

SPECTRUM with Dr. Ray Damazo, a dentist and businessman in Seattle, Washington, as chairman. Members of the board have committed themselves to contribute a minimum of \$500 a year for three years in order to expand the circulation of the journal and secure its continuity. They will receive reports about SPECTRUM plans and be invited to meet once a year to share their views with the editors of SPECTRUM and the elected leaders of AAF.

The first decade of AAF has now ended. Beginning as the idea of several dedicated laymen, AAF has lasted longer than many would have predicted. It has had its share of problems, from internal tensions to external confrontations with church leaders. However, it has performed a vital service to Seventh-day Adventism as best expressed in the February 1977 Forum:

Along with their fellow Protestants, Adventists believe in a church whose authority is God, whose will is revealed in the Bible, which is available to all members. The church is not just the clergy, but *all* the members. The Association of Adventist Forums is committed to what is implicit in

this concept of the priesthood of all believers — a democratic church. The only way democracy can function is by constant and full communication among members of the community.

AAF's base of leadership and membership may be small, as many volunteer organizations are, but AAF has made the mission of many church members easier to attain and, in turn, has aided the church's mission by creating a more open environment. For this one contribution above all others, church members can be grateful for the vision of a few laymen in 1967.

This history is based upon extensive administrative files located in the Association of Adventist Forums office in Takoma Park, Maryland, interviews and correspondence from Roy Branson, David Claridge, Molleurus Couperus, Lawrence Geraty, Alvin Kwiram, Joe Mesar, Ronald Numbers and Ernest Plata. Janet Minesinger provided valuable editorial help. In addition, since 1971 the author has been involved in AAF affairs as a local chapter officer, as well as national officerships as a regional representative, vice president, executive secretary and treasurer. Because of his close involvement during these years, the account may show some bias in certain areas — something every historian attempts to avoid but usually fails to do.

Dominant Themes in Adventist Theology

by Richard Rice

The word "theology" refers both to religious beliefs and to the task of reflecting on these beliefs. Since the first issue of SPECTRUM appeared in the late sixties, a lot has happened in Adventist theology in both senses of the term.

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As we look over the recent developments in SDA theology, we notice that different segments of the church's membership have somewhat different theological concerns. The primary concern of the world leadership during this time, as represented by Robert H. Pierson, has certainly been eschatology, with its emphasis on finishing the work and preparing a people to meet the Lord. Other theological matters are clearly subordinate to this. Concern for church unity thus arises from the desire to create an efficient

evangelistic effort which will hasten the fulfillment of the hope of the church. And church leaders are likely to be at least as concerned with the potentially divisive effects of the discussion of, say, righteousness by faith, as with which of the various views expressed is valid.

If the content of SPECTRUM reflects the interests of what may be roughly designated as the intellectual or academic-oriented branch of the church, the theological concerns of this group are typically related to the intelligibility of the Christian faith as Adventists understand it. Its members are committed to examining the credibility of traditional Adventist beliefs from the perspectives of modern science and history, as the extensive discussion of such topics in SPECTRUM as the age of the earth and the literary dependence of Ellen G. White indicate. And they are also interested in explaining the significance of Adventist beliefs to an intellectual audience outside, as well as within, the church, as past articles exploring the meaning of the Second Coming and of the Sabbath indicate. In addition, as SPECTRUM articles on the proposed statements of belief reveal, they are also anxious to preserve "room" in the Adventist community, both intellectually and politically, for reflection of this kind.

We can review the developments in Adventist beliefs by following the general sequence of Christian doctrines found in almost all systematic theologies, from Augustus Hopkins Strong's to Paul Tillich's.¹ The usual procedure is to consider first the topic of revelation, or knowledge of God, and then to deal with the doctrines of God, man, salvation, church, and last things.²

Revelation

In the area of revelation, the question which most concerns Adventists is the factual or historical reliability of inspired writings. Is the Bible completely trustworthy, not only in its general view of man and God, but also when it makes historical claims, when it speaks of the origins and early history of life on this planet? This has been an important issue in Adventism for some time, but in view of the division it has recently

caused in other conservative churches, such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,³ some leading Adventists are anxious to resolve it in a decisive way. Thus, the recent documents on inspiration and creation are intended to "preserve the landmarks" of Adventism by stating an official church position on the matter.⁴

The North American Bible Conferences of 1974 dealt in part with this aspect of inspiration. In the opening essay of the Conference publication, *A Symposium of Biblical Hermeneutics*, Raoul Dederen rejects interpretations which construe revelation exclusively in terms of personal encounter and minimize or eliminate its factual significance. He insists that revelation comprises both divine-human encounter and the verbal interpretation of such encounter. So the factual claims of scripture are integral to divine revelation, not subsequent or secondary to it.⁵

Adventists often decry the consequences of abandoning the historical reliability of scriptures, arguing that scripture is unreliable in all respects if it is unreliable in any. Therefore, if the plain statements about the origins of life on earth are not taken simply as they read, the Bible cannot be trusted when it speaks of God's love for man or His provision for man's salvation. Even when not explicitly stated, this view of doctrinal breakdown, the fear that the whole system of belief will cave in if this crucial position is surrendered, underlies a great deal of Adventist discussion of inspiration.

Creation

The most important portion of Scripture in this connection is Genesis 1-11, and attempts to reconcile these chapters with historical and scientific data appear in the regular *Ministry* columns "Science and Religion" and "Archaeology and the Bible," in the publications of the Geoscience Research Institute, and in numerous SPECTRUM articles by Adventist scientists. Adventists usually insist that a factual interpretation of these chapters entails belief in a literal seven-day creation week and a "short chronology" for a history of life on this planet, meaning roughly 6,000 years. The difficulty of main-

taining these views in the face of conventional biological and geological theories is obvious, and Seventh-day Adventist scientists have responded in a variety of ways.

