

Sect or Denomination: Can Adventism Maintain Its Identity?

by Bryan Wilson

To sociologists, to describe the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a sect is simply to seek an appropriate designation for the movement, as one of a number of significant and eventually sizable religious movements that had their origin in the eastern United States in the nineteenth century. These various movements have become some of the largest minority religious movements in Christianity. They have become international, and they have given the very word "sect" a somewhat new dimension. From being small, local, separated, communities, sects have now become worldwide, growing, internationally organized bodies. Despite growth in size, however, they remain sects, separated from other Christians by distinctive teaching, a more uniformly dedicated life-style, and by a self-interpretation which claims at least a unique place in the Christian community (and which sometimes denies much of a place to other groups).

Let me pause to make clear the limits of my task. A sociologist looks for examples in social conditions. He treats his data as social data; religious movements are to him, social phenomena. The explanations of their emergence and development are to be looked for at least in very large part in prevailing social conditions. His attempt then stands in sharp contrast with

the attempt of theologians to explain. Theirs is a normative discipline; he attempts a level of value-neutrality. Theologians are concerned with prescribing just what the truth is, with the implication that truth must then be canvassed against all other views which are, in greater or lesser degree, heresy. The sociologist, while seeking truth, is not committed to it. For him, the truth is not necessarily identified with the good or the desirable. The truth is limited to the possibility of establishing casual connections, describing functions, providing a mode of analysis which is convincing. It is not his business to look for correct statements of faith; to attribute truth to particular nonempirical propositions; to endorse particular ethical prescriptions. As far as possible, his language is neutral and his terminology is devoid of pejorative or commendatory connotations.

Thus, unlike theologians, who have usually used the word sect in a pejorative sense, the sociologist employs sect in a neutral way to describe a separated minority, a group with ideological differences from those of the majority in the broad tradition which they share.

All the sociologist means by "sect" may be set out in a number of propositions which describe certain expectable (but not essential) characteristics:

1. Sects are separated minority groups, which have chosen to stand apart from traditional church communities. They also separate themselves from the culture of the wider society by their ethical precepts, and a sense of apartness and of special mission.

2. Sects claim a monopoly of the complete truth; (a) either as restoration of pristine teach-

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ings, or (b) by special revelation appropriate to the time of their own emergence and to all subsequent ages.

3. Therefore, the sect represents itself as in some measure an "elite" vis-a-vis the outside world, a remnant specially preserved and with a special destiny.

4. Within the movement, there is an expectation of equal commitment of members, and rejection of all internal distinctions of religious virtuosity as a special calling.

5. This equal commitment is expected to be total commitment, and there is a sense in which sects seek to provide a total environment for their members in one way or another (either by attempting to control their mental orientation to the world, or by proscribing many aspects of secular involvement).

6. There is an emphasis on lay leadership and equality among members in respect of leadership roles, and often the rejection of a professional ministry, and certainly of a specialized professional "priesthood."

7. Concerned with standards of commitment, the sect must have mechanisms for the expulsion of the wayward and the maintenance of sect boundaries: thus there are tests of merit for admission and for continued membership.

8. The sect maintains a distinctive way of life, not merely separating its members from involvement in the world, but prescribing special modes of conduct and particular patterns of ethical obligations.

9. Thus sects stand as ethical protest groups against the wider society which is seen as in some measure damned.

10. The sect has a special historical sense of its own role in world affairs, reevaluating the historical past in terms of the sectarian present.

These propositions appear to hold, in a general way, for the groups that sociologists (and the man-in-the-street) readily identify as sects. Like all religious bodies, sects are concerned with salvation. They are communities of the saved, or at least of those who have made themselves eligible for salvation. What they are to be saved from may be variously specified, but in a sociological sense it can be said that the sect is saved from the world, from the destiny facing other men, and from the prevailing circum-

stances in society. There is a sense, sociological rather than theological, in which the sectarian movement itself is "salvation"—in taking men out of the wider society, and bringing them into a community which has a strong sense of its own sanctity and destiny. This idea of the community itself as salvation is an ancient one and conforms to a wide range of human experience. The extent to which it is consciously elaborated as doctrine varies, of course, from one movement to another, but it is often a discernible element in the appeal and self-interpretation of sectarian movements.

