

**Some Reflections on Adventist Identity by a “Sympathetic Outsider”
on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Publication
of *Questions on Doctrine***

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I am deeply honored, as an “outsider,” to be invited to speak to this distinguished conference analyzing the QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE volume on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. 1957 must have been a much more unusual year than I had realized. This last summer I gave a paper at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the founding in the North America of the ecumenical movement on “faith and order.” In the process I was reminded that this year is also the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of a very influential book in my own tradition, REVIVALISM AND SOCIAL REFORM by Timothy L. Smith. And as I write, U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT (August 13-20, 2007) has a cover story on the “year that changed America” by the launching of the Russian Sputnik, the move of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles, the birth of the European Union, the introduction of the ill-fated Ford Edsel, the release of the birth control pill, the publication of THE CAT IN THE HAT by Dr. Seuss, among other key events.

I should indicate at the outset that I have no real claim to expertise in Adventist history and theology and am very conscious of the cliché that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” On the other hand, I have always been interested these questions. For nearly two decades I served on the faculty of Northern Baptist Seminary where I had an assignment that led me to joke that I was the “professor of non-Baptist history and thought.” We had a denominational heritage requirement. A colleague taught Baptist heritage; I was assigned all the rest and usually fulfilled this task by a series of “independent studies.” Northern is in the western suburbs of Chicago; so I occasionally had Advent Christians from nearby Aurora College. Northern also had probably the largest Hispanic program in the country with most of the students from Latin America, including a sizeable contingent of Spanish-speaking Seventh-day Adventists. One term I had so many students in this category that I combined the independent studies into a class which I attempted to teach in Spanish. As I look back on this experience I marvel that we managed to communicate at all, but I do remember some heated discussions about the interpretation of the Adventist tradition and its theology.

I would also like to make clear that my interest in Adventism is very genuine and personal. In my doctoral program at the University of Chicago Martin Marty once commented that the question of eschatology was perhaps the central question of the 19th century and that those who unlock the mysteries of this question will give us keys to the interpretation of that “hinge” century in the American experience. I therefore am interested in Adventism not as a fringe movement on the margins of society, but as a movement that helps me understand not only American religion and culture in a larger sense, but also as a movement that helps me understand myself and the traditions in which I was reared. Perhaps I can make this clear by exploring the interconnections between Adventism and my own tradition (originally the abolitionist Wesleyan Methodist Church founded in 1843, but now called, since a 1968 merger, the Wesleyan Church).

Two or three decades ago I was driving west across upstate New York in the heart of the “burned over district” (so-called because it was so often swept by “revival fires”). I am known

for my inability to leave a used bookstore unvisited. I passed through one city (Utica, I believe) and had only five minutes before a bookstore closing. I begged the owner to give me a few minutes in the religion section and purchased a stack of books without much study of them. When I got a chance to look at them more closely, I discovered that I had an odd volume of a periodical edited by George Storrs of Adventist fame. This particular volume carried a report on a church trial among the Wesleyan Methodists. I have lost track of this volume and so far have not been able to locate the report in library collections. I am, therefore, relying on my memory of what I read over two decades ago.

First a bit of background: The two most important founders of the Wesleyan Methodist Church were “Yankee” abolitionists. Orange Scott, converted to abolitionism by reading William Lloyd Garrison’s *LIBERATOR*, was the leader of the abolitionist party in the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who, when he failed to get the General Conference to reaffirm Wesley’s opposition to slavery, was pushed out of the Methodist Episcopal Church shortly before the church split into northern and southern blocks. Luther Lee was the other founder (from upstate New York), also a radical abolitionist who preached the graveside sermon on the death of revolutionary John Brown and was best known for preaching the ordination sermon of Antoinette Brown, the first woman to be ordained. Lee was also a prolific theologian and controversialist. His works included a systematic theology and a book defending *THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL*. I have always understood this last book as a sign that the doctrine of “conditionalism” was having an influence among the Wesleyans—and evidence of influences shared by Adventism and my own church.

The report in *THE BIBLE EXAMINER* (?) of George Storrs indicated that Luther Lee was the prosecutor in a church trial of an “Elder John Tate.” Tate was accused of heresy in having adopted “conditionalism” and “annihilationism.” In his defense, Tate introduced a letter from Orange Scott, indicating that Scott had abandoned the classical doctrine of hell, but would not make this fact public until he decided whether “conditionalism” or “universal restorationism” was the more biblical position. Lee disputed the interpretation of the letter, and Tate was driven out of the church. Scott died shortly thereafter (1847), apparently before deciding, and this incident was lost to history except for this report. But this story has provided me with a useful lens through which to view the antebellum era that gave birth to both Adventism and my own church.