The best-known and least controversial response is to emphasize the complexity of life as supporting belief in an intelligent designer of the universe. Another is to argue that the data thought to support conventional theories are not conclusive. And a third is to argue that certain data are accounted for with equal, or even superior, adequacy on the model of catastrophism, or by means of a short chronology.⁶ For example, some Adventist scientists argue that the Yellowstone fossil forests can be accounted for by a "transport model," compatible with a relatively short chronology. Others, however, including Richard Ritland, insist that the data support the more generally accepted "position of growth" explanation, which requires much longer periods of time.⁷

In comparison with the interest in the factual reliability of Genesis 1-11, much less attention has been given to the precise nature of these chapters. Many Adventists merely assume that a factual interpretation of Genesis 1-11 necessarily entails a chronology of a few thousand years. But some of the church's biblical scholars have questioned that assumption. Writing in SPECTRUM, Larry Geraty concludes that ancient genealogies do not provide a basis for precise chronology. Their basic purpose is to establish descent from some particular ancestor, and the list of names they contain is typically selective, rather than exhaustive. Consequently, the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 set no outside limits to the number of years that life has existed on this earth.⁸

Ellen White

Believing that God is revealed in the writings of Ellen White, as well as in the Bible, Seventh-day Adventists have also reviewed the nature and purpose of her ministry. SPECTRUM articles by Herold Weiss and Joseph J. Battistone deal with the important question of her relation to the Bible.⁹ Weiss observes that the tendency of many Adventists to give her writings "hermeneutical mastery over Scripture" closely parallels the Roman Catholic attitude toward tradition.

To remain faithful to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, he states, Adventists must not allow her writings to distract from the direct study of the Bible, or regard them as a shortcut to its meaning.

By far, the most vigorous discussion of Ellen White concerns her literary dependence and its implications for the claim that she was divinely inspired. One stage of this discussion appeared in the pages of SPECTRUM in the early 1970s, beginning with William S. Peterson's study of Ellen White's account of the French Revolution. Another surrounds the publication of Ronald L. Numbers'

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*Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White.*¹⁰ Peterson and Numbers find striking similarities between Ellen White's views on history and health, respectively, and those in various writings she was familiar with. They observe that the similarities often extend beyond a limited amount of data or language to the basic concepts she propounds. According to Peterson, Ellen White not only borrowed certain descriptions from such writers as D'Aubigne, for example, but her general perspective is indistinguishable from theirs.¹¹ And Numbers notes that the relation between masturbation and disease described in *Appeal to Mothers* was widely held in the nineteenth century.¹² In addition, Numbers disputes Ellen White's denials that she was acquainted with certain materials before expressing the messages she received in vision.

Both Peterson and Numbers describe their work as "historical"; neither explicitly addresses the question of Ellen White's inspiration. But as far as many Adventists are con-

cerned, this is clearly the issue the two have raised. For one thing, their findings call into question the familiar explanation that she received the broad outlines of her views in vision, and turned to other sources simply to fill in the details. They also render problematic the claim that while Ellen White's views were not always unique, her selection of the right views among the many available to her substantiate the supernatural origin of her work.

The availability of Donald R. McAdams' study of Ellen White's use of sources in the writing of *The Great Controversy* has further stimulated the church's thinking on the nature and purpose of Ellen White's prophetic gift. Besides corroborating the conclusions of others that Ellen White made extensive use of the historical writings available to her, McAdams' work shows that she incorporated many of the historical errors found in her sources. His research also brings to light the considerable extent to which Ellen White's manuscript was reworked by her literary assistant, Marian Davis.¹³

Among the various respondents to these studies, none has taken them more seriously than the Ellen G. White Estate. Its representatives have replied to Peterson and Numbers, and it has published an extensive critique of Numbers' book.¹⁴ In addition, the *Adventist Review* recently presented a seven-part series by Arthur L. White, secretary of the White Estate for 41 years, on the use of historical sources in the writing of the Conflict of the Ages books, particularly *The Great Controversy* and *The Desire of Ages*.¹⁵

The responses take several tacks, all designed to minimize the impact of these studies on the church's traditional understanding of Ellen White's prophetic inspiration. One is to argue that some of the supposed errors discovered in Ellen White's writings are not really errors, after all. Another is to insist that what questionable material there is comprises an infinitesimal portion of her writings. However, such approaches presuppose an inerrancy view of inspiration, as Gary Land observes in his SPECTRUM review of the White Estate's critique of Numbers' book. He suggests that the dichotomy *either God or man*, is false

when it comes to explaining the source of a prophet's messages.¹⁶ The possibility exists that divinely inspired ideas may coincide with naturalistically acquired ones.

