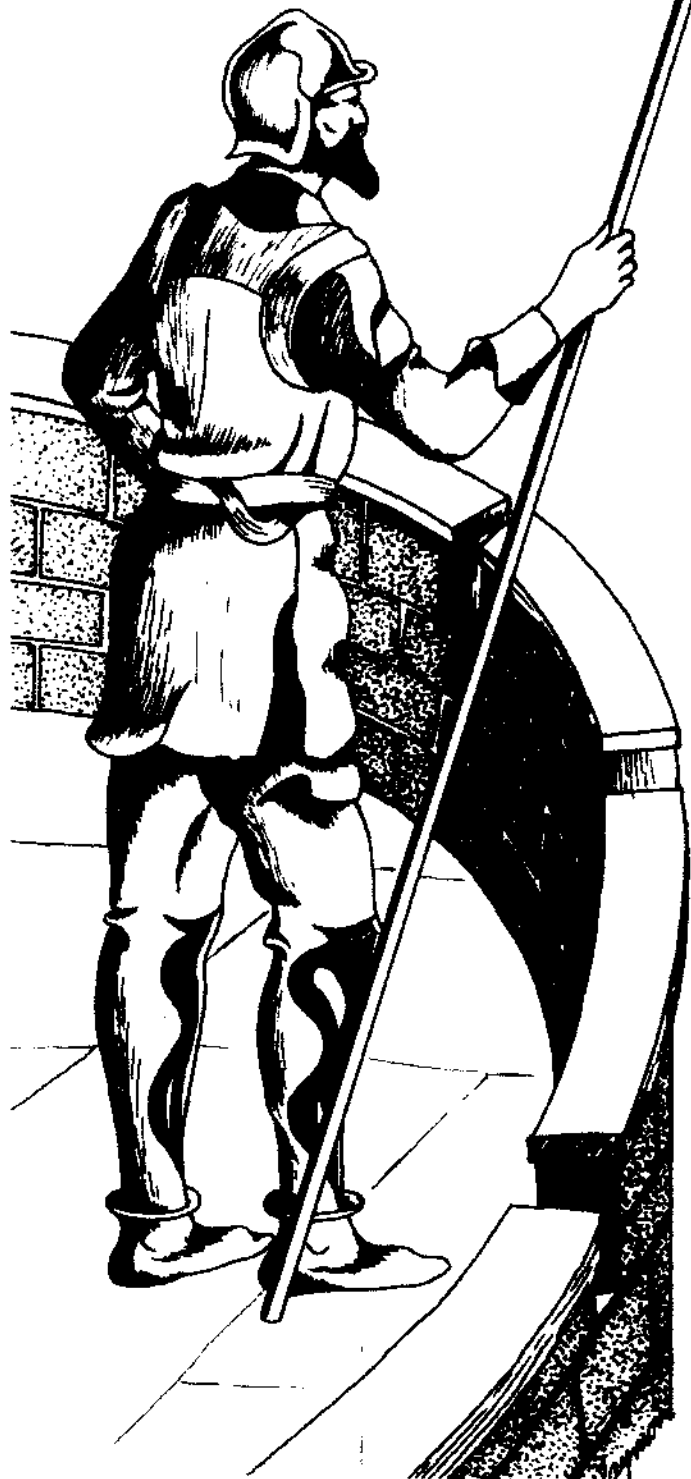


*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

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

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)



TAKING ISSUE WITH ISSUES

Part Three

The third section of Seventh-day Adventist Church history discussed in *ISSUES* covers the time period from Ellen White's death in 1915 through 1992 (pp. 45-51). The writer indicates that "several historical factors and significant events" from that period "have contributed to the current situation in the church." (p. 45) This is an understatement because events and decisions made in this period are the primary cause for dissention in Adventism today. Yet the writer elects not to discuss as fully these "important events and trends" as such events and trends were discussed during the first two periods of the Church's history - its formative years, and the period when Ellen White worked with the organized Adventist Church. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that these "historical factors and significant events" be more fully and forthrightly addressed.

