

THE FUTURE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

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ABSTRACT

Early in 1984 I was asked to speak at the annual conference of the Association of Adventist Forums, the umbrella organization for all the Adventist Forum chapters both in the USA and beyond and the publisher of *Spectrum Magazine*. Since Adventism in the USA had been passing through a series of crises that had resulted in a great deal of press coverage, including a court suit demanding damages from two of the women editors at Pacific Press because their salaries had been much lower than those of men doing the same work; the inappropriate use of church funds by several church leaders, including Elder Robert Pierson, the President of the General Conference, to invest with an Adventist investor in return for personal rewards; the firing of Dr Desmond Ford, a college professor and loved preacher for his public critique of the Sanctuary doctrine, which was in turn followed by the loss of many pastors both in the US and Australia; and mounting evidence that showed that Ellen White had commonly plagiarized many other sources and had used her literary assistants to help produce what were supposed to be her writings. In view of these several crises, I was asked to present a paper assessing the likely future of Adventism.

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist church is one of the five large American-born denominations, but unlike the other four--Mormons, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals--it has been largely ignored by sociologists. Adventism has been shaken by several crises in recent years which have received considerable coverage in the American press, with, for example, front-page stories in the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, and in-depth articles in Newsweek, Time, and Christianity Today. These crises have included charges that the Adventist prophet, Ellen White, plagiarized much of her material; the disavowal of distinctive doctrines by a theologian with a wide following; the loss by several church entities of some \$20 million which was invested in high interest but poorly secured investments controlled by an Adventist; and a bitterly contested court suit in which two female employees of an Adventist publishing house, who were joined by the federal Department of Labor, charged the church with discrimination based on gender and won a handsome settlement. Such crises demand explanation, and raise questions concerning the future directions of the church. In order to address these issues, we need to look back at early Adventism and its evolution since then.

The Seventh-day Adventist church traces its roots back to the Millerite Movement of the 1840s. William Miller, a Baptist lay-preacher, taught throughout upstate New York and New England that the world would end with the second coming of Christ in 1844. The failure of his prophecy,

which is known within Adventist circles as "the Great Disappointment", brought jeers from without and disillusionment to many within the circle of his followers. Some, however, encouraged by the visions of Ellen (Harmon) White, a young woman who was soon to attain the status of a prophet, reinterpreted Miller's prophecy and went on to found Seventh-day Adventism. Adventists believed that they had been appointed to preach God's final message of warning to a doomed world, a message that was summarized in the name they adopted: Christians should prepare for the return of Christ, which was imminent--indeed, the "investigative judgment", which must immediately precede the second *advent*, had begun in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844; and all should return to the observance of Saturday, the *seventh day*, as the biblical Sabbath, which was to be a mark of the faithful awaiting Christ's return.

Before she died in 1915, Ellen White had augmented the fundamental beliefs so extensively that Adventism, conscientiously practised, had become a way of life, setting the church members apart from other Christians. Adventism required vegetarianism, abstinence from coffee, tea, alcohol and tobacco, avoidance of all "worldly" entertainment, and observance of Saturday as a holy day. These practices, together with the great amount of time customarily committed to church activities, thrust members in upon themselves, except for the task of evangelism. The insulation was further encouraged by exhortations to remain a distinct, "peculiar people", by a parochial education system catering to students from grade 1 through college, and by the tendency of many Adventists to live near church institutions, such as hospitals and colleges, which were built in geographically isolated areas.

That is, early Adventists were homogeneous: they were white, rural, North-easterners, recruited from a fairly narrow socio-economic status range. While they were fairly poor, they tended to be drawn from independent occupations--farmers, craftsmen--where Sabbath observance was not too difficult at a time when the 6-day week was universal. They were sectarian: they believed that their special doctrines were God's last message to the world; that Ellen White was a prophet sent to guide the Adventist church; that Adventists were God's "Remnant Church", their message was "the Truth", while Catholicism was the instrument of Satan and the Protestant churches were "apostate." And they were set apart--by their beliefs and their lifestyle. Their separation was strengthened by the emergence of "Adventist ghettos" around the institutions that they soon began to establish, and by a growing sense of being a people--that is, in many ways they became an American ethnic group, with their own history, culture, and a dense network of interpersonal and economic ties.

