articulating his views on sanctification. This raised concerns that a view of the sinlessness of Christ’s human nature could lead to a misunderstanding as to how this holiness is manifested in the life of believer, opening the door to infallible “holy flesh.” Haskell also felt unable to explain his

\textsuperscript{106} Letter, George A. Irwin to Ellen G. White, Nov. 4, 1900, EGWE.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} General Conference Committee Minutes, 1900, 182.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Muncie Morning Star}, Sep. 20, 1900, 2; “Convention Has Closed.” \textit{Muncie Morning Star}, Sep. 21, 1900, 6.
\textsuperscript{110} General Conference Committee Minutes, 1900, 182.
own views of Jesus’ “fallen” human nature, he later confessed to Ellen White.\footnote{Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, Nov. 1, 17, 1900, EGWE.}

The meeting with Donnell stood at an impasse; the GC Committee pressed him to resign but he did not feel he had “lost the confidence of the people.”\footnote{General Conference Committee Minutes, 1900, 182.} At his suggestion, the entire Indiana Conference Executive Committee was called up.\footnote{“Seventh Day Adventist Church.” The Indianapolis News, Oct. 29, 1900, 12.} Meeting on October 29, Irwin read a testimony to the effect that “new light” should be submitted “to brethren of experience,” as well as the letter from Ellen White to Haskell about Indiana.\footnote{Testimonies for the Church 5, 32.} While the Indiana officials acknowledged problems and vowed to “counteract any movement that is detrimental” to the church, they declined to accept Donnell’s resignation. When they asked for a copy of Ellen White’s letter to Haskell, Irwin refused, feeding suspicions in the mind of the Indiana officials.

With the Indiana Committee’s dissent, the call for Donnell’s resignation was dropped by the GC, much to Haskell’s disgust. “The brethren … thought probably I was on the extreme in my views when they came to decide on the Indiana matter,” Haskell later wrote to Ellen White, but bemoaned that “a great victory” against Donnell had been lost.\footnote{Letter, Stephen N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, Nov. 17, 1900, EGWE; ibid., Oct. 31, 1900; Nov. 17, 1900, EGWE.}

8. Debating Jones on the Human Nature of Christ
The meetings in Battle Creek appeared to galvanize the two opposing camps on the human nature of Christ.

Shortly after the Battle Creek meetings, Donnell published a series of articles in the Indiana Reporter (Nov. 20–Dec. 25, 1900) titled “Did Christ Come to This World in Sinful Flesh?” and “The Faith of Jesus,” where he lays out his views on the human nature of Christ as being “sinless” like Adam before the fall. Building on Ellen White’s statement that Jesus “is a brother in our infirmities, but not possessing like passions,”\footnote{Testimonies for the Church 2, 202.} Donnell differentiates between a “liability” and a “tendency” to sin, writing: “Christ took upon himself the liability to sin,
but not the tendency” because “in His flesh the enmity (carnal mind, mind of Satan) was abolished” (Donnell 1907, 7 and 9).

Donnell was listening closely to Ellen White for cues on the degree to which a Christian could be victorious over every sinful propensity. Reflecting Ellen White’s eradicationist views from April 1900 that “[we] need not retain one sinful propensity,”117 Donnell argues that “the only reason why God does not dwell in man is because sin is there, and in order for God to again dwell in man, sin must be eradicated” (ibid., 5; cf. White 1898, 161). A similar statement written in 1882, also quoted by Donnell, leaves little room for quibbling: “Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement.”118 Yet another from 1893 is equally forceful: “Christ came to the world to counteract Satan’s falsehood that God had made a law which men could not keep. … He showed that it is possible for man perfectly to obey the law.”119 Further, Donnell favoured prooftexts by Ellen White that highlight Jesus’ sinlessness such as: “We should have no misgivings about the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ” – to the detriment of others that stressed his “sinful nature,” such as: “It was in the order of God that Christ should take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen man.”120

Although Donnell had disavowed “holy flesh” at the meeting in Battle Creek in October 1900, his terminology was closer to Wesleyan and Pentecostal eradicationism than Keswick suppressionism. Donnell’s son-in-law’s former connection with the Salvation Army – known for its eradicationist views – could have been a compelling force, not only in the revival’s worship style, but also theologically. In essence, Donnell was united with Jones, Ballenger and White in advocating eradicationism, only that he did so from a staunch pre-lapsarian view of Jesus’ human nature.