This story is, in the first place, a useful reminder of how fluid and varied the antebellum era was on such issues and a substantial warning against our tendency to project back on this era the parties that have taken shape in the wake of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy of the twentieth century. It was an era of the collapse of high Calvinism and the rise of Methodism—with a corresponding shift from themes of the sovereignty of God to the love of God. The revivalism of Charles Grandison Finney set people on a path that occasionally led to “universalism” (Antoinette Brown and Finney’s assistant Theodore Weld, for example, were motivated by moral concerns about doctrines of the condemnation to hell of children not among the “elect”). It is hard to grasp the extent to which the Unitarian and Universalist movements were at the time something of “back to the bible” movements, rejecting the metaphysical constructs of traditional theology (especially high Calvinism) for a more common sense reading of the bible that placed a greater weight on the humanity of Jesus. Most modern “fundamentalists” and “evangelicals” are shocked to learn that Hannah Whitall Smith, author of *THE CHRISTIAN’S SECRET OF A HAPPY LIFE*—perhaps the most widely read devotional book of the 19th century and still given as a premium to contributors to Jerry Falwell and Pat

Robertson, was a “universal restorationist.” She was also something of a feminist (regularly giving a bible lecture on “God as Our Mother”) and argued explicitly from her experience as a mother that God would not finally reject his own wayward children. She was not the only one to take this position, and it is worth pondering how the theological world might have taken different configurations if Orange Scott had lived long enough to revise his eschatology and perhaps carried either “conditionalism” or “universal restorationism” into the denomination that would found in mid-nineteenth century Wheaton College, the symbol of twentieth century “evangelicalism.”

But, in the second place, we should also notice the theological pilgrimage of George Storrs. He was first a Congregationalist minister before becoming a Methodist abolitionist of a violent sort (he was imprisoned at one point for his abolitionist activity). He, like Orange Scott, left the ministry for a while to serve as one of the famous “seventy” commissioned on the New Testament model to travel and agitate the slavery question. I have heard it said, but have not been able to confirm, that he actually joined the Wesleyan Methodists. This is, however, unlikely in light of the fact that he seems to have identified with the Millerites before the formation of the Wesleyan church. In the Adventist tradition Storrs became a major contributor to Seventh-day Adventist theology, especially its understanding of “conditionalism.” Most studies of Storrs suppress the last stage of his pilgrimage as a member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This I learned from James Penton, the distinguished Canadian scholar of the JW’s, who led a group of Jehovah’s Witnesses out of the movement toward “evangelicalism” while retaining the JW “Arian” Christology. (He and I once convened together a consultation of non-trinitarian Christian groups). I regret that we shall probably not see the biography of Storrs that Penton once wished to undertake.

A close study of Storrs and his pilgrimage on eschatological themes would be a very useful project. He breaks our categories, but he might well help us to unlock what holds together the eschatological positions in the nineteenth century that seem so divergent today. He was likely first of all a radical “post-millennialist” of the sort that one found among the Wesleyans and at early Oberlin College. These optimistic/perfectionist “post-millennialists” looked forward to an imminent millennium that Finney suggested might come in six months or three years if the church would do its duty. But by the early 1840s Storrs was caught up in the “premillennialism” of the Millerite movement and lived through the “great disappointment” of Millerite Adventism. (The Wesleyans suffered their own “great disappointment” with the failure of the arrival of a millennium that would bring both peace and the abolition of slavery—and in the late nineteenth century along with Wheaton College increasingly turned to “dispensational premillennialism.”) I know less about the role of Storrs among the JW’s, but what seems to hold these positions together is the expectation of an imminent apocalyptic change in history expressed through a variety of eschatological visions of the millennium and a timetable of the “end times.”

Today this trajectory of Storrs seems oxymoronically impossible, but I have wondered if we should not turn such an analysis on its head. Maybe we should assume that the theological pilgrimage of Storrs makes sense and then wonder what it is that we are missing that makes his a more natural trajectory than it appears. As I have pondered these questions over the years, I have come to the conclusion that one way to make sense of Storrs is to assume that fundamentalism, Adventism and the Jehovah’s Witness all belong to the same family of Christian movements. I don’t expect this conclusion to appeal to any of us, but several things have driven me in this direction.

I have over the years puzzled about the significance of the fundamentalist “cottage industry” of the refutation of the “sects” and “cults.” Walter Martin’s approach to Adventism that resulted in *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE* was driven by these questions and he became the key illustration of this concern, devoting his life to such a ministry. Over the years I have come to understand that the fiercest polemics are often a sign of a sibling relationship. In my own tradition I was reared with a strong anti-Pentecostal animus. Many have assumed (most notably, perhaps, Timothy Smith) then a historiography that places the Holiness Movement and Pentecostalism on the opposite ends of a spectrum. It was quite a readjustment for me to conclude in my doctoral dissertation (published as *THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF PENTECOSTALISM*) that the polemics were actually a sign of very close relationship and that Pentecostalism emerged a century ago out of a radical wing of the Holiness Movement. The intense polemics were actually a product of a turf struggle and a basic affinity. Similarly I have come to wonder, as I contemplate the trajectory of George Storrs, if the same is not true of the relationship of Adventism to fundamentalism, and whether we ought not to interpret the character of fundamentalism through the lens of Adventism rather than the reverse perspective which seems to dominate the literature on the discussions that led to the publication of *QOD*.

