



A More “Liberalized” Adventist Future

An argument that Adventism will be more “liberalized”—open, inclusive, culturally aware—and “pluralistic” than it is at present.

by Fritz Guy

The Adventist future¹ will be more “liberalized”² (that is, more open, inclusive, and culturally aware) and more “pluralistic” (that is, more self-consciously diverse) than is the Adventist present.

IT MAY WELL SEEM TO SOME—EITHER MORE “conservative” or more “liberal” than I—that this statement is more normative than descriptive, and that my prediction is really a disguised prescription. Usually I am more comfortable prescribing rather than predicting. But my intention here is to describe the

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Adventist future as I think it will actually turn out to be. The picture I paint is what I perceive through my own eyes. These eyes are far from perfect, but they are the only eyes I have, and I am simply going to report what I see. I will endeavor to explain my picture of the Adventist future by means of four straightforward theses. The first is the most important and will receive the most attention.

Thesis 1: The Adventist future will be shaped in part by a number of “liberalizing” theological factors in the Adventist past and present.

In the spectrum of contemporary Christianity, Adventism is obviously on the conservative side. Most of us are comfortable here, with a theology and life-style that remain largely traditional, and with socio-political views that tend toward the right rather than the left.³ Nevertheless, in the Adventist heritage are some surprisingly non-conservative (even anti-conservative) liberalizing ingredients that deserve attention. Some of these ingredients are primarily theological; some are primarily his-

torical. All are part of the present reality of Adventism, and all will help to shape its future.

- The first—the earliest and most fundamental—of the theological ingredients is a profound commitment to Scripture. This commitment is reflected in our official affirmation of the Bible as the infallible revelation of [God's] will—that is, the standard of character and the test of experience, as well as the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.⁴ The remarkable fact is that reading the Bible—really *reading* it—thoughtfully and intelligently, *document by document* (the way it was written and was originally intended to be read), letting each document speak in its own distinctive voice⁵—leads a person from biblical literalism⁶ to biblical literacy.

Curiously, many people who have the most to say about the authority of the Bible seem not to have actually *read* very much of it. For the more we truly read it (instead of merely making claims about it and quoting it to prove that our own theology is correct⁷) the more evident it becomes that biblical literalism is mistaken.⁸ The biblical documents were obviously written by a variety of persons with different vocations, temperaments, social environments, and cultural contexts. And they were written for a multiplicity of purposes—to recount an ancient story, to worship and to instruct, to comfort and inspire, to evangelize.

And as we read (and listen),⁹ it becomes increasingly clear that it is not a sentence or paragraph here or there but the Bible *as a whole* that is “the infallible revelation of [God's] will.”¹⁰ The various authors and documents, with their different purposes and perspectives, are like spotlights of colors shining on a magnificent sculpture: it is in the totality of illumination that we see most clearly what we are looking at. To turn on a single spotlight may highlight certain features, but for the best comprehension of the sculpture, we need all the light we can get. A preoccupation with

“proof texts” and “problem texts”—emphasizing the former and explaining (or explaining away) the latter—is the result of a misunderstanding of the nature and function of the biblical revelation.¹¹

Perhaps the most surprising of all the “liberalizing” ingredients in Adventism is the gospel. The gospel leads to genuine spiritual liberation as we get clear about the relation of God's love and our behavior.

The truth that God is love is, of course, is the heart and center of the gospel, the “good news” of Christianity; and to be “Adventist” is simply to have a particular eschatological perspective on this truth. It is often (and appropriately) noted that in Ellen White's Conflict of the Ages series of books, the first three words and the last three words are the simple statement that “God is love”; the whole story of salvation is surrounded by this affirmation of the real nature of God.¹²

And precisely because God *is* love, life now and in the future comes to each of us as a *gift*, not as a reward for being “good enough” or doing “well enough” or thinking “correctly enough.” A gift is not something we earn or deserve, and the person who gives it would be insulted if we tried to pay for it. When we receive a gift, the only proper response is to accept it with appreciation and thanks.

But (and this is the great paradox of the gospel) this message that God really is *love* is difficult for us to believe and easy to forget. We Adventists have been talking about “Christ our righteousness” at least since 1888,¹³ but too many of us are still “closet legalists,”¹⁴ and the rest of us are recovering legalists. Somewhere deep inside the Adventist psyche is a suspicion that we will miss salvation if we aren't good *enough*.¹⁵ Even if we know that everlasting life is a gift, we think we have to show by our good behavior that we appreciate it (and thus in some sense retroactively deserve it); and we suspect that if we don't, God

will take it back.

We say that human beings are saved by God's grace; but we also say that grace enables us to overcome sin. This is of course true: "God can do more about sin than forgive it." But we often add (by implication if not explicitly) that we had better be overcoming sin, because if we aren't, we are not actually saved and our ultimate destiny is in doubt. Thus overcoming sin becomes a requirement instead of a gift, grace is turned into a demand, and the focus of our attention is on how well we are doing—how completely we are gaining the "victory over sin." This makes us spiritually anxious and insecure, because we are not at all sure that we are doing *well enough* (or, more correctly, we are quite sure that we are *not* doing well enough). We start wondering and worrying (and arguing) about *how well we have to do* in order to be acceptable to God.¹⁶ Even worse, we start worrying about how well *others* are doing.

