

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

were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

You will remember that in the Exodus version of this event the people were asked to remember the Sabbath because it pointed to the creation of the world and the rest of God. In Deuteronomy, however, the people are told that the Sabbath is a reminder of their deliverance from Egypt's slavery. What concerns me tonight is not the source-critical question, important as that may be. I am interested in what these variations in the record may have to say to teachers gathered here this weekend to consider the problem of "Continuity and Change within the Adventist Church."

The people of Israel were able not only to live with but also to preserve two *differing* interpretations of their experience of and with their God. They were evidently more concerned with the covenant relationship between themselves and their God than with the particular formulation or codification of that relationship.

Here on the borders of Canaan, in one of his farewell speeches, looking from the vantage point of their recent past history forward to the new experience of the people soon to be established in their own land, Moses appears to be saying, "Don't forget the *new world* God has created for you out of the previous chaos of slavery." The creation and rest to which the Sabbath pointed was as meaningful in the context of their new existence as delivered slaves, as it had once been in the new world of Eden. This re-interpretation of the religious meaning of the Sabbath in the light of Israel's contemporary experience not only gave the Sabbath a relevance for the people, but also guaranteed the continuity of the Sabbath command and its important place in the religious life of the community.

This same kind of re-interpretation continues to take place in the ministry of the prophets to follow. And centuries later, when the full bloom of Judaism ripened into the fruit of Christianity, we find the writer of Hebrews once more re-interpreting the

meaning of the Sabbath for the Jewish-Christian community. The author in this case borrows from both Genesis and later accounts to provide the grounds for his new understanding that the Sabbath speaks to the

“The community must be not only permitted but also encouraged to continue its re-interpretation of its past for the sake of its present and its future.”

rest enjoyed by persons who fully trust in the merits of Christ for salvation.

In all of these accounts, the references to past experience are not made for the purpose of better understanding the *past*. Rather, the past is made to serve the interests of the present. In order for a community to exist it must have a shared past. But, in addition, its continuity can only be maintained as long as that past continues to speak to the needs of the present. So if responsible community leadership cannot permit a community to break from its past, neither can it afford to force a community to remain in its past. The community must be not only permitted but also encouraged to continue its re-interpretation of its past for the sake of its present and its future. Such a hermeneutical task is constantly being carried out on the individual and social levels of civilization. It is this constant re-interpretation that ensures the survival of any given community.

In this instance of the Sabbath command, the new interpretation was not diametrically opposed to what had been held in the past; if such had been the case, continuity would have been shattered. Rather, the new interpretation continued to speak to the fundamental concepts of creation and rest that were basic to the origin of the Sabbath. But, there *was* re-interpretation, and it helped to guarantee continuity.

Now we may turn our attention to our own situation. As a people we have been preaching the Advent message for over 130 years. Except for a few brave voices, the general

viewpoints on the Sabbath, sanctuary, investigative judgment, second coming, etc., remain largely the same, even to the extent of vocabulary, use of texts and illustrations. Let us honestly ask ourselves this question: Do they stir the church like they did a century ago? Do they speak to affluent, computerized, pagan, space-age society and third world groups as they did to agrarian Protestant America of the past?

And remember, it is not just the world out there that has changed; so has the church. It is much larger in size, more complex in the multiplicity of its tasks, more centralized in its organization, and the majority of its membership is found outside the North American continent. Even its theology and religion have undergone change, though such developments are only recognized unofficially.

We cannot, even if we would so desire, change the fact that people, their viewpoints, the questions they raise, their institutions, change. This has ever been so. A disturbing question does arise, however, and it is probably seriously affecting the sleep patterns of our church leadership. To what degree can such change go on, publicly recognized or not, without affecting the continuity of the church?

I am quite sure that if church leaders felt that some ecclesiastical dictum would calm the troubled seas, they would, wisely or not, rush to proclaim it. But they must know, as the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and other church bodies have discovered, that such dicta, rather than stopping change, destroy continuity. For in the eyes of many in the community, inflexibility among leaders is itself interpreted as the highest kind of heresy. It represents a rejection of the prophetic vision, a surrender to man's authority and power rather than commitment to God's power and sovereignty. And persons who, despite the charges of heresy, see themselves as faithful to the leadership of the Spirit, may either sever their membership from the church, or just absent themselves in spirit, in body, in finances, from the support of the church.

