

# THE SHAKING OF ADVENTISM?

## I. A View from the Outside

by Fritz Guy

The central thesis of Geoffrey Paxton's book is that Adventism is facing a major crisis over the proper understanding of righteousness by faith. The argument this Australian Anglican employs in advancing his thesis is clear enough: it comes in seven easy steps.

1) The best way to think about a religious movement, church or theology is in terms of its central claim, its "heart," rather than its peripheral characteristics (which may be more or less attractive or objectionable). 2) The "real heart" of Adventism is "its conviction that those within it constitute God's special last-day propagators of the gospel in such a way as to make them the only true heirs of the Reformation" (11). 3) The "true heirs of the Reformers" are those who do not modify

but build directly upon the central affirmation of the Reformation—the doctrine of justification by faith alone (purified of any notion that salvation in any sense depends upon sanctification). 4) Adventism has generally had an inadequate doctrine of justification, because it has emphasized the importance of sanctification, which sometimes led to perfectionism and which, in any case, is suspiciously like the Roman Catholic view of salvation. 5) Significant progress toward a clearer, more truly Reformation view may be seen in the message of righteousness by faith at the 1888 General Conference, in the book *Christ Our Righteousness*, written by A. G. Daniells and published in 1926, and, since 1950, in the work of such theologians as Edward Heppenstall, Desmond Ford and Hans K. LaRondelle. 6) An opposing view, emphasizing sanctification and perfection, has been recently championed by Herbert Douglass of the *Review and Herald* and other denominational leaders in Washington and in Aus-

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tralia. 7) The resulting polarization of these two views — one true to the Reformation and the other an essentially Roman Catholic view — means that Adventism is headed for a “shaking”: “Contemporary Adventism — especially in the 1970s — is in conflict over the nature of the gospel of Paul and the Reformers” (147).

What can we learn from Geoffrey Paxton’s look at Adventism from the outside? Let’s consider some instructive insights which the book provides.

First, it underlines the need for clarity of thinking and carefulness of formulation regarding the relation of justification, sanctification and salvation. It seems clear to me that Adventists have said some things about these matters that were misleading, even wrong. Paxton’s numerous examples show that we have often failed to think through the implication of some of our statements; and, in some cases, we have been genuinely confused. Although, for instance, we have all repeated and affirmed Ellen White’s statement that justification is “our title to heaven” and sanctification is “our fitness for heaven,”<sup>1</sup> we have sometimes talked as if, when everything is said and done, in the day of final judgment a person’s *title* to heaven in fact depends on his *fitness*, so that sanctification is the crucial issue in salvation, after all. Such confusion must surely lead us to agree

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that we need to think more clearly and talk and write with more theological precision.

The book also reminds us of the fact of variety in the history of Adventist thought, which is nowhere nearly as simple and uniform as we usually suppose (or as some wish they could now make it). On the one hand, there is pluralism — a diversity of views, a diversity of understanding and formulation even on so central a matter as the central issue

in personal salvation. The simple fact is that we do *not* all see things the same, and we do not use the same words to express our understanding. On the other hand, there have been change and development. In some cases, this has reflected a maturing religious experience and theological understanding as the church has lived and studied and grown during the past 134 years. In other cases, the change has resulted from the fact that we are speaking to an ever-changing audience in an ever-changing world, with new problems, new perplexities, new understandings and misunderstandings.

**W**hat we need to remember is that a certain pluralism is healthy, and change is essential to life (theological as well as biological). Thus, diversity is good — not because we suppose that theological correctness does not matter (for, in fact, it matters very much), but because we recognize our limitations, and because we have so much to learn. “The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people,” wrote Ellen White, “should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.”<sup>2</sup>

Another insight from the book concerns the importance of continuing dialogue among those who reflect on the church’s message, the importance, to put it another way, of *corporate* investigation of eternal truth. Paxton notes that the unfortunate division created by the preaching of Waggoner and Jones in 1888 and afterward had two costly consequences: 1) Those who opposed the new emphasis on righteousness by faith thereby limited their own experience and understanding, and thus reduced the experience and understanding of the whole church. 2) Because the polarization strained relation-

ships between those who needed each other's friendship and constructive criticism, "Waggoner and Jones missed out on a *corporate* investigation into truth — an investigation which might have preserved them from pantheism" (67). Do I dare make an application to ourselves? In our present discussions of the nature of Jesus, or of the age of the earth, it is absolutely imperative that those who seriously disagree with each other keep on praying for and talking to each other, so that they can learn as much as possible from each other.