Over time homogeneity gradually gave way to diversity. Unexpectedly, this may be traced first to Ellen White and the theology she endorsed. The prophet apparently felt no great urge to consistency, so that to her may be traced two quite different doctrinal faces of Adventism that I have dubbed "sectarian" and "mainstream". While, for example, in some of her writings she was lashing out at "apostate Protestantism" while portraying the central role Adventism was to play in the final scenes of "the great controversy between Christ and Satan," she was in other writings (it has been shown recently) boldly plagiarizing the leading Protestant authors of her time to

develop themes taken straight from mainstream Christianity. The result has been that participants on both sides of Adventist doctrinal controversies have always been able to appeal for support to the authority of the prophet. While some leading churchmen did exit Adventism as a result of such controversies between 1888 and the early 1970s, most disputes were kept largely under covers, and therefore papered over and left unresolved, with the result that the typical Adventist continued, throughout that period, to understand church doctrine as a unified belief system.

Meanwhile, Adventism expanded from its initial geographic base throughout the United States and also, in response to the urgings of Ellen White, around the world as the central governing body of the church, the General Conference, established a formidable missionary program. As Adventists preached their message "to every nation, kindred, tongue and people," the once racially and culturally homogeneous church was transformed. This occurred within the U.S., where it came to mirror the pluralistic society, as well as universally. As Adventism took root in other continents, first in Europe, Australasia and Asia, but then most notably in Latin America and Africa, the relative size of the U.S. church shrank until in 1982 it stood at only 15% of world membership--600,000 of a total of 3.9 million. The missionaries, in turn, followed the prophet's admonition to establish schools and colleges, clinics and hospitals, publishing houses and vegetarian food factories. By 1982 there were 5,800 such institutions world-wide.

The educational and employment opportunities available at the church institutions enhanced chances for upward mobility, especially in the United States, where the institutions were developed first and most fully. To cite but one example: between 1914 and 1982 the medical school at Loma Linda in Southern California graduated a total of 5,723 physicians. The work ethic prevailed in spite of the millenarian doctrine: indeed, to quote Edwin Scott Gaustad, "seldom while expecting a kingdom of God from heaven, has a group worked so diligently for one on earth". Education and upward social mobility exposed Adventists to the values of the broader society, and led them to value social respectability. This process was enhanced as the 5-day, 40-hour week became general practice in the U.S.A., thus removing a serious economic difficulty for Sabbath-keepers, and as several of the previously isolated Adventist communities surrounding church institutions found that they were embraced by expanding metropolitan areas. Upward mobility has added to the heterogeneity of church membership, for not all have kept pace--it has been concentrated, in the U.S., among second- and third-generation Adventists, those in the best position to make use of the educational opportunities the church offers. However, the church continues to expend extensive resources on evangelism, and here its success is largely limited to relatively poor members of racial minority groups: the white membership remains static, but first-generation black, hispanic, and oriental numbers are increasing rapidly.

In 1929 H. Richard Niebuhr argued that as Protestant Americans experienced upward mobility they tended also to change denomination—for example, Baptists were low in status, Episcopalians high. This process tended to limit diversity within each denomination. The Catholic church, however, was much more diverse because its people did not feel free to move about in

this way. Adventists were like Catholics in this respect, because of their belief that they were the Remnant, and especially because Sabbath-keeping left them few options. Adventism therefore tended to retain its increasingly diverse elements.

The Adventist commitment to providing educational and health services led church leaders to make a series of decisions in the period between World War I and World War II that were to have a far-reaching impact on belief profiles within the church, and eventually help trigger bitter theological conflict. At the turn of the century Adventists established a medical school, the College of Medical Evangelists, to meet staffing needs in their hospitals and clinics around the world. However, this move soon forced them to accommodate their education system, both in curriculum and education of faculty members, to the standards of accrediting bodies, as first the medical school was forced to obtain accreditation, and then Adventist colleges were obliged to follow the same path if their graduates were to be admitted to the medical school or receive certification as nurses or teachers. Accreditation forced the colleges to send their faculty members to secular universities for graduate education, where they were exposed to views and debates from which they had previously been sheltered. In 1937 the first steps were taken to upgrade the education of clergy with the founding of a seminary, with the result that by the 1950s and especially the 1960s the faculties of the theological seminary and of the theology departments at the colleges were enrolling in doctoral programs in rapidly increasing numbers: although their programs were not forced to seek accreditation, the biblical scholars became uneasy with their status as the lowest educated faculty. The process of accommodation was perhaps best symbolized as those colleges whose names referred to their mission at the time of their founding replaced them with titles better befitting the educational mainstream: the College of Medical Evangelists became Loma Linda University in 1945, Emmanuel Missionary College was transformed into Andrews University in 1957, Washington Missionary College was renamed Columbia Union College in 1961, and Southern Missionary College emerged as Southern College in 1982.