In this discussion of "issues," we will focus on certain major events and decisions which the writer of *ISSUES* introduces - the 1952 Bible Conference; and the SDA-Evangelical Conferences with its resultant publication, *Questions on Doctrine*. But first how are these events introduced in *ISSUES*:

F. D. Nichol, *Review* editor from 1945 to 1966, well known for his apologetic defense of Adventism, may have contributed to a Fundamentalist-type perspective in the church. After the 1952 Bible Conference for example, Nichol wrote in the *Review* of the "impressive fact that we have not changed our theology." To be sure, the qualifiers that Nichol adds to that statement tend to temper its intensity. He seems to be speaking of Adventism's major doctrines. But even then it would seem that the shift to a Trinitarian theology is a significant "change" in Adventist thinking. Living in the shadow of Fundamentalism, however, the spokespersons for the church were not ready to call attention to change.

Ironically, in Gary Land's Adventism in America the very next page after the one citing Nichol's statement is headed "Dialogues With Evangelicals," an event that seemed to introduce into Adventism what many have considered inappropriate "change." For many of the church's more strident critics, that event plays a key role. (p. 46)

In the section, "The Questions on Doctrine Debate," ISSUES states - "This significant event in the history of Adventism deserves full and thorough treatment, given the central role it has assumed in the current discussion." (ibid.) But such a "treatment" is not given in ISSUES. However, to begin with a discussion of this book, would be like putting the cart before the horse. We must begin with the 1952 Bible Conference.

THE 1952 BIBLE CONFERENCE

The 1952 Bible Conference was held in the Sligo Park Seventh-day Adventist Church during the first two weeks in September. It was called by Elder W. H. Branson midway in his four year term as president of the General Conference. In attendance at this conference were representatives of the Church world-wide as well as the North American Division. Administrators, pastors, teachers, and evangelists were all represented. D. E. Rebok, the Secretary of the Bible Conference declared it to be "a high-water mark of the Advent movement. Such was the power and influence of one of the greatest convocations of God's people this side of Pentecost." (Our Firm Foundation, Vol. I, p. 12) Elder Branson in Introducing the forthcoming Bible Conference through the pages of The Ministry, July, 1952, stated:

A very great power resides in the truths of God distinctive for these last days. There is a new lift for our hearts and minds and spirits that can come from studying together the doctrines that have made us a people and that justify our continued existence. It is one of the prime purposes of this conference to provide that heavenly lift for heart and soul as we reaffirm those truths that have most certainly been believed among us through all our history. (Foundation, Vol. I, p. 15)

This conference must also be considered against the backdrop of some history. In 1950, Elders R. J. Wieland and D. K. Short had presented to the new incoming General Conference leadership, their call for denominational repentance as contained in their original edition of 1888 Re-Examined. Whether Branson perceived a reaffirmation of the fundamental truth committed to the Church as

meeting the challenge raised by Wieland and Short, we do not know, but we do know that at this Bible Conference, Branson himself presented the subject - "The Lord Our Righteousness." (Foundation, II, pp. 575-618) As he closed his presentation, he proclaimed:

The message of righteousness by faith given in the 1888 Conference has been repeated here... And this great truth has been given here in the 1952 Bible Conference with far greater power than it was given in the 1888 Conference...

No longer will the question be, "What was the attitude of our workers and people toward the message of righteousness by faith that was given in 1888? What did they do about it? From now on the great question must be, "What did we do with the light on righteousness by faith as proclaimed in the 1952 Bible Conference?" (ibid., pp. 616-617)

ISSUES quotes from a Review Editorial as Nichol looked back on the Bible Conference noting how he was elated over the "most impressive fact that we had not changed our theology." (October 23, p. 10) ISSUES indicates that this elation should be tempered by the "qualifiers" Nichol used in connection with this conclusion. The full sentence reads: "No exhibit of differing views on obscure Scriptures or on unfulfilled prophecy on the part of some of us can hide this most impressive fact that we have not changed our theology." He had begun the paragraph by stating - "We repeat these papers (presented at the conference) failed to give any suggestion of doubts or uncertainty concerning those teachings that have made us a distinctive people. This is not a point to be passed by hurriedly or casually." In another paragraph, Nichol commented - "The Bible Conference has come and gone, and the pillars of the (Advent) temple are still standing, unmoved and erect."