But the truth is we are *already* accepted. The good news is that doing well enough or being good enough or thinking correctly enough is not the crucial issue. There are many reasons for right behavior, good theol-

ogy, and healthy spirituality; but being accepted by God is not one of those reasons. To put Paul's words into current American language: "Just as one person doing it wrong got all humanity into trouble with God, so one person doing it right put all humanity right with God."¹⁷ God is "the Savior of all humanity."¹⁸ *This* is the good news.

If (and only if) we are clear about the gospel, we can talk fervently (and nonlegalistically) about the profound importance of living in the light of the *torah*, the teaching of God.¹⁹ We can be enthusiastic about the spiritual maturity and moral improvement that come through love, justice, and hope.²⁰ The fact that God's ideal for us is "higher than the highest human thought can reach"²¹ is now an invitation, not a demand.

- A third "liberalizing" ingredient in authentic Adventism is the idea of "present truth,"²² the spirit of theological discovery. This idea points to the fact that, as Jack Provonsa has written, "each generation must in some ways be a first generation all over again."²³ Each generation is called to build on the foundation of the past, but it is called to *build*, not just *preserve*.²⁴

As we look back to the experience of 1844, the most important lesson to be learned is the fact that after Tuesday, October 22, a day of great disappointment,²⁵ came Wednesday, October 23, a day of new beginning.²⁶

Cherishing the heritage that gave them their religious identity and vision, the progressive Adventists of 1844 were responsive to new facts, new circumstances, and new needs. This was Adventism with Present Truth, Adventism truly on the way to the future. The spirit of theological discovery enabled the progressive Adventists to admit that they had been wrong about some things²⁷ (but not everything) and to move past their disappointment toward the better understandings they knew would come. And theological discoveries did come: the

Adapted from Henri Matisse's "La Peniche et la Sûreté"



continuing ministry of Christ on behalf of humanity, the seventh day as holy time, the prophetic role of Ellen Harmon, conditional immortality (which eliminated the horrendous notion of a soul suffering in an ever-burning hell),²⁸ the religious significance of physical health, the tithe as the beginning of financial stewardship, the expansion of the Adventist horizon to a literally global mission.²⁹

This remarkable series of theological discoveries was complemented³⁰ by a willingness to abandon invalid or inadequate views—the “shut door,”³¹ for example, obedience to the law as the crucial issues in salvation,³² and opposition to the historic Christian notion of God as Trinity.³³

- A fourth, unexpectedly “liberalizing” element in Adventism is the Advent hope: the brightness of an ultimate future with God makes it impossible to be pessimistic about the future. The Advent hope means knowing that the future will bring the completion—not the frustration—of everything that is good in human existence. Whatever one is looking forward to—professional success and satisfaction; children or grandchildren; financial security—the personal presence of Jesus our Lord—will be even better. It will bring the continuation of the best aspects of humanness—the love of family and friends, the awareness that our lives matter to God, the experience of beauty, and the joy of discovery and understanding. It will also bring transformation into everlasting life in a world where neither human existence nor the natural environment is distorted by the consequences of sin.

So it doesn't make sense for an Adventist to be a pessimist. This doesn't mean that there are no Adventists pessimists; it means that the pessimism is a temperamental contradiction of one's belief. Because the final outcome of history is sure, one need not be overly anxious about what will happen in the meantime. The “time of trouble,” is a reminder that the future will not be all fun and games; but the primary

focus of attention is the ultimate future.

Even the announcement of eschatological judgment³⁴ is “good news,” because it means that God is more powerful than all the insanity, perversity, and brutality of our world. Everyone knows what it is to be misunderstood and misjudged—to go the second, third, or fourth mile and be criticized because one didn't run fast enough and carry a backpack. The news media continually bring reports of horrendous tribal warfare by terrorism and atrocity, resulting from hatreds that are deep and old. The fact of final judgment means that, however much misunderstanding and prejudice, domination, and exploitation there is in our world and even in one's own life—however bad things may seem, and however bad they may actually *be*—in the long run God's intention for human existence will be realized.

A fifth “progressive” and “liberalizing” theological element in authentic Adventism is its recognition of “spiritual gifts,” particularly the idea of a contemporary prophetic witness. It is precisely the vocation of a prophet to articulate insights that go beyond what is already known, believed, and experienced; a prophet is by definition a theological discovery.

This has been the actual Adventist experience with the ministry of Ellen White. Her encouragement (and sometimes insistence) helped to initiate major Adventist efforts in publishing, health care, world missions, and education. Theologically, she encouraged and exemplified openness to the possibility of new and more adequate understandings: “the truth,” she said, “is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.”³⁵

- A sixth “liberalizing” theological factor is the Sabbath: the experience of time for being fully human relativises all hierarchical relationships and all efforts to produce, achieve, and accomplish. For Sabbath time is uniquely

graced time; it is time that comes, like human existence itself, as a gift. It is a time when no person is defined as master or servant, rich or poor, time when every person experiences the reality and dignity of being a daughter or son of God. It is time that unmask all human pretensions to power and authority over others, time that discloses humanness in authentic relationship to God, to God's world, and to God's whole human family. It is the liberating (and thus liberalizing) time of *Shabbat shalom*.

- A seventh "liberalizing" factor in Adventism is its moral seriousness, the Adventist understanding of human personhood as the integration of moral, physical, spiritual, and social dimensions of human existence leads to ethical concerns about racial and gender justice, stewardship of global resources and the natural environment, and the expansion of personal freedom.

These "liberalizing" theological factors pro-

vide the conceptual foundation for a number of historical factors that are much more obvious but would not be so powerful without their theological support.

