

INTRODUCTION

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The birth of the advent movement initiated a period of tremendous activity. It was a time when ancient articles of faith were being rediscovered and reformulated in terms of “present truth.” It was a time when policies were being developed and new structures were being created, when men sensed that they were engaged in shaping destiny. Those inspired pioneers established a sound base on which succeeding generations built a church with worldwide commitments.

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The Adventist Church will *continue* to grow. But it is imperative that we, its members, recognize our almost imperceptible emergence into a new era. The exponential increase in factual information, the explosive proliferation of issues and ideas, the impersonal dominance of technology, the sophistication of today’s communication techniques, the shrinking of the world and the changing of its features — these factors, with their complex and subtle interactions, characterize this new era. The advent movement is confronted by an array of new challenges and questions unparalleled even by those of the formative years.

How will we respond to these challenges? The ideal situation would call for the active participation of every person in the church. It would evoke dialogue and exploration on an unprecedented scale. It would demand the maximum utilization of all resources — spiritual, intellectual, and material. The degree to which the church will fulfill its mission of bringing hope and meaning to the world will depend on the degree to which that ideal is achieved.

Unfortunately the situation is far from ideal. The man of today is largely a secular man who increasingly regards the role of the church in society as irrelevant. There are even those who, though nurtured by the church, are convinced that their individual participation within the framework of the church is an ineffectual means of dealing with the larger issues of the twentieth century. Such disillusionment has caused many to turn their backs on the programs of the church in order to lend their energies and talents to the efforts of secular agencies.

Fortunately, there are many others who, though equally concerned, are more optimistic. In recent years some of these have met in small groups in this country and abroad, with the primary aim of trying to understand how the secularizing and divisive trends can be reversed. Very often such groups have formed around a nucleus of graduate students and/or academic and professional people who must deal directly with issues in interaction with peers. The rapid growth of these groups made it clear that a coordinated effort is needed to extend the dialogue to a wider community of interested persons.

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To further this spontaneous search for meaningful participation, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists invited representatives from several of the groups to meet with them in October of 1967. The purpose was to discuss possible methods of establishing a cohesive program to provide for dialogue between the church leadership and this segment of the laity and to involve the latter more significantly in the activities and concerns of the formal church. The outgrowth of that meeting was an action by the officers of the General Conference (taken at the 1967 Fall Council) to approve the establishment of an organization known as The Association of Adventist Forums.

The overall purpose briefly stated in the constitution is "to provide a Forum in which thoughtful persons of Seventh-day Adventist orientation will be encouraged to examine and discuss freely issues and ideas relevant to the church in all its aspects and to its members as Christians in society." Local Forum chapters, Adventist Student Ministries on university campuses, regional retreats, and the publication of SPECTRUM will continue in different ways to achieve that purpose.

The church has important things to say. We must rediscover what they are and develop the language to communicate them effectively. Analysis and criticism are essential ingredients in this process, but they must always be viewed as precursors to the discovery and implementation of feasible proposals. In this context we invite the participation of all who feel that there is an urgent need to engage every segment of the church community in the discussion. It is time for the advent movement to reaffirm its historic commission to proclaim *present* truth and to engage with vigor and imagination whatever inhibiting forces it may face.