**W**e may turn now to some weaknesses and limitations of Paxton's book, bearing in mind that these, like the book's insights, are instructive for us. To begin, the peril of oversimplification — a kind of monocular vision that is confined to a single idea — afflicts Paxton's work on at least four levels.

1) The book ignores much of the New Testament, giving exclusive attention to the understanding of Paul. We must remember that there is more to Christian truth and theology than what the great apostle articulated. There is, above all, the primary witness to the words and works of Jesus in the four canonical Gospels — and one wonders if the Sermon on the Mount, for example, would pass Paxton's doctrinal filter. An unintentional (and therefore all the more significant) confirmation of Paxton's limitation here is his repeated reference to "the gospel of Paul and the Reformers."

2) The book also ignores much of the Reformation's theology, which does not limit itself to the doctrine of justification as Dr. Hans LaRondelle makes clear in his critique of Paxton (see below, pp. 45-57). The truth of justification by faith may be the heart of Reformation belief; but the heart cannot be understood apart from its relationship to the whole body. In fact, Luther and Calvin spent less time talking about the doctrine of justification than they did talking about Christ, repentance and faith.

3) The book ignores much fundamental Adventist belief. There is, I believe, only one passing reference to the Sabbath; and it is hard to imagine a book seriously claiming to

deal with the heart of Adventism that does not look carefully at the theology and experience of the Sabbath. And there is no reference at all to the doctrine of the great controversy, which, although surely not the center of Adventist religion or belief, is just as surely a distinctive theological motif, which provides a context for our understanding of all other doctrines, including justification and sanctification.

4) Finally, the book ignores other issues in the church that are currently being discussed as vigorously as that of justification. For many Adventists, the "burning issue" is *not* "the message of 1888" (81), but rather the tension between "preserving the landmarks" and the theological development of the church. Without minimizing the importance of an adequate understanding of justification and righteousness by faith, and without slighting either the dignity or the theological concerns of our brethren in Australia, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Paxton's view of "the shaking of Adventism" is profoundly influenced by his particular geographical position and by his close personal acquaintance with Robert Brinsmead.

From the peril of oversimplification, we may turn next to the danger of an "eccentric" theological norm — substituting for the Biblical revelation some particular understanding of it, and thus making something other than Scripture the central theological criterion. The book picks one point in religious history and regards it as normative for the whole of history. Now, as a matter of fact, in regard to the doctrine of justification, the Reformation view is essentially true to the New Testament, and Adventism ought to have no quarrel with it. But the principle here is a methodological one: not whether the Reformation view on this or any other doctrine is correct, but whether it ought to be regarded as the criterion by which all other views are to be judged.

One of the fundamental convictions of the Reformation was expressed in the affirmation, "Ecclesia semper reformanda est" — "The church is always in need of reformation," because it is imperfect. This conviction applies not only to the piety of the church, but also to its theology. And so, to be

true to the Reformation means not to recite its formulas and slogans forever and ever without change, but to share its fundamental commitment to truth. Here we may well recall that one of the most important elements in our Adventist heritage is the notion of “present truth” — truth that has come newly alive and has become newly understood and significant because of a new experience, a present situation. What is important, then, theologically and experientially, is not whether our understanding is just like that of the Reformers; what is important is whether our beliefs are *true*.

A third weakness is that Paxton has yielded, it seems to me, to the temptation to read only words, without going to the trouble of probing for their deeper, authentic meaning. What I am getting at here is that words (and theological formulas) may mean different things to different people. Yet, Paxton seems to overlook this. It is correct that we often speak of ourselves as “heirs of the Reforma-

tion,” and we cannot complain that Paxton has heard us saying it. But, instead of trying to discover what we mean by this kind of talk, Paxton decides what we *ought* to mean and then proceeds to use that assumption as a criterion for a theological evaluation. That, I am saying, is a questionable procedure.