Thesis 2: The Adventist future will also be shaped in part by a number of "liberalizing" sociobistorical factors in the Adventist past and present.

Clearly the most important historical factor in the "liberalizing" of Adventism is education, a logical outgrowth of the Adventist idea of "present truth." Knowledge and critical thinking about human experience and the natural world lead to questions about religious doctrine, about life-style, and about church policies and practices.

Ever since Socrates was condemned for corrupting the youth of Athens, education has been subversive of established ways of thinking and therefore of established authority.³⁶

On SDA Internet By the Year 2020 . . .

GENERAL CONFERENCE

At the General Conference Session the possibility of allowing individual divisions to ordain women is again postponed for discussion at the 2025 General Conference Session.

At General Conference Session, Deborah Adjeonu, an attorney and a lay person elected General Conference president, announces that she will move General Conference headquarters from Sao Paulo, Brazil, to Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

Biggest job is moving virtual reality communications equipment for headquarters staff of 40 people. President Adjeonu vows to use new technology and cut travel of G.C. officers in half, reducing by one-quarter the total General Conference budget.

ARTS

Pulitzer Prize for fiction goes to Jonathan Butler's bestseller, the *Shaking Time*. His previous work, *The Remnant*, had been ignored by all but a few appreciative critics.

For Easter celebration televised worldwide, *Take Six* perform with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir their rock version of Bach's B Minor Mass.

CNN interviews young Russian Adventist from St. Petersburg who has just become musical director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

NORTH AMERICA

More missionaries arrive in North American Division than it sends elsewhere.

President of Loma Linda University, a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Barbados, accepts appointment as Assistant Secretary for Health in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

McKees introduce Little Debbie Granola, receive public commendation from U.S. Surgeon General for product's nutritional value.

Time magazine features Adventist Colleges in California and Texas because the majority of their faculties are bilingual and teach in both English and Spanish.

This explains why educational enterprises are usually regarded with considerable ambivalence by organized religion, government, and the general population. Educational institutions are prized for the prestige they bring to their sponsors; and they are at the same time accused of undermining traditional beliefs, practices, and values. Yet we Adventists have been "true believers" in education. In all ethnic groups, Adventists in North America are significantly better educated than the general population.³⁷

When the church prepares its college and university graduates to be "morally courageous" as a countercultural force in society,³⁸ it cannot prevent them from becoming a countercultural force in Adventism, too. Furthermore, expanding knowledge and developing skills facilitate upward socioeconomic mobility, often accompanied by an increasing interest in the contemporary world and a corresponding decline in otherworldly con-

cerns and commitments.

• A second historical factor is the Adventist interest and investment in health and healing. This has several consequences. For example, a scientific understanding in the medical sciences (such as biochemistry and neurophysiology) leads to scientific thinking about earth sciences (including geology and paleontology). One cannot enthusiastically endorse the medical sciences because they are useful and then simply discount the earth sciences because they are troublesome. Nor can one properly use *a priori* theological arguments to come to conclusions about empirical reality—whether we are considering the nature of biblical inspiration³⁹ or the age of the earth. If one is going to think scientifically, empirical questions must be answered by objective evidence. And facts are facts. In spite of all we know about the fallibility of science and the foibles of scientists, and about paradigms and paradigm shifts in the history of science,⁴⁰

EDUCATION	THEOLOGY	WORLD CHURCH
<p>Professor occupying endowed Richard Schwarz Memorial Chair in Adventist history at Andrews University, after publishing a fifth book, accepts invitation to become professor of American religious history at the University of Chicago. His inaugural lecture, later published, is entitled "Ellen White Was More Than A Feminist: Shifting Methodologies in Millerite and Adventist Studies."</p>	<p>The Public Broadcasting System in the United States syndicates for world release a series called <i>Jubilees</i> with a female Seventh-day Adventist theologian as host. It explores sacred time in world religions, with the final segment devoted to film clips of celebrations of the Seventh-day Sabbath around the world.</p>	<p>UN gives Adventist Church in Uganda award for mobilizing other religious groups to work with World Health Organization to dramatically decrease spread of AIDS.</p>
<p>A graduate of Adventist Medical University in Argentina is first to be accepted into radiology residency program at Loma Linda University. She hopes to work with head of department who has won a Nobel Prize for medicine for successfully miniaturizing proton accelerator to the point it can be carried and operated by one person almost anywhere in the world or in space.</p>	<p>The Adventist Society for Religious Studies and the Adventist Theological Society agree that their simultaneous annual professional meetings will, for the first time, gather for a worship service in the same Adventist congregation. This will take place despite the first group wanting to decrease the 27 Fundamental Beliefs to seven, and the latter insisting the 27 should be increased to 49 (seven times seven).</p>	<p>General Conference Session gives final approval to creation of a new European Division, with headquarters in Geneva. The Europeans have the first two-chamber division committee. In the larger chamber, each union has one vote, from the 100,000-member Romanian Union to the 6,000-member Hungarian Union. In the much smaller chamber, voting strength is determined by size of tithe contribution. In this chamber business is almost always conducted in the German language.</p>
		<p>Papua New Guinea reaches its goal of being a tobacco-free nation. Government invites Adventist world president to Port Moresby celebration.</p>

facts and their logical implications⁴¹ must still be taken into account. There is no substitute for honesty with the evidence. "Truth," as Ellen White put it, "can afford to be fair."⁴²

The Adventist interest in health has also produced some other liberalizing effects. For example,⁴³ the level of remuneration of health-care personnel (especially physicians) in the United States facilitates swift upward mobility that is accompanied not only by the increasing interest in the contemporary world we noted earlier in connection with education, but also by increasing political influence in the church.