The author of ISSUES again introduces the question of "Trinitarian theology" into the picture. It must be kept in mind that two decades have lapsed between the 1931 formulation and 1952. Nichol was very conversant with that statement having been consulted in regard to it by its author - Wilcox. (See Movement of Destiny, pp. 413-414) Furthermore, this statement had been voted at the 1946 General Conference session and the two articles on the Godhead were left unchanged. The change had come in 1931, not in 1952, naturally, he could write, the Bible Conference had "not changed our theology."

There was dissent. W. E. Read presented a paper on "The Great Controversy" which outlined the order of events through to the Second Coming of Christ. In it he presented Armageddon differently than had Uriah Smith in his book, Daniel and Revelation. This aroused the indignation of W. R. French, an highly respected Bible teacher. A class room at Washington Missionary College just across the street from the Sligo Church was arraigned, where he presented during free time at the session the "old view" with force and vigor.

It had been decided from the beginning that there was to be "no open-forum type of discussion." (Vol I, p. 29) Even the questions asked had to be written out and signed. This left only one type of public reaction to be expressed by the delegates - walking out on the speaker. This was done during the presentation by Edward Heppenstall on "The Covenants and the Law." One veteran evangelist from the South became very agitated during the presentation, shaking his head frequently, and then finally, he stomped out of the meeting. Others followed him.

As to whether the published paper in the report of the Bible Conference accurately reflects what Heppenstall said during the presentation would have to be compared with the taped recording of the session's presentations. There was editing of what had been presented. Prior to the Bible Conference, Arthur Maxwell, in preparation for his assigned topic, had polled a segment of the Adventist ministry as to what they believed and preached concerning the Second Coming of Christ. He gave the findings of this poll when presenting His paper on "The Imminence of Christ's Second Coming." The poll so adversely reflected upon the ministry that it was omitted from the published reports, and he was forbidden to release his findings.

It is essential to understand what was taught at the 1952 Bible Conference in regard to the Incarnation, the Sanctuary truth, and Christian perfection so that one has a basis by which to compare the teachings which resulted from the SDA-Evangelical Conferences as set forth in Questions on Doctrine.

No specific presentation was made at the Bible Conference on the doctrine of the Incarnation. H. L. Rudy, one of the vice presidents of the General Conference, in his study on "The Mediatorial Ministry of Jesus Christ" made comment on the incarnation. He said:

The providing of this sacrifice (by Christ) was possible only at an infinite cost. It included more

than just the death on the cross. As the Father's representative He must fulfill all righteousness. Every day of His humiliation in sinful flesh was a day of suffering. (Vol. II, p. 17; emphasis ours)

This statement is remarkable. From the very beginning of Adventism there was the consistent teaching that Christ in assuming humanity "took of Him **the nature** of the seed of Abraham." The one exception, was the aberrant Holy Flesh movement which taught that Christ "must at least be as free from sin in every particular as was Adam before he fell." In 1949, a major change occurred. D. E. Rebok was requested to revise Bible Readings for the Home Circle. (Movement of Destiny, p. 428) In the study, "A Sinless Life," Rebok twice altered, the phrase, "in sinful flesh," to read simply, "in the flesh." For the 1952 Bible Conference, the same Rebok chaired the committee which passed on the content of each paper presented. (Vol. I, p. 30) How H. L. Rudy's statement cleared, I do not know, but I do know in my working with him in Canada that he was a man of conviction and honest dealing.

In the areas of the atonement, sanctuary teaching, and perfection, we shall give quoted statements from the various papers presented:

Atonement

Death is not simply the penalty for disobedience but also the price of redemption, and both are accomplished by the same person in one event - the atoning death of Christ, the Innocent One, on the cross of Calvary. (Vol. I, p. 361)

The death of Christ on the cross paid the redemption price, but His blood must be applied to the repentant sinner through His own mediation, in order that the atonement or reconciliation may be complete. (ibid., p. 373)

The atoning sacrifice was made certain upon the cross, when Christ uttered the words, "It is finished." This sacrifice becomes effectual for individual sinners by the priestly ministry of Christ in heaven. ... Necessary and helpful though the ministry of Christ is in the holy place in heaven, yet His service there does not entirely do away with sin. ... The ministration in the second apartment was needed to effect the final destruction of sin. (ibid., p. 334)

Sanctuary Teaching

The message concerning the mediatorial ministry

of Christ is God's answer to the apostasy of the last days. It is the heart of Christianity. (Vol. II, p. 11)