Along somewhat similar lines, Fritz Guy reminds us that since an inspired prophet is not necessarily an infallible human being, as the Bible clearly shows, the discernment of personal failings in Ellen White's life does not discredit the divine source of her messages. He also maintains that there is a difference between recognizing a prophetic ministry and fully understanding it. With this distinction in mind, he argues, we can carefully study questions like those which Numbers raises, and consequently revise our understanding of Ellen White's inspiration, without surrendering our basic confidence in the divine authority of her ministry.¹⁷

The discovery of the minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference some 60 years later shows that the problem of interpreting Ellen G. White's writings accurately has been with the church a long time.¹⁸ The minutes reveal that some prominent Adventist leaders around the turn of the century, including A. G. Daniells, W. W. Prescott and F. M. Wilcox, all of whom were personally acquainted with Mrs. White, affirmed their complete confidence in her prophetic gift, but rejected the idea that her messages were verbally inspired and provide an infallible historical or even doctrinal authority. At the same time, these leaders were sensitive to the fact that many Adventists did believe in the verbal inspiration of her writings and would be distressed to find this concept criticized. So they urged Adventist teachers to be exceedingly careful in dealing with the topic and to avoid disrupting the faith of church members. Reading the minutes leaves one with a sense of astonishment, so closely do the issues of that day parallel those which now concern Adventist scholars, teachers and administrators. One cannot help wondering what would have happened to the church in this century if, instead of burying the minutes of their meeting in a vault, the participants in the conference had continued a frank discussion of the questions they raised.

God and Man

The doctrines of God and man are fundamental to any theological system, and in the work of contemporary theologians their significance had increased. Indeed, for many today, theology is essentially anthropology, the attempt to formulate an adequate understanding of man. Thus, Paul Tillich offers no independent doctrine of man in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, because the entire system represents an interpretation of human existence. And in his most recent work, the Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner develops an explanation of Christianity on the basis of an extensive analysis of man as the potential recipient of divine revelation.¹⁹

In contrast to this increasing emphasis on God and man, Seventh-day Adventists have devoted comparatively little of their theological attention specifically to these two topics. Instead, they typically deal with these themes

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as they arise in connection with other doctrinal concerns. Recent interest in the nature of human sin, for example, arises out of a primary concern for the question of perfection, rather than from a basic interest in understanding human nature. There are several exceptions to this trend, however, including two anthropological treatises by European Adventists, Jean Zurcher’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*,²⁰ and Carsten Johnsen’s *Man the Indivisible*.²¹ Both works deal with the unity of man, a familiar concern of Seventh-day Adventists, and both approach this topic from a philosophical, rather than a theological, perspective. In the area of the doctrine of God, a notable exception is the work of A. Graham Maxwell, a professor of religion at

Loma Linda University and its predecessor for the past 18 years.

The central concern of Maxwell’s teaching and preaching is the character, or trustworthiness, of God, which he explores almost exclusively within the framework of the great controversy concept that permeates Ellen G. White’s writings. His most recent book, *Can God Be Trusted?*, develops this theme in relation to such topics as the incarnation and atonement, and distinctive Adventist concerns like the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, the Sabbath, the judgment and the Second Coming of Christ. According to Maxwell, the essence of the Gospel is that “God is not the kind of person Satan has made him out to be,”²² and the true picture of God is supported by abundant evidence that appeals to the reasonable person.²³

Salvation

The doctrine of salvation is the central and most comprehensive division of Christian theology. As generally formulated, it concerns both the person and work of Christ and the different aspects of the experience of salvation, such as justification and sanctification. Salvation had probably received more attention from Adventists than any other doctrine in recent years. At the same time, no area of theology has generated more sharply divergent opinions within the church. Indeed, the discussion of these issues has become so heated that some are fearful of its effects on the unity of the church. Five months after assuming the presidency of the General Conference, Neal C. Wilson issued an open letter to the church calling for a moratorium on public presentations dealing with “the fine points and the controversial aspects of the theology of righteousness by faith.” He proposes that the General Conference appoint a representative committee from different branches of the church to provide “helpful and practical direction” on these matters under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

We can review some of the controverted aspects of Adventist soteriology by referring to the work of Edward Heppenstall, long a major influence in Adventist theology, and for 12 years professor of theology at the SDA

Theological Seminary. Since retiring, he has written three books devoted to soteriological themes: *Our High Priest*, *Salvation Unlimited* and *The Man Who Was God*.²⁵ These books are noteworthy for several reasons, including their discussion of some traditional Adventist positions, such as the investigative judgment, which have not received as much attention lately as in the past, and their incorporation of other doctrinal themes, such as man, church and last things, within the overall rubric of salvation. However, the number of issues on which Heppenstall and other Adventists differ underscores the current diversity within the church's soteriology.

One of these is the question of perfection. The symposium volume, *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility*,²⁶ illustrates the different approaches to the subject of perfection prevalent in Adventism and offers different views of the possibility and necessity of perfection in this life. For two of the book's contributors, Herbert E. Douglass and C. Mervyn Maxwell, the question of perfection is closely related to the mission of the Advent people at the end of earth's history. On the basis of the "harvest principle," Douglass argues that Christ is waiting to return "until the gospel has produced a sizable and significant group of mature Christians in the last generation."²⁷ According to him, the individuals in this group will reach a point in their experience which actually reproduces Christ's success in resisting sin. They will thus demonstrate the justice of God's requirements of man even more decisively than did Christ, who was divine as well as human.²⁸

Maxwell, too, maintains that the unique destiny of the Advent people ultimately requires them to develop perfect characters, since they must eventually stand in the presence of God without a mediator and live to be translated at Christ's return. While "justification by faith suffices for resurrection," it is not adequate for translation. For this, a "more than ordinary preparation is needed."²⁹ This "harvest readiness" requires one to appropriate the significance of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the seventh-day Sabbath.

The book's other contributors, Edward Heppenstall and Hans K. LaRondelle, base their interpretations of perfection upon biblical uses of the word. They describe the content of perfection as a positive orientation to the will of God and the manifestation of love toward others. In contrast to Maxwell and Douglass, Heppenstall denies that a special level of moral attainment, comparable to that of Christ, will be reached by God's people at the end of time, and emphasizes the distance between Christ's achievement and that of every other human being.³⁰ Adventists disagree, then, as to the level of moral development attainable in this life.