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The idea of salvation is, of course, capable of very diverse interpretations theologically. The different world religions conceive of salvation in very different terms—as the overcoming of desire; as the resurrection of the body; as the transmigration of the soul. In less abstract religious systems, salvation may be more concerned with "making things work" by magical devices; by eliminating illness; or by ridding oneself of the attention of a witch, a bad fairy, or a curse. Even within the Christian tradition divergent soteriological possibilities can be distinguished, and much of the spectrum, from the healing of the body to the purely spiritual conception of a heavenly afterlife, can be found in the Christian tradition—not excluding the need to be saved from an evil political order in the world. Whatever the theological content of the concept of salvation, however, there is a common sociological element which can always be discerned in the advice, activities and hope that have to do with salvation. That element is the search for present reassurances about one's life circumstances, one's life chances, or one's afterlife chances. Religious systems are always short on empirical verification. The prospects of salvation remain matters of hope in by far the

greatest part: even where healing of the body occurs by application to supernatural power, it is often emphasized that the subjective condition of the supplicant is more important than the objective power of the supernatural—men are healed by faith. This subjective element then is what the sociologist recognizes as the sociological aspect of salvation: salvation is present reassurance concerning what is culturally defined as great evil.

Clearly the problem of salvation from evil is faced by all sects within the Christian tradition. But different movements differ in respect of what they take to be evil, and in what form they expect salvation. Different sects have differing responses to the world. There are several easily distinguished hypothetical responses among Christian sectarian movements:

1. The *Conversionist* response, in which the emphasis is on “changing men” by prompting a subjective experience which is of such intensity that their attitudes to life, the world and their fellow men are all transformed. The emphasis is on the heart, and salvation largely consists in the awakening and release of new emotionally based orientations to the world. The Salvation Army, the Holiness movements and the Pentecostals approximate this position, which has the closest links of all sectarian positions with the older Protestant orthodoxy.

2. The *Revolutionist* response avers that God will change the world, eliminating evil and securing righteousness. This response is the expectation of the overturning of the world order and the establishment of God’s Kingdom suddenly by God’s own intervention in human affairs. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christadelphians most closely approximate this position.

3. The *Introversionist* response is to withdraw from the evil world. Neither men nor the world need to be changed. Men must be abandoned and the world must not be allowed to intrude into the piety of the community. This response was characterized by the English eighteenth century Quakers, by various communitarian groups and by the Exclusive branch of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

4. The *Manipulationist* or *Gnostic* response seeks to overcome evil by the use of secret knowledge of divine principles provided by God for man but partly hidden from him. The initiate learns how to manipulate his own

conceptions of the world, society and God in order to reinterpret events in ways which will diminish evil and enhance the prospect of the experience of salvation. Christian Science and the various New Thought movements are close to this position.

5. *Thaumaturgical* responses are similar to these last mentioned manipulationist responses, but they tend to be very much more limited appeals for dispensation from the operation of normal causation. They provide a personal and local experience of salvation in some immediate instance. This is less a belief in objective principles of the metaphysical sphere as in particular spirits or powers which have almost personal connotations and relationships. In western society, Spiritualists come close to this position.

6. The *Reformist* response is of a rather special type. Evil is seen as something that may be dealt with piecemeal by the application of conscientious effort and social works. Religious insights are largely reduced to the promptings of conscience in this position, which is much more affected by rationalistic interpretations of society. The contemporary Quakers are the closest sectarian group to this position.

7. The *Utopian* response is a radical demand for the complete reconstruction of human society on the divine plan. This response also occurs in strong rationalistic forms, but it is a possible Christian and sectarian response as long as the ends that are sought are believed to be in conformity with divine precepts. The Oneida community is an example of a group which adopted such a response.