Christ made the atoning sacrifice once for all, and when He entered the "holy places" in heaven He "entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." "Eternal redemption" indicates that the full price was paid, and by His sacrifice the work of redemption is to be fully and eternally completed. (ibid., p. 63)

At the beginning of the Investigative judgment in 1844 Christ was seen to enter into a new phase of His mediatorial ministry. ... Christ entered the most holy to perform the work of atonement. (ibid., p. 65)

On Calvary, Christ is the substitute accepted in the sinner's stead. In the holy place in the heavenly sanctuary Christ ministers His blood on behalf of penitent believers. In the most holy place the sins of all the truly penitent are blotted from the books of heaven. Then the sanctuary is cleansed from the record of all sin. (Vol. I, p. 347)

Perfection

It should be noted that the washing took place in the court, and so it is, here on earth, that this work must be done for us. It is now that we must put away every sin. It is now that our robes must be washed white in preparation for entrance into the holy places not made with hands. (Vol. I, p. 323)

Merely forgiving sins will never put an end to sin. Christ could keep on forgiving sins forever, but if He took no steps to dispose of sin, there would never be an end to this blight that came upon the world and the universe. (Vol. II, p. 69)

John states a profound idea simply: "And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Rev. 14:5) The fact that there was no guile found was the result of their condition -- "without fault." Significantly, amomoi, the word here translated "without fault," is the same word that is used to describe Christ in I Peter 1:19 as "without blemish and without spot." Paul uses the same word in Hebrews 9:14, where he mentions that Jesus offered Himself "without spot to God." How could the character of these "firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" be better portrayed than by describing their character in the identical terms used to depict the Master Himself? (ibid., pp. 407-408; emphasis his)

It is the similarity of the experience of the 144,000 to that of the Saviour that sets them apart from the others of the redeemed host. (ibid., p. 411)

Here we face a conundrum. The speakers presented clearly what was declared to be the objective of the Bible Conference - the reaffirmation of those great and fundamental truths that have most certainly been believed among us throughout our history," in other words, "historic Adventism." Yet within three years time, these truths would be repudiated, and this repudiation would be published in a book which was given wide circulation - Questions on Doctrine. This is compounded by the fact that ten of the men who served on the 1952 Bible Conference Planning Committee also served on the Questions on Doctrine Preparation Committee. Further, eight of these ten men, presented papers at the Bible Conference. Not only this, but three of these eight were the Adventist conferees plus T. E. Unruh at the SDA-Evangelical Bible Conferences. What happened? Before suggesting an answer to this question, let us consider what was compromised and repudiated by the Adventist conferees.

First, we need to keep in mind what F. D. Nichol wrote in his editorial reflection on the Bible Conference beyond what ISSUES noted. He stated that "the conference impressed us anew with the fact that the primary doctrines of this movement are interlocked. They are not isolated, unrelated beliefs, any one of which might be undermined or discarded without damage to the others. On the contrary, the whole structure of truth is affected if even one of them is attacked." (Vol. II, p. 764)

The Evangelicals were the first to report their perceptions of the Conferences in a series of articles in Eternity. Barnhouse, its editor-in-chief, wrote the first appraisal, asking the question, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" In it he wrote that the Adventist leaders "do not believe, as some of their earlier leaders taught, that Jesus' atoning work was not completed on Calvary but instead that He was still carrying forward a **second ministering work** since 1844. **This idea is also totally repudiated.**" (Sept., 1956, p. 44; emphasis ours)

Twenty years later, T. E. Unruh, who chaired the conferences, gave the Adventist version on this point. He wrote - "We emphasized those doctrines held by our church in common with

Evangelical Christians of all faiths in all ages. ... We affirmed our belief in [Christ's] priestly ministry before the Father, applying the benefits of **the atonement completed on the cross.**" (Adventist Heritage, Vol. 4, #2, p. 38; emphasis supplied)

How is this denial reflected in Questions on Doctrine, and how are other doctrinal concepts altered?