A related difference of opinion concerns the condition of Christ's human nature. Theologians disagree as to whether or not Christ's humanity was identical to that of other men, and both views find support in various statements of Ellen G. White. Not surprisingly, those who maintain that Christ's moral achievement can be "reproduced" by others also emphasize Christ's similarity to other human beings. In a controversial series of Sabbath School lessons entitled "Jesus, the Model Man," Herbert E. Douglass argues the possibility of moral victory in the Christian life on the grounds that Christ inherited the same nature as other men.³¹

Directly opposing this view, Edward Heppenstall asserts that "the Christ presented as a human being with a sinful nature is not the God-man of the Scriptures, but only a god-like man." In fact, Christ was not born as all others in a condition of self-centeredness and alienation from God, but enjoyed "conscious and unbroken oneness in fellowship with God through every phase of His life." According to Heppenstall, the view that Christ's humanity was sinful contributes to a mistaken concept of Christian living which distracts one from Christ as the only hope of salvation and ultimately "reduces the gospel to concentration upon self."³²

The humanity of Jesus is also the subject of two recent book-length studies. Drawing largely upon the writings of Ellen White,

Thomas A. Davis presents a strongly exemplarist interpretation of Christ in *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* His basic purpose is to assure Christians that they can live the victorious life which Jesus did, on the grounds that he was subject to all our liabilities and we have access to all his resources.³³ The thesis of Davis' Christology is that Jesus' human nature is best understood as that of the person who has been born again.³⁴ Though he never sinned, Jesus nevertheless possessed fallen human nature, that is, "human nature affected by the Fall of Adam and Eve, in which the whole person is susceptible to the temptations and weaknesses of mankind, and is inadequate of itself to conform to the will of God."³⁵ While insisting that Jesus was really like us, Davis acknowledges that in many respects he was different, including the height of his spiritual achievements, his inherent divinity, the absence of a sinful past, and most significantly, the possession of an unfallen will.³⁶ Since a distorted will is certainly the most important moral effect of sin, it is not clear how Davis can consistently maintain that Jesus assumed fallen human nature and at the same time deny that his will was affected by sin.

In *Jesus the Man*, Edward W. H. Vick examines the way in which Jesus functions as the central object of Christian faith. He emphasizes that all that Christianity claims for Jesus has its basis in faith, including his humanity, his divinity and his resurrection.³⁷ Christianity involves not only the recognition that God was uniquely active in the life of Jesus, but also the recognition that this recognition itself is due to God's activity. This does not mean that faith creates its object, but it means that the claims of faith cannot be substantiated on grounds that are independent of faith, such as the conclusions of scientific or historical investigation.³⁸ It also means that attempts to describe the object of faith, such as the classic christological formulas, should be regarded as exploratory expressions of Christian experience rather than final, authoritative statements.³⁹ In contrast to these classical formulas and in harmony with contemporary theology in general, Vick's own approach is to develop a Christology "from below," which affirms

the full humanity of Jesus at all costs, including his participation in the sinful structures of human existence.⁴⁰ Vick does not pursue this concept along the lines of Adventist writers like Davis, however, for he criticizes the exemplarist approach to Christology. In his view, our condition is such that we need a savior, not merely an example, and regarding Jesus primarily as example may lead us either to despair of ever reaching the standard he sets or to the unchristian view that he could conceivably be surpassed.⁴¹

Recent Adventist treatments of the work of Christ contain contrasts in viewpoint no less striking than those surrounding the question of his person. In *God Is With Us*, Jack Provonsha presents what is essentially a "subjective" theory of atonement, emphasizing the transforming impact of the cross

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upon man's perception of God. Provonsha interprets the cross primarily as a revelation of the suffering which sin has caused God from its very inception, because of his unfailing love for man. And since "man's sin did not alienate God—it only alienated man," there is no need for God's attitude toward man to change, only man's attitude toward God. Accordingly, the purpose of salvation is to deal with man's misperception of the divine character. In the effort to communicate His acceptance of man, God has provided various "aids to trust," of which Christ's death is the most effective. The saving aspect of the cross is its power to inspire men to trust in God after all. In Provonsha's words, "the central event in the at-one-ment, properly understood, is the possibility it opens up for faith."⁴² What makes atonement necessary is thus man's distorted view of God, not some aspect of the divine nature, such as wrath or justice.

To the contrary, Edward Heppenstall asserts, "the necessity for Christ's death lies in

the righteousness of God rather than in the radical nature of man's rebellion."⁴³ Subjective theories of atonement are inadequate because the cross is more than a demonstration of love. Indeed, the spectacle of undeserved suffering may create hostility rather than awaken trust. The cross is appropriately understood, therefore, as required by God's righteousness, not merely by His love.⁴⁴

Geoffrey J. Paxton's book, *The Shaking of Adventism*, produced a shaking of its own within the Adventist Church.⁴⁵ For one reason, the author is a non-Adventist who is keenly interested in Adventist theology. For another, the book deals with righteousness by faith, which has long been a sensitive issue for Seventh-day Adventists. A third reason for the wide attention the book has received may be its author's association with Robert D. Brinsmead, who for nearly 20 years has agitated the church's thinking, first with his perfectionist views on the cleansing of the sanctuary, and more recently with his anti-perfectionist views of righteousness by faith.

The general purpose of the book is to assess the claim of Seventh-day Adventists to be the authentic heirs of the Protestant Reformation. To evaluate this claim, Paxton examines the Adventist understanding of salvation in light of the Reformation doctrine of righteousness by faith, and by this standard he finds it wanting. While a few Adventists now steadfastly affirm the Reformation understanding of righteousness by faith as justification only, many synthesize sanctification with justification by their emphasis on character development as a condition of salvation. And with any such synthesis, Paxton insists, the Reformer's principal insight is lost.