These are hypothetical and pure types of “responses” to the existence of evil in the world and the need to overcome it or escape from it. Actual sects may adopt one or more of these positions at any given time, and in time may change the balance of their responses. Certain circumstances precipitate changes of response. Most typical of such changing circumstances is the impact of war, which may radically alter the living conditions of a sect, and its relationships with political authorities, nonsectarian neighbors, etc. A second kind of change may be prompted as a movement experiences a shifting balance between new converts and

second or subsequent generations of members. All persisting sects face the problem of socializing the children born to converts. All of them face the fact that second-generation adherents may have different preoccupations from those of their parents: they may interpret their own positions vis-a-vis the world rather differently; they may fail to appreciate positions that were hard-fought in the past; and they may be ready for much greater adjustments and accommoda-

“The influence of internal specialists is likely to produce ambivalent relationships between different sections within a movement: between traditionalists and liberals, between intellectuals and men of simple faith, between organizers and thinkers.”

tion to the outside world than was ever originally conceived as possible. Since most movements acquire new converts and second-generation adherents over a considerable timespan, the actual moment of tension is often far less dramatic than that which arises from the experience of war, of course, but analytically the two types of “intake” can be distinguished and some of the crucial problems isolated.

A third circumstance conducive to change is the problem of reconciling sect values to the changing life-circumstances of members. Not infrequently the austerity, regularity, conscientiousness and hard work that are enjoined in sectarian movements—the canons of Victorian virtue—result in considerable increases in the prosperity, education and social status of many members of the group. Wesley saw the logic long ago in regard to the Methodists of his own lifetime, but the problem is perennial. There can be no doubt that improved relative prosperity, a greater measure of education and the attainment of position and respect in the world are circumstances that tend to alter men’s religious predilections. To state an extreme case, the man who has attained social respectability in the business community may not find it congenial—as he may have done as a poor youth—to continue to

engage in the emotional excesses of an extreme Holiness sect. The consequences of such changes are various. In denominations with little differentiation, people may shift their allegiances (most easily effected when moving house) by leaving a denomination of lower general standing for one with a clientele which is closer to the newly attained position of the individuals concerned. Status confirmation can be obtained by belonging to the desirable social groups—churches included. Alternatively, the sense of allegiance to the group may remain, but the upwardly mobile members may entertain new ideas about the appropriateness of various group activities, the style of worship, the extent to which involvement in the wider society is justified and so on. Generally, as their members have risen in social status and prosperity, the pattern has been for sects to accept increasingly liturgical styles and forms of worship, and to seek parity with older churches in respect to excellence of buildings, robes and organs. Sometimes there is active competition with other denominations; sometimes the same trend appears to be simply the demand for “status congruence” in respect to religious and general social milieux.

Mutation of response may also occur when events enforce some reappraisal of doctrine. Clearly, such reappraisal occurs most unalterably in respect of the failure of prophecy. Some explanations must be forthcoming to provide members with an adequate understanding of their position once firmly expected events have failed to take place. A number of possibilities always remain open, of course, some of which will perhaps fail to satisfy some of those who had previously been faithful. Usually, at least some measure of doctrinal readjustment must take place. In the matter of prophecy there must be a reinterpretation of the significance of dates, or new exegesis, for not only must failure be explained, but also new hope, commitment and reassurance must be provided. Not all failures have to do with actual prophetic exegesis, of course. Some are related to more general expectations: the growth of the movement (as in Christian Science); or the mental accomplishments of votaries following a particular process of therapy (as in Scientology, in

which the end-state of “clear,” in which the individual would be free from all implanted engrams and so find himself with much improved memory and intelligence, has been at least twice reassessed as these desired results failed to be attained). Such reappraisal is, however, not necessarily an occasion for the mutation of pristine response; it is the occasion on which mutation might occur.

Among the various types of sect, it is the conversionist type—the sect which relies on a profound inner experience—which most causes the individual to alter his whole orientation to the world. The conversionist sect is most likely to undergo a process of denominationalization, and by sloughing off specifically sectarian characteristics to seek a place of parity among denominations. This particular type of sect is likely to be denominationalized for a number of reasons. In the first place, it was in many respects least differentiated of all sectarian groups from the general Protestant tradition, and thus could always take the older denominations as some type of reference point, even if a reference point of similar but more Laodicean movements. Secondly, because in part of the case with which new members are drawn in, these groups are likely to undergo the experience of the loss of commitment on the part of their membership. Specific allegiance to the movement is often less emphasized than a general sense of being a saved individual. With this less intense commitment to movement boundaries, a certain fluidity of association may lead to diminished doctrinal rigor and to eventual adjustments for convenience. Third, there is implied in this position a wider tolerance of other groups, and their diverse or slackening standards may also begin to exert influence. The absence of a firm badge of identity to a particular tradition and to a known body of people encourages a dilution of original positions. Fourth, groups of this kind which are intensely committed to evangelistic campaigns, often develop a centralized bureaucracy, in which agencies of control evolve at the center which are themselves relatively out of touch with local and grassroots concerns. As the movement acquires increasingly specialized agencies, so the distinctions between professionals and laymen have every opportunity to develop. The process encourages a sense of specialized