A third "liberalizing" historical factor is its sense of world mission, symbolized by the apocalyptic angel flying across the sky carrying a message for every nation, every ethnic group, every language, and every culture.⁴⁴

Communicating the Advent message leads inevitably to interaction with contemporary life and thought. For to communicate successfully requires an understanding of the intended audience, including its language. It is obvious that if we are going to speak to the Chinese culture, we must learn to speak a Chinese language. It is perhaps less obvious, but certainly just as true, that if we are going to communicate to a modern, secular, and scientific culture, we must learn to speak modern, secular, and scientific languages. But learning a new language entails an investment of time and effort to understand not only words and sentence structure and grammar, but also ways of thinking and valuing and being. This means truly *listening* and *bearing*. The inevitable

Ellen White was involved in the initiation, development, and survival of many of the other liberalizing ingredients: righteousness by faith; a long list of education, health care, world mission and publishing activities; and certain kinds of social responsibility.

result will be new ideas and insights. For there can be no real communication without genuine conversation, and genuine conversation changes all its participants. It goes like this: if I expect you to listen to me, I must truly listen to you.⁴⁵ If I truly listen to you, I will learn from you. If I learn from you, I will be a little more like you by the end of the conversation.

Thus an encounter with cultural diversity, whether ethnic or intellectual, leads to a recognition of different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. The result is not necessarily a thoroughgoing cultural relativism, in which all beliefs, attitudes, and values are regarded as equally valid and appropriate. The result is, rather, an awareness that no one

culture or subculture is a perfect expression of humanness, and that every culture, including one's own, should be open to the possibility of learning from the others.

A fourth "liberalizing" historical factor is the presence and social impact of Adventist institutions, which bring stability, prosperity, and community recognition.

These factors in turn lead to a sense of respectability that contrasts sharply with the original Adventist self-understanding as a marginalized "remnant." The persecuted minority becomes a *prophetic* minority.⁴⁶ The idea of "remnant" remains, but its existential meaning is transformed.

Also, as they involve interaction with a larger social, cultural, and intellectual world, Adventist institutions become places of cultural and intellectual openness. They provide a context for thinking critically and constructively about what it means to be Adventist as

an academic or as a health-care professional, and for thinking about the fundamental nature, meaning, and mission of Adventism.

- Finally, a fifth “liberalizing” historical factor is the Adventist enthusiasm for printing and publishing, which leads to a proliferation of Adventist voices.

Beginning with the Millerite Adventist *Signs of the Times* in 1840, the *Present Truth* in 1849, the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1850, and the *Youth's Instructor* in 1852, Adventism has given birth to a host of periodicals of various sorts (and varying quality). Today's list runs the gamut from general and official publications like the *Adventist Review* and the union conference papers to specialized magazines like *Ministry* and the *Journal of Adventist Education* and to unofficial publications like *Spectrum*, *Our Firm Foundation*, and *Adventist Today*, all promoting particular viewpoints. While the intention and effect of some periodicals has been anything but progressive, the very fact of their existence and diversity is in principle a “liberalizing” force.

The same can be said for books. Some have served to preserve traditional views: we think of *Daniel and Revelation*, by Uriah Smith,⁴⁷ along with *Bible Readings for the Home*,⁴⁸ and, more recently, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.⁴⁹ Some have encouraged new ideas along with the old: *Questions on Doctrine*,⁵⁰ for example, and the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.⁵¹ Some have been more deliberately innovative: *Festival of the Sabbath*⁵² and *Pilgrimage of Hope*,⁵³ edited by Roy Branson; *The Openness of God*, by Richard Rice;⁵⁴ and *Inspiration*, by Alden Thompson.⁵⁵ Some have offered alternative views of doctrines and events: *Prophetess of Health*, by Ronald Numbers;⁵⁶ *The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual Identity*, by Desmond and Gillian Ford;⁵⁷ *Betrayal*, by Merikay McLeod;⁵⁸ and *The Word Was Made Flesh*, by Ralph Larson.⁵⁹ Whatever their content or intent, these books reflect a diversity that is both a cause and a consequence of

the liberalizing of Adventism.

After thinking about these “liberalizing” factors in Adventism, I would offer two observations. The first is the remarkably pervasive influence of Ellen White. While her work is often regarded as a symbol and bulwark of conservatism, I see it also as a major factor in the “liberalizing” of Adventism. Not only did she encourage a thoughtful openness to “new light”; she was also prominently involved in the initiation, development, and survival of many of the other liberalizing ingredients. She consistently advocated personal Bible reading; she emphasized God's love and endorsed the doctrine of righteousness by faith; she vigorously supported a long list of education, healthcare, world mission, and publishing activities; she was a champion of certain kinds of social responsibility. So, although it will be disputed on both the left and the right, I want to say that much of the credit (or blame) for the “liberalizing” of Adventism properly belongs to Ellen White.

My second observation is that the continued liberalizing of Adventism is inevitable. For some people this is good news; for others it is very bad news. But however the prospect is evaluated, the forces involved are too obvious to be honestly denied and too strong to be effectively resisted. This is why I say that the Adventist future will be more “liberalized” rather than that it will be more “liberal.” The passive participle points to the fact that the process of “liberalization” is something that is *happening to Adventism* rather than something that is *chosen by Adventists* (or by the “liberal” Adventists, whoever they might be).