Paxton reads more into their claim to be heirs of the Reformation than most Adventists do, and his interpretation of the Reformation doctrine of justification oversimplifies the Reformers' actual understanding. In fact, the Reformers themselves held that justification and sanctification are inseparable. So the rigid standard by which Paxton evaluates Adventist views is somewhat artificial. But,

if the general strategy of the book can be faulted, its review of the development of the doctrine of salvation within Adventism and its analysis of the diverse views of salvation among contemporary Adventist theologians are well informed and generally accurate. The experience of salvation is one aspect of Adventist theology which exhibits a notable lack of consensus.

Church

Traditionally one of the least developed aspects of Adventist theology, the doctrine of church has become a major topic of interest. This is due largely to social and political developments, which, as the history of Christianity reveals, often provide a powerful stimulus to theological reflection. In current Adventist ecclesiology, the principal issues fall into two categories: relations within the church, and relations between the church and other people and institutions. In the area of intrachurch relations, the major questions concern the nature and scope of church authority. Who should participate in the leadership of the church and to what extent should the lives of its members be subject to church authority?

One of the most important questions confronting the church is the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, an issue which Adventism shares with many other Christian groups. A subcommittee of the Biblical Research Institute has examined the various biblical and historical aspects of this question, but the 1974 Annual Council decided for social, rather than theological, reasons not to extend ordination to women at this time. The rationale is that the attitude toward women prevalent in certain parts of the world makes their ordination there impossible, so the church should not ordain women anywhere in the interest of uniformity.⁴⁶

The participation of black Adventists in church leadership is also a matter of recent concern, although the issue has a long history. One of the questions discussed is whether the church should establish black union conferences within the North American Division.⁴⁷ Some maintain that the increased opportunities for black leadership created by these institutions would lead to

dramatic growth in black church membership. But others argue that this development would widen the gap between blacks and whites within the church just when we need increased communication and understanding, and that the logical conclusion of such a development is an entirely separate church organization for black Adventists.

The question of church authority has received a lot of attention, mainly because of some rather widely publicized litigation involving several Adventist institutions.⁴⁸ On one level, the lawsuits are concerned with the status of women employees within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whether or not their wages should be equal to those of men doing the same work. But the suits have raised several other questions, too. One is whether the U.S. government has the right to require the Adventist Church to meet employment practices established by federal law. Church leaders have argued that such a

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requirement violates the separation of church and state guaranteed by the constitution. Another concerns the scope of church authority within its members' lives. Should an Adventist who sues one of the church's institutions be subjected to church discipline?

The most important theological question arises from the use of the expressions “spiritual leader,” “first minister” and “hierarchical system” to describe the leaders and organizations of the Adventist Church in the affidavits of church officers. In his “Report to the Church” two years ago explaining the lawsuits, Robert H. Pierson, then General Conference president, attributed the use of these terms to non-Adventist attorneys and denies that they indicate a new church polity.⁴⁹ But he did not deny—indeed, his discussion as a whole affirmed—what these terms imply, namely,

that the authority of the church is concentrated at the highest level of elected leadership, that is, in the officers of the General Conference. In a SPECTRUM article, Ron Walden compares the idea of church which emerges from the legal documents recently filed by our church leaders with the classical Roman Catholic doctrine of the church. The most striking parallel he finds is precisely this concentration of the power and essence of the church in the highest church offices. According to Walden, our church leaders' understandable desire to protect church unity accounts for their emphasis on the church's highest authority. Nevertheless, he argues, by shifting the center of gravity in Adventist church polity toward its hierarchical pole and away from its congregational pole, this development poses a threat to the important value of diversity within the church.⁵⁰

This concern for church unity is also reflected in the proposed statements of belief which officials of the General Conference have presented to various academic groups within the past several years. In a *Review* editorial entitled “Preserve the Landmarks,”⁵¹ W. J. Hackett, vice president of the General Conference, declares that statements clearly defining the church's position in various doctrinal areas are needed in order to preserve the church's identity and prevent the erosion of faith evident in many other Christian bodies. Thus, the documents circulated so far are attempts to formulate a “centrist position” or a “statement of consensus” on the issues of inspiration and creation. Actually, however, they have stimulated little discussion on these matters. As several of the items appearing in SPECTRUM indicate,⁵² the church's academic community in general is much more concerned about the use to which these documents will be put and the possible effects of making them a standard of orthodoxy. The letters published in the *Review* responding to Hackett's editorial reveal that the most pressing question in the minds of many church members is what this whole development represents in light of the historic approach to truth within the Adventist Church. To some, the attempt to establish doctrinal consensus by administrative action is a disturbing departure from historic Ad-

ventism, with its rejection of creeds in deference to the ultimate authority of the Bible, its commitment to the ongoing discovery of truth, and its belief that the development of doctrine is the responsibility of church members in general and not the special province of official leaders. Since a religious community's view of how to arrive at truth is fundamental to its self-understanding, the basic issue here is the essential nature of the church. The questions raised by the recent statements are thus very similar to those emerging from the lawsuits. These attempts to achieve doctrinal conformity also reveal an increasing emphasis on the authority of "elected leadership," to use Neal C. Wilson's expression,⁵³ and an expanding conception of its role.