I am reminded, having made these criticisms, of Hugh of St. Victor, who once said (in a quite different context, to be sure) that one ought not to be ashamed to learn from anyone. Geoffrey Paxton has provided us not only a “view from the outside,” but also an incentive to think about ourselves — our theological past and our present beliefs — with clearer vision and deeper understanding. This is good; this can be very useful; and I hope that we make the most of it.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Review and Herald*, June 4, 1895 and *Messages to Young People* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1930), p. 35.
2. *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 5 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), p. 707.

## II. Paxton’s Misunderstanding of Adventism

by Herbert E. Douglass

It can be argued from several viewpoints that Geoffrey Paxton’s *The Shaking of Adventism* has done everyone a favor. Although the various reasons for this observation may be mutually exclusive, this volume is the first to expose publically some of the interesting doctrinal developments within the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the last quarter century.

In less than 156 pages, the author touches on many events and people dear to Adventists, and although I can commend him for his

frequent moments of perception, I must also say that his exposure to Adventist history does not seem to have been thorough enough to support his conclusions. His own presuppositions color the work more, I think, than he may realize.

The review will note, first, my appreciation of the author’s perception in analyzing historic Adventism’s self-understanding; second, my pleasure in identifying with certain basic judgments; third, my commendation for certain historical observations with which others may yet disagree with him; fourth, my distress with certain conclusions he draws from Adventist history and teaching; and fifth, some questions I would like to ask the author in the interest of further clarification.

To begin, the author’s awareness of his-

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toric Adventism's self-understanding seems right in the following respects:

Seventh-day Adventists do see themselves as standing in the Reformation stream, clarifying, correcting and consummating the glorious work to which we are all indebted (11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 52, 77, 85, 91, 106, 108, 115). The concept of the "shaking" is a significant event in Adventist eschatology and the issues involved in "righteousness by faith" may be its probable cause (12). Seventh-day Adventists understand themselves to be entrusted with God's last-day message of invitation and warning (23, 24).

Moreover, Adventists believe that through the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian will be enabled to live Christ-reflecting, loving, holy lives (74); that righteousness by faith includes, by God's grace, victory over sin (75); that there is eschatological urgency in the Biblical doctrine of moral perfection (97); and that there is an experiential element in the total concept of justification (139).

With respect to the following judgments, I also agree with Paxton:

It is true that the crux of current discussion among certain Seventh-day Adventists is the relation of justification and sanctification (148), and that the sixteenth-century Reformers were unanimous on the centrality of justification by faith (35). (However, Paxton does not recognize some of the differences among the Reformers regarding the implications of justification, and his understanding

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of Luther often seems contrary to what this reviewer has read in Luther.)

It is also true that the basis and cause for justification lie outside the believer (38); that the error in the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification lies in mingling two types of righteousness, in confusing imputed justification with imparted sanctification (39); that

the righteousness in the believer is not the basis, or the cause, for his or her acceptance by God (46); and that one of the reasons that justification seems to be emphasized especially by certain Protestants is that they believe that God's law can never be kept at any time (49).

The author has also correctly described some crucial aspects and developments of Adventist history. It is right, for instance, to say that the 1888 syndrome has been a continuing influence on Adventist thought (29), that "most" rejected the "message" in 1888 (30), that the 1888 episode appears to be inadequately treated by denominational historians (30-34) and that there are crucial questions Adventists should have been asking themselves since 1888 — questions that were, it seems, never raised publicly until the 1973 Annual Council Appeal (33).

**P**axton rightly observes that there are numerous instances when Adventists have wrongly (though, in most cases, inadvertently) referred to justification as "mere" and as pertaining to "past" sins only (56, 71). Also, some unfortunate expressions regarding the relation of justification and sanctification indeed have been made (77) during the past century.