These impressions have grown with my increasing exposure to the wider Christian world. I have spent a great deal of time in Latin America, where I have been fascinated with the Roman Catholic literature on the “irruption of the sects” and their threat to the traditional Catholic culture of that continent. It is not often noticed that the fastest growing religious movements in Latin America are four American born churches from the 19th century: Pentecostalism, Adventism, Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Catholic literature tosses into this mix the holiness movement, Baptists, evangelicals and others and often does not find it worthwhile distinguishing these movements. They all appear to be radically eschatologically oriented movements sharing a remnant (or perhaps “rapture”) ecclesiology that shatters the integralism and “caesaropapism” that has shaped the Roman Catholic integration of church and state. Much ink has been spilled, perhaps appropriately, on various apologetic efforts to prove that some of these movements (Fundamentalism or Pentecostalism, for example) do not really belong in the category of the rest. In such a context, it is a major ecumenical achievement when at least some Roman Catholics are able to recognize such movements as valid Christian Churches.

I have had a similar experience in a quarter of a century of participation in the work of the “faith and order” movement on both the national and the world levels. I have become increasingly convinced that the major differences between the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance (or the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States) are not well described as differences of “liberalism” and “conservatism.” Issues of conflict are often better described in terms of differing ecclesiologies—between those churches descended from the national state churches of Europe and those counter-cultural churches often revealing a radical apocalyptic eschatology and a remnant ecclesiology. Take, for example, the current fights over “environmentalism” in the NAE. This issue is not a product of “liberal” influence. The issue is illuminated more by eschatology and the wider questions of the status of this world in a vision of the future.

The full argument is beyond the limits of this paper, but I have become increasingly convinced that “fundamentalism” (and the “neo-evangelical” tradition that emerged from fundamentalism in the middle of the 20th century) is best interpreted in light of a metanarrative that gives pride of place to the role of premillennial dispensationalism as the fundamental issue

at stake in the fundamentalist/modernist controversy. This is no new thesis. It was sharply articulated by Earnest Sandeen in *THE ROOTS OF FUNDAMENTALISM* (1970). This was his University of Chicago dissertation written during the 1960s while he taught history at what is now North Park University. (My own dissertation on Pentecostalism was written during the 1970s at North Park Seminary and was modeled in part on Sandeen's—as can be seen in the title.) Sandeen had been an undergraduate at Wheaton College and his dissertation (and perhaps the rest of his prematurely shortened life) might be interpreted as a struggle to describe what he had lived through theologically at Wheaton. He concluded that it was a late stage in the development of an eschatology that had been born early in the 19th century (under the influence especially of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren), that was promulgated through the “prophecy conference” movement in the late 19th century, and that reached its height of influence through the Scofield Bible and the “bible college” movement in the early years of the 20th century—and continues to shape profoundly, especially on the popular level, the fundamentalist/evangelical traditions even now through such phenomena as the writings of Hal Lindsay and the “Left Behind” series of novels.

This thesis has had a very mixed reception. It was largely buried by George Marsden, who reviewed it in the *GORDON REVIEW* (an antecedent of the *CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR'S REVIEW*). He was unable to deny its importance (as evidenced in his *FUNDAMENTALISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE* (1980) where he defines fundamentalism as the confluence of dispensationalism, the holiness movement, and the fight against “modernism”), but he regularly underplays its importance and subordinates everything to the struggle against “modernism,” making dispensationalism the “anti-modernist” movement *par excellence*. Similarly, Sandeen has been neglected in the burgeoning “neo-evangelical” scholarship of our own time, where it calls into question the claim of neo-evangelicalism and fundamentalism to be little more than a form of “generic orthodoxy.” The scholarship of “continuing fundamentalism” (at Bob Jones University, for example—see George Dollar, *A HISTORY OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN AMERICA*, 1973, and David Peale, *IN PURSUIT OF PURITY: AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISM SINCE 1850*, 1986), however, remains enamored with Sandeen's thesis and uses it to construct its typologies and analyze the defections of Carl Henry (in his neo-evangelical *programmsschrift* *THE UNEASY CONSCIENCE OF MODERN FUNDAMENTALISM*) and Jerry Falwell (in *THE FUNDAMENTALIST PHENOMENON*) in their turn to political engagement. I am more in this line and am convinced that both Marsden and Sandeen himself failed to realize the explanatory value of this thesis—especially on the theological level.

I had been drawn to Sandeen in the 1970s as I puzzled in my book *DISCOVERING AN EVANGELICAL HERITAGE* over the “great reversal”—the shift at Wheaton College, for example, from the radical reform vision of its earlier years to the apolitical stance of the 1950s and 1960s. I began to take Sandeen even more seriously when I happened on a classic book in the southern Holiness Movement, *POSTMILLENNIALISM AND THE HIGHER CRITICS* by Andrew Johnson and L. L. Pickett. This book argues that “The critical spirit is postmillennial in all its trend and teaching.” I then noticed how often such claims were made, especially in the Baptist literature.