In the area of extrachurch relations, or relations between the church and people and institutions outside the church, the church's understanding of its mission has undergone careful examination in recent years. In several writings, beginning with two articles in *SPECTRUM*,⁵⁴ Gottfried Oosterwal, the most prolific contributor to this discussion, challenges the church to rethink its conception of mission and to establish its missionary endeavors on a firm theoretical foundation. His basic claim is that "mission" defines the essential purpose of the church, and he calls for a new understanding as to what constitutes mission activity and who represent "missionaries." According to Oosterwal, mission is not merely one among the several responsibilities of the church, but its one fundamental task. Every church activity should be evaluated in light of its contribution to the fulfillment of this task. Because mission is the work of the church as a whole, not of a special class of church members, the conventional distinction between ministers and laymen must give way to a new concept of the laity as the whole people of God committed to one common goal. Besides his constructive reformulation of the concept of mission and the procedural innovations that logically follow, Oosterwal's work is notable for its use of mission as the most fundamental ecclesiological category. For Oosterwal, missiology—or doctrine of mission—is not

merely one aspect of ecclesiology. When properly formulated, it is nothing less than a full-fledged doctrine of the church.

The general surge of social consciousness in the past several years, particularly in the United States, has also had its counterpart in the Adventist Church. A number of Adventists are convinced that the church should take a position on certain topics of social and political importance. In particular, the church should officially become involved with the struggle for equal rights among minorities in the United States.⁵⁵ The question of theological significance here is whether the church as a corporate entity, and not merely its members as individuals, should assert itself vis-à-vis other institutions in society and cooperate with other institutions for social improvements. A number of Adventists have answered "yes" to this question, insisting that the church cannot avoid its responsibility to speak out on social issues, indeed, that such action is integral to its witness in the world.⁵⁶ Others, however, argue that such activity will distract the church from its principal task and divert its attention and energy to matters secondary to its ultimate concern.⁵⁷

Eschatology

The doctrine of last things, which concludes the standard systematic theology, is especially important to Seventh-day Adventists, and they have given it considerable attention. Since Adventism arose from the Millerite expectation of Christ's imminent return, its nature and purpose have always been related to its situation at "the end of time." Adventists describe themselves as the "remnant church" entrusted with God's last warning message to the world. Consequently, the continued passage of time without the fulfillment of their hopes challenges the basic self-understanding of Adventists, despite their generally remarkable progress in areas such as institutional size and complexity.

Adventist theologians have responded to this challenge in different ways. One is by examining the cause for the delay and suggesting ways of bringing it to an end. According to Herbert Douglass, Christ has postponed His return because His people

have failed to develop their characters sufficiently. They have not yet become the “quality people” who will reproduce Christ’s moral achievement and decisively vindicate God’s government.⁵⁸ Others attribute the delay to a widespread lack of enthusiasm for evangelism among Adventists, especially among ministers, and call for deeper commitment and more efficient programs for finishing the work.⁵⁹

In contrast to these various forms of self-criticism, Adventists have also responded to the delay in more positive terms. Contributors to the SPECTRUM issue on eschatology offer several reasons for a revised assessment of the delay.⁶⁰ From an analysis of apocalyptic movements in general, Jonathan Butler concludes that the apocalyptic perspective of Adventism is validated by its critique of civilization and the quality of life it affirms, whether or not its chronology turns out to be accurate. Recalling the change in attitude toward the time of Christ’s return in the New Testament writings, Roy Branson discerns a parallel shift in Adventist eschatology, from the Millerite period, when the Second Coming was immediately expected, to the turn of the century, when Christ’s return was clearly in the future. By putting the present in a new perspective, he argues, this shift opened the way for the extensive development of institutions for which Adventists are well known, and provides the permanent justification for active involvement in the concerns of this world. Richard W. Coffen insists that the writer of the Apocalypse anticipated the advent in the near rather than the distant future, and Tom Dybdahl argues that we properly await and hasten the Second Coming by faithfully doing our work each day, rather than trying to figure out when it will happen or what it will take to hurry it along.

Although the views expressed in these articles are by no means unanimous—the contributions of Branson and Coffen disagree, for example, as to whether the New Testament writers uniformly expected Christ’s immediate return—they generally illustrate two features of some of the church’s recent

thinking on the advent. One is the conviction, expressed elsewhere by Jack Provonsha and Sakae Kubo,⁶¹ that the advent hope has as much to do with life in the present as with life in the future. The other is that this concern for the meaning of the present in no way diminishes the expectation of Christ’s eventual return. If anything, Branson maintains, it expresses the confidence that what Christ has already accomplished guarantees the certainty of His return in the near future.⁶²

Sabbath

Adventist theologians have probably been most creative in recent years in their interpretations of the Sabbath, a topic which is hardly more than mentioned in many systematic theologies. (Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* is a happy exception.) Several Adventist scholars, including Niels-Erik Andreasen, Samuele Bacchiocchi, Fritz Guy and Sakae Kubo, have devoted doctoral dissertations and/or subsequent books to a discussion of some aspect of the Sabbath.⁶³ And a number of articles exploring the meaning of the Sabbath have appeared, notably in *Insight*, the church’s publication for young people. The SPECTRUM issue entitled “The Festival of the Sabbath” testifies to this growing interest and contains some of the principal themes in this developing theology of the Sabbath.⁶⁴

“Adventist thought on theological method is still in an early stage of development.”