Paxton is accurate, too, I think, in these assertions regarding several key figures of Adventist history before the 1950s:

Jones and Waggoner, in the 1888 episode, did include sanctification in the total doctrine of righteousness by faith (66). L. E. Froom did teach that major issues, such as the Trinity, the full Deity of Christ and the "correct" understanding of His humanity were the special accomplishments of the 1888 emphasis (69, 87). W. W. Prescott (69) does seem to be (Ellen White aside, one assumes) the most creative Adventist thinker in the early twentieth century. A. G. Daniells, General Conference president (1901-1922), after recognizing that the message of 1888 was not fully understood even in 1926, did propose a solution that has been, in some respects, confusing (75). And M. L. Andreasen's general theses did represent basic, historical Adventist thought prior to the 1950s (76).

Paxton is also, I believe, correct in saying that some denominational spokesmen repudiated basic, historical Adventist teachings in the 1950s (76), and that this repudiation of certain basic Adventist doctrines tended to polarize the Seventh-day Adventist Church (82). Moreover, the Australasian Division's definition of justification in 1959 (91) does seem defective, although it seems to the reviewer that if the authors had expressed their meaning more fully there may not have been such a stark violation of Biblical intent as the truncated definition seems to indicate.

The following claims about various theologians from 1950 onward also seem justified:

Branson, Jemison and many others did believe in the possibility of overcoming all sin by the enabling grace of God (95). Branson, General Conference president (1950-1954), did represent, in his many publications, the basic and typical Adventist position on moral perfection (98).

As for Robert Brinsmead, it is true that in the 1960s he was troubled with his own understanding of original sin, leading to several theological changes and ambivalences (99-101). And Paxton may be right in saying that the General Conference Defense Literature Committee, in their dialogue with the Brinsmead development, did not focus enough on Brinsmead's real theological errors (110). In any case, it is true that for many, the Brinsmead-Ford alignment did seem to be "an almost unbelievable turn of events" and a "dangerous threat" (124).

Paxton asserts, I think rightly, that denominational leadership seemed to show ambivalence in the 1960s on key doctrinal issues (119-120, 127). He is also right in saying that the editors of the *Review and Herald* have represented the historic Adventist positions on the central doctrines of Christianity (124, 126, 127, 133, 142, 144), and that the disagreement that Brinsmead-Ford have with the *Review and Herald* positions is not merely semantic but represents two different theologies (126-127).

Finally, Paxton is accurate in stating that Basham in Australia saw clearly the antithetical nature of Brinsmead-Ford doctrine when compared with traditional Adventist

thought (128-129), and that the Palmdale conference appears to have settled nothing and revealed Brinsmead's contribution to Ford (132).

Having set down some points of agreement with Paxton, I will now consider some substantive disagreements. Again, I feel some embarrassment for what will appear to be only a fast overview lacking in-depth reasons for any disagreements noted. But the most that can be done in a few pages is to note specifically the disagreements and hope that Paxton will sense the fraternal desire to be helpful and candid.

It seems to me that Paxton has not personally read much of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner. Forcefully endorsed by Ellen White, these two position-makers in 1888, and years thereafter, included far more in the phrase, "justification by faith," than Paxton or Brinsmead do; they were not "obsessed with the doctrine of justification by faith alone" (30) unless Paxton concedes that they included far more in that phrase than he does, or than Luther and Calvin did (63).

Strawmen seem to spring out from many a page of the book. Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that justifying righteousness dwells in the believer at any time (41-49), but they do believe that, in addition to imputed righteousness, the Bible is also teaching an imparted righteousness. To emphasize this imparted righteousness is not "to lapse back into the synthesis of medieval Catholicism" (46); nor is the anticipated result of imparted righteousness "imperfect" (45) or inadequate (47). But in saying this, Adventists do not for a moment believe that imparted righteousness constitutes our basis for acceptance and pardon.

Moral perfection, or mature sanctification, or the spontaneous impulse of love's motivating every thought and act is called for and expected in Biblical thought. It is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in cooperation with man's diligent effort (not unaided human will power) and thus the actual "appropriation" of the virtue, merit and provisions of our Lord's atonement. "Active righ-

teousness” is thus not the “work of sinful men” *alone* (45).

Paxton seems to make no effort to differentiate between the Biblical doctrine of Christian maturity (moral perfection) and “perfectionism” (47). The call to Christian perfection is not an echo of the Council of Trent. Paxton, after further reflection, may not wish to be so sweeping when he connects John Wesley as well as basic Adventist thought with the errors of the Church of Rome: “All who insist on perfection in the believer in this life, in whatever shape or form, reiterate the teaching of the Reformers” (46–49).