The very word “fundamentalist” was coined by Baptist Curtis Lee Laws, the editor of the *WATCHMAN-EXAMINER*, to avoid the label “premillennialist” in the midst of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy. The University of Chicago Baptists attacked premillennialism, fearing that its conviction, following the book of Daniel, that all the empires of

the world would collapse, might erode the confidence in Western Culture and undercut the resistance to Germany. Attitudes toward the emerging ecumenical movement reveal similar concerns. The First Baptist Church of New York City passed a resolution on April 25, 1920 against the Interchurch World Movement, which was raising money to rebuild the infrastructure of Europe after the bombing of WWI. Pastor I. M. Haldeman expanded this resolution into a pamphlet **WHY I AM OPPOSED TO THE INTERCHURCH WORLD MOVEMENT** that makes the millennial issue the consistent basis of attack. The first argument (in italics) is that *“The Interchurch Movement is purely and simply a Post-millennial Drive”* and the final sentence in the pamphlet (this time in bold face) is **“the preacher who professes to be a premillenarian and yet supports it is either grossly ignorant of the logic of his profession or lacks the courage of his convictions.”**

Educational philosophies were shaped by eschatology. Postmillennial evangelists founded liberal arts colleges and universities while premillennial evangelists for the most part founded bible colleges, though these have often evolved into universities over time (The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, now Biola University, being a good example). Baptist Fundamentalist W. B. Riley from the Twin Cities did a survey and concluded that of 236 faculty members in theological seminaries (representing 27 institutions and eight denominations) only eight were premillennialists. By contrast, no teacher at the bible schools was postmillennialist. For Riley the former institutions “study about the Bible” while the latter “study the Bible itself, believe increasingly in its prophetic portions, and find in prophecy the very mould in which history will run.”

One might expect that if any issue would yield to the “conservative/liberal paradigm,” it would be the conflicts over the rise of Darwinism and “creationism.” But even here the influence of eschatology is determinative. It is not often realized the extent to which every classical creationist is either an Adventist or a dispensationalist premillennialist. In Ron Numbers’ ten volume collection of creationist primary literature Lutheran Byron Nelson is the only figure that I am not sure falls into this pattern. In Adventist literature the acceptance of a literal seven day “creationism” is often linked to the seventh day Sabbath, but more important would be the underlying “apocalyptic” categories. Uniformitarian geology and its interpretation of the fossil record are usually correlated with postmillennialism while “catastrophic geology” (of Adventist George McCready Price and others) generally presupposes some form of premillennialism. What is at stake in this is revealed in the classic text of modern creationism **THE GENESIS FLOOD**. The authors, Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, both dispensationalists, comment that every one must choose between the “secular humanist” doctrine of “progress” and the “biblical” view of decline (even the second law of thermodynamics with its view of “entropy decline” is linked with the “fall” in Eden). Darwinism was often easily assimilated in the 19th century by orthodox postmillennialists, and it was not until the heyday of dispensationalism in WWI that the Scopes trial took place in east Tennessee. In fact, in 1919 the Prophecy Conference steering committee changed its name to the World Christian Fundamentals Association and declared it was willing to support legal proceedings over the teaching of evolution in the schools. The issue is clearly revealed in a pamphlet by W. B. Riley, **DANIEL VERSUS DARWIN** (for some unfathomable reason not included in the volume of W. B. Riley pamphlets reprinted by Ron Numbers). There Riley comments on “The Reversal of Evolution”: If ever there were two men who took opposite positions on any subject, they were Daniel and Darwin; and every intelligent student of Scripture is compelled to make this choice between them. According to Darwin, the human race, involving the question of personality, government

and civilization is on the ascent. But Daniel's interpretation of the image insists that the opposite is true. This interpretation of Daniel's presents the descent of kings: it presents the decline of nations; it portrays the catastrophe of civilization.

It presents the descent of kings!'

Here we see clearly the how eschatology is shaping the reception of Darwin.

The point here is that fundamentalism is something other than "generic orthodoxy." It is rather a particular theology that in its own way creates the category of "modernism" in a way that includes many forms of classical Christianity. This is very clear in the 1919 keynote address of W. B. Riley at the founding meeting of the World Christian Fundamentals Association where he delineates the differences between two parties of the "great divide":

Opposing schools are attempting to interpret Christ's mission to the world. Those who make the plain teaching of the Bible the rule of faith and practice look upon this age as the "Church period," a period in which the Holy Spirit is the Administrator of God's earth plans; and they recognize in a true church a "called out" company, who have found in Christ what Noah and his household found in the ark, the only place of safety from judgement. They also see in the church God's appointed institution for this dispensation; and clearly read from the sacred Scriptures God's intention to follow it with another, namely, the righteous dispensation of "the kingdom."

On the contrary, Moderns, who still claim to be Christians, teach that the Kingdom of God is now in existence, and has been from the beginning of the world. Its manifestation was made the more clear by the appearance of Jesus. The renewing process is to be a slow growth resulting from the preaching of the Gospel, which they would like to limit to the sermon on the mount, and which will finally Christianize the world. This age, when it waxes moral, will be worthy the name of "Millennium;" and at the termination of it there will be the judgement of all men, both good and bad, and the introduction of eternity.

By this analysis a figure such as John Wesley is made into a "modernist."

We cannot explore here the details of these arguments, but I hope that I have given enough evidence to explain why I think fundamentalism must be interpreted primarily in terms of the line of dispensationalism—as an eschatological movement with affinities to both Seventh-day Adventism and even the Jehovah's Witnesses. Both movements were present at the prophecy conferences whose reports I edited in their modern edition. "Neo-evangelical" historiography tends to suppress the fact that some Adventists attended these meetings. Even Father Russell of the JWs attended one meeting, where he was forceably evicted from the podium when he attempted to speak. Later he reported in his own organ that he attended and that his own movement belonged to the discussions taking place in the prophecy conference movement. Maybe the pilgrimage of George Storrs is not as odd as it seems.