117 “Christian Perfection.” RH, April 24, 1897, 1, quoted by Donnell 1907, 12.
118 Testimony for the Church 31, 210, quoted by Donnell 1907, 25.
119 Manuscript 48, 1893.
Shortly thereafter, Jones penned an eight-part editorial series in the Review titled “The Faith of Jesus” where he mounted a fierce defense of the “sinfulness” of the human nature of Christ. A moot point for the denomination until the mid-1890s, Jones, Waggoner and Prescott had turned the human nature of Christ into a central point of righteousness by faith (cf. Knight 2011, 167). During the GC session of 1895, Jones preached extensively on it, stating at one point: “‘Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren.’ In how many things? – All things. Then in his human nature there is not a particle of difference between him and you… Christ’s nature is precisely our nature” (italics supplied).

In the Review editorials, Jones argued that “when He came to the earth, His nature was the same as the nature of man. … His likeness to men is not simply in form or in representation, but also in very substance. It is likeness to men as they are in all things, exactly as they are… this is likeness to man as he is in his fallen, sinful nature, and not as he was in his original, sinless nature…” (italics original). Quoting Galatians 4:4–5: “God sent forth his son, made… under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,” Jones argued that Jesus had been “made ‘guilty,’” not vicariously on the cross, but during a “whole lifetime in this world of guilt, condemnation and the curse… [He] lived the perfect life of the righteousness of God, without ever sinning at all” (italics original). Jones argued that Jesus took upon himself “sin in its tendency, and sin in the act; sin as it is hereditary in us, uncommitted by us, and sin as it is committed by us” (italics original). “The faith of Jesus,” is the same faith that the inner must have,” so we can be victorious like Jesus was, he contended.

Following the editorials, Jones moved to a series on the Ten Commandments. Jones had essentially argued that Jesus was a “sinner” who had never sinned. Donnell called this reasoning a “fallacy” because it lowered Christ to be “equal with man in his sinful state” (Donnell 1907, 15). “For surely,” rebutted Donnell, “if He actually takes the position, or condition, of the man needing redemption … He would have nothing with which to redeem other men

from bondage . . .” (ibid., 16). “His sinful, fallen condition would constitute him an imperfect offering, an atoning sacrifice of less value than Adam before his fall,” Donnell contended (ibid., 9).

Jones had always been hyperbolic in his views and was prone to “over-reach the mark,” as Ellen White had come to realize. Jones “was an extremist who had never mastered the Christian virtue of temperance,” writes George Knight (Knight 2011, 59). His pupil Donnell was equally attracted to extreme prooftexts on character perfection by Ellen White, but had failed to balance these with the forensic justification he had embraced in 1888. Jones and Donnell’s extremism in matters of obedience had effectively eclipsed the good news of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the believer’s only hope.

In sum, Jones and Donnell defended sinless perfection, but from differing views on the human nature of Christ. Jones had told Indiana minister O.S. Hadley that the Indiana revival was “darkness and would lead to fanaticism.” The rift effectively placed Donnell in Jones’ enemy camp.

Advocates of both pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian views on the human nature of Christ in Adventism throughout the 20th century and beyond would continue to defend their views using essentially the same lines of argument used by Jones and Donnell. In the 1950s, after dialogues with Evangelical theologians, mainstream Adventism would lean toward pre-lapsarianism.