The higher education of the theology faculty began to make itself felt as early as World War II, when a group at one college, disturbed at the "seize the headlines" interpretations being given to the war by Adventist evangelists and publications, formed an "Eschatology Society" to share their research; this rapidly evolved into a "Biblical Research Fellowship" embracing scholars at all English language colleges around the world. Although the independence of the BRF made church administrators so nervous that it was brought under the control of a General Conference department in 1952, the 10 volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, released between 1953 and 1957, showed a commitment to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation (a sharp break with the "proof-text" approach of earlier decades) and for the first time presented Adventists with alternative interpretations of scripture. In a series of conferences with the renowned cultologist, Walter Martin, in 1956-57, three leading scholars were so successful in disavowing such sectarian positions as the Remnant being limited to Adventists and Ellen White's authority being equal to that of the scriptures that his book, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, declared that Adventists were not a cult but were "brethren" of the Christian

Evangelicals. Adventism seemed to be changing, with the "mainstream" face becoming dominant under the administration of General Conference President R. R. Figuhr (1954-66), who left theology to the theologians.

The early biblical faculty sent to complete higher degrees were older, tried men who restricted themselves to such "safe" disciplines as biblical languages, church history and archeology. Their involvement in graduate school was usually restricted by part-time attendance. However, by the mid-1960s, with the off-spring of the baby-boom years entering college, there was such a demand for new faculty members that bright young graduates were sent full-time to such schools as Harvard Divinity School and Berkeley Theological Union, where they formed clusters and now felt free to build on what they had learned in the Adventist Seminary by exposing themselves to more "daring" disciplines, such as theology and ethics. These young scholars formed both informal networks and a formal organization, the Association of Adventist Forums, which issued a journal, *Spectrum*, which was both scholarly and independent of church authorities. When these scholars took up teaching positions at Adventist colleges they continued their interest in reforming church doctrine, and used both their networks and *Spectrum* to keep abreast with and build on the work of one another. However, these bold directions taken by the young biblical scholars were taken just as key forces within the General Conference were themselves adopting more activist, but conservative, positions.

By the late 1960s, prominent sectarians who were dismayed by the directions taken during the previous two decades found themselves in a stronger position, with a more sympathetic General Conference president (R. H. Pierson, 1966-1978) and control of the official church paper, *The Adventist Review*. In the early 1970s Pierson packed the Biblical Research Institute, the body responsible for doctrinal directions, with administrators; an administrator seized control of the scholars' organization; the *Adventist Review* adopted positions antagonistic to those embraced by the conferees who had met with Walter Martin; there were open tensions between the Association of Adventist Forums and General Conference leaders, with one AAF president, a seminary professor, forced out of office rather than lose his job; and the church hierarchy ignored the mounting evidence of Ellen White's gross dependence on sources put forward by several scholars building on each others' work, some of the earliest of which was published by *Spectrum*. However, these tensions were only finally revealed to the church membership at large in 1980 when, within a year, the press publicized two bitter conflicts that had erupted. Both were broken by the *Los Angeles Times* in front-page stories, and on each occasion the wire services then picked them up with the result that they were published in the press across the nation and also abroad, with follow-up analyses in the major news magazines. The first of these stories was occasioned by the suspension of Dr Desmond Ford, the most prominent Australian theologian, who was then teaching in California. He had, at a crowded Forum meeting in October 1979, publicly rejected the doctrine of the investigative judgment (which had, until that point, largely fallen into obscurity). His suspension was followed by a demand that he face trial. The second story gave an account of Ellen White's plagiarism which was apparently leaked by a researcher, Walter Rea, whose work had been spurned by church

leaders. He, too, was subsequently defrocked and, embittered, he published his findings in *The White Lie*. The response of the church, *The White Truth*, has been aptly described as a "white wash". The shock to many church members was enormous: the rifts within Adventism had been rudely revealed, and its special status thrown into doubt by the questioning of the authority and veracity of its prophet. Ford's suspension led ultimately to the firing of not only him, but also of over 100 clergy, the majority of whom were in Australia and New Zealand, the formation of many independent congregations and, it is reported, the polarization of many others. Reverberations continue to be felt with, for example, witch-hunts among the faculty at several of the colleges. Disillusionment is said to be widespread, especially among the theologians, and perhaps even more among the young.

