

CHANGE IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGY: A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

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Like other churches, Seventh-day Adventists face the challenge of harmonizing the essential immutability of revelation in Christ and what seem to be significant doctrinal modifications. This study provides the first in-depth treatment of the intricate problem of doctrinal development from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

Chapter 1 defines the problem, chapter 2 offers a historical-genetic survey of proposed solutions, while chapter 3 presents a systematic-typological analysis of possible responses to doctrinal change in Christian theology.

Chapter 4 investigates the extent, nature, and direction of Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal developments in the light of the religious background of the church in relation to doctrinal adjustments historically, terminologically, and systematically; and, finally, chapter 6 discusses Ellen White's personal involvement in and conception of doctrinal change.

The study yields the following results:

1. Doctrinal development involves complex theological and hermeneutical issues.

2. History reveals three fundamental approaches (immobilist-stationary, progressivist-evolutionary, and revisionist-revolutionary) successively developed in response to the growing awareness of doctrinal change.

3. The many theories of doctrinal development may be classified in three "ideal" types (static, dynamic, and evolutionary/revolutionary) indicating the basic options available to Christians today.

4. Seventh-day Adventism grew out of William Miller's apocalyptic, and increasingly separatist, revival movement. Its fundamental and distinctive teachings have been significantly affected by homogeneous and hermeneutical developments under the impact of sociological forces that tended to move the church closer towards evangelical Protestantism and denominationalism.

5. In the past, Seventh-day Adventists have predominantly advocated the historic and/or organic theories of doctrinal development; more recently, theological, situationist, and revisionist conceptions have also been proposed.

6. Ellen White was personally involved in theological change; her concept of doctrinal development reflects a remarkable depth of insight and represents a well-balanced approach to the subject.

A dialectic approach that is equally concerned for substantial continuity and authentic change can best avoid the twin dangers of doctrinal immobilism and revisionism. To this end, a comprehensive study of the hermeneutical issue of doctrinal development from an Adventist theological perspective is needed.