9. The General Conference of 1901

During the initial months of 1901, tensions between Indiana and Battle Creek subsided, but back home, opposition to Donnell mounted. Sometime in late 1900 or early 1901, Indiana minister S.G. Huntington published The Son of Man a booklet targeting Adventists in which he attacks the “sinless” nature of Christ. Like Jones, Huntington comes short of ascribing sin to Jesus when he writes that he had the “same nature and propensity” and “the inclinations of sinful flesh” as fallen humans (Huntington n.d., 2). Jesus overcame “through His implicit faith in His Father, He was fortified so that His divine nature overwhelmingly triumphed over His sinful nature and hereditary tendencies” (ibid., 8.16). Further, Huntington explained Indiana’s eradicationism:

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127 Letter, Ellen White to A. T. Jones, April 9, 1893, EGWE.
128 Letter, Ida V. Hadley to Ellen White, June 1, 1900, EGWE.
“accompanying the sinless flesh [of Christ] doctrine is another we will not consider, viz., that at conversion the desires, inclinations, and propensities of the flesh, and the hereditary tendencies are all taken away; that the warfare with the flesh ceases and that from thenceforward our temptations are all from without – none coming from within” (itals original; ibid., 13).

But Battle Creek’s truce with Donnell would soon come to an end. At the GC session of April 17, 1901 in Battle Creek – like a thunder booming over the prairies of Indiana – Ellen White addressed the controversy: “Instruction has been given me in regard to the late experience of brethren in Indiana and the teaching they have given to the churches. Through this experience and teaching the enemy has been working to lead souls astray.”130 “All may now obtain holy hearts,” she declared, “but it is not correct to claim in this life to have holy flesh. … It is an impossibility.”131 In addition, she chastised their worship style stating that “mere noise and shouting are no evidence of sanctification, or of the descent of the Holy Spirit.” By scapegoating the Indiana revival, Ellen White had effectively rejected all “holy flesh” theories accosting the church at the time – including physical righteousness oozing out of Battle Creek – and the charismatic emphasis by Ballenger and Jones. One of the first shockwaves of Ellen White’s message in Battle Creek was the replacement of Jones by Uriah Smith as editor of the \textit{Review}, much to Ellen White’s delight.132

Donnell addressed the GC assembly on the morning of Thursday April 18, stating, among other things: “As nearly all of you know, in the Testimony of yesterday morning the test came to me. But brethren, I can thank God this morning that my faith in the Spirit of prophecy remains unshaken. God has spoken. He says I was wrong, and I answer, God is right, and I am wrong.” (Donnell would later claim that his confession was incorrectly printed in the GC Bulletin, probably because it may have been shortened.133) The confession

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131 \textit{GCB}, 1901, 419.

132 Letter 47, Feb. 5, 1902, EGWE.

133 \textit{GCB}, 1901, 422. Donnell’s confession was followed by those of the evangelist S.S. Davis, P.G. Stanley, A.L. Miller, A.L. Chew, F.M. Roberts. Cf. Letter, Judson S. Washburn to Willie C. White, April 11, 1907. Donnell’s original confession is not in the conference’s transcripts.
André Reis

was later followed by the motion to transfer him to Wilmington, North Carolina. Willie C. White, however, objected and proposed a meeting with the church at large in Indianapolis ten days later.\textsuperscript{134}

During the meetings in Indianapolis (May 3–5), Donnell approached Willie and asked for a meeting with Ellen White. When Willie relayed his request to Ellen White the next morning, he was overheard in an adjacent room by the sanitarium cook who had the impression that Willie was “dictating” to Ellen White what to say to Donnell (see Moon 1993, 271–273). Donnell’s meeting with Ellen White never materialized, but the conversation between Willie and his mother was later conveyed to Donnell by the cook at the Greenfield camp meeting, raising questions that the prophetess had been told by Willie what to do.\textsuperscript{135} (Willie later explained to Ira Hankins that he had simply reminded his mother of what she had already recommended in Battle Creek, i.e., that Donnell resign\textsuperscript{136})

On Sunday morning, May 5, Ellen White addressed the issue again.\textsuperscript{137} By day’s end, nearly all Indiana officials involved with the revival had been replaced.\textsuperscript{138}

10. The Aftermath of the Indiana Perfectionism

Donnell remained a minister in Indiana, trustee and supportive member of the Conference Executive Committee, but questions about his involvement with the now-disgraced revival lingered.\textsuperscript{139}