The Incarnation

Although born in the flesh, He is nevertheless God, and was exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam. (p. 383; emphasis supplied)

Comment: The word, "exempt" carries theological overtones from Romanism. This word is used by Cardinal Gibbons in explaining the force of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. (The Faith of Our Fathers, 88th ed., p. 171)

Atonement

Adventists do not hold any theory of a dual atonement. "Christ hath redeemed us" (Gal. 3:13) "once for all." (Heb. 10:10). (p. 390; emphasis theirs)

Comment: If as affirmed by the Adventist conferees that the atonement was completed on the cross, and we do not believe in a "dual" atonement, what atonement is repudiated? None other than the "final atonement" which was fundamental in basic Adventism from its beginning.

How glorious is the thought that the King, who occupies the throne, is also our representative at the court of heaven! This becomes all the more meaningful when we realize that Jesus our surety entered the "holy places" and appeared in the presence of God for us. But it was not with the hope of obtaining something for us at that time, or at some future time, No! He had already obtained it for us on the cross. And now as our High Priest He ministers the virtues of His atoning sacrifice to us. (p. 381; emphasis theirs)

Comment: Paul stated that we do have a hope through the Spirit - "the hope of righteousness by faith." (Gal. 5:5) This "hope" involves "being conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom. 8:29) Deny the final atonement, and you deny that there will be a people "without fault before the throne of God." (Rev. 14:5) The whole structure of truth is affected as Nichol noted in his reflection on the 1952 Bible Conference. The example he used

is apropos - "To give up the sanctuary truth would be to repudiate our teaching that God raised up a prophetic movement in 1844." (op. cit.) This is exactly where we are today and the crux of the crisis in Adventism.

This repudiation of basic Adventism has not been repudiated, but rather reaffirmed. On February 16, 1983 (note date - three years after Dallas), Walter Martin wrote the General Conference "calling for the Conference's public and official statement reaffirming or denying the authority of the Adventist book, Questions on Doctrine." On April 29, 1983, W. Richard Leshar, then vice-president of the General Conference, now president of Andrews University, replied:

You ask if Seventh-day Adventists still stand behind the answers given to your questions in Questions on Doctrines as they did in 1957. The answer is yes. (Quoted in The Kingdom of the Cults, p. 410; emphasis supplied)

WHY?

Why could men after reaffirming their beliefs in "historic" Adventism in 1952, three years later deny the very uniqueness of Adventism? Even the Evangelicals were amazed because they contemplated prior to the formal talks with the Adventist conferees that on the doctrine of "the investigative judgment," it "would be impossible to come to any understanding which would permit [their] including [Adventists] among those who could be counted as Christians believing in the finished work of Christ." (Barnhouse, op. cit.) They recognized that the Adventist sanctuary teaching was "a doctrine never known in theological history until the second half of the nineteenth century and which is a doctrine held exclusively by the Seventh-day Adventists." (ibid.) We simply in these conferences denied our uniqueness. How could we?

Historical Adventism failed us. We had not followed counsel. "The Lord has made His people the repository of sacred truth. Upon every individual who has had the light of present truth devolves the duty of developing that truth on a higher scale than it has hitherto been done." (Ms. 27, 1897; emphasis supplied) Nichol in retrospect was elated that the Bible Conference proved "that we have not changed our theology." We failed to realize that we had "many, many" things to unlearn, as well as things to learn, God and heaven alone being infallible. (TM, p. 30) As a result when certain texts in Hebrews were thrown at the Adventist

LETS TALK IT OVER

The section in ISSUES devoted to "The Questions on Doctrine Debate" has two interesting paragraphs, a key sentence of which we need to talk over. These paragraphs read:

One side stresses Jesus' role as our sinless substitute arguing that His nature was like Adam's before the Fall. The other stresses Jesus' role as our example, arguing that He came in the "likeness of sinful flesh" with a nature like Adam's after the Fall.

Both sides can marshal Ellen White quotations in support of their positions, and both sides can claim devout and prominent personalities in the church among their proponents, including editors of "official" Adventist publications. (p. 46; emphasis mine)

The emphasized sentence is not only true but its accuracy creates a serious problem. Anyone who has done careful and thorough research in the major areas of theology, such as the incarnation, the Godhead, and the atonement, relating that research to the Writings of Ellen White, finds that while the preponderance of the statements will come down on one side of the question, there are other statements which support the opposing viewpoint. Let me illustrate the problem. In Acts of the Apostles, there a statement reads:

Behold the apostle preaching in the synagogue at Corinth, reasoning from the writings of Moses and the prophets, and bringing his hearers down to the advent of the promised Messiah. Listen as he makes plain the work of the Redeemer as the great high priest of mankind, - the One who through the sacrifice of His own life was to make atonement for sin once for all, and was then to take up His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. (p. 246; emphasis mine)

Clearly this is stating that Jesus by His death on the cross made a completed atonement - "once for all" - and "then" took up His High Priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. This was published in 1911. In 1884, Ellen White had written:

The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after his resurrection, He ascended to complete in Heaven. (SP, Vol. IV, p. 313; emphasis mine)

Again clearly this is saying something different than was written in 1911. Further, in 1878, the discussion of the same incident in the life of Paul does not state it as it read in 1911. Note:

He brought his hearers down through the types and shadows of the ceremonial law to Christ, to His crucifixion, His priesthood, and the sanctuary of His ministry, - the great object that had cast its shadow backward into the Jewish age. (SP, Vol. III, p. 409)

So long as individuals can point to references in the Writings to support their side of the major theological questions, and others can point to references from the same source on the opposite side, there will continue to be divisions in Adventism. This is not questioning the inspiration of Ellen White. Evidences in support of her gift, and call as a "Messenger of the Lord" are persuasive. But why are references in later works published under her name at variance with theological positions taken in earlier publications? This the White Estate has not answered, and there is evidence that they know of some of these irregularities if not all of them. The illustration given above can be repeated in regard to other areas of theology.

The releases of Ellen White material increased dramatically after the SDA-Evangelical Conferences. With these added releases came this divisive phenomena. There are various ways in which this could have occurred. Transmission from her hand writing by the secretaries; improper type setting; but these should have been caught by adequate proof reading. But there is still that haunting factor of a self-inking rubber stamp of her name which W. C. White purchased upon their return to the States from Australia. There is also the question of the preparation of her books after the years had taken their toll on her alertness.

This problem cannot, dare not be pushed under the table. If it is, then forget about "Issues" which are presently dividing the Adventist Community. Unless this is solved, then there is only one answer for each and every concerned Adventist, and that is to take Ellen White's counsel as she addressed the General Conference in session for the last time in 1909. Elder W. A. Spicer tells the story -

Mrs. White spoke a few words of good cheer and farewell, and then turned to the pulpit, where lay a Bible. She opened the book, and

Issues - from page 5, col. 2

conferees, they caved-in because deep Biblical research including linguistic study had not been done.

They did not heed the words - "We must not think, 'Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge.' **The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.**" (R&H, March 25, 1890) While professing to be preaching the message of 1888 in greater power than had been done in 1888, the 1952 Bible Conference committee and speakers failed to heed the counsel given in connection with 1888. They failed to accept "the fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible." (R&H, Dec. 20, 1892) If we had had our concepts on the sanctuary truth cleaned up and squared with the Bible in all details, the Evangelicals would not have been able to throw the conferees a curve by which they struck out.

But that which applies to the Church also applies to the "Private" ministries named. They are crying "historic" Adventism, and it will fail them as it did the Church they are so vigorously condemning. In fact, it already has. Dr. Larson who prepared a very commendable research on the history of the Doctrine of the Incarnation, has now denied the basic concept he set forth in that research. Not only this, but in the educational institution sponsored by these named ministries, the study program denies to those who are emphasizing Biblical Studies the knowledge of Biblical languages. This only compounds their impotency to meet the challenge against the sanctuary truth by those who are attacking it, both within and without the Church.

Until the doctrine of the Sanctuary is squared by the Scriptures, both the Church and the "Private" ministries named in ISSUES, will remain in a crisis. Until we are willing to "walk in increasing light" and "advancing truth" we shall continue in a quagmire of confusion. Sad.

Lets Talk - from page 6, col. 2

held it out with hands that trembled with age. And she said: "Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book." (Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement, p. 30)

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1993

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"Some have feared that if in even a single point they acknowledge themselves in error, other minds would be led to doubt the whole theory of truth. Therefore they have felt that investigation should not be permitted, that it would tend to dissension and disunion. But if such is to be the result of investigation, the sooner it comes the better. If there are those whose faith in God's word will not stand the test of an investigation of the Scriptures, the sooner they are revealed the better;... We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances to be relinquished. There is but One who is infallible -- He who is the way, the truth, and the life."

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 105

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