Without exception, Paxton applies the pejorative terms, perfectionistic and perfectionism, to anyone in the Adventist church who disagrees with him regarding sanctification or the concept of a prepared people in the last generation (142). C. M. Maxwell, Morris Venden, Lawrence Maxwell, J. L. Tucker, K. H. Wood, R. H. Pierson, Neal Wilson, Hans LaRondelle, this reviewer, and a host of other current leaders are not perfectionists. But they do believe that by God’s help men and women can live without sinning and for such people God waits!

**A**dventist theology before 1888 is not to be equated with Tridentine theology (56). Although there may be phrases and even emphases that could be improved upon, most of the Adventist spokesmen Paxton quotes knew well enough not to imply that the faith of the penitent is infused goodness which gives some basis for justification; they knew well that faith has no merit in itself, that it is the condition for justification and not its cause or basis. The fact that these writers insisted that there must be growth in grace in order to retain a justified experience did not make them Tridentine theologians!

Paxton has sometimes quoted Ellen White hastily or in snippets. Rarely, it seems, is there a quotation that does not misrepresent the general tenor of its context. For example: Ellen White *does* agree with her husband and most other Adventist leaders when she sets forth the Biblical position that God is calling for sinless, overcoming Christians, espe-

cially in the last generation (60). Moreover, Ellen White’s sermons in 1888 are hardly an echo of Luther, or Calvin, regarding justification: “Righteousness of Christ in connection with the law”—a central theme of Waggoner, Jones and White in 1888 and afterwards—stressed a fuller understanding of righteousness by faith than Paxton has seen (64). It is true that Paxton quotes what seems to be an unqualified statement by Ellen White regarding Martin Luther (19), but he

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closes a sentence where she did not, and fails to give the proper thought in context—a context that would have canceled out his argument.

Contrary to Paxton, Jones, Waggoner and White were Biblically correct when they joined justification and sanctification in the larger term of “righteousness by faith” (67). Imputed and imparted righteousness is all of God’s doing, always “by faith,” but never without man’s diligent effort. The sovereign God imputes and imparts His righteousness only when man chooses to cooperate with His enabling Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately again, Paxton apparently has not had the time to research the Kellogg — *Living Temple* issue or he would never have confused Kellogg’s position with the Biblical concept of “cleansing of the temple of the human heart” (68).

It is interesting to note that Paxton believes W. W. Prescott to be the only creative Adventist thinker between 1905–1920s (69). This *Review and Herald* editor, college president and seminal thinker was one of the foremost spokesmen for such historic Adventist positions as the humanity of Jesus, the character perfection required in the last generation, the full-orbed concept of righteousness by faith that includes justification and

sanctification, and the central need for a correction and proper fulfillment of the good work begun in the Protestant Reformation.

M. L. Andreasen's positions, such as righteousness by faith, the humanity of Jesus, the character preparation that God will wait for in the last generation are truly basic, historic Adventist positions—thoroughly in harmony with Ellen White and Biblical principles. Yet Andreasen is always referred to in a pejorative sense (72, 76, 88, 95, 109).

Paxton reveals his Calvinistic blinders when he accuses Adventists of semi-Pelagian, Tridentine theology from the standpoint of his concept of the freedom or sovereignty of God (77). Such a presupposition gives no room for the enormous amount of freedom that God has given man in the plan of salvation; it redefines the Biblical meaning of grace and faith and further distorts what the Bible expects out of the converted person.

Furthermore, it leads Paxton to misunderstand Adventist positions on faith (the human cooperation with the indwelling Spirit whereby the sinner “comes to himself,” accepts pardon, claims the promised power and eventually reflects the fruits of the Spirit or Christlikeness) and grace (that work of the Holy Spirit, among other gracious provisions of God, that strengthens the “new creation,” not subjugates him).

When Paxton says, “this ontological appropriation of the merits of Christ is at the expense of the believer's humanhood,” he reveals his philosophical presuppositions and a blindness to the New Testament good news wrapped up in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (78-79).