In a letter to Ellen White in March 1902, Donnell asked for guidance on whether he should leave the ministry, but never got a reply.\textsuperscript{140} Writing to Willie White in August, he regretted that his attempt to correct things in Battle Creek had not been fully accepted and placed a large part of the blame on Willie for the “unchristian … ungodly” effort to ostracize him and the publication of all Conference dealings to the church at large, “making it almost an

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\textsuperscript{134} GCB, 1901, 356, 448.
\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Letter, Judson S. Washburn to Willie C. White, April 11, 1907, EGWE.
\textsuperscript{136} Letter, Willie C. White to Ira. J. Hankins, Dec. 24, 1901, EGWE.
\textsuperscript{137} GCB, 1901/1902, 511–512.
\textsuperscript{140} Letter, R. S. Donnell to Ellen G. White, March 3, 1902, EGWE.
impossibility for me to get a place in the work anywhere.” The whole de- bacle, Donnell believed, was a confirmation of a dream he had had a year before in which he was demoted and a new president “hanged” him. In his reply, Willie reaffirmed the leadership’s “duty to encourage you to go forward with the work of the ministry,” and suggested an unreached part of Indiana.

By the Spring of 1903, Donnell’s evangelistic efforts started paying off. Around this time, Hankins, new Indiana conference president, sent Donnell and S.S. Davis eight questions about their views on the human nature of Christ and sanctification. In answer to the question “Do you believe that this testimony condemned certain things which you and others taught in the State?” Donnell answered: “For myself, no. ... As to the doctrine of ‘Holy Flesh’, no man ever heard me preach it. I have maintained, and do still maintain, that in order to live a holy life, we must eat and assimilate the flesh and blood of Christ ... we must be made new creatures in Him” (Donnell 1907, 18–19). In answer to question number eight “Do you believe that conversion embraces both the mind and the body, so that the body in this life is fully cleansed and is brought back to the condition of man before the fall, or is this a work that begins now, and is completed at the resurrection...?” Donnell responded, “Yes. The mind surely, and also the body, so far as its life and actions are concerned” (ibid., 24).

Donnell added: “I teach that those who fully appropriate the power of the Gospel of Christ need not die” (ibid., 25). This idea was not at all original with Donnell but reflected the intersection of consummated soteriology (sinless perfection) and accelerated eschatology (the imminence of the end) prevalent in the denomination at the time. The 144,000, a symbolic number of the saved living at the end as taught by the denomination, would reach that state of

141 Letter, R.S. Donnell to Willie C. White, Aug. 24, 1902, EGWE.
142 Ibid.
143 Letter, Willie C. White to R.S. Donnell, Aug. 31, 1902, WCW-LB 20, 453–456, EGWE; Letter, Willie C. White to Arthur G. Daniells, May 24, 1901, EGWE. There had been discussions about a transfer to California and GC president Arthur G. Daniells asked Willie to intercede on Donnell’s behalf, but he was hesitant to have Donnell around. Cf. Letter, Willie C. White to P.T. Magan, Sep. 24, 1901, WCW-LB 17, 408–411, EGWE.
144 Donnell, R.S. “Give Yourselves to God.” Indiana Reporter, March 4, 1903.
145 Donnell’s answers were later published in What I Taught in Indiana (Donnell 1907), and Davis’ answers are found in Box 5, folder 24, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR.
146 Cf. White, Ellen G. Testimonies on Education, 33.
perfection before the end. The “Laodicean message” would lead to “trans-
lation faith” for the Second Coming, an event that was ever so imminent, es-
pecially in light of the enactment of Sunday laws. Advocates of sinless perfection could only defend provisional immortality rationally within the confines of the imminent end of the world.

Following this interaction with the new Conference president, Davis left the ministry in 1904 and the family was pushed out of the SDA church in 1910 when their church in Elnora was reorganized without them. Donnell moved to Tennessee in early 1904 to help reorganize the Memphis church.

Their departure removed the last remnants of Indiana’s “cleansing mes-
gage,” but that was hardly the end of “holy flesh” theories in Adventism. As early as 1903, in an editorial titled “Translation Faith,” new Review editor and advocate of physical righteousness W.W. Prescott explained it: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.’ This is translation faith, and a people who are preparing for translation must have just this faith. … [A] people to be translated without seeing death.”