The implications of this reorientation are profound, and it has taken me years to work my way out of the assumptions of the "conservative/liberal" paradigm. As a result I share very little of what seems obvious to both the participants and the interpreters of the QOD discussions. I no longer think of either fundamentalism (or "neo-evangelicalism" for that matter) or Adventism as in any useful way "conservative." Let me illustrate this with an incident. I am an alumnus of Houghton College, founded by the Wesleyans after they lost control of Wheaton College. My father served as President of the college during the seventies. I friend of mine, the editor of the campus paper on which I had worked as a student, was an early traveler on the "Canterbury trail" that has led many "evangelicals" into the Episcopal Church. My father, a student of Carl Henry and deeply influenced by the neo-evangelical movement, could only think in categories of "conservative" and "liberal." In analyzing David's decision to become an Episcopal priest, my father lamented the fact that even though David had the advantage of being reared in a Wesleyan parsonage he had now "gone liberal." My response at the time was that on the contrary, David

had “gone conservative.” He was driven in this direction by a growing appreciation for the BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER and the classical creeds of the church—and as a result he was closer to Anglican priest John Wesley than my father was. David was a representative of a major movement away from a more “radical” position back toward more classical forms of Christianity.

Such trajectories are actually quite characteristic of new religious movements. The first generation of a new movement arises in protest against some dimension of the classical tradition (perhaps a too easy routinization of church life and the suppression of the apocalyptic in the case of the Adventists or a compromise on the question of slavery in the case of the Wesleys). This first generation is often sectarian in temperament and often overstates and radicalizes its insights and denies any validity to the classical traditions. Successive generations often then struggle with this sectarianism and gradually move back toward that which occasioned the birth of the movement in the first place—often obscuring in the process the important and distinctive contribution that the new movement is custodian of and owes the wider Christian tradition as an insight of its radical trajectory.

These trajectories have been very clear in my own church. The Wesleys from the 1850s began to ordain women, becoming one of the first denominations to adopt the practice. By the 1950s and 1960s many of my peers were ashamed of the fact that their mothers were ministers and longed to belong to a proper “middle-class church” with a male pastor. For a variety of sociological, theological and psychological reasons, they were abandoning the ministry of women just as the larger culture was discovering it—but not learning the practice from those traditions that had been historical carriers of the practice. Similarly, as a child of the 60s, I was drawn away from my church (then very “conservative” and assimilated into a racist culture) by the civil rights movement. It was only years later that I discovered that my own church had been perhaps the strongest church witness on this question. In the 1960s this heritage had completely buried, and I had no idea that the church organ (THE TRUE WESLEYAN) carried in its name an antislavery testimony second to none.

I have seen similar movements in other traditions. I always marvel over the strong impulse of some Pentecostals to assimilate into the fundamentalist and evangelical traditions—whose leaders had once dismissed them as the “last vomit of hell” and “the religion of a sodomite.” While in seminary, I did a lot of rethinking of the inherited tradition of scripture mediated to me through “neo-evangelicalism.” But I did this under the leadership of such figures as Krister Stendahl of Harvard and Brevard Childs of Yale. Later I discovered some of these insights in the literature of early Pentecostalism as it attempted to rethink questions of biblical authority and the nature of the canon in light of the continuing gift of prophecy in the church. I did not learn these lessons from the Pentecostals, who by this time were caught up in a process of “evangelicalization” which required them to deny that they had ever said the things that troubled the “evangelicals”—the very things that I had come to value but had learned from other, now mainstream, sources.

I think that I often see similar dynamics among the Adventists. Over the years I have pondered the fact that I did not come to understand “conditionalism” and “annihilationism” from Adventist sources. Instead I struggled with these ideas in seminary at Yale though such books as THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY OR THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL? by Basel New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann. Since then these doctrines have become much more common in “evangelical” circles—so much so that Kenneth Kantzer, editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, could tell me in the 1960s that this position was a “classical

evangelical option.” But, again, I think for the most part that we did not learn these lessons from the Adventists.

Obviously, I am working here toward putting the QOD discussions in the context of a larger trajectory. As an amateur in Adventist history, I think I discern these patterns of a radical centrifugal movement away from the classical tradition followed by a corresponding centripetal movement back toward it. Major steps in this trajectory might be identified as the conference of 1888 with the movement of some toward a greater emphasis on “righteousness by faith,” the prophetic conference of 1919 (recently studied by Michael Campbell in his dissertation) modeled on the fundamentalist conferences, the discussions before us here that culminated in the publication of QOD, and perhaps the more recent controversies associated with the “shaking of Adventism” and the efforts of some to restate Adventism in the tradition of a radical Lutheranism. I think that we should debate the significance of the QOD in the light of this trajectory and in light of the danger of losing important insights of classical Adventism in a rush to assimilate into the fundamentalist/evangelical traditions and more broadly to return to certain themes of the classical Christian traditions.

We cannot explore all the issues of QOD, but I would like to pick up a couple of key issues and explore some of the ways in which I find my own affinities with the “historical Adventist” party and worry that important insights of the Adventist tradition may be buried in a rush to assimilate into the fundamentalist/evangelical tradition. Lurking behind all this is the conviction that new religious movements in the church are often powerful testimonies to cracks in the classical tradition, and in opposition to the “refutation of the sects and cults” tradition of Walter Martin, I am inclined to say that we should listen to these movements to discover these cracks before rushing to refutation. I will take two issues: the much debated question of whether Christ assumed “sinful human nature” in the incarnation and the issues of “justification by faith” and obedience to the law.