But this is not the whole picture.

Thesis 3: The Adventist future will also be shaped by other, anti-liberalizing ingredients.

The intellectual and social development of a religious community is never rapid, easy, or smooth; and there is no reason to

suppose that Adventism on the way to the future will be a special case. These “anti-liberalizing” ingredients are of slightly different kinds. There are “conservative” ingredients that tend to make the Adventist future a *continuation of the present*; and there are “reactive” ingredients that tend to make the Adventist future a *return to the past*.

- I see two main “conservative” ingredients. In the first place, religion is, as Paul Tillich used to say, a matter of “ultimate concern”⁶⁰—and we do not take lightly to religious change. Indeed, we expect religion to be a rock of stability amid the shifting sands of historical, social, and cultural flow. It is a citadel of permanence amid the “change and decay” we see all around and, even worse, feel within ourselves.⁶¹ So the theological and moral seriousness that is one of the great strengths of Adventism also encourages resistance to change. Adventism is both a theological perspective and a way of life, and change of any sort can be viewed as “lowering the standards” of belief or behavior.

In the second place, institutional structures lead inevitably to hierarchical thinking and bureaucratic practices, both of which reinforce the intellectual and procedural inertia of large organizations. The larger and more complex the organization, the more difficult and costly is any change of thinking. And Adventism surely qualifies as being both large and complex. It is notoriously difficult for us to discontinue any program, policy, department, or institution, even if the reason for its existence has disappeared. And it is just as difficult for us to change our thinking about our beliefs and our mission. Paradoxically, the more we feel change occur-

ring within the church, the more we feel a need to maintain unity by resisting change. Although there may be wide and deep dissatisfaction with the reality of the present, there is equally wide and deep disagreement about any specific proposal for change.

So, there is a strong tendency to try to make the Adventist future an extension of the present. But the present is hardly an ideal model for the future. Adventism in North America is becoming a sabbatarian version of the kind of mainline Protestantism that is increasingly respectable, increasingly gray, and increasingly bland—culturally comfortable, experientially unimportant, and theologically stagnant; accompanied by decreasing church attendance, decreasing financial support, and decreasing school enrollment. Nobody—not the people, the pastors, or the church officials—really wants the future to be a continuation of the present.

- It is not at all surprising, therefore, that there is also a tendency to try to make the future a return to the past. This tendency is encouraged by some “reactive” in-

redients. For one thing, a long Adventist history of biblical literalism has encouraged simplistic thinking and attitudes. These in turn provide fertile soil for the self-appointed critics who claim to be the only authentic Adventists left amidst widespread apostasy.

For another thing, our typical evangelistic and missionary fundamentalism—that is, preaching a simple, unambiguous message with complete certainty from a position of religious superiority—has understandably attracted to Adventism people with a fundamentalist mentality. There is a steady influx of “true believers”—people who not only

The “liberalizing” ingredients I see in Adventism are not merely incidental; they are some of its defining characteristics. They are part of what Adventism is. They are ingredients of the spirit, the fire, of authentic Adventism.

have a simple faith but for whom simplicity is faith.

And for a third thing, our effectiveness in world mission has led to a demographic shift toward continents with traditions of conservative authoritarianism which contrast rather sharply with the tradition of liberal democracy in North America.

But Adventism cannot simply become a 19th-century island, or even a 20th-century island, surrounded by a 21st-century ocean.

An attempt to return to the past is not a recovery of faith but a failure of nerve.⁶² For genuine faith is a commitment to the whole truth—to the truth we do not yet know as well as to the truth we think we know. It is not so much a “hanging on” as it is a moving forward, “an unreserved opening of the mind to truth, whatever it may turn out to be.”⁶³

Trying to go back to the past, furthermore, is actually an abdication of the church’s mission to the world, which is necessarily the world of the present. This abdication is reflected in the fact that many of the reactionary “independent ministries” have no mission to the world at all, but are completely parasitic on the Adventist community.

Every new generation lives in a new world, with new questions to address, new challenges to meet, new problems to solve. The gospel of God’s love is everlasting; but our understanding of it—our theology—is a snapshot of it from a particular perspective at a particular point in time.⁶⁴ As Ellen White once said, “The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.”⁶⁵

So the task of Adventism on the way to the future is not to try to relive the original Adventist experience or respond to the original Adventist questions with exactly the same answers—any more than it is my duty to go back to Minnesota and live in the place where my grandfather lived and where my father and I were born.

The Adventist future will be shaped by

some combination of progressive, conservative, and reactive ingredients, because none of these ingredients is going to capitulate, be converted, or go away. None of them will let itself be swallowed by the others; nor will any one of them become dominant. This situation will yield one of two consequences: pluralism or fragmentation.

Thesis 4: For better or for worse, Adventist pluralism is already here.

Since 1980 the word *pluralism* has become something of an obscenity among some church officials in North America, but whatever one chooses to call the phenomenon—“pluralism” or “diversity” or “pluriformity”—it is a reality. The picture of a universally homogeneous Adventism—with every believer around the world studying the same Sabbath school lesson, singing the same hymns, having the same life-style, and understanding Advent beliefs in the same way—is an illusion.