In my estimation, we, as a people, are not immune to such developments. It could be

that they have already begun among us. There does appear to be a disenchantment among us as a people, a loss of vision, a loss of momentum, and, on the other hand, a cry for change. For some, it is a desperate plea for change of any kind, an anxious concern for some indication that the church is alive and not dead or dying. They are not to be fooled by membership lists and baptism accounts, or even mission stories. They've been around too much, seen too much, heard too much.

Personally, I am not so pessimistic as to believe such a condition has already permeated the church. Still, there are those who strongly resist any changes of religious or theological viewpoints.

My fellow teachers, we today, as Adventists, have no guarantees of permanence as a people apart from faithfulness to God. And it would appear to me that faithfulness to God demands a dynamic, changing, involvement with God's sovereign rule in history, a sensitivity to our place and condition in the last quarter of the twentieth century, an openness to the ongoing revelation of God in our experience, in nature, in His Word.

This does not mean that interpreters of the Bible can speak with the authority of the prophets of Scripture; they must remain obedient to the authority of Scripture. But it does mean that the interpreter must seek new insights, and from man's experience and his study of nature as well as from Scripture. For if God is the author of all truth, we need not fear the investigation of truth.

Our Lord has promised us His Spirit to guide us. He speaks of Himself as "the way, the truth, the life." These descriptive terms are dynamic rather than static in the type of existence they point to. And so faithfulness to God's will—so it seems to me—runs diametrically counter to a dead or dying orthodoxy. The probability of a few good heresies in doctrine in the context of a passionate religious concern is not nearly so fearsome a future to avoid as is the possibility of a dead or dying orthodoxy propped up by religious and institutional "ho hum."

May I suggest in closing that, as Bible teachers, we stand, to use some Old Testament models, between the laity and the

priesthood—where we can offer a prophetic ministry. To the degree that my picture of the condition of the church is not to be dismissed as the ramblings of a constitutional pessimist, I hold that we, along with the leadership and the laity, are responsible for the condition of the church. We are the church even as they are.

Without claiming too much for ourselves, shouldn't we, as Bible teachers, take a stronger role in the continual development of church doctrine and theological viewpoint? Could we offer some possible re-interpretations of Scripture which would again strike a responding chord in the church and under the Holy Spirit bring the needed revival? Could we not provide some theological justification

for legitimate and responsible change which would at the same time foster continuity of the community?

Ellen White sought to encourage us with the words that we have nothing to fear for the future except as we forget God's leading and teaching in our past history. If this leading and teaching tell us anything, they speak of change and continuity, not only in the way of operating a church but in the religious self-consciousness of a community and in the interpretations of its faith. If change and continuity will be permitted to include these dimensions, then, I am confident, we have both a humbling and challenging future before us under the blessings of our Lord whom we are committed to serve.

IV. A Response from PUC

The following letter was circulated among participants at the annual conference of West Coast religion teachers, held in May 1977, in Angwin, California.

The Editors

To: DR. RICHARD HAMMILL, ELDER DUNCAN EVA, ELDER WILLIS HACKETT

RE: DENOMINATIONAL POSITION PAPERS ON INSPIRATION/REVELATION AND CREATION

Dear Brethren:

The statements on Inspiration/Revelation and Creation have received serious study by the Religion Department of Pacific Union College and we submit the following preliminary general response in the interest of a successful session together on Sunday, May 15. Once these fundamental issues are satisfactorily solved the way will be prepared for an intelligent and responsible evaluation of the specific doctrinal statements.

The following questions have been raised by the decision of the church leadership to "develop some more definitive statements"

on such topics as Inspiration/Revelation and Creation and by the procedure which is apparently being used to draw up such statements.

- 1) What problems are arising among the believers relative to the church's position on these two issues which are of greater significance than the problems arising over justification/sanctification and the sanctuary (for example) on which the Bible departments are not being asked for input?
- 2) On what grounds is it being argued that "more definitive statements" by the church would have the effect of solving rather than exacerbating such problems?
- 3) It can be shown from a study of church history that such descriptive extrapolations on church doctrines tend to lead the laity to depend upon the church as the authority for defining Christian doctrine rather than upon their personal study of Scripture as the authority for faith and practice. Would not such a tendency to lean upon the church's interpretation of Scripture militate against the historical Adventist position of elevating the Bible above the church?