divisions of labor in which differential standards come to be emphasized for professional ministers and local laymen. In particular, professionals may be expected to “know doctrine” while laymen need not be concerned. The absence of a widely disseminated knowledge of doctrine, and even of the distinctive “truths” of the movement further attenuates distinctive commitment. The growth of such a class of professionals is also a way in which decisions pass from the sectarian community to the special department. Technical considerations increasingly influence decisions without regard to local demand for involvement, or the pristine sense of the equal competence of saved individuals to discern the will of God.

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Fifth, such movements tend increasingly to routinize their operation, and often become preoccupied with the success of their activities as measured in terms that can be used in the “rational” processes of accounting and book-keeping. Quality is somewhat surrendered for quantity—one has this perspective most consciously subscribed to in the writings of the missiologist Donald MacGavran. The swift conversion of people who are but little socialized to the values and norms of a movement cannot but lead to the dilution of the movement’s goals and life-style. Since the characterization of a sect depends upon the members’ being recognizable as sectarians before they are described by their occupation, ethnicity, education, etc., this process is a clear intimation of incipient denominationalism.

Sixth, and this follows from the fifth point, such is the pressure for conversions—now relatively easily attained through “changes of heart”—that the relatively unsocialized converts are likely to be pressed into the process of evangelizing, intensifying the process of dilution. Since these movements are not doctrinally oriented, it is easy for knowledge of doctrine to be discounted as long as the felt experience of

conversion has occurred. But the felt experience of conversion is not always easily communicated, and if communicated, is likely to be communicated with only vague doctrinal support. Uncertainty of specific commitment is closer to denominational positions than to that of pristine sects.

Revolutionist sects may also undergo mutations, but the likely change here is from the revolutionist, adventist position, to a much more introversionist position, particularly after the disappointment of unfulfilled prophecy. The formal hope of the advent may not be abandoned, but what may happen after either a specific disappointment with respect to time, or gradually as patience is increasingly demanded, is that the adventist idea may in effect recede in significance in the life-style and day-to-day involvements of the group concerned. The up-building of community life may loom more largely in the daily concerns of such a group—as with the Rappites of Pennsylvania. Or the emphasis may shift to the idea of salvation attained within the life of the community, as has occurred among the Exclusive Brethren. Formal doctrine is not in itself the only evidence of response to the world, for often sects inherit a wide and even divergent set of traditions, some of which more fully characterize its actual concerns than others. Even the Christadelphians, who had a strong and insistent adventual hope from their earliest beginning, became in the inter-war years a much more introverted group, although they now appear to be emerging increasingly as a reformist sect.

The Seventh-day Adventists do not conform to the mutation pattern of revolutionist to introversionist movement. This is in part because the movement did not begin as a very close approximation to a pure type of response. From the beginning, its response was many-sided, and although not a conversionist sect, the movement has shown a much more denominational path of development than have many of the separatist bodies which emphasized the advent as their primary point of separation from the other bodies in Christendom. Several broad considerations help to account for the difference between the Seventh-day Adventists and the development of other sectarian bodies which began with

strong adventist-revolutionist-orientations.

1. First, the Seventh-day Adventist movement did not emerge as a separate body simply as an adventist movement, but rather in disappointment about the advent, and after some reformulation of ideas.

2. From the beginning, the Advent teaching was one among several concerns which were part of the primary charter of the movement and in terms of which it came into being. Not only preaching the advent but also the conditions for it became an essential focus of attention, with significant consequences for faith and practice.

3. These conditions and the need to preach about them were validated by divine inspiration. So the movement acquired from its origins as a separate organization an alternative source of legitimation; not only the Scriptures, but also a vessel of interpretation. Thus Adventism had possibilities for other courses of development than the model I have been employing.

