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### The Reformation and the Advent Movement

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# The Reformation and the ADVENT MOVEMENT

By DANIEL WALTHER

**A**T A time when the world is being reminded of the momentous events of 450 years ago, Seventh-day Adventists should remind themselves of the impact the Reformation has made on their church. There is more than a mere historic tie between the Reformation and the Advent Movement.

As was the Reformation movement so is the Advent Movement a call for reformation and revival. There is scarcely a conference meeting or a spiritual-emphasis gathering where we do not hear the call. The genuine desire for a reformation indicates a deep-seated longing for an improvement of our spiritual condition, a conviction that things are not what they ought to be. Through the Spirit of Prophecy writings we have been persistently warned to do our part to bring about a reformation.

A lassitude is perceptible in our ranks when we think of the goal to be attained: "How long is this to continue? . . . God calls for a spiritual revival."—ELLEN G. WHITE, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902, p. 113. (Italics supplied.)

When we hear an expression of concern about our condition, we are reminded of our too-obvious shortcomings, but often we are not told *what* should be "reformed," or *how* we should go about reforming it. In fact, can we individually do something about it? Is it not entirely in God's hands? True, a reformation in the church is God's work. Yet we can do something. We can read our Bibles more fervently. We can improve the quality of our prayer life. We can cultivate our inner relationship with the Lord. A reformation will not occur by mere organization. All of us are in need of regeneration. God appoints the time. God alone can bring back to life a church that is spiritually lifeless. But we can get ready, we must condition ourselves individually for that refreshing from above.

There is a difference between revival and reformation. "Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quick-

ening of the powers of mind and heart. . . . Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. . . . Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend."—*Ibid.*

## Truth Is Restored

The Reformation of the sixteenth century and the Advent Movement are truth restoring. Both set forth Christ as Redeemer; both are strongly eschatological, that is, they emphasize the doctrine of last things. Both came into existence in a God-appointed time. Basic teachings are often similar but not always. Martin Luther and John Calvin were not Seventh-day Adventists, nor are we Lutherans or Calvinists. The Reformers nevertheless were our forerunners, not because of doctrinal identity, but because the Reformers were entrusted with a specific task in their time. On the other hand, there is one important difference especially between historic Lutheranism and our movement. Luther was concerned to bring the gospel to the German people without much concern for "the ends of the earth," while the Advent Movement is directed to go to the whole world, in a short time.

Lutheranism was arrested, bogged down by formalism and dogmatism which it had criticized in Catholicism. Adventism must be on guard lest its progress be hindered by excessive organization, lukewarmness, and even dogmatism.

Among the concepts that we share with the Reformers is our belief that the Bible is the cornerstone of our faith and practice. When Luther clutched the Bible, he perceived in it the voice of God—"We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a sound that flies into the air and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell . . . for it endures everlastingly."

Seventh-day Adventists also rely on the Scriptures. It is their spiritual road

map through a maze of conflicting ideas. The Scriptures helped them to find the way.

Impressive were Mrs. White's words spoken at the General Conference meeting in Washington, D.C., 1909: "Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book."

It has been claimed that Luther was the greatest exponent since Paul of justification by faith. This teaching permeated his thinking and sustained his life. It was the key to his personal problem on salvation. "No marvel," wrote Cardinal Newman, "that he has given us the clearest, fullest, joyfulest exposition on saving faith extant in Christian literature."

To us this teaching is equally important. Justification by faith is not merely part of the Advent message; "it is the third angel's message in verity" (*Evangelism*, p. 190). "The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35, 36. "The righteousness by which we are justified is *imputed*; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is *imparted*. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 35. (Italics supplied.)

When we stress obedience to the law we mean that obedience is the sequel of our regenerate nature and not a prerequisite. We observe the law not in order to be saved—but *because* we are saved through Christ. Like Luther, we hold that good fruit does not make a good tree; it is the good tree that makes good fruit. We, too, recognize that we cannot attain the righteousness of God by our own efforts in keeping the law.

## Luther's Contradictory Views

On several teachings Luther held contradictory views; for example, on baptism. He stated that "the child, or whoever is baptized, should be sunk entirely into the water and then be drawn out again." Again, "I will have

the candidates for baptism completely immersed in the water, as the Word says and as the sacrament signifies, not that I deem this necessary." We do not go along with Luther in his practice of baptizing infants nor do we accept his view that immersion is unnecessary.

Luther held contradictory views also on the state of the dead. In his works more than 100 times he refers to death as a sleep; in some 30 passages he avers that death is a conscious state; seven times he notes that the dead live but are unconscious. In a characteristic mood he wrote: "We shall sleep until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, Doctor Martin, get up! Then I shall rise in a moment and be happy with Him forever."

In Antichrist whose "raging was a definite sign of the end," Luther saw two persons: "The person of the Antichrist is at the same time the Pope and the Turk. Everybody consists of a body and a soul. So the spirit of the Antichrist is the Pope, his flesh is the Turk."