Am I correct in thinking that more ink has been spilled over the issue of the incarnation than any other theme in QOD—both in the original text (and appendices!) and the discussion since? I have had, however, some difficulty internalizing the terms in which this debate has been carried on within Adventism. In the first place, as I have suggested above, I do not consider the fundamentalist/neo-evangelical movement a form of traditional Christianity or a measuring rod of orthodoxy, as seems to be assumed by the various sides of the debates surrounding QOD. Nor do I share the horror of the fundamentalist/evangelical tradition at the suggestion that Christ assumed sinful nature in the incarnation. This doctrine (not at all foreign to the Christian tradition!) had a significant revival in the latter half of the 20th century, largely due to the influences of Karl Barth, whose thought was often misunderstood during the fundamentalist controversy and therefore was not well understood until these issues faded into the background. For Barth the soteriological axis is the incarnation (which includes all that follows) rather than Good Friday and Easter isolated from the longer narrative. Barth was more inclined to give Christmas meditations than Good Friday talks in churches because he understood the assumption of human flesh in the incarnation was in itself “saving” in that it transformed the “ontological” status of all humans by redeeming humanity itself. (Barth’s characteristic word for this—“reconciliation”—is often mistranslated “atonement” in English translations.) Some have suggested that Barth may be showing the influence of the Eastern traditions of Christianity where there is a greater emphasis on the incarnation and the fundamental issue from which we are being saved is not so much the guilt of sin (as in the Western tradition) but from the problem of “mortality” (through a strong tradition of sanctification or “theosis”—the divinization of human

nature). Since Barth, we have taken more seriously the appearance of this doctrine in such figures as Thomas Aquinas and in the early church. In the early church, there was a slogan that “what is not assumed is not redeemed.” The logic of such positions requires that Christ assumed “sinful human nature” in the incarnation.

I have learned much from Barth on these questions and have come to understand that the fundamentalist tradition is usually a carrier of a reductionist (and perhaps docetic Christology) that fails to grasp the complexity of the biblical material. Ever since the posing of the question by Anselm in *CUR DEUS HOMO?*, there has been a tendency to answer primarily in terms of the nature of the sacrifice required by a “penal substitutionary” doctrine of the atonement. This logic requires a human sacrifice on the behalf of humanity but only the divine/human Jesus can make it work for the whole of the human race. And the parallel with the Old Testament atonement sacrifice requires that this be a “lamb without blemish.” Surely much of the horror of the fundamentalists at the apparent teaching of Ellen White arises from such implicit theological concerns.

In seminary in the 1960s I was instructed on these issues by Princeton professor George Hendry (a student of Barth!) in his *GOSPEL OF THE INCARNATION*. One of the defects of most forms of classical Protestantism (and especially of fundamentalism) is the way in which they jump over the incarnation, the life and teachings of Jesus to get to the death. This move has led to fragmentation of the Reformation traditions into the magisterial traditions that have emphasized a distorted version of a Pauline soteriology and the more radical traditions of Anabaptism which have placed greater emphasis on the soteriological functions of the “model” of Jesus and his teachings, especially the sermon the mount. One of the great (but often unrecognized) contributions of Karl Barth was to reunite these in a more full orb ed Christology. And one of the reasons that I have been drawn back to the Wesleyan tradition is the way in which John Wesley does the same.

I think I also discern other theological issues at stake in these discussions. It may be significant that that the QOD dialogues took place through Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. The reformed (Calvinist) tradition has some special doctrines that make it very nervous about any admixture of the human and the divine in the incarnation. One of these is expressed in the Latin slogan *finitum non capax infinitum*, that the human cannot become a carrier of the divine. One result of this doctrine is the Calvinist reserve about such themes as the Eastern doctrine of theosis (God became human so that humans might become divine!) and even the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification—so great is the commitment to a certain doctrine of sin and its pervasiveness! Similar is the concern of the reformed tradition over against the Lutheran doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* that allows a certain interpenetration of the human and divine. The point is that Calvinism (contrary to other streams of the Christian tradition) has difficulty thinking about the incarnation in terms of a real assumption of human nature let alone the assumption of “sinful human nature.”

It may be worth noting another figure accused of heresy on this point in the 19th century. Proto-pentecostal Edward Irving also ran afoul of the reformed tradition on this issue. But in his case he was also accused of teaching that Jesus was dependent on the Holy Spirit and prayer just as we are. This apparently offended the Reformed tradition that could not think of an incarnation that did not include omnipotence, omniscience, and other divine attributes present in Christ that make unnecessary (or even offensive) certain acts of piety (prayer, etc.) that seem to be reported in the NT. This difficulty of the Calvinist doctrinal tradition in thinking in terms of a more genuinely interactive model may also affect other themes in the discussion like the “finished

work” of the atonement. The Calvinist presupposition that all action is God’s action and that because it is God’s action it is necessarily completely and totally effective lies behind the doctrines of election endemic to that tradition. For such reasons the Reformed tradition is allergic to an Arminianism that suggests the atonement provides the “potential” basis of a salvation that requires a human response to find its fulfillment. On this and other points, it has always seemed to me that Adventism is best interpreted in terms of the Arminian tradition, especially as it found expression in Methodism, the dominant Protestant tradition in 19th century America.