Paxton will find a very large group of thoughtful Adventists who would not agree with his conclusion that there were Christological and soteriological gains in the 1950s (83), or that *Questions on Doctrine* represented a “distinct superiority” over earlier Adventist literature (89-90). Without question, *Questions on Doctrine* has provided the world with excellent statements of certain aspects of Adventist thought and we are all indebted to it, but there are some areas that come short of the accolade he gives.

The *Review and Herald* of the 1970s is

categorically not an echo of Brinsmead thinking of the 1960s (127, 153). Although there may be similarities, the strange turns and resolutions that Brinsmead took because of his misunderstanding of the nature of man are nowhere reflected in the positions of the *Review and Herald* editors.

The *Review and Herald* does not downgrade justification because it may give, at times, more column inches to sanctification than to justification—any more than Paul does when he devotes far more verses and chapters to sanctification than to justification. The same comparison would apply to Ellen White. If one is speaking to nonbelievers, obviously justification would be given more emphasis. When speaking to believers who should be at peace with the continuing assurances of justification, the strong exhortation to grow in grace is appropriate (138).

Opting for Luther and Calvin almost exclusively, rather than including Wesley and many others, Paxton rejects the thought that sin can be overcome (48-49). Possibly this misunderstanding rests on another misunderstanding—his doctrine of the nature of man. Because of these two doctrinal presuppositions, Paxton quarrels with such historic Adventist concepts as the human nature of Jesus, sanctification and why the Advent is delayed.

Paxton misreads Hans LaRondelle (135). Dr. LaRondelle and this reviewer could not be closer in their emphasis on the possibility that sin can be overcome, here and now, by the grace of God. More than this possibility, we have been emphasizing for years that such an experience will happen to many the world over in the last generation. LaRondelle may not always stress everything he believes when he writes an article, or delivers his masterful sermons, any more than anyone else does. But to suggest that he lies in the theological camp of (the later) Robert Brinsmead is inaccurate.

Although from Paxton's viewpoint and presuppositions it may seem so, the present situation in contemporary Adventism is not analogous to the Protestant Reformation versus Roman Catholic antithesis (147-151).



It is more correct to say that it is a conflict of whether we should stay with Luther and Calvin or follow the progressive clarification of New Testament truth as made clearer by Wesley and others. If following in the steps of the Reformers means to wade in the dammed-up stream of the sixteenth century, we would be doing violence to the best in Luther and Calvin, never mind to the intent of Paul and the purposes of God.

Paxton cannot be blind to the Reformation's particular place in the stream of restoring New Testament truth, to its internal conflicts, to its inconsistencies, to its strained and often unbalanced definitions of key Biblical words. He recognizes, for example, that the Reformers had little eschatological perspective and urgency (147). But it seems to me that if the Reformers had had time (and if they had not been fighting a battle on so many fronts at once) they would have followed through as Wesley did, and as Adventists have done, and discovered the purpose of the gospel seed, what the harvest represents, and what part God's people, who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," play in the finishing up of the great controversy with evil.

In fact, it is unacceptable to say that traditional Adventist thinking does not stand in the "Reformation stream" (148). We have for over a century emphasized and revered the twin principles of the Reformation: the sole authority of the Bible and salvation through faith in Christ alone. Our theology is grounded completely and without embarrassment on these twin pillars of the Reformation.

The "life-and-death struggle" that Paxton perceives may be more wishful thinking than reality (152). Hearty study and self-examination are not the worst things that could happen to anybody or to a whole church. If heresies arise, hoary issues appearing as new light, a healthy church grows stronger in restating basic Biblical truths.

**I**t is sheer fantasy to find a correlation between 1888 and today by noting that the editor of the *Review* (1888) fought young

men with clear light on justification by faith and the editor of the *Review* (1970s) also is in conflict with younger men who purport to have clearer light on justification by faith. This is the language of the debater, not that of the scholar.

Perhaps this reviewer's greatest concern is that Paxton (155) does not seem to understand the relation of Jesus to the Law, why Jesus came, the function of the Holy Spirit ("in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"—Rom. 8:4), how the believer can be kept from sinning and thus an obedient child of God by the same grace that kept Jesus from sinning. To be enabled by the Holy Spirit to overcome sin is not to fall into the trap of legalism or Romanism!