The evidence of real pluralism is abundant and inescapable. Hundreds of Adventist congregations are identifiable according to ethnicity, language, form of worship, life-style, or theological emphasis; some of these are identified officially, some unofficially. Regional and national differences increase the diversity: Adventism in Argentina is different from Adventism in Austria or in Alabama—and it should be. This diversity is not a weakness but a richness. Parachurch organizations institutionalize the diversity: The Adventist Women’s Institute, Hope International, SDA Kinship, and the Adventist Theological Society—all illustrate the variety of interests and viewpoints. In Adventist higher education, Southern, Atlantic Union, and Walla Walla colleges are different in more than geography.

Pluralism tends to perpetuate itself by creating space for isolated elements that are

immune to dialogue and criticism—intellectual and ideological ghettos for both left-wing liberalism and right-wing reaction. These kinds of differences have already made uniformity impossible, and they also make pluralism necessary if Adventism is going to avoid organizational fragmentation. Attempts to impose uniformity on diversity⁶⁶ are never more than temporarily successful; sooner or later they result in some kind of separation. On the other hand, while pluralism makes spiritual unity more difficult to maintain, it does not necessarily subvert it; the subversion of unity comes from attitudes of pride and arrogance, desires to dominate and control, and practices of exclusion.

"When you visit the altars of the past, somebody once said, bring back the fire, not the ashes."⁶⁷

"Bringing back the fire" has been the intention of this whole series of presen-

tations (see author identification, p. 18) as they have reviewed the past and anticipated the future. It is always easier, of course, to bring back the ashes. It is also much safer; playing with any kind of fire is hazardous. But in the long run it is better to take the riskier option—choosing the fire rather than the ashes, recognizing that great disappointment is transcended by greater hope.

The "liberalizing" ingredients I see in Adventism are not merely incidental; they are some of its defining characteristics. They are part of what Adventism is. They are ingredients of the spirit, the *fire*, of authentic Adventism. They are also the impetus for moving beyond the present, into the 21st century and an Adventist future that is theologically progressive, spiritually healthy, and organizationally inclusive. They therefore encourage the possibility of envisioning the future as God's future and going out to meet it—with confidence and vigor, freedom and creativity, gratitude and hope.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In this presentation the word *Adventism* means the Adventist community in North America. Whatever insight or understanding I may have about Adventism comes from life and work almost entirely on this continent. Yet within this geographical focus, I will use the word *Adventism* broadly, to mean the community as a whole, not merely (or even primarily) its organizational structures and institutions, and to include practices, functions, and relationships as well as beliefs.

The phrase "on the way" [in the title of the original lecture, "Adventism On the Way to the Future"] points to the fact of being in process—in transit and transition. As an approximation of the Latin *in via*, it connotes both movement and incompleteness. The movement is inevitable and intentional—inevitable because the future (and the change it brings) cannot be forestalled, and intentional because one need not let the future (and change) simply happen (one can anticipate it, go out to meet it, and help to shape it). The incompleteness is entailed by the fact that the process continues: it has not yet attained its goal. The word *future* means, of course, what is coming, what is ahead, what has not yet arrived; and it also means direction and destination. The idea of

the Adventist future has at least three dimensions: not only Adventism's own future, arising from its past and present, but also its relation to the future of the world and (even more important) to the future of God.

2. There is no reason why the connotation of words like *liberal* and *liberalizing* should be determined by persons who are hostile to their authentic content. It may have been the poetical campaigning of Ronald Reagan that made "the L-word" an epithet; in any case, its use as a negative value-judgment (rather than an objective description) is now common in American political and religious rhetoric. In any event, the word may refer to a particular intellectual position (as in the phrase "19th-century liberalism") or to a general attitude of intellectual openness (as in "liberal-mindedness"). It is in the latter sense that the word is used throughout in this discussion; it is used descriptively, not as a positive or negative value-judgment.

3. Yet Adventism is not in general "fundamentalist," and in some ways it is not properly classified as "evangelical" since that once-general term has been commandeered as a partisan self-designation by, for example, the groups that constitute the National Asso-

ciation of Evangelicals. See Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, "Do Adventist Voters Lean Left or Right?" *Spectrum* 23:3 (October 1993), pp. 5-13.

4. "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," par. 1.

5. See Charles M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), "The Canon of Christian Understanding," pp. 82-105, and "Christian Understanding as a Critical Task," pp. 106-120.

6. To be precise, one should speak of degrees of literalism; I do not personally know anyone who holds an absolute literalism, nor do I know anyone who does not let scientific knowledge influence one's understanding of Scripture. Without any explicit biblical evidence, readers of Scripture believe, for example, that the earth is spherical, rotates on its axis, and revolves around the sun, and that the sun came into existence at least as soon as the earth. Here I use the term "biblical literalism" to point to a *relatively* literalistic reading of Scripture, recognizing a minimum of metaphorical and symbolic language.

7. A danger of theological polemics is the almost irresistible temptation to use Scripture as the servant of one's theology rather than its master and judge.

8. See the objections to Alden Thompson, *Inspiration*, raised by various contributors to *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., *Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers*, 1 (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society, 1992), pp. 31-199. A curiosity of current Adventist theological discussion is that those who most emphasize the humanity of Christ often have an almost docetic view of Scripture.

9. See Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1896), p. 1: "Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons."

10. See Dalton D. Baldwin, "Openness for Renewal Without Destructive Pluralism: The Dilemma of Doctrinal Dissent," in *Christ in the Classroom: Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning*, 3 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), pp. 65, 66: "It is the underlying harmony of the Bible as a whole that is infallible."

11. A wider recognition of the "canonical" nature of Biblical authority would eliminate much if not all of the opposition to the ordination of women in professional

ministry.