Indeed, I am increasingly drawn to the perspective of Daryl Hart, who in his recent books, sharply distinguishes “evangelicalism” (the revivalism of Billy Graham and his antecedents going back to Charles Grandison Finney) and “reformed confessionalism” (the Princeton tradition and other efforts to maintain “Calvinist orthodoxy” in the face of modernity). Hart is concerned to defend the latter against the former; I would probably move in the opposite direction. The point here is that I find increasingly puzzling the assumption that “evangelicalism” should be interpreted in terms of the Calvinist tradition. In my reading of history “evangelicalism” is born in the collapse of Calvinism and the rise of Methodism in the antebellum period. Methodism is the better candidate as the base line against which to interpret “evangelicalism”—and as I shall suggest momentarily, much more useful for the interpretation of Adventism in general.

Of course, some of these Calvinist reservations are shared by the wider Christian tradition. One thinks of the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary where Mary, as the “receptacle” in which Christ is conceived, needs to be preserved from original sin so that Christ can be born without sin. I have always found this one of the oddest of Catholic doctrines. It is of course dependent on a very “physicalist” or “materialist” doctrine of original sin that assumes it is transmitted physically, or, in the case of Augustine, even through the necessarily sinful sex act. I have always wondered whether such metaphysical assumptions are necessary. In my own tradition some have attempted to deal with these problems by developing a “relational” concept of sin that does not require the same metaphysical assumptions. Others have experimented with “social” or “psychological” understandings of the transmission of “original sin.” This is to say that some of the issues involved may be philosophical rather than theological.

I was trained in theological traditions that have openly questioned the metaphysical and philosophical traditions in which classical Christianity has been expressed. Paul Holmer, my adviser at Yale, was fond of saying that the greatest barrier to Christian belief in our time is the philosophical tradition of Christian theism. I was startled to discover in the recent CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY that Kevin Vanhoozer of Trinity argues quite explicitly that “evangelical theology” (by which he means “orthodox” or “classical” theology—an identification which I reject, as developed above) presupposes a fusion of Biblical and Greek horizons. One of the reasons that he takes this position is to lay the foundation for a refutation of the “open theism” being articulated by such figures as Clark Pinnock and his collaborators, including Adventist Rick Rice. On this point my sympathies are with “open theism,” though I came to such conclusions in seminary through the study of Barth. It may well be that the problems with thinking about the incarnation are created by the “substance” metaphysics of Greek philosophy and its *via negativa* mode of doing theology—that God’s character is everything that humans are not, especially in the “omni’s” of the divine attributes. This mode of reasoning creates problems for the doctrine

of the incarnation: how can a being of “divine” substance be united with “human” substance? Barth argues that the result is a pagan doctrine of God with questionable sources (Greek metaphysics?). Barth argues that if we take the NT seriously and understand that Christ is the genuine revelation of the nature of God, we must reason in an *a posteriori* rather than in an *a priori* manner. That is to say that the one thing that we know about God from the NT is that God is the kind of God that becomes incarnate—and that we must reject the practice of importing assumptions that make this either impossible or difficult. It may be that the objections to the assumption of sinful nature in the incarnation are drawn from inappropriate philosophical assumptions—the concerns of Greek philosophy about the divine appearing in human life that surfaced in early Christian Gnosticism and neo-Platonism.

As a way of transition into another cluster of QOD issues I would like to make one further comment on this theme. This comment is made somewhat tentatively because I am not sure that I master the sources sufficiently to make a definitive judgment. I have wondered if the Adventist tradition would pick up hints in the biblical material and in the tradition by developing a view of the work of Christ based on his perfect obedience to the law on behalf of humanity. I see hints of this in the material I have read, but the texts are often ambiguous and it is not clear whether references to such obedience refer primarily to the struggle in Gethsemene in anticipation of Calvary or have a wider reference to the whole life of Christ. But it does seem to me that the logic of such a position would require a similar affirmation of the assumption of sinful human nature. It would be difficult to understand how such action could be “saving” if undertaken by a person artificially preserved from any real contact with the human sinful condition. But this comment does raise questions about the status of “obedience” in the logic of Adventist “soteriology” and leads us into the other set of QOD questions on which I wish to comment.

I am not sure how best to approach these questions, but I shall open up the issues by commenting on a puzzling Adventist pattern of speech that I first noticed in Michael Campbell’s dissertation. In discussing such issues as the significance of the 1888 conference there is a tendency to speak of moving toward a more “Christian position.” I suggested that this should perhaps be a “more Lutheran position” and then was a little embarrassed to discover that he was using a wider convention that I found also in the texts of his teachers. I had similar problems in attempting to discuss these issues with my Latin American Adventist students at Northern. They were horrified by my suggestion that the Adventist tradition is not Lutheran even though I intended my comment as a compliment and a suggestion of themes that needed more precise articulation. No doubt this was due in part to the distinctive Latin American context where Luther becomes the symbol of the rejection of Roman Catholicism, even by groups whose soteriology is closer to Roman Catholicism than it is to Luther (Pentecostalism, the holiness movement, etc.). But this incident points to one of the most difficult questions in the interpretation of Adventism.