4. The movement inherited and adapted a professional ministry to its service. This factor circumscribed the extent to which the demand for full equality of commitment might be exacted, and gave room for the development of specialized agencies in a degree which would be precluded by a more completely sectarian stance. It is clear, of course, that in Seventh-day Adventism the ministry does not stand in quite the same relation as do other ministries to their movements, but the existence of a cadre of full-time agents of the movement was an influential element in the possible development of the Church.

5. Extremely important elements in causing the movement to develop differently from the model I have outlined was the accretion of concerns: in particular, the concerns with educational provision, dietetic requirements, medical care, religious liberty and Sabbatarianism. In some respects, these various items might, of course, have become mechanisms for the insulation of the Seventh-day Adventists from wider involvements with the society, and perhaps in some respects have done so.

Control of educational provision is an extremely important strategic device for the maintenance of boundaries, since it operates in the most sensitive area of socialization of the

young. I do not know just how important education has been to the maintenance of the separate identity of Seventh-day Adventists, but I should be inclined to believe that it has been extremely significant to reinforcing group solidarity in the past. This has remained so as long as a very large element of education was essentially moral rather than strictly technical. (The trend has been, in all education, for the moral to give place to the technical—no doubt also in Adventist schools.)

6. Finally, the course of Adventist development has probably been considerably influenced by the inherited diversity of liturgical styles and by the relative freedom within the movement for liturgical development. It is not for me to speculate about the reasons for the liturgical differences within Adventism. Given the different traditions from which Adventists came in the beginning, perhaps emphasis on liturgical uniformity might have appeared unnecessarily divisive, and to be a matter of less than primary importance, given the expectation of an early return of Christ. It may also have been the case that the emphasis of the Sabbath teaching itself may have made actual liturgical *practice* less

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important than the *occasion* for practice. It may be that in common with many other “free church” groups, primary interests were in doctrine and in exegesis, which itself is the mark of a newly literate public capable of debating such issues. In the face of these interests, liturgy, styles of devotion and the embellishment of churches and church practice were of less direct concern. This may have permitted somewhat “higher” styles to be established in some places which may have reflected the upward social mobility and increasing status of Adventists. It is also the case that, with the diminution of doctrinal interests (as other concerns have mobilized man’s capacity for literacy), so the

attention to worship has increased, leading usually to more elaborate forms. Where the interest in liturgy grows, one can be certain that it will be expressed in the development and elaboration of liturgical practice. If there has been an enrichment of church life by liturgical development, this may also, of course, indicate some diminution in the urgency of Adventual expectations. Other elements in Adventism have also had the opportunity to grow since the disappointments of the 1840s, and this could be said to have occurred in approaches to diet and evangelism.

It appears to me that certain factors in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition point to the likelihood of a process of denominationalization. The existence of a professional ministry is important in this respect. Ministers are likely to take as one important reference-group for their own performance the already-existing ministries of other movements. Therefore, the ministry is likely to evolve concerns important to its own functions. These are especially concerned with training in which there is likely to be a desire for intellectual parity with the ministry of other movements. These concerns differ from those of the laity, and the ministry is often in a position to cultivate its concerns and to impress the need for them on the whole movement. It is also likely that over time the more seriously committed young men give increasing thought to whether they ought not to become ministers. This in itself becomes a recruitment of those who feel themselves more likely to be suited to a life of greater religious virtuosity. Differential opportunities come to exist for those with different dispositions towards their common faith.

The existence of a ministry over a long period is also likely to promote an interest in research and a desire to know what is being said by other religious professionals, by the intellectuals of religion (the theologians). This leads to demands for the movement’s own theologians, both to provide the movement with the types of scholarly support enjoyed by other movements, and to claim respect according to the same criteria. Such a process is not merely a development of new interests. It is likely to lead to an increased relativity of religious beliefs. To enter into a

universe of discourse with outsiders is to begin to share the premises of that discourse, and to accept frameworks for argument and discussion which belong to the theological tradition and not to the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. This process is likely to lead to reappraisals of one's own teachings, history, assumptions and self-interpretation. The existence of universities within the movement is a commentary on the processes of sect development. The very fact that an outsider who knows only a little about Seventh-day Adventism is asked to talk about the movement from an external point of view is an indication of a type of liberal orientation which is not characteristic of sects, except after very long processes of development. The influence of internal specialists is likely to produce ambivalent relationships between different sections within a movement: between traditionalists and liberals, between intellectuals and men of simple faith, between organizers and thinkers. However, there is also a sense in which the existence of a body of ministerial specialists must encourage the development of other groups of professionals either from the ministers themselves, or in the form of new cadres of special recruits.