11. Leaving the Ministry
Donnell’s work in Tennessee from 1904–1906 led to the reorganization of the Memphis church with about 60 members. During his time in Memphis, Donnell sent his pen pal S.S. Davis a paper titled “The Nature of Christ and Man,” which rehashed his previous positions on the human nature of

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147 Cf. Haloviak 1980, 10 who argued that Donnell believed in immortal “holy flesh.”
149 “News and Notes.” Indiana Reporter, March 16, 1904. Ballenger called this the “Florida method”: “this method is to disband the church, with or without a vote of the congregation, and then reorganize, leaving out the heretics …” (See Edwards and Land 2000, 183).
Christ.\(^{153}\) Despite somewhat orthodox statements, Donnell’s paper oozes with the fundamentals sinless perfection he had learned under his former partners in holiness, and supported by Ellen White’s perfectionistic statements.

Despite leading a successful ministry in Tennessee, the Southern Union, whose president George I. Butler had evangelized Donnell back in 1875, removed his credentials on February 24, 1907 for teaching “holy flesh.”\(^{154}\) In response to his dismissal, Donnell published *What I Taught in Indiana* (ca. 1907), a booklet containing the articles he had published in the *Indiana Reporter* in 1900 and his answers to the questionnaire sent by Hankins in 1903. “I taught the same things in Memphis, Tenn., that I taught in Indiana,” he wrote, because “the Laodicean message involves the nature of Christ.”\(^{155}\)

Donnell’s dismissal caused a split in the Memphis church, which was disbanded and reorganized with only fifteen members. A signed statement by twenty-seven of those who left affirmed they “never heard Elder R.S. Donnell advocate or mention the doctrine of ‘Holy Flesh,’ neither have we heard one thing that, by logical deduction or sequence, could be construed as such.”\(^{156}\) Many of Donnell’s defenders later returned, but he retired to a farm in southern Missouri.\(^{157}\)

After his dismissal, Donnell engaged in a two-year letter-writing campaign to Willie White and other church officials to protest the removal of his credentials and his sustentation after over a quarter century of service to the church, but no action was taken to restore his sustentation.\(^{158}\) In 1915, an operation for gallbladder stones forced Donnell to quit farming and move back to Memphis. He soon applied for sustentation, and a retirement benefit of $8 per week was

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\(^{154}\) Letter, George I. Butler to Willie C. White, April 11, 1907, EGWE; Letter, George I. Butler to Ellen G. White, Feb. 2, 1907, EGWE.

\(^{155}\) Donnell 1907, 1, Box 5, folder 29, Coll. 287, William H. Grotheer Collection, CAR; Letter, Judson S. Washburn to Willie C. White, April 11, 1907, EGWE. Cf. Knight 2011, 62.

\(^{156}\) Statement, March 12, 1907, SDA Archives.

\(^{157}\) Cf. Letter, Judson S. Washburn to Willie C. White, April 11, 1907; ibid., Nov. 22, 1908; Letter, George I. Butler to Willie C. White, April 20, 1907, EGWE; Letter, Robert M. Kilgore to Willie C. White, April 1, 1909, EGWE; *Central Union Outlook*, July 30, 1912, 7.

\(^{158}\) Cf. Letter, Willie C. White to George A. Irwin, March 22, 1909, LB 37, 820, EGWE; Letter, Charles McVagh to Willie C. White, March 10, 1909, EGWE.
approved by the GC in 1916. His name appears as “honorary” minister of the Southern Union in the SDA Yearbook for 1927.

