

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?

Is not our entire evangelistic thrust geared to bringing the people to accept the authority of the Bible instead of that of their particular church?

- 4) How are such statements to be used by the church leadership? What authority will they carry, whether explicit or implicit? How will a teacher be viewed if he/she should find himself/herself unable to agree with such statements? Will teachers be asked to confess their faith in such statements before they are granted employment?
- 5) Why are the college teachers being asked for input on these particular questions? They were not involved in the discussion of proposals for changes in the church manual. They were not involved in the matter of the nature of Christ and the justification/sanctification issues which were discussed at Palmdale. Yet they are being asked for input on the two kinds of questions for which the General Conference has two research institutes particularly suited to provide such evaluation, the Biblical Research Institute and the Geo-Science Research Institute. Would not position papers produced and circulated by these two institutions

be adequate to meet the questions of those believers concerned over these issues?

- 6) The formulation of the statements is at present in its second (at least) revision. Some weeks ago we gave serious attention to the first revision and on Sunday we will be discussing the latest stage of the developing statement. Would you clarify for us the procedure being used in gathering, collating and correlating the responses to a statement which appears to be in a state of flux? How will its final form be established?
- 7) To which laity in the church are these statements to be directed? The vocabulary and direction of the content of these papers would indicate that the problems are not being raised by the "average" layman. The statement should carry the same level of sophistication as the nature of the question suggests. For example, the typical church member is not likely to divide the creation of the world into two phases, the primordial state and the "organized-life state."

Sincerely,  
The Religion Department,  
Pacific Union College

## V. The West Coast Bible Teachers: A Statement of Concern

**A covering letter accompanied the following statement by the religion faculties of the three west coast Seventh-day Adventist colleges. The letter was addressed to W. Duncan Eva, W. J. Hackett and Richard L. Hammill, and signed by the three departmental chairman, Walter F. Specht of Loma Linda University, John M. Staples of Pacific Union College and Gordon S. Balharrie of Walla Walla College. Copies were sent to Robert H. Pierson and Neal C. Wilson, of the General Conference, and to the presidents**

**and academic deans of the three colleges.  
The Editors**

**A** special meeting of Bible and Science teachers convened on Sunday morning, May 15, 1977, in connection with the West Coast Bible Teachers Conference held this year at Pacific Union College. The session was called at the request of Dr. Richard Hammill, who, along with Elders Duncan Eva and Willis Hackett, had asked that a special meeting