

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

be arranged for the purpose of reviewing two doctrinal statements being developed by the leadership of the church, one having to do with the church's position on inspiration and revelation, and one concerned with the doctrine of creation.

The evident seriousness with which the religion faculties of Loma Linda University, Pacific Union College and Walla Walla College approached the discussion of such statements and their possible use makes it not only professionally advisable but also confessionally necessary that the response of these Bible department faculties to the presentation of the doctrinal statements be articulated

“Does the formulation of such statements harmonize with the historical Seventh-day Adventist commitment to a progressive understanding of truth?”

in writing. This intention to record the concern expressed only orally at the special meeting was under discussion unofficially during and immediately following the conference. There was some hesitancy to produce a written response because of the interest we shared that such action not be misunderstood as precipitant or provocative. With the appearance of Elder Hackett's editorial in the May 26 issue of the *Review and Herald* the recording of our response no longer remained a question to be discussed. It was now a duty to perform.

The statement of response which appears below has been composed through the cooperation of all three west coast schools and has been approved by all three faculties of religion as representative of the consensus which exists among them on the matter of these doctrinal statements. The statement is composed of three parts. The first two sections treat the general and specific concerns voiced during the special session on May 15. The third part attempts to concretize one of the constructive suggestions made at the conference which was supported by both teachers and General Conference personnel.

The religion faculties which met with Elders Eva, Hackett and Hammill at Pacific Union College on Sunday, May 15, 1977, appreciate the opportunity of free and open discussion of the proposed statements on *Inspiration and Revelation and Creation*. We express our gratitude to the three vice presidents of the General Conference for their manifest interest in the suggestions we might have relative to these doctrinal statements. We wish to assure our brethren from the General Conference that we share many of the same concerns for the future of the Adventist Church and its message that they have. We are wholeheartedly committed to the message, mission and unity of the church, and are gladly devoting our time, talents and life energies to it.

It is this dedication to the Seventh-day Adventist Church that motivates our response. It is because we wish to be constructive and supportive of church leadership as well as responsible and conscientious in the fulfillment of our duties as church members and Bible teachers that we question with all seriousness the advisability of producing such doctrinal statements. This grave concern over the nature, use and effect of such documents within the Adventist church community so occupied our attention during the special session that we were prevented from completing our review of the first paper (*Inspiration and Revelation*), the only paper discussed. The result was that the second paper was not even read and neither document was approved.

In order that the deep concerns expressed above not be misunderstood in terms of their importance and relevance for the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we think it would be helpful to articulate them more explicitly in the form of questions which for the purposes of clarity and understanding have been phrased rather pointedly. It is our hope and prayer that through this written expression of specific questions the dialogue among church leaders, whether organizational, institutional or ideological, over the message, mission and unity of the

church may not only continue but be enhanced.

- 1) Has not the Seventh-day Adventist Church historically held to the Protestant principle of the individual priesthood of the believer and its Scriptural corollary that each believer is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the teachings of the Bible?
- While such interpretations of biblical teachings as concisely stated in the baptismal vow serve to identify a community of faith, would not the extended official statements on church doctrines as are now being drawn up lead the believer to look to the church institution rather than to inspired revelation for his religious authority?
- 2) Does the formulation of such statements harmonize with the historic Seventh-day Adventist commitment to a progressive understanding of truth? Or, is there danger that we shall stifle the progressive spirit which has made the denomination what it is?
- 3) What guarantee is there that these statements will not assume a creedal function in the future? Does not the history of such statements and their use in other religious communions indicate that this could easily happen in the Adventist church?¹
- 4) What specific problems within the church justify the formulation of such statements? Is there a sizable contingent of members who are unclear over what inspiration has to say on these issues or who are being instructed erroneously on these subjects? Does this desire for such formulation and use of doctrinal statements reveal a basic distrust of the church's scholars, administrators and teachers on the part of the General Conference officers?²
- 5) Are the statements, when formulated and approved, ever to be used in an attempt to ascertain an individual's commitment to orthodox Adventism?³
- 6) As the church needs to re-examine doctrinal issues, should not such formulations be developed by a representative convocation, including church scholars

and administrators, and thereafter become part of the church's ongoing theological investigation?

- 7) Considering the present climate within the church, is there any danger that the effects of attempting to implement such statements as a test of commitment to orthodox Adventism will be more divisive than whatever heretical tendencies may currently exist among church members?

The religion teachers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, if we can judge by the comments made during the May 15 meeting of the west coast group, desire above all to be

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constructive in this discussion over the developing position papers on the church doctrines. They take seriously their ordination to the gospel proclamation and are most ardent in their hope that they may be permitted to offer a redemptive ministry to the life of the church. In harmony with this commitment to present a team approach to the solution of the vexing problems facing the church leadership over the questions relative to the church doctrine, we propose the following concrete suggestion which was adumbrated at the May 15 session.

We would suggest that an association be formed of the Adventist Bible (or Religion) teachers consisting of three regional divisions. The western branch, composed of Loma Linda University, Pacific Union College and Walla Walla College is already functioning. The central regional grouping might

consist of the religion faculties of Andrews University, Southwestern Adventist College and Union College (perhaps also Canadian Union College). The eastern branch would include Atlantic Union College, Columbia Union College, Oakwood College and Southern Missionary College. Each division according to this arrangement would include a General Conference educational institution. The regional associations would meet once a year to deal with similar, related or identical issues and the conference papers would then be circulated throughout the national association. Once each year representatives from the sections would meet together with the General Conference personnel which had been in attendance at the various regional meetings. In this general session the work of the national association as conducted throughout the year within the divisions would be synthesized and the impact of the studies on the life and faith of the church could be reviewed in the context of informed discussion and prayer. The annual meetings of the professional societies to which we be-

long are hardly adequate for the type of serious work and dialogue necessary to treat successfully the problems facing the church, though we could take advantage of the wider representation usually in attendance at such meetings for handling association business matters.

While the suggestion above is only one model which might be considered,⁴ it does seek to take seriously the desire clearly expressed in our meeting that the administrators and theologians in the church need to meet together to discuss their common concerns. The unity and mutual understanding possible from such a fellowship would in our estimation be of inestimable value in advancing the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to which we have dedicated our lives.

Respectfully submitted through
common Christian concern,
Division of Religion,
Loma Linda University
Religion Department, Pacific Union College
School of Theology, Walla Walla College

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. A modern example of such a development was cited by Walter B. Shurden, the Baptist historian, in a paper presented at the American Society of Church History Convention (April 22-23, 1977, Louisville, Kentucky). In this report, which is to be published in the January 1978 issue of *Review and Expositor*, Shurden recalls how at the founding of the Southern Baptist church in 1845 the convention declared it would have no creed but the Bible. By 1925 the church felt it needed a confession of faith for use as a guide, not a creed. Shurden sadly affirms that the confession is now being used in the examination of Sunday School Board members, missionary aspirants and seminary teachers.

2. In the statement on academic freedom currently being reviewed by the Board of Higher Education of the General Conference, questions of orthodoxy are

to be settled by the local administration and a committee of peers.

3. The Board of Higher Education of the General Conference, according to its proposed statement on academic freedom, is evidently satisfied to evaluate the orthodoxy of teachers on the basis of the statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" as published in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*.

4. Perhaps the implementation of some such program which makes possible the meeting of minds between the administrators and scholars of the church would also fulfill one of the basic requirements necessary for academic freedom to exist in religious institutions of higher education. Cf. The Board of Higher Education statement on "Academic Freedom in Seventh-day Adventist Colleges and Universities in North America," pp. 2,3.