What is especially striking about these SPECTRUM articles is not only the freshness of their approach to this traditional pillar of Adventist belief, but also the scope of ideas encompassed by the Sabbath theme. One interpreter sees the Sabbath as a symbol of the relatedness and ultimacy of God.⁶⁵ For another, the Sabbath illuminates the temporal quality of human existence.⁶⁶ Others find in the Sabbath a powerful expression of redemption, both as accomplished by Christ and as experienced by the believer.⁶⁷ The

Sabbath is also related to the believing community as a symbol of covenant fellowship and as a means of establishing social harmony.⁶⁸ Finally, the Sabbath presents an answer to the transience of all human accomplishments and points in various ways to man's ultimate destiny in eternity.⁶⁹

Going beyond the familiar legal aspects of the fourth commandment, these writers have found in the Sabbath a deeper understanding of God, man, salvation, church and human destiny. When the themes in these articles are sketched in this (by now) familiar sequence, the Sabbath emerges as a potential organizing principle for all aspects of Christian faith. In other words, these articles suggest that a fully developed theology of the Sabbath can assume the proportions of a comprehensive systematic theology. In addition, almost all the contributors emphasize the role of the Sabbath experience as the means of appropriating personally the various truths described. Far more than just one of Adventism's distinctive doctrines, then, the Sabbath may represent its most profound theological and experiential resource.

We noticed earlier that theology can refer both to religious beliefs and to the enterprise of reflecting on these beliefs. Having looked at some of the ways in which the beliefs of Adventists have developed in recent years, we now need to ask how the ways in which Adventists reflect upon their beliefs have also changed. On the most general level, Adventists have simply become more theologically conscious. They believe that it is important not only to be doctrinally correct, but also to articulate their beliefs as carefully and systematically as possible. This growing interest in theological reflection can be seen in the establishment of doctoral programs at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, and in the rising number of Adventists who have pursued graduate study in systematic theology or closely related areas such as philosophy of religion and Christian ethics. The establishment of the Association of Adventist Forums and its official journal, *SPECTRUM*, also testifies to the strength of the conviction that

Adventists' beliefs need sophisticated reflection.

Explicit calls for such reflection have been issued in *SPECTRUM* articles by Herold Weiss and William G. Johnsson.⁷⁰ In addition, the series on Adventist theologians emphasizes the contributions of those who have led the way in fulfilling this task, such as Edward W. H. Vick and Jean Zurcher.⁷¹

Adventists have also suggested some rather specific criteria for theological reflection. Wrestling with the problem of how to avoid destructive innovation while attempting to communicate the Adventist message with greater sophistication, Charles Scriven suggests that the theologian "work within the tradition." That is, he should treat it, however critically, with love and respect, rather than "come at it from the outside," or regard it with hostility and disrespect.⁷² Others, however, propose a more formal guarantee of theological adequacy. In a long supplement to *Ministry* entitled "A Conservative Approach to Theology,"⁷³ E. Edward Zinke of the Bible Research Institute, asserts that Adventist theology is distinguished by an approach to theology that arises out of Scripture. Occasionally, sounding like Karl Barth, Zinke maintains that the revelation in Scripture is simply a "given," and must be accepted solely on its own terms. Any attempt to apply to the claims of Scripture some external criterion, he insists, inevitably results in a distortion of the biblical truth, the forcing of Scripture's message to an alien mold.

Neither of these positions is really satisfactory. The personal sincerity of the theologian can be neither a criterion nor an objective in evaluating theology for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its notorious inaccessibility. And Zinke's position, among other things, leaves us without any means of identifying divine revelation or evaluating rival claims to revealed authority. Nevertheless, whereas Adventist thought on theological method is still in an early stage of development, it is now a matter of explicit concern within the Adventist community, and articles such as these have helped to make it so.

In addition to establishing certain criteria for appropriate theological reflection, Ad-

ventists have begun to offer theological proposals with such criteria specifically in mind. One example is Jack Provonsha's *God Is With Us*.⁷⁴ It deals with a number of familiar themes, such as the Atonement and the Second Coming, but it attempts to do so with the aid of reason and in a way sensitive to the difficulty of the modern mind under the traditional claims of Christianity. Moreover, the author makes use of contemporary resources such as behavioral science to interpret ancient ideas like sin and salvation.

Charles Scriven's book, *The Demons Have Had It: A Theological ABC*⁷⁵ is also sensitive to the problems of modern man. It begins by considering the prevalent question of meaning in life and goes on to argue that the truths expressed in the various doctrines of Christianity provide the only adequate basis for an affirmative answer to the question. Like Provonsha, Scriven, too, makes use of contemporary interpretations of Christianity, such as those of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Paul Tillich. In both their general approach to Christian beliefs and the resources they employ, works like these indicate that Seventh-day Adventists have begun to take seriously what Christian theology in general now regards as its most pressing challenge—the task of interpreting the Christian message to a contemporary audience who finds its historic claims increasingly problematic.

Some important theological questions have not been treated at any length in *SPECTRUM*. In the area of soteriology, for example, the widely discussed topics of righteousness by faith, perfection and the nature of Christ received relatively little attention until the issue which devoted several articles to Paxton's *The Shaking of Adventism*.⁷⁶ Perhaps the editors believe that these topics have received sufficient consideration in other denominational publications. Or they may feel that Adventists do not have anything particularly distinctive to say about them, in comparison with other Christian groups.

The typical theological concerns of the most elusive, and important, segment of church membership, the "general" or "aver-

age" church member, are, of course, the most difficult to identify. They probably are primarily soteriological, focusing on what is needed for personal salvation. This may explain the continuing interest in the question of what righteousness by faith really is and in whether or not the church has ever grasped this doctrine in its clarity.