Underlying the current theological conflicts are other tensions which are related intimately to the new Adventist diversity. Major theological conflict had always been possible because of unresolved issues. Tensions rooted in the new diversity forced these issues to the surface, for they represented a struggle for power within the church. During her lifetime Ellen White never occupied a post of formal leadership, and although she usually worked closely with the officers of the General Conference, she warned against the evils of hierarchical centralization, and from time to time when the leaders disagreed with her over, for example, a new doctrinal emphasis, she appealed over their heads to the membership at large. However, following her death the role of the prophet was institutionalized and control of her legacy was placed firmly in official hands: an additional 33 books, compiled from her manuscripts and letters, were issued, and the interpretation of her writings was monitored strictly. The sectarian position was rooted in her position as "messenger to the Remnant". Concurrently, the centralized leadership cadre was strengthened, and the representation of non-church employed laity on key committees largely eliminated. Meanwhile, challengers to the authority of church administrators were also appearing. Perhaps the most significant group, as we have seen, has been made up of many of the church's academics, especially the theologians at the seminary and the colleges, whose independence had been strengthened by their professionalization and organization. These have frequently adopted mainstream positions. Administrator/scholar distrust surfaced frequently during the 1970s, and greatly increased the rancor of the theological conflict that was unleashed in 1979. A second significant, though less coherent, interest group was comprised of the lay professional members, whose education made them more ready to be independent in thought and action. Because of their upward mobility, their tithes greatly increased the wealth of the church. However, they also showed much greater concern for how the church used its income. This concern was heightened when, in 1982, it was revealed through widespread press publicity that several church entities had lost \$20 million following poorly secured loans made to Dr Donald Davenport, an Adventist investor who was forced into bankruptcy. This scandal also had the effect of subtracting from the credibility of the church administrators as a group right at the height of the theological conflict, for it was admitted that 80 of them were involved, but the General Conference backed off from releasing their names.

Meanwhile, other tensions have been superimposed on those already discussed. Tensions rooted in socio-economic and racial differences are mounting, spurred by the greater self-consciousness among racial minorities in the society at large, and administrators of the American church, which has long been WASP-dominated, worry about a "demographic time-bomb" occasioned by the growing proportion of racial minority members. The voices of yet other newly organized groups, notably women and homosexuals, provide further evidence that the new pluralism is multi-dimensional. Because all these issues are addressed in theological terms they tend to be joined to those listed above.

Another key dimension to Adventist tensions is a consequence of the growing international diversity of the church. Adventism has been dominated from its beginning--in leadership, finances, and theology--by the American church. Australia and New Zealand, both also similar English-speaking societies, became important second bases from the 1890s on. But in recent decades the growth in third-world countries, especially those of Latin America and Africa, each of which now have about one million members, has been very rapid. New languages, cultures, leaders are coming to the fore, and the brand of Adventism that they are carrying is much more traditional--strict and sectarian--than that now typical of much of the American church. Although the U.S. church now contains only 15% of the total membership, it continues to provide 70% of the income of the whole church, much of which is distributed to poorer divisions in return for a leadership and control that has been taken for granted. It seems certain that an international power conflict is brewing, which will, of course, be expressed in theological terms. Many of the church leaders are saying privately that the next president of the General Conference, the chief executive of the world church, is likely to be the first non-American to hold the position. They are also laying plans, perhaps with this in mind, to make the American church more independent of the General Conference.

Meanwhile, with the growth and professionalization of Adventism, Adventist institutions seem recently to have crossed a threshold, and to have become big business, and as such to have an undreamed of impact on broader society. The administration of the American hospitals, which have been multiplying rapidly in the last decade, is currently being consolidated into Adventist Health Systems (U.S.), a corporation worth almost \$2 billion, the second-largest hospital system in the nation and one of the five largest in the world. How should the church relate to its thousands of hospital employees, most of whom are not Adventists, especially in the light of its history of antagonism to labor unions? Voices in some quarters of the church are demanding that Adventists divest themselves of hospitals where employees have unionized. Pacific Press in California, where almost all employees are Adventists and not unionized, would not pay its female employees on a scale equal to that of males until two Adventist employees won a bitterly fought suit. Again, decisions to move the General Conference and Review and Herald Publishers from a decaying section of Washington D.C. or to close a boarding academy in a section of rural Massachusetts already undergoing economic slump must hasten decay within the communities

abandoned by the church. The sectarian mindset is not used to having an external impact; it is taken by surprise when Adventists are accused of being exclusive, superior, separated from the masses, not affected by the problems of the poor. It has not developed an ethic of participation in society. Neither has it a corporate ethic: the treasury was caught unawares when members asked about rules governing church investments and it did not understand the protests when it admitted to substantial investments in companies making arms or working in South Africa-- indeed, its only rule proved to be one drawn from its past, a prohibition of investment in companies making strong drink.