While Luther asserted that the commandments were not repealed by Christ, he thought that there was no need of observing the seventh-day Sabbath, which, he thought, was part of the Mosaic ceremonial law: "The Sabbath or rest day is a universal law in order that the people may assemble for the worship of God. But that they should assemble on the seventh day applies only to the Jews." There were some people who kept the true Sabbath in Luther's day and he opposed them with his usual vehemence.

We are naturally disappointed in Luther's position. He did insist that the Decalogue is still in force but dissociated the fourth commandment (the third in his catechism) from the Decalogue. On the other hand, we might learn from Luther how the Lord's day should be observed, in a deeply spiritual fashion. He was wrong on the day, but helpful on the spirit of its observance.

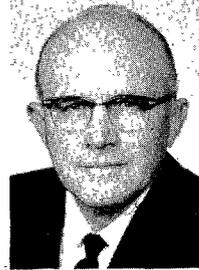
#### Belief in Second Advent

Of significance is the Reformer's belief in Christ's second coming. The Reformation was heralded in a stormy, anxious age, when for centuries the Mohammedans had menaced the West. In Luther's day the Turkish threat was particularly fearsome. Therefore, in 1528, when the Old Testament was to be translated, Luther thought that he had better translate first the book of Daniel so as to benefit "the poor Christians" in the "last times" before everything perished. Frequently Luther spoke of the end of all things. "I hope that the last day will not be long delayed, not over a hundred years." He mentioned that the world could not last more than 300

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*A Personal Message From Your General Conference President*

## HEART to HEART



*Dear Children of God in Many Lands:*

Perhaps you have read the story of "Prosperous Journey" and "Pleasant Acquaintance" in Paul's letter to the Philippians. These two interesting women, believed to have been prominent in the church at Philippi, are better known by their transliterated names—Euodias and Syntyche. Anyway, "Prosperous Journey" and "Pleasant Acquaintance," in spite of their disarming names, were a bit of a problem in the church, and Paul was appealing to them to make up their differences that unity in the church might be restored. "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2).

The apostle Paul was right! Differences should not exist among God's people. When misunderstandings arise we should make them up "as Christians should" (Phillips).\*

Paul was but reflecting the teachings of Jesus. The Saviour said, "If, when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23, 24, New English Bible).†

"Let every wrong that has been committed be made right," the Lord's messenger admonishes. "If during the day, one has wronged another or spoken unkindly, let the transgressor seek pardon of the one he has injured."—*My Life Today*, p. 32.

"Confess your faults one to another," the apostle James admonishes (James 5:16).

This is clear, practical instruction. We make wrongs right by confessing our mistakes and seeking forgiveness. Only when barriers between brethren are thus removed are we in right relationship with God to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

"Many are zealous in religious services," the servant of the Lord says, "while between them and their brethren are unhappy differences which they might reconcile. God requires them to do all in their

\* *The New Testament in Modern English*, © J. B. Phillips 1958. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company.

† *The New English Bible*, New Testament. © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press 1961.

power to restore harmony. Until they do this, He cannot accept their services. The Christian's duty in this matter is clearly pointed out."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

We may be able to explain the 2300 days with flawless clarity. We may pay our tithe and give our offerings with impeccable honesty. We may be in the Lord's house every Sabbath. We may even be Sabbath school teachers or officers in our church, but if there are differences between us and others there is yet a work of grace that must be done in our hearts and lives. We cannot be "wrong" with men and "right" with God!

To say, "I am sorry," is not easy, but it is the right thing to do—even when we have contributed little to the trouble between ourselves and others. "If you have committed one wrong and they twenty, confess that one as though you were the chief offender. Take them by the hand, let your heart soften under the influence of the Spirit of God, and say, 'Will you forgive me? . . . I want to make right every wrong, that naught may stand registered against me in the books of heaven. I must have a clear record.'"—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 16, 1884, p. 785. (Italics supplied.)

This is a real test of my Christian experience. I must go as though I were the chief offender. This takes real grace, but the Lord will supply the help we need!

If we follow this counsel, Christian unity may be restored quickly. If self is humbled, little time would be required to "make up our differences." "If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties. Angels have been grieved and God displeased by the hours which have been spent in justifying self."—*Early Writings*, p. 119.

May God help you and me to learn a lesson from "Prosperous Journey" and "Pleasant Acquaintance," and close the old year certain that we have made up our differences with God's people "as Christians should."

Yours for all barriers removed,

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years. He also mentioned other dates and he had his own way of figuring out the time of the end. He spoke often of the signs in the heavens and the earth: famine, pestilence, earthquakes, the roaring of the sea. The most potent sign to him was the spreading of the gospel: the Bible translations into vernacular, the discovery of new continents. And then there were the wars. We might smile a little when we listen to Luther saying: "Wars at the present time are of such character as to make former wars appear as a mere child's play." What would he say if he saw world conditions today?

One day Luther had guests for a meal. His children saw on the table in the dining room a bowl of fresh peaches. They could not taste them but they looked at them with longing. Luther and his guests saw them and Luther remarked: "See those looks of the children. If only we could behold the Lord's return with the same joyous desire."