I have suggested already that I think it important to read Adventism against the backdrop of Methodism, and the same problems arise in the interpretation of that tradition. John Wesley is often read as a recovery of Luther’s doctrine of “justification by faith,” especially since his famous Aldersgate “heart-warming experience” took place in response to the reading of Luther’s preface to the book of Romans in a Moravian meeting. It is true this side of Wesley was very important (and led to his being locked out of some Anglican churches because this doctrine cut across an inherited Anglican “moralism”), but it vastly over-simplifies Wesley’s ambiguous relation to Luther.

When he finally got around to reading a substantial section of Luther (the commentary on Galatians) Wesley was horrified and reflected in his diary about how to take back his earlier endorsement of Luther. The preface to Romans is a very special text in the Lutheran corpus. It was loved by the Pietists who claimed that it supported their claim to have continued the trajectory of Luther to “complete” and “fulfill” the Reformation. This claim is, of course, disputed by “orthodox” Lutherans who saw Pietism precisely as a subordination of justification to “sanctification” as the organizing principle of theology and thus tantamount to a return to “Catholicism.”

It is arguable that Wesley made the same move of making justification instrumental to sanctification, faith to love. He used the image that justification and faith are the porch or the door of the house that itself consists of sanctification and love. Albert Outler struggled with this tension in Wesley and argued that Wesley erected a “Catholic doctrine of sainthood” on the “Protestant foundation of Justification by faith” and thus radically qualified the Lutheran position. Wesley’s response to the Commentary on Galatians had three major themes which I believe help illuminate the development of Adventism.

Most importantly, Wesley found Luther “blasphemous” in associating the “holy law of God” with the devil and hell. Wesley had a very positive view of the “law.” Ken Collins has termed his a “Platonic” view—one in which “nomos” plays the role of “logos” in other Christian traditions. In contrast to Luther’s view that faith “abolishes” the law, Wesley argued in two of his basic forty-four sermons (the doctrinal norm of Methodism) that the “law is established by faith.” These two sermons are followed by thirteen on the “sermon on the mount” as the new law that the Christian is expected to obey as empowered by the Holy Spirit. This positive view of the law was reinforced on the American scene by the thought of “academic orthodoxy” and its reliance on “Scottish Common Sense Realism,” a conservative reaction to Hume’s skepticism that argued that “common Sense” could discern the existence of God and the basic shape of the moral law though the natural faculty of the “conscience.”

Thus in Wesley “justification by faith” is held in tension with “obedience to the law.” At some stages in Methodism there has been a tendency to speak of a “double justification”: a “justification by faith” and a “justification by works,” this latter as a form of “fruit inspection” or justification by conformity to the “law of Christ.” I find this position confirmed by the recent emergence of the “new perspective on Paul” that has challenged the Lutheran hegemony over our interpretation of Paul in Protestantism. Swedish Lutheran (and later Bishop) Krister Stendahl of Harvard pointed out the deleterious influence of Luther on the “introspective conscience of the West” in a way that leads to a distorted reading of Paul. Figures like James Sanders, N. T. Wright and James Dunn have extended this analysis into a more positive view of Judaism and the law. In the words of James Dunn (a “charismatic” Methodist), one gets in by “free grace” but stays in by “obedience to the law.” This position then gives greater weight to “obedience” to the law and opens the way to a form of “judgment” (whether “investigative” or not) that does not contradict “justification by faith.” The implications for the interpretation of Adventism are, I think, obvious.

This point is underlined by another point of Wesley as he reflected on Luther’s commentary on Galatians—one that challenges our stereotypes of these figures. Wesley found the commentary “tinged with mysticism throughout.” This comment is not immediately self-interpreting, but Wesley’s great fear was “antinomianism.” He considered Calvinism “antinomian” because he thought the doctrine of “eternal security” undercut the necessity of obedience to the law. He thought Lutheranism had an antinomian tendency in its separation of

faith and works, law and gospel. He felt that mysticism and contemporary “charismatic prophets” were “antinomian” in their claim to have direct access to God in a way that short-circuited ethics, the law and atonement. Thus Luther’s commentary was “tinged with mysticism” in seeming to imply that one could do business with God in a way that suppressed the question of obedience to the law.

Thirdly, Wesley was concerned with Luther’s tendency to call reason a “whore.” Wesley was more a product of the enlightenment and considered reason little more than the faculty by which we think; modern articulations of Wesley’s theological method make “reason” (along with the Bible, experience, and tradition) one of the elements of the “Wesleyan quadrilateral” and a “source” of theological insight. This tendency of Wesley was given added emphasis as it coalesced with “Scottish Common Sense Realism” in the American scene. This tradition was again a “conservative” reaction to Hume’s skepticism that remained in the stream of enlightenment rationalism. This again would seem to be important for the interpretation of Adventism. Here I am pushing back a bit against George Knight in his otherwise stunning short history of Adventist theology. There he reaches toward deism and rationalism for the sources of a positive view of reason when he has a much nearer and more friendly source in Methodism. When I view Adventism in the context of Methodism, I am inclined to read the comments of Ellen White about the role of Adventism in “