Future Work

Our review indicates that there is no single pervasive concern or dominant emphasis in current Seventh-day Adventist theology. While a diversity of theological interests and opinions is certainly healthy for the church, it would also be beneficial if a good share of the church's theologians would work from a few basic theological themes. If we were to suggest an agenda for the church's theologians, therefore, its most important items would be to define the essential theme of Seventh-day Adventist theology and to explain the contents of Christian faith as a whole on this basis, or construct a comprehensive Seventh-day Adventist theology whose various parts are integrated by means of this central idea. The richness of the recent studies on the Sabbath suggests that this doctrine may provide just the basis for this undertaking. The fulfillment of this constructive task could establish the unity of Adventist thought, and it could also lead to further work in comparatively neglected aspects of Adventist theology, such as the doctrines of God and man. Such a theological endeavor will meet the needs of Adventists today, however, only if it is contemporary as well as comprehensive. That is to say, only if it consciously attempts to speak to the particular problems of ultimately believing in anything in the modern world.

Besides this general need for comprehensive and constructive theological reflection, there are also more specific items which deserve immediate attention. One is to define the nature and function of Ellen G. White's ministry. This need is evident from a variety of questions, including not only the age of the earth question and the literary dependence discussion, but also the sharply contrasting interpretations of Christ's humanity, whose proponents appeal with equal certainty to her statements. Far too much

“theological” discussion consists of merely stringing together quotations from Ellen G. White and announcing a conclusion, rather than carefully interpreting the material appealed to. Her wide-ranging writings need to be carefully reflected upon, interrelated and analyzed in light of their historical context. The formulation of some basic principles of interpretation would prevent her from being misused and would clarify the relation of her writings to the Bible. In short, what is needed is a full-fledged hermeneutic of Ellen White’s writings.

“Far too much ‘theological’ discussion consists of merely stringing together quotations from Ellen G. White and announcing a conclusion, rather than carefully interpreting the material appealed to.”

Another specific issue which deserves immediate theological attention is the doctrine of the church. No doctrinal developments in recent years are likely to have more far-reaching effects for Adventists than the implicit theological developments in this area. But the doctrine of the church is far too important to be allowed to develop implicitly. It demands the concerted effort of the church’s entire theological community.

If the challenges to Seventh-day Adventist theology are formidable, the opportunities confronting Adventist theology have probably never been more favorable. Besides an increasing number of theologians within the church, the situation outside the church may have become particularly receptive to their work. There is a growing sense of theological identity on the part of conservative Christians in America, and a greater willingness on the part of the general theological community to hear what they have to say. Harper and Row recently published a two-volume work by Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, and the fourth volume has just appeared of what may become the definitive statement of the evangel-

ical position, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, by Carl F. H. Henry.⁷⁷ An example of the interest stimulated by such efforts is the fact that *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* devoted its Winter 1977 issue to a consideration of “The Evangelicals.” All of this indicates that the religious world at large may now be more interested in a scholarly presentation of Adventist theology than ever before.

To determine whether the church can meet this opportunity, we need to take a close look at the vehicles for scholarly theological expression available to Adventists. Among the church’s official periodicals, *Insight*, *Ministry* and the *Adventist Review* regularly contain articles of theological significance. Of these, the *Ministry* is probably the only one to reach a sizable number of non-Adventists, due to the project which regularly sends copies of the journal to Christian clergymen of all denominations in North America. During the past ten years, SPECTRUM has provided a helpful outlet for theological reflection, although its articles are geared primarily for the educated Adventist layman and it includes a wide variety of material. Because of its independent status, SPECTRUM has been able to present articles of an innovative or provocative nature that would not likely appear within the church’s official publications. It is encouraging to see the church’s publishing houses offering substantial theological works, like the Anvil Series of Southern Publishing Association. But denominational publishing houses are principally concerned with sales among Adventist readers, and their books have little circulation outside the church.

It is significant that there is no journal devoted primarily to Adventist theology as such. The most obvious place to look for a scholarly presentation of Adventist theology is the official publication of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, which is sent to university and seminary libraries throughout the country. However, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* is noteworthy for its paucity of theological articles. Over the years, it has been much more concerned with archaeology and history than with theological matters. One suggestion deserves careful consideration as a way of encouraging

theological reflection within the church and its communication to the non-Adventist theological world. This is the formation of a scholarly society of the church's theologians with a regular publication of its own. The opportunity to meet together on a regular basis, as do members of other professional societies, and a more or less autonomous or-

ganization might help to provide the freedom and cohesiveness needed to stimulate significant theological conversation.

At any rate, the SDA theological community has its work cut out for it. It has growing resources, growing challenges and growing opportunities. We can hope that its accomplishments will be equally impressive.

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Tensions Between Religion and Science

by Molleurus Couperus

Are scientific and religious views of reality complementary or conflicting? Can one accept the Bible as divine revelation and also accept the validity of scientific theories regarding origins? Can a competent and honest scientist also be a committed and sincere Seventh-day Adventist? Attempting to answer such questions led to a decade of tension and struggle for Adventist intellectuals and church administrators.

Two General Conference institutions were directly immersed in issues of science and theology: the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) and Biblical Research Institute (BRI). During the seventies, both were pushed into apologetic roles that saw them promote

strongly conservative, if not fundamentalist, attitudes toward the nature and authority of science and Scripture.

Those who resisted change in the relation of science and religion feared especially that the findings of science would weaken the authority of Ellen White. In order to protect the Bible and Ellen White from the theories of modern science, they questioned the authority of science as an independent avenue to truth. In general, efforts to practice "true science" as a search for substantiation of long-treasured beliefs and authorities characterized church-sponsored publications.

But at the same time, the church's continued commitment to higher education produced a whole new generation of Adventist scholars with advanced degrees and personal commitments to the open and critical methods of scholarship. Godfrey Anderson (1969) expressed the viewpoint of these scholars:

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