Although the reviewer cannot expect Paxton to appreciate Ellen White as he does, Paxton should be more accurate when he quotes those who consider her to be a special messenger for a special purpose in the unfolding plans of God. Can Paxton find anywhere among Adventist writers, especially among those he quotes in his book, any comment that would faintly suggest a basis for the following statement: "It is a sad sign of a people who take another human being—however gifted and used of God—and place her above the Bible and herself" (155)? Nowhere, to this reviewer's knowledge, has an Adventist placed Ellen White either above the Bible as a higher authority or in conflict with the Bible as a wiser authority.

Let me conclude with a few questions on which it is to be hoped that further clarification from Paxton will be forthcoming:

Why does Paxton imply strongly that historical Adventism does not regard the basis for justification as a finished work, when surely it does (42)?

Why does Paxton use the debater's either/or technique? For example: a) anyone who believes sins may be overcome by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit is a perfectionist; b) anyone who believes that Christ within, through the Holy Spirit, may cleanse the soul from sin tends toward pantheism; c) anyone who believes that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, performs a work of righteous-

ness in the believer is rooted in Tridentine theology?

Does Paxton really believe that Luther and Calvin needed no correction in their soteriology, that Wesley, or even Ellen White, have nothing to teach us?

Has Paxton really read the Annual Council Appeals of 1973 and 1974? If so, would he conclude that such clear, dynamic statements are hangovers from the adolescent days of

immature Adventism? These Appeals are perhaps the clearest presentations regarding the Adventist denomination's present relationship to the 1888 syndrome that have appeared anywhere for decades. The two Appeals touch so many of the concerns that Paxton raises that it seems they should have been represented by more than a passing comment (33) in a book that covers almost all the rest of the waterfront.

### III. The Truth of Paxton's Thesis

by Desmond Ford

In *The Shaking of Adventism*, Anglican clergyman Geoffrey J. Paxton sets forth the thesis that Seventh-day Adventism's claim to complete the Reformation (by proclamation of its doctrinal heart in an improved framework) falls miserably short of the facts. He argues that, apart from Ellen White, Adventism had almost nothing to say on the gospel of grace prior to 1888 and that from 1888 until the present "acceptance in the final judgment" has been said to be "on the basis of the inward grace of sanctification," that justification has been considered as significant chiefly for the initial pardon of the believer, and that "righteousness by faith has meant *both* justification and sanctification, but mainly sanctification."<sup>1</sup> Paxton also argues that, while in the 1960s the perfectionism of Robert Brinsmead roused the opposition of many anti-perfectionism writers in the *Review and Herald* and elsewhere, in the 1970s, when Brinsmead has reversed his theological emphasis, a spate of perfectionistic articles have been appearing, especially in the *Review*.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Paxton says that, despite their claim to base their doctrines on the Bible only, Adventists often form their conclusions on the basis of the writings of Ellen G. White interpreted according to prevailing prejudices.<sup>3</sup>

Here is a distinctively new approach by a critic of Adventism. There is no contention about the scapegoat, the investigative judgment, the seventh-day sabbath or the nature of man. Instead, our traditional opposition to Rome is construed as claiming fidelity to the chief doctrinal motif of the Reformation and we are examined accordingly. In his debate with Cardinal Sadoletto, John Calvin affirmed that justification alone constituted the righteousness of faith, and that it should ever be distinguished but never separated from sanctification.<sup>4</sup> Paxton charges Adventists again and again with having lost the Gospel as taught by the Reformers and asserts that precisely our inclusion of sanctification within the article of righteousness by faith demonstrates this loss.

Do we have here the lopsided work of one who because he does not dwell among us cannot represent us aright? Or is it a case of the onlooker seeing most of the game? Let us consider some of the objections critics put forth against the book.

Probably the chief one is the suspicion that it is a thinly disguised apologetic for Robert Brinsmead, that troubler of Adventism in the sixties; he is certainly the most prominent figure of the book. Second, the thought stirs that it may not be entirely true that Adventist pastors were all perfectionists until the sixties (not that Paxton says precisely that, but to many readers it is implied). A third question, more vital theologically, is whether Paxton is promoting justification to the exclusion or

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