Differing Responses to the Growing Diversity

Adventists were not used to such diversity, especially the doctrinal diversity. It created tensions and conflict. I will examine an array of responses to it.

Church administrators, who are often more insular and less aware than seminarians or educated lay persons, are generally uneasy. They are used to concentrating on keeping everyone happy, and feel caught between the various views. They fear that older Adventists as well as the new converts would feel very insecure if they felt that traditional sectarian positions were threatened. Since they are afraid of rocking the boat, they adopt a public stance that avows that nothing has changed.

Consequently, those who publicize the existence of divergent views have been dealt with severely. (This was seen as traitorous, whereas merely holding such views was not nearly so threatening.) Thus, public dissenters like Desmond Ford and Walter Rea were discredited and fired.

The Clergy. In practice doctrinal positions have continued to change. They are not announced-- that would create a storm. Change comes through default, as certain doctrines drop from view. These have included the sanctuary (until Ford made it an issue), anti-Catholicism, and indeed much of the traditional interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. (It is now difficult to find scholars to teach Daniel and Revelation, for they are likely to be uncomfortable with the traditional interpretations, but feel that it is dangerous to put forward alternatives. Yet only 35 years ago such fine points of the traditional view as the identity of the King of the North were the central issues at meetings of Adventist theologians!) The doctrine of the Remnant also seems to be dropping away in a lot of quarters, while I am told that in many places the Second Coming is also receiving much less attention.

Why are these changes in preaching taking place? It is not that everyone has suddenly stopped believing the traditional positions—Adventism is too diverse for this, and change proceeds at different speeds on various fronts. It seems to be that many of the clergy have themselves become uneasy with these positions, or at least find them less pertinent, and that this unease is shared by segments of the laity--segments that are influential because they tend to be well

educated. Meanwhile, however, new converts are often taught the sectarian doctrines, and they are more likely to be preached in the churches of racial minorities and in rural areas.

The church at large may be divided into 4 groups according to their response to the emerging doctrinal diversity:

1. Defenders feel very insecure about the situation--they cling to what they were first taught, and are likely to see the Devil at work in the new emphases. They respond, for example, by supporting independent, unaccredited schools and colleges, and by publishing and subscribing to independent sectarian newsletters which specialize in reporting evidence of widespread heresy.
2. The disillusioned are, for example, those whose faith was based on the infallibility of Ellen White--such a faith seems to shatter upon confirmation of a single problem. They fall into two sub-groups:
 - a. most, because they are primarily sectarian Adventists rather than primarily Christians (a situation which is common among sect members), give up all religious faith and activity when they leave, often feeling bitter, as if they have been hoodwinked.
 - b. others move on religiously, e.g. becoming Evangelical Adventists or Seventh-day Baptists.
3. Ostriches bury their heads--they don't want to know about the doctrinal diversity. These also fall into two sub-groups:
 - a. pietists involve themselves in church routine and good works.
 - b. the superstitious are often alienated and hostile, are not having their needs met. Nevertheless, they continue to participate superstitiously, just in case the traditional Adventism they have been taught is right and their continued observance will get them through a last judgment successfully.
4. The modernists are fascinated by the changes and challenges afoot. They avidly read the mainstream-oriented independent press, savoring each new challenge to traditional Adventism; they flock to Forum meetings when they deal with controversial topics. That is, they are very concerned with the sectarian issues, though they are likely to be very open-minded about them.

Meanwhile, however, they often continue to stress behavioral norms such as vegetarianism, Sabbath observance standards, social prohibitions, etc. In part this is because they see this as a way of keeping their children in the church--they hope to keep them behaviorally sectarian if not doctrinally so, reasoning that if they feel different as they grow up they will put down strong roots. They want their children to stay Adventists because they feel good about their own Adventist friends and their Adventist "ethnicity", and because they feel uneasy about any prospect of their children growing up too different from themselves.