12. *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn, 1913), p. 33; *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1911), p. 678.

13. See Arthur G. Daniells, *Christ Our Righteousness* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 1926); Norval P. Pease, *By Faith Alone* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1962), pp. 107-176; LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1978), passim; Robert J. Wieland, *The 1888 Message: An Introduction* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn., 1980).

14. This phenomenon may be called "the Adventist disease."

15. See Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra Univ. Press, 1992), p. 272: "We have seen that though our youth have heard the words of the Gospel of righteousness by grace through faith, the Adventist emphasis on behavioral standards has led the majority to believe that they must somehow do something to merit salvation. It is very difficult for an Adventist adolescent to emotionally accept the fact that his or her salvation rests entirely on the merits of Jesus Christ and the he or she cannot contribute to it in any way."

16. For the discussion of perfectionism, see Hans K. La Rondelle, *Perfection and Perfectionism: A Dogmatic-Ethical Study of Biblical Perfection and Phenomenal Perfectionism* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1971); Herbert Douglass, et al., *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn, 1975).

17. Rom. 5:18; translation based on Peterson, p. 314. NRSV reads, "Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." For a brief discussion of the universalistic thrust of the New Testament, see my essay, "The Universality of God's Love," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), esp. pp. 42-46.

18. 1 Tim. 4:10.

19. One of the most unfortunate phenomena in the history of religious language has been the translation of the Hebrew word *torah* by the Greek *nomos*, the Latin *lex*, and the English *law*. The positive connotation of teaching or instruction that is prominent in the Hebrew word is eclipsed in the others by the dominant idea of legal compulsion.

20. The principles are often illustrated rather than specified in the Bible, which is for the most part better understood as a "casebook" than as a "code book." See

Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1991), pp. 98-109.

21. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 18.

22. *Present Truth* was the name of the first Seventh-day Adventist periodical; it was taken from the King James Version of 2 Peter 1:12 and explained by James White in an introductory note on the front page of the inaugural issue (1:1, July 1849): "In Peter's time there was present truth, or truth applicable to that present time. The Church [has] ever had a present truth. The present truth now, is that which shows present duty. . . ."

Thirty-five years later, in *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of Time* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1884), p. 118, Ellen White echoed her husband's words: "There was a present truth in the days of Luther,—a truth at that time of special importance; there is a present truth for the church today." See also *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1950), p. 143.

23. Jack W. Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1993), p. 13.

24. Ellen White wrote several times about the progressive nature of truth. See, for example, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1889), vol. 5, pp. 706, 707: "Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. [People] rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion."

"Search the Scriptures," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 26, 1892), p. 465; reprinted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn., 1946), p. 37: "We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed."

"Christ Our Hope," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (December 20, 1892), p. 785, reprinted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35: "There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions

of Scripture are without an error. 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. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation."

25. See Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1961), p. 98; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1977), pp. 48, 49; George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1993), pp. 217-224.

The most memorable account is the poignant recollection of Hiram Edson contained in an undated manuscript fragment located in the Heritage Room of the James White Library at Andrews University and published in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the 19th Century*, Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1987), p. 215: "Our expectations were raised high, and thus we looked for our coming Lord until the clock tolled 12 at midnight. The day had then passed and our disappointment became a certainty. Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.

"I mused in my own heart, saying, My advent experience has been the richest and brightest of all my Christian experience. If this had proved a failure, what was the rest of my Christian experience worth? Has the Bible proved a failure? Is there no God—no heaven—no golden home city—no paradise? Is all this but a cunningly devised fable? Is there no reality to our fondest hopes and expectation of these things? And thus we had something to grieve and weep over, if all our fond hopes were lost. And as I said, we wept till the day dawn."

26. Spalding, Vol. 1, pp. 98-113; Maxwell, pp. 51-54; Knight, pp. 304-319. Again Edson's memoir provides a vivid account (in Numbers and Butler, p. 216): "Heaven seemed opened to my view, and I saw distinctly, and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy [Place] of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth. That he came to the marriage at that time; in other words, to the Ancient of days, to receive a kingdom, dominion, and glory; and we must

wait for his return *from the wedding* and my mind was directed to the tenth ch. of Rev. where I could see the vision had spoken and did not lie; the seventh angel had began [sic] to sound; we had eaten the littl [sic] book; it has been sweet in our mouth, and it had now become bitter in our belly, embittering our whole being. That we must prophesy again, etc., and that when the seventh angel began to sound, the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament, etc.”

Maxwell, pp. 51, 52 raises the question of the precise nature of Edson's experience: “Did Hiram Edson, as some suggest, have a prophetic vision in the cornfield? He may have. He does not, however, state that he actually saw Jesus enter the most holy place. Instead, in his best-known account, he says that he saw ‘that’ Jesus entered it on October 22. In a different account he says nothing about ‘seeing’ anything, but recalls instead that he heard a voice speaking to him. Possibly he himself did not know exactly how his valuable insights came to him.”

27. See, for example, Joseph Marsh in *Voice of Truth* (Nov. 7, 1844), p. 166, quoted in Knight, pp. 230, 231: “We cheerfully admit that we have been mistaken in the nature of the event we expected would occur on the tenth of the seventh month.”

28. See Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1915), pp. 48-50.

29. See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

30. Theological change is evident also in the various ways the doctrine of the sanctuary in heaven has functioned in the history of Adventism: first as a way of understanding the disappointment of 1844, then as a reinforcement of the continuing importance of the fourth commandment, later as a symbol of “victorious living,” and more recently as a mark of Adventist identity and orthodoxy, and as a call to moral seriousness. See Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1981); and Jon Dybdahl, “The Sanctuary as a Call to Moral Seriousness,” *Spectrum* 14:1 (August 1983), pp. 47-51.