12. Final Years
Donnell lived his final years in solitude and poor health. His wife Nannie died in 1919 and his daughter Nellie died in 1924.159 Around 1930, Paul C. Dysinger moved with his family to Memphis in order to start a self-supporting ministry and was told to seek Donnell’s support. Dysinger writes: “I talked to him about the work we felt the Lord had called us to do in the city and he was immediately very interested ... we had never met before and I was nearly struck dumb when he pulled out his purse and began to count out bills.” In all, Donnell loaned Dysinger $1,700.00 to get his ministry started (approx. $25,000.00 in today’s currency).160

As time went on, Donnell took a less dogmatic view of sinless perfection, as reported by Dysinger: “Never once did he subscribe to the doctrine of Holy flesh any more than that he did believe that God did expect perfection and holiness in all His people through the grace of God and the merits of the blood of Christ.”161

Around mid-1932, in advanced stages of dementia, Donnell was placed in the care of the Tennessee River Conference after being bilked out of all his money. In March 1933, Dysinger and his wife took Donnell into their home and cared for him until he died in his sleep on Nov. 28, 1937 at the age of 91.162 He was buried in the Old Fountain Head cemetery in Portland, Tennessee, near what is now Highland Academy.163

Dysinger’s two children, William and Ruth, now in their nineties remember how Donnell would recount his days as an evangelist. He was known as a “wonderful Christian” and “very fine man, a very gracious and kindly individual,” a “sincere, conscientious, educated Christian ... whom we all loved,”

162 State of Tennessee, Division of Vital Statistics. “Certificate of Death.” The certificate reflects an 1844 date of birth but that is unsupported.
163 Letter, Paul C. Dysinger to William H. Grotheer, Feb. 22, 1965
wrote a family friend.164 “Even in his senility,” recalled Dysinger, “he would kneel and offer the most wonderfully worded prayers, and I never doubted the Lord heard him.”165

13. Conclusion

Robert Sloan Donnell’s career in Adventism highlights a transformational period in Adventism marked by interest in the human nature of Christ, Christian perfection, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the end-times. His biography not only opens a window into this fascinating denominational period, but is loaded with contemporary implications.

Living at the confluence of epochal theological and organizational currents in the denomination, Donnell was the quintessential Seventh-day Adventist: an avid reader of the Testimonies, health reformer (to a fault), indefatigable evangelist, zealous administrator and charismatic salesman who dedicated his prime years, family and finances in the service of the church. He is still remembered during church anniversaries in the American Midwest and South.166

The camp meetings in 1900 showed Donnell to be an innovator, open to incorporating new methods in evangelism, such as taking his camp meetings from mostly a cappella music to singing accompanied by musical instruments, even some percussion. The move to advance Adventist music clearly backfired and because of the events in Indiana “Adventist music has been constrained,” observed church historian Arthur Patrick.167

165 Letter, Paul C. Dysinger to William H. Grotheer, Feb. 22, 1965, CAR. Donnell used to say that during the meeting in Indianapolis, Ellen White warned GC officials “to be careful how they treated Elder Donnell for he was a man of God and had great light.” A slightly different version of this story found in letters from the Davis’s family reads “deal gently with these brethren for God has given them great light.” What Donnell thought this “light” might have referred to or whether this statement was ever made is impossible to ascertain.
Significantly, Donnell opposed the longstanding Adventist view at the time that Jesus had “sinful flesh” or a “fallen” nature. His position on Jesus’ human nature was “ahead of the brethren,” and would eventually become the church’s official position with the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* (1957) whose editors stated: “Although born in the flesh, He was nevertheless God and was exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam. He was ‘without sin,’ *not only in His outward conduct, but in His very nature*” (italics supplied).\(^{168}\)

Looming large in the soteriology of the period are Ellen White’s views on Christian perfection which contributed to the rise of the perfectionism at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Even as the Indiana camp meetings were taking place, she would write that “[t]o be redeemed means to cease from sin.”\(^{169}\) Such statements continued long after the demise of the Indiana perfectionism; in April 1902, she wrote: “The Saviour … came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness.”\(^{170}\) The following year, she warned: “No part of the diseased life of sin is to remain,”\(^ {171}\) and in 1908, she alerted that the cleansing of “appetites … will have to be done before His people can stand before Him a perfect people” (italics supplied).\(^ {172}\) The inherent tension between consummated soteriology (sinless perfection) and accelerated eschatology (the imminence of the end) in her writings would become a defining trait of the Adventist experience well into the 21\(^{st}\) century.