Let me comment in passing that their actions here have had a good basis, for the children of totally liberal Adventists exit the church. Sectarianism has been basic to inheriting an Adventist

identity. But a problem is now emerging with this strategy, in the form of a generation gap. Such parents may be fascinated with the changes afoot, but these are not their children's issues--or, for that matter, the issues of most young Adventists, notwithstanding the doctrinal stance of their parents. Nationally, the Forum, for example, has been rather unsuccessful in attracting the generation younger than its founders, who were in graduate school at the end of the 1960s. Many of the students in Adventist colleges today actually fall into the ranks of the disillusioned--they are in college because their parents are paying for them.

Thus, the varied responses to the growth of diversity within Adventism have themselves heightened that diversity.

The impact of diversity on evangelism

Evangelism by lay people in this country has declined sharply in recent decades, and the numbers of converts are falling drastically. There are two reasons for this:

First, because the heart of Adventist sectarianism--the belief that Adventists alone are God's people and that all other denominations are rejected--is being discarded, there is less motivation to recruit to Adventism. Administrators continue to push evangelism, but now through big programs and events.

Second, the peer groups of upwardly mobile 2nd and 3rd generation Adventists are not the constituency from which recruits have been drawn in the past, and do not seem to be a ready constituency now. Indeed, the bulk of the converts in this country in recent years have been poor immigrants--West Indian blacks, Latin Americans, and Asians.

The Future?

Thus, tensions and conflicts continue to be revealed, and although the General Conference administration has adopted a "business as usual" stance in the hope that the problems will pass, the church seems, in many ways, to be reeling. The people in the pews have been rudely alerted to the doctrinal diversity and uncertainty by the press coverage of the last three years. Growth patterns in North America are changing sharply. The next generation has been shaken, and will be very different from its forebears. It seems certain that Adventism is at a major crossroads, although it is not at all clear yet where it will go from here. As I see it at the moment, there appear to be four possibilities:

1. Adventists could attempt to renew their stress on their distinctive doctrines and lifestyle, and try to return to a strict sectarianism. This seems to be the goal of the sectarians, including any in prominent positions, and they are currently mounting a strong effort on several fronts. However, this result would be almost impossible to accomplish, although there may be further attempts to implement it. It would require, for example, discarding the education program or radically reshaping it to exclude upward mobility and exposure to non-Adventist ideas. It would also be likely to force Adventists to abandon their

hospitals rather than engage in collective bargaining with labor unions or practice non-distinctive modern medicine. I doubt whether a church which has embraced upward mobility so firmly has the will to be so radical. It would also mean cutting off much of the diversity, maximizing intolerance, forcing members into line, and reducing the size of the church by cutting off from their roots large numbers who would not conform. Such an Adventist church would be marginal to society. It would continue to win fewer and fewer converts in developed countries, though it would continue to do better in sections of the Third World in the immediate future. The past emphasis on evangelism would perhaps eventually be replaced by a stress on trying to keep its own children, though it would continue to lose many to disillusionment.

2. Alternatively, Adventists could learn to live with their diversity and continue along their present road towards becoming another denomination. The membership would be held together by ties and some beliefs, with the primary bond becoming that to the congregation rather than that to the denomination as a whole. However, such an Adventism would have less and less to say as beliefs continued to contract, and the gradual removal of a sense of peculiarity would weaken the ties. As the membership continued to prosper, it would merge into society. The number of converts from without would continue to decline and Adventism would lose many of its own children also. Consequently, the size of the church, beginning in this country, would contract. This is the most likely possibility--Adventism has been moving from sect to denomination at an increasing pace. The facets that set Adventists apart from the rest of society are diminishing in importance: for example, vegetarianism, total abstinence and Sabbath observance have become less of a problem socially, while, concurrently, fewer Adventists are vegetarians or total abstainers and standards of Sabbath observance are liberalizing.
3. A third alternative is more radical, and therefore unlikely, although it has important precedents such as the reshaping of Catholicism in Vatican II. Adventism could recognize that the doctrinal changes described earlier have been contracting beliefs that are rooted in the nineteenth century. It could use the new ethical dilemmas consequent upon accumulating financial power and the questions concerning social responsibility as catalysts to rethinking its vision. Taking time for a Sabbath and believing that God controls and intervenes in history are surely the basis for critiquing both economics and foreign policy!
4. The fourth possibility is that Adventism could split, either de facto or de jure, with the parts following the divergent courses suggested in the first three alternatives discussed above.