31. See Damsteegt, pp. 149-164; Knight, pp. 313, 314.

32. See the references in note 13, above.

33. See *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1957), pp. 35-37, 645, 646. Published without identified authorship, this is evidently the work of LeRoy E. Froom, W. E. Read, and Roy Allen Anderson. See also LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Move-*

ment of Destiny (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1971), pp. 322, 323.

34. Rev. 14:6.

35. Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald* (March 25, 1890), reprinted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn., 1946), p. 33.

36. See Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Delacorte, 1969).

37. See Monte Sahlin, “Who Are North American Adventists?” *Spectrum* 21:2 (March 1991), p. 18: “The percentage of Adventists with less than a high school diploma is half that of the general population in the United States and Canada. Two out of five Adventist males and a third of the females have college degrees. The majority have spent some time in postsecondary schools. . . . The percentage of highly educated church members is significant in all ethnic groups. In fact, the percentage of males with college degrees among black and Hispanic Adventists may be slightly greater than among white Adventists.”

38. See Robert Folkenberg, “The Challenge for La Sierra University,” *University Vitae Extra* (February 3, 1994), p. 3. The term “countercultural force” occurred in the public presentation but does not appear in the published version.

39. For an Adventist endorsement of a deductive approach to an understanding of the nature of Scripture, see John T. Baldwin, “Inspiration, the Natural Sciences, and a Window of Opportunity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5:1 (Spring 1994), p. 134.

40. Beginning with the influential work of Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962). For an example of the ensuing discussion, see Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970).

41. Science involves more than the reporting of data (facts); it also entails the coherent interpretation of data (theory). So the claim, “We don’t dispute the facts; we just reject the theory,” is not scientifically credible unless it is accompanied by a more adequate theory.

42. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (Dec. 20, 1892); reprinted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35.

43. Another example is the prominence of health care in Adventist life and mission, which has encouraged thinking about sin, salvation, and the Christian life in metaphors of disease and healing (or wholeness)—metaphors that soften the legal language of “transgression” and “justification,” imply a gradual development rather than absolute contrast between life “in the world” and “life in Christ,” and relativize the notion of “perfection.” Besides the motto of Loma Linda University, “To make man whole,” there is the linguistic connection of

the word *salvation* to the Latin *salmus*, which means both "safe" and "healthy."

44. Rev. 14:6.

45. This is a version of what Dalton D. Baldwin has named "The Golden Rule of Evangelism." For a more formal description of the "ideal speech situation," see Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon, 1970), p. 17; and William Nacher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), pp. 76, 77, 105-122.

46. See Jack Provonsha, "The Church as Prophetic Minority," in *Pilgrimage of Hope*, Roy Branson, ed. (Takoma Park, Md.: Association of Adventist Forums, 1986), pp. 98-107.

47. Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation. The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn., 1897).

48. *Bible Readings for the Home* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1915; rev. ed. 1949).

49. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988).

50. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1957). Published without identified authorship, this is the work of LeRoy E. Froom, W. E. Read, and Roy Allen Anderson.

51. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1957).

52. Roy Branson, ed., *Festival of the Sabbath* (Takoma Park, Md.: Association of Adventist Forums, 1985).

53. _____, *Pilgrimage of Hope* (Takoma Park, Md.: Association of Adventist Forums, 1986).

54. Richard Rice, *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1980); reprinted as *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985).

55. Thompson, *Inspiration*.

56. Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); rev. ed.: *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1992).

57. Desmond and Gillian Ford, *The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual Identity* (Newcastle, Calif.: Desmond Ford, 1982).

58. Merikay McLeod, *Betrayal: The Shattering Sex*

Discrimination Case of Silver vs. Pacific Press Publishing Association (Loma Linda, Calif.: Mars Hill, 1985).

59. Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology, 1852-1952* (Cherry Valley, Calif.: Cherrystone, 1986).

60. See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 1-4.

61. See Henry F. Lyte, "Abide With Me," *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1985), No. 50:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me.

62. See Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. x: "The current resuscitation of very conservative positions . . . is a sign not so much of a recovery of faith as of a loss of nerve before the onslaught of new perceptions of the world."

63. Watts, p. 24.

64. See Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the 20th Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), p. 359: "For only the gospel is eternal, and theology is temporal; it must always translate the eternal gospel anew for the changing times. . . . We must always begin to build once again, and we must always dare once again to do the unheard of thing which consists of men, sinful, finite, imperfect and mortal men, daring to speak in human words about God. Here too it is God's grace alone which can make good what in every case man does badly. God must also forgive us our theology, our theology perhaps most of all."

65. Ellen G. White, "Open the Heart to Light," *Review and Herald* (March 25, 1890), p. 177; reprinted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 33.

66. For a current example of such an attempt, see Alan Cowell's report, via the New York Times News Service, in the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, May 31, 1994: "Pope John Paul II told the world's Catholics yesterday to abandon any thought of women being ordained as priests, saying that the issue was not open to debate and that his views must be 'definitively held by all the church's faithful.' Although the pope's words fell just short of a formal statement of infallible doctrine, the particularly severe and authoritative tone of his letter to bishops suggested that he was seeking to remove the idea from the Catholic agenda for decades to come."

67. Original source unknown.