Considering the fact that the denomination as a whole was inebriated by the perfectionistic leanings of Ellen White, as well as Ballenger, Jones, Waggoner, Prescott and their propensity towards charismatic manifestations, the “holy flesh movement” was simply an excrecence of the larger theological currents at work within the denomination at the time. The bias against the “holy flesh movement” as an anomaly within the denomination clamours for the historian’s attention.

But “holy flesh” dies hard in Adventism; it was soon reborn as Last Generation Theology (LGT), a concept proposed by M.L. Andreasen in the 1930s and published in his landmark study *The Sanctuary Service*. In his own words:

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\(^ {168}\) *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (original title) 1957, 383 and 647–660.


\(^ {170}\) “Instruction to Church Members.” *RH* April 1, 1902, 1.

\(^ {171}\) *Signs of the Times*, March 11, 1903.

The final demonstration of what the gospel can do in and for humanity is still in the future. Christ showed the way. He took a human body and in that body demonstrated the power of God. Men are to follow His example and prove that what God did in Christ, He can do in every human being who submits to Him. The world is awaiting this demonstration (Romans 8:19). When it has been accomplished, the end will come. God will have fulfilled His plan. He will have shown Himself true and Satan a liar. His government will stand vindicated. (Andreasen 1937, 299)

Through this eschatological empowerment, Andreasen explains, “God gives the final demonstration that men can keep the law of God and that they can live without sinning” (ibid., 315).

If White and others planted the seeds of a hybrid theology of Christian perfection for the end of the world to be matured by the “latter rain,” Andreasen and his disciples reaped a mighty harvest: in their theological construct, the arrival of the end actually depends on the last generation of believers achieving sinless perfection before the close of probation (cessation of Jesus’s intercession in heaven) and the Second Coming. At that moment, believers will have fully matured “translation faith” and be beyond the reach of temptation; their salvation secured by their individual, meritorious sinlessness (since Christ no longer intercedes). LGT perfectionists would eventually claim that their “later emphases are an essential and integral part of what Ellen White endorsed as the ‘Minneapolis message,’” posits Woodrow Whidden (Whidden 2008, 207). Andreasen’s The Sanctuary Service continues to be sold and promoted by the church.

LGT has enlisted prominent Adventist leaders and theologians and continues to be bankrolled by the deep pockets of fundamentalist independent ministries in the United States. Among its most prominent supporters are GC presidents Robert Pierson (1911–1989) and Ted Wilson, who has promoted LGT ministries such as the Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC) and Amazing Facts (White 2017, 69; cf. Bruinsma 2018, chapter 2; Knight 2000, 144–145). During his long career, influential theologian and author Herbert E. Douglass (1927–2014), developed his “harvest principle,” i.e., that “God will wait for the maturing of Christian character in a significant number of people as the
chief condition for determining those events which affect the time when probation for the world will close” (Douglass 2001, 65–81).

But the effects of perfectionism on the SDA church suggest other, less sunny agricultural metaphors. Like a genetically modified crop of former “holy flesh,” LGT perfectionism lays its roots deep into the Adventist psyche, spreading its fundamentalist views of Christian living and sectarian eschatology. Our modern-day perfectionists are simply more dignified descendants of their shouting ancestors, with two main differences: (1) sinless perfection derives from Christ’s fallen human nature as the believer’s example in sinless perfection; (2) the “latter rain” falls softly at the sound of traditional music and formal worship – lest the use of drums in worship should inadvertently accelerate the close of probation.

Ironically, however, the exuberance with which LGT perfectionists defend sinless perfection as “possible” is only matched by their inability to show its fruits. Thus, rather than ushering in the end, their failure sets the close of probation into an ever-receding horizon; while seeking to hasten the end by their own efforts, they end up delaying it.

Ultimately, the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist church continues to struggle with varying degrees of “holy flesh” today – more than a century after the denomination vowed to stamp it out – is a testament to the perpetually contentious nature of Adventist soteriology and the way it encroaches on its eschatology.

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174 Based on a misreading of Ellen White’s statement that “shouting, with drums, music and dancing” were part of a Satanic ploy to disrupt worship (cf. Letter 132, 1900; cf. White 1958, 36).
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Zusammenfassung


Résumé


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