### Awesome Responsibility

Seventh-day Adventists are entrusted with an awesome responsibility. We must reopen the Scriptures in the face of present conditions. We are to warn of serious impending events and how to prepare for them. Are we ready to pay the price of loneliness and unpopularity? Can we display the courage and steadfastness that preceding witnesses have shown? Do we know what our message *really* is?

Some years ago I was in the office of a Lutheran pastor, Martin Niemöller, who had become well known during the last war for having spent many years in a concentration camp. He had refused to submit to the authority of a Nazi-appointed state bishop. He knew I was a Seventh-day Adventist when I asked him: "What contribution can we, Seventh-day Adventists, make to the German community today?" He thought a while and then said: "I believe you have made a contribution. Some 75 years ago you were the ones to make the Christian world aware of the end of all things. We were a little afraid of you. You had no temples, worshiped in tents, and the people were upset. You seemed to be everywhere. Today we are no longer afraid. You now have churches like everybody else. The teachings on the last things are taught by theologians who do not use the literalistic method as you did. You do not seem to preach as you used to. So, you *did* make a contribution some 70 years ago, but no more!" I begged to differ, but in honesty I wondered as I re-

flected on his words. Are we now so comfortably settled down in institutions and an intellectually acceptable set of doctrines that we are not aware of our situation as it really is?

God grant that in these days when we are reminded of fully committed

men of God we may do what lies in us to be ready for that reformation which mankind expects.

The Reformation is not over. A reformation for these days is to go on. "The best is yet to be."

(Concluded)

## The art of living

By MIRIAM WOOD

*when you're Young*

**"YOUR LITTLE REIGN IS OVER"** While I was doing some grocery shopping in a large supermarket—a prosaic occupation, to be sure, but nonetheless a necessary one—I was the amused observer of a little "slice of life." The incident seemed significant because it might almost be thought of as a microcosm of all human experience in this area of living.

The experience itself was small, as was also one of the principals. I judged him to be about five years old, standing there with his feet planted wide apart, defiant, determined, the light of battle in his gray eyes.

The second actor in the impromptu drama, a young and unusually attractive mother, was somewhat larger, though equally pugnacious, equally determined, and with feet planted just as firmly. With hands on hips, she addressed her tiny tormentor in tones not one whit less emphatic because of their just-above-a-whisper pitch. (No scenemaker, she.) "You won't eat *vegetable* soup. You won't eat *mushroom* soup. You won't eat *peas!*" As her sense of maternal injustice grew, she grabbed cans from the shelves, waving them about for emphasis. "You don't like asparagus, so you tell me not to buy it; *broccoli is out!*"

As the mother continued, the now slightly less pugnacious-looking moppet squirmed uneasily and licked his lips, not hungrily, but seeking a suitable reply that might stanch the veritable flood of words from his mother's outraged mouth. He couldn't, though, formulate one; it was quite obvious even to him that something was about to happen.

It did. An ultimatum. A declaration of culinary independence. "From now on," she continued in steely tones, "you'll eat the well-balanced meals I'll cook. You're *through* dictating to me on the subject of food!"

A moment of silence ensued, during which she seized cans of the much-despised foods and piled them in her shopping cart with reckless emancipation. As the two combatants moved off down the aisle, she fired a final volley.

"Your little reign is *over!*"

And I rather imagine that's the way it will turn out. I'm sure the Fastidious

Feeder thought so too, judging by the look of wry acceptance on his face as he trudged along in his mother's wake. I certainly *hope* it turns out that way, both for his sake and for society's. We've quite enough tyrants already, without another in the making.

I'm implacably opposed to tyrants, be they five, 15, or 50. People who are absolutely determined to bend (or break) others to their will haven't, it seems to me, internalized even the introductory phase of basic Christianity. Granted that they may possess superior judgment, superior knowledge, superior insights, they've still no right to throw their weight around. (Actually, their superiority is most often self-declared.)

Tyranny is practiced in a variety of guises, of course. While some tyrants are loud, emphatic, dogged, and wear their victims down by sheer refusal to let up even momentarily, others practice a kind of silken, clinging, cloying, octopus-tentacle method—not to forget the cold, silent, forbidding tyrants who, when they don't achieve their aims, make the atmosphere so poisonous that their victims finally give in out of desperation. (No one can live without seeing the sun once in a while!)

Very recently I heard of a tyrant—a full-grown one, both chronologically and emotionally—who, without even being asked for his opinion, moved into a friend's private life and attempted to completely rearrange it. When the friend, understandably, protested, the tyrant resorted to character defamation, innuendo, and appeals to persons in positions of authority.

For the consideration of all tyrants, potential, beginning, and accomplished, I'd like to point out that in the historical realm such creatures have usually been deposed rather summarily. They've lost their heads, literally, under many an executioner's ax. Their "little reign" has come to an end—and so have they.

In the interest, then, of your keeping your emotional head—and your friends and your happiness—I suggest that if you've been a wee bit of a tyrant, you depose yourself. Don't make it necessary for someone else to declare with authority, "Your little reign is *over!*"