A movement having as many sides as the Seventh-day Adventist Church has abundant room and urgent need for expertise in several departments, particularly in education and medicine (each of which subdivides at an increasing rate into internal branches of specialization of its own). The development of these areas of specialization cannot but create more demands for coordination, administration and organization at various levels, so that bureaucratic posts must also grow in number and influence. Given the contemporary world situation, especially in missions and education as well as medicine, the trend can be discerned as growth of centralized agencies over local activities. Economies of scale are increasingly realized in many departments of human activity; technical subdivisions grow in number, and so does the need for their internal coordination one with another. There is the increased dependence on elaborate and costly equipment (in hospitals, research laboratories, computer departments, etc.) and the considerable likelihood of growth at the central agency, with further subdivisions of hierarchic coordination. As technical control and rational plan-

ning increase there is likely to be a displacement of the strictly moral, and perhaps the theological, by the demands of the new methods of organization. Growth of specialization is itself something which can be seen within church organizations. It is itself a feature of the large denominations, and in many ways the Seventh-day Adventists are equipped to continue to develop in this direction towards increasingly denominational patterns of organization, internal specialization and control.

(I am not unaware that, in spite of the trends in this direction in the wider world, the movement maintains what is to an outsider an interesting and, in many respects, unique balance as a "mixed economy," in which there is both official and private enterprise, in, for example, nursing homes, publishing work and the production of health foods.)

Denominationalism implies a complex of characteristics, including increased tolerance of other movements, attenuation of distinctive commitment, diminished emphasis on boundaries and boundary-maintaining devices. Also, the denomination accommodates to the secular culture in very large measure and accepts its provisions. There is a compromise in moral obligations to a point somewhere between the official and ideal norms of the society and the ordinary practice of other people. There is also gradual increase of reliance on secular and political agencies of control instead of on internal group control. Willingness to cooperate across group-boundaries in a variety of special causes, even at the risk of "losing" to those special causes the members who are primarily concerned with these areas, is a final characteristic of denominationalism. Clearly, in these terms the Seventh-day Adventists have still some way to go before they are denominationalized. There are, of course, several important barriers which have hindered their "progress" to this goal.

The inhibiting mechanisms scarcely need to be listed since they are better known to Adventist readers than to me. First among them is the Sabbath teaching, which, perhaps more than any one other item, has been a means of keeping Adventists separate and different. Perhaps more than anything else this time is least understood by those outside the movement. This, above all, is the badge of identity, and such a badge must act as a distinctive, sectarian device, maintaining

boundaries and reaffirming, however unstressed the point may now be, the idea of an elite.

It is also evident that the acceptance of special inspiration by the movement at its origin must also be a point of division between the Seventh-day Adventists and other movements, and to them must appear as a distinctive sectarian trait. As long as other movements hold the Seventh-day Adventists at a distance, the process of denominationalization is likely to be impeded, both because of the inappropriateness of the models of other movements in Christendom, and because of the Seventh-day Adventists' own likely reactions to enforced separation.

The dietetic position of the movement is also a powerful boundary-maintaining item and this has, of course, been a cumulative force, from Old Testament prescriptions to their extension through Mrs. White's further proscriptions. The practice of Adventists in these matters thus reinforces their distinctive beliefs to consolidate and to make evident in actual life-style as well as in important symbolic form their apartness from the wider world.

In some degree the voluntary segregation and concentration of Adventists into particular regions, at least in the United States, has, of course, been a powerful agency for the further consolidation of isolation from the wider community. Sects are, in origin, communities, and the Adventists despite their size have managed to maintain many of the features of community in the face of increasingly impersonal society. Clearly, such developments enhance group social control, reinforce group values, and maintain distinctions between community ideals and the practices of men in the wider society. The development of the mass media has somewhat altered the possibility of geographical segregation into self-contained neighborhoods, and the simultaneous distribution of news, ideas, values, styles and fashions from centers far outside the control of the movement may have its powerful accommodating effect. The prospects for community life and for sectarian separation are very much altered in the world since the second World War II.

To the outsider, there are certain features of

distinctiveness in the movement that should be mentioned. In the first place, there is the balance of local autonomy and hierarchic order. Adventists are, of course, proud of the structure they have evolved, and there is no doubt about the unusual balance between center and periphery, through intervening echelons of considerable regional independence. Perhaps it is this diversity of levels of control which leads to a wider diversity in the movement than is usual in sectarian movements; a diversity in liturgy and in the openness-exclusivity or ecumenistic-separatist dimensions of Adventist life and practice. (Ecumenical thrusts are, of course, affecting many movements today, and the unfashionability of boundaries in highly mobile society, in which a permissive ethic of "man come of age" prevails, is evident in many movements.) There is also an interesting balance of communal values in an international movement. Adventists are perhaps not unique in this respect, since all modern large sects necessarily seek to foster local involvement and pride in international presence, but certainly a great deal is done in the Adventist movement through the Sabbath School to make local people aware of their connections with people across the world.

Yet it also appears that there exists some measure of tension with respect to primary

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goals. Adventism is many-sided and its many-sidedness is both a strength and a source of problems. If one divides, as has Sir Isaiah Berlin, the world into hedgehogs and foxes—hedgehogs who, in difficulty, know one big thing, and foxes, who know many things, then the Seventh-day Adventists are foxes. If one asks how man shall cope with difficulties, the Adventists point to education, to dietetic practice, to a variety of health measures, to particular avoidances, and

finally, to the solution of all problems in the adventual hope. Yet the balance between these concerns (and perhaps some others) in any given situation is perhaps not always easy to strike.

There is also the feature of openness in Adventism, seen particularly significantly in education. For all sects, education is a problem comparable with the development of the mass media. Contemporary education conflicts with various premises on which religious ideals may rest, and it is no secret that the majority of teachers in higher education in, for example, Britain, have no religious affiliation. Education challenges the idea of inspiration as a concept. Committed to empirical procedures, methods of verification, testability and adhering to both assumptions about the material nature of causation and the possibility of rational techniques of enquiry, education clearly finds the operation of the supernatural a problem. Sudden nonnatural processes and events pass beyond its expectation, and such processes (in inspiration, or charisma) and such events (in biblical times, or in the expectations of prophecy) are central to the Seventh-day Adventist position and implicit (if less emphasized) in the traditions of much of Christianity.

But science is, curiously, easier perhaps to accommodate with religion than are the humanities. Science has boundaries. The scientific enterprise can be contained on the assumption that other causes might operate certain well-defined spheres. The arts are but another problem, offering a range of alternate values to those that have been religiously received; relativizing human experience, and frequently drawing (particularly in literature and poetry) on areas of experience that stand in sharp contrast with contemporary ideal morality, even more with the ideal moral assumptions of Christianity,

most particularly Christianity in its sectarian forms. The social sciences most of all, using or attempting to use the rational empirical methods of the sciences, but dealing with the content of the arts—the realm of values—makes compartmentalization of knowledge almost impossible. The social sciences proceed on the assumption that knowledge can be relativized, that religious truths can be, in some measure, “understood” in relation to the context in which they arise and find acceptability.

Openness to education for the Seventh-day Adventists must mean that at some point these problems are confronted, even if they are not readily resolved. For it must become apparent that the energy and resources that have gone into the wider educational process outmatch what has gone into the specific religious tradition of any group. The prestige of education in the secular world is difficult to scale down, even in the face of strong faith and doctrinal certainty. A movement which is open to education will not escape this particular problem, although there may be other grounds for hope.

To the outsider, the tensions for the separated religious movement must occur in the extent to which it is open to the wider world. Evangelism does not allow the Adventists to turn away from the wider society, yet evangelism, too, presents its own problems for the persistence of community values and the morality that is learned in face-to-face relations of local community. As social relationships transcend the communal level, as they now so quickly do, even in the life of the child, so the moral commitment of the separated groups may be harder to sustain since its moral precepts were forged with face-to-face relations in mind. In the modern world, it appears to me to be more difficult than ever to be in but not of the world. But Seventh-day Adventists appear to be continuing to wage that struggle—and not without success.