

*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"*

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

REFORM MOVEMENT

ITS HISTORY, TEACHINGS AND ORGANIZATION

Out of experiences connected with World War I, a major splinter group developed from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. European in origin, it has, since its inception date in 1925, become world-wide with much success in Latin America. Progress has been slow in North America for various reasons, but with the confusion which presently dominates the "mother" Church of Adventism, this Reform group has been able to attract adherents. Concerned conservative Seventh-day Adventists have given them a second look.

The Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement, with headquarters in Roanoke, Virginia, publish as their General Church paper, the Reformation Herald, which is issued quarterly. They also produce a pleasing Sabbath School Lesson booklet structured very much like the Seventh-day Adventist quarterlies used to be, using a question and answer format, with notes almost exclusively being quotations from the Writings.

The first issue of the Reformation Herald for 1994 was a special edition defining "the Remnant Church" which they perceive themselves to be. The editorial extended an open hand "to earnest believers seeking fellowship with those of like precious faith." The editor noted that "many sincere sheep who actually believe so similarly to the way we do have never really taken the time to learn more about the SDA Reform Movement or its beliefs." Then he pled to all such to "dig deeply in the study of present truth," and to all who had been receiving their literature to "'Come and see.' Do not just rely on hearsay, see for yourselves." (p. 4)

This article concerning the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement will be based on personal contacts with leaders and ministers of the Movement extending over two decades, correspondence, and their own publication, Principles of Faith and Church Order, known as the "Green Book."

First, in discussing this Movement, we should note its origin and what happened. What caused its existence? Was an attempt made toward unification, and with what



success?

World War I placed many Seventh-day Adventists in Europe in a very difficult situation. Were they to bear arms, and what about Sabbath observance in the imperial army of the German Kaiser? Elder L. R. Conradi was vice president of the General Conference for Europe, and president of the Legal Association of the German Conferences. He made no attempt to secure consideration for conscientious objectors or for release from Sabbath duty but assured the Imperial government that Adventist men would be loyal soldiers of the Fatherland. This action produced hardship and trial, to put it mildly, for those who could not in good faith bear arms or violate the Sabbath. It produced division in the European Church, for the East German Union included the Balkan countries as well.

After the War, a delegation of the separated brethren came to the 1924 General Conference to seek a redress of their grievances and a unification of the Church in Europe. The General Conference was in turmoil over whether A. G. Daniells would again succeed himself, or whether a new president would be elected. The politics of the session were such that the delegation was not even given a hearing. They returned to Europe and in 1925 at Gotha, Germany, organized themselves, adopting a statement of beliefs known as the "Gotha Statement" and referred to as the "Green Book."

My first contacts with the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement was through Elder John Nicolici, whose father had been a long time respected voice in that Church. The contact with Nicolici came through Elder David Bauer with whom he was closely associated and still is. Nicolici introduced me to the leadership of the Reform Movement on the West Coast at Sacramento, one of their headquarters at the time, the other being at Blackwood, New Jersey. I had an extensive visit and discussion with the leaders there including their long time editor, Elder A. Balbach.

In visiting their eastern headquarters in New Jersey, I was welcomed, and spoke to the group in their chapel. I stayed with Brother Benjamin Burek and his family who made me feel very much at home. I still, when meeting him since then, have a deep brotherly regard for him. I might add that in all my contacts save one with the leadership and ministers of the Reform Church I have found them to be open and forthright in their approach to issues discussed. This is more than I can say of contacts and

discussions with the "brethren" of the "mother" Church. On a more recent trip to the East Coast, I spent the Sabbath in Roanoke and visited their new headquarters church and offices. In the afternoon we discussed various issues facing Adventists, including doctrinal beliefs. A goodly representation of their General Conference officers were present and joined in the discussion. It was a very pleasant Sabbath from my viewpoint.

In a recent issue of the Reformation Herald, a current doctrinal concept on the Godhead which is being pressed by certain "independent" ministries was addressed. I found that in responding to certain positions taken, and I hold no brief for the "independent" ministries' positions, that there was a reluctance on the part of the associate editor to come to terms with what she had written. I hope that this attitude does not signal a move "to pull into their shell" and block out forthright exchange on current issues.

The Reform Movement does face two major problems in dealing with the present agitation within the Community of Adventism. The first problem surfaced early-on in a discussion with Elder Balbach at the time of the first contact in Sacramento. The Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement believes strongly that they are the true successors of the Advent Movement which began in 1844, in other words, they are **the** Remnant Church. My question to Balbach was simply, that if this is the case, then why does their Gotha Statement not reflect the positions set forth in the 1872, 1889, and 1914 Statement of Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His reply was that they did not have access to these statements when they formulated the Gotha Statement in 1925. This is no doubt true, but they have them now! Still there has been no correlation attempted.

There is a reason. Elder John Nicolici gave me some insight into the why. The European Reform Movement has split into two movements: the German Reform Movement, and the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement. They are at loggerheads with each other, and both affirm the Gotha Statement. For one to alter even the dotting of the "i", or the crossing of the "t" of this statement would give the other a basis to charge the one making any change with heresy. Thus they are boxed into a corner.

The second major problem is the educational program for their ministers and theologians, if they have any of the latter. From my

observation and contacts, their ministry is trained in only one discipline - the Writings of Ellen G. White. As laudable as this may be, they are in so doing, rejecting her own counsel. I have attended one of their campmeetings at which the then president of their General Conference spoke. At the Sabbath worship hour, one brother placed a large stack of E. G. White books on the pulpit. For the sermon, the District leader read verses from the Bible, with the President following each text read with paragraphs from the E. G. White books with very little, if any comment. This is not preaching the Word as demanded by ordination. (II Tim. 4:2) This one-time experience, which I had, may not reflect the regular format for the main Sabbath service at their campmeetings.

The Gotha Statement is more than just a confession of the principles of faith, but also sets forth their Church Order. It is divided into three parts: I) Principles of Faith; II) The Church Order; and III) Organization of the Denomination. It regulates every phase of the member's personal life as well as detailing church order from the local church through the various conferences to the General Conference. The Statement makes the General Conference the final arbiter of what constitutes truth. (p. 29)

In noting the first section of the Gotha Statement, there are doctrinal questions which need clarification. The first three statements define the Reform Movement's perception of the Godhead. There is but "one God" and Jesus Christ "is the living Son of God...one in nature with the Father." While the Holy Spirit is declared to be "the representative of Christ upon the earth," He is defined as "a **power** from the Father and the Son, and is active also through human beings." (p. 3; emphasis supplied)

In an article in the Reformation Herald (XXXIV, #3, pp. 8-11), referred to above, the Associate Editor, Barbara Monteiro, modifies the Gotha Statement, setting forth Christ as not only the Son of God, but as One "with God from all eternity." The Holy Spirit is declared to be a "Person," and she seeks to mute the word, "power" as used in the Gotha Statement by applying the word to all Three Persons of the Godhead, as "infinite, omniscient dignitaries or powers."

In regard to the Doctrine of the Incarnation, the Gotha Statement is written so that you can believe either one of two ways as to the nature of the humanity which Christ took upon Himself. The Statement reads that "He was born as a

human being on this earth at Bethlehem in Judea, of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Spirit of God." It must be remembered that Adam was a "human being" both before and after he sinned. Merely to say that Christ became "a human being" in the incarnation does not define the human nature He accepted. It is true that in conversation with the leadership of the Reform Movement, they state they believe that Christ accepted the fallen nature of Adam. However, even in the article written by the Associate Editor, this issue is sidestepped, and declared to be a mystery "beyond our finite comprehension." While it is true that the "how" of the incarnation does remain "a mystery" as we use the term mystery, the nature He accepted is clearly defined in the Word of God. He "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh," taking upon Himself "the slave form of man." (Rom. 1:3; Phil. 2:7)

The most difficult sections of the Gotha Statement to understand as to why the language as used was adopted are sections "9. Grace and the **Means of Grace**," and "11. Baptism." Section 9 declares that "we can **only** have the benefits of redeeming grace if we shun sin through the power of Christ, united with our will. ... We believe that God has provided several **means** to draw sinners to Himself and give them the promised redemption through the grace of Christ." These means are listed as the Word of God, the Church of God, the Washing of Feet, and the Lord's Supper. In Section 11, one reads - "Baptism is administered only once, while the other **means of grace** like feet washing, Lord's supper, and prayer are repeated in the life of faith."

It would seem that the proverbial German order - the cart before the horse - is stated in Section 9: "shun sin so you can receive the grace of God." I cannot shun sin without the grace of God having operated in my life through the working of the Spirit of God. The grace of God that bringeth salvation comes first, the shunning of sin is an on going experience. (Titus 2:11-12)

The very language used, and the "means" set forth in both sections 9 and 11, echo Roman Catholicism. One wonders if the movement was infiltrated from its inception. Note the following teachings and wordings from a Roman Catholic Catechism:

"What is grace?"

"Grace is a supernatural gift of God bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ for our

salvation. Grace is something real, just as the soul is real. It is not merely the absence of sin but rather a spiritual quality infused by God into the soul. ...

"What are the principle ways of obtaining grace?

"The principle ways of obtaining grace are prayer and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. The sacraments of Baptism and Penance were instituted chiefly to give grace to those who do not possess it; the other sacraments to increase it in those who are already in the state of grace." (New Baltimore Catechism, No. 3, 1949 edition, pp. 61, 64)

Since when has the adoption of Roman Catholic doctrine, clothing it in the language of Adventism, made it truth?

Even in the sections of the Gotha Statement on Church Order one finds a modification of Catholic teaching. The Church is defined as "several believers in the three-fold angels' message, who are led by an ordained church elder (or church chairman), a deacon, treasurer, and secretary." (p. 19) The concept of a church as a congregation of believers under ordained authority is Roman Catholic. While the SDA Reform organization is a modification of this concept, nevertheless it falls short of the Protestant perception expressed by Melancthon - "There is no other church than the assembly of those who have the word of God, and who are purified by it." Actually in function, the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement approaches the same hierarchical structure as operates in the "mother" church from which it sprang.

It is only natural for a concerned Seventh-day Adventist, who has become disenchanted with the way the "mother" Church is going, to cast about for fellowship and a "church" home. It is difficult to walk "alone." However, when we are searching and seeking for fellowship with "those of like precious faith," we need to be sure that it is indeed of "like faith" and not a substitute as questionable as that with which we have become concerned.

It would be a step in the right direction if the SDA Reform Movement would seek to engage in a meaningful dialogue with others concerning questionable features of their Gotha Statement with a view of finding and embracing truth, pure and unadulterated, which is defined as "the righteousness of Christ." (TM, p. 65) Perhaps this is expecting too much of a group which seems solidified in their perceptions of what

constitutes truth. It is difficult at times to remember the counsel - "The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light." (R&H, March 25, 1890)

This past week (August 19) we received in the mails some materials from another editor. Enclosed was a yellow clipping - "Truth's Champions." It was a quote from Cosmic Conflict, p. 146. What is quoted is very apropos:

"There are many at the present day thus clinging to the customs and traditions of their fathers. When the Lord sends them additional light, they refuse to accept it because, not having been granted to their fathers, it is not received by them.

"We are not placed where our fathers were; consequently our duties and responsibilities are not looking to the example of our fathers to determine our duty instead of searching the word of truth for ourselves.

"Our responsibility is greater than was that of our ancestors. We are accountable for the light which they received and which was handed down as an inheritance for us, and we are accountable for the additional light which is now shining upon us from the Word of God."

Our problem is that we cannot modify and bring into line our inheritance from tradition with the light which deeper study of the Word reveals. We box ourselves in by closed statements of belief, instead of being open to the ever increasing light of truth which is to shine upon the pathway of the just. (Prov. 4:18)

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LET'S TALK IT OVER

In discussing the SDA Reform Movement, we noted an article in the Reformation Herald written by the Associate Editor on the Doctrine of the Godhead. While one may question the ultimate conclusions drawn by the editor, this subject is coming to the fore in the Community of Adventism. Especially is it being emphasized by various "independent" voices.

While the divisive nature of the discussion is to be abhorred, nevertheless this doctrine cannot be ignored in the light of the ecumencial thrust which is using this doctrine as the basis for a visible church unity on a world-wide scale. The

doctrine of the Trinity was defined in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381). This creed, expressed in an abbreviated form in the Constitution of the World Council of Churches, is made the basis for membership in that body. It is now being used by the Faith and Order Commission to achieve its stated objective "to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship."

To further this objective the Commission has published Faith and Order Paper No. 153, under the title Confessing One Faith. The preface is written by Jean-Marie Tillard OP, who is the Moderator of the Apostolic Faith Steering Group. This says volumes. The Roman Catholic Church considers basic to their whole doctrinal structure, the doctrine of the Trinity, as they express it, based upon this Creed. While the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, nevertheless the "Moderator" of this steering committee toward the objective of visible church unity is a Roman Catholic cleric.

The preface by Tillard was written in 1990, and in this preface, he noted - "In view of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order to be held in 1993, the present ecumenical document should play a significant role in the discussions and have an impact on this great ecumenical event." This Conference was held in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in Roman Catholic facilities. On the last day of the conference, Jean Tillard in his address suggested without specifying a date, that consideration be given to "a gathering of all the major church leaders [of] the churches - perhaps in Jerusalem - simply to sing the creed together. That would be a wonderful expression of the degree of unity already present and of its origin," he concluded. (One World, Oct. 1993, p. 15)

The issue of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is central today in Adventism. Why? The statement from the WCC Constitution based on this creed was written into the 1980 Statement of Beliefs formulated at Dallas, Texas. We can no longer relegate a discussion of the Doctrine of God to a "back burner" neither can we regale ourselves in speculative theories presently being projected by "independent voices."

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not a "voting" member of the WCC, it does have a representative voice on the Faith and Order Commission. This commission began its trek toward a more visible unity in the issuance of the Lima Document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in 1982. All churches were invited to

give their reaction to this Statement. The Seventh-day Adventist Church responded, and expressed disagreement with parts of it. The same opportunity is being afforded in regard to the Confession of One Faith. Inasmuch as the Church's Statement of Beliefs reflects the Nicene Creed of 381, its response should make interesting reading.

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Seminar on Hebrews

The video tapes of the Seminar Studies are now available. The set of six can be obtained for \$35.00 per set postpaid. Write directly to Brother Gary Patrick, 634 S Van Buren, Mason City, IA 50401.

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Note: With this issue we enclose the Order Form for 1995. There are a few changes. The book, Individuality in Religion, is out of print. Several new audio tapes have been added. The book, Facts of Faith, is on the list. This book, if ordered as a part of a larger order, will be only \$7.50. However, if ordered separately, it will be as indicated, \$10.00 postpaid. This book should be read and carefully studied by every student of Bible prophecy.

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