

II. Preserve the Landmarks

by W. J. Hackett

The following is the full text of the guest editorial in which W. J. Hackett, vice president of the General Conference, explained why church administrators are now urging the adoption of several official statements of Seventh-day Adventist belief. It first appeared in the May 26, 1977 *Review and Herald* and is here reprinted by permission.

The Editors

The present is a time of openness. Flouting confidentiality, people demand that such things as income-tax reports and personal holdings of candidates running for public office be examined. These advocates of openness are not afraid to question traditional views and established policies. Boasting a new climate of academic freedom and innovation, they champion individual opinion against group opinion or against the established policies, beliefs, and practices of an organization. In their quest for truth, students training for the professions are taught to challenge every facet of what formerly had been regarded as verified. Research-oriented persons are told to insist on the opportunity for unrestricted inquiry.

This spirit of openness has brought certain benefits. For example, it has advanced education, research, invention, and commerce. It has helped the church to find new and improved methods of meeting its objectives, as well as to establish policies benefiting the church's working force.

But how open can the church afford to be? How deviant should the church allow a member's viewpoints and life style to be and yet consider him a part of the fellowship? That the line must be drawn somewhere, everyone recognizes; for if it isn't, the church eventually loses its identity.

Since its founding, the church has insisted

that the Bible and the Bible only should be its rule of faith and practice. It has opposed a creed. It has recognized the writings of Ellen White as focusing on the Bible and as instructing members how to live by the Bible's teachings.

Many years ago it fixed certain landmarks of truth that, ever since, it has held to be nonnegotiable. Beyond these the church has allowed room for individual differences of viewpoint. In a church adding many new members each year it is necessary from time to time to spell out clearly and in contemporary terms the basic body of truth that accounts for the church's unique place.

Other church bodies facing similar challenges have lost their identity. Once zealous in the proclamation of the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, today they openly espouse a liberal theology. The history of these churches shows that the eroding of faith that occurred did not emanate from bad men or atheistic schemers. Rather, there occurred an almost imperceptible decline in the thrust of the gospel on the part of those who claimed to be the gospel's supporters. While their life style remained exemplary, somehow they lost touch with the Spirit of Christ and the Scriptures. An erosion of faith, once begun, often turns out to be irreversible.

None of us would like to see the Adventist Church travel down this road. Nor, if it should be nudged down this road, would we wish it to awaken too late to take remedial measures.

Is the Adventist Church doing anything to forestall possible tragedy? Yes. It is preparing carefully formulated statements on what it considers to be its fundamental beliefs. These statements will be presented to a large circle of church leaders and scholars, so that there may be wide input. After the input is pooled, these statements will be published in the church's papers, as well as in books.

Areas to be explored are those concerning

the church's positions that have been challenged. Some fall in the area of science and include topics such as a literal, seven-day Creation, a universal Flood, and the age of life on the earth. A clear definition here will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church's position.

Other areas that will receive attention are: the unity of the Bible, the unique mission of the remnant church, the nearness of the Advent, the doctrine of the sanctuary, the place and work of Ellen White, the historicist approach to prophetic interpretation, and standards of Christian living.

With the spelling out of what the church believes to be the basic tenets of faith, not as a creed but simply as the current majority understanding under the "Bible-and-the-Bible-alone" principle, administrators, church leaders, controlling boards, and leaders at all levels of the church will find it easier to evaluate persons already serving the church, and those hereafter appointed, as to their commitment to what is considered basic Adventism. Thus the church will be protected against the subtle influence of those who have become unclear and doubtful as to

God's self-revelation in His Word and in the counsels of the Holy Spirit.

No church has developed a system of higher education without finding itself nudged in the direction of change by those who advocate making the gospel more modern and science-oriented. Doubtless many, in doing this, have been motivated by an honest ambition to make the language of the faith more relevant, but at times it has turned out they have set in motion a movement that compromises the basic truths of Scripture.

In its concern to maintain its identity, the church must not assume the role of inquisitor. There must be dialog and counsel with the church's theologians, science teachers, school and university administrators, and well-trained laymen of the church. Although there must be nothing that resembles an inquisition, no effort to divide, hurt, or destroy those who may seem to have a slightly different orientation, those who lead the church must stand up and be counted, and guide the church into the unity of faith and practice that will be rewarded by the latter-rain experience.

The watchmen on the walls of Zion must constantly be watching, lest the church established by Jesus Christ cease to follow its Leader and begin to walk in the sparks of its own kindling. There is too much at stake. The coming King is at the door.

III. Some Reflections on Change and Continuity

by Fred Veltman

For our Sabbath meditation, let us read a Sabbath text, a few verses from Deuteronomy 5, where we find a second account of the giving of the law by the Lord

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from Mt. Sinai. Verses 12 - 14a and 15 read as follows:

Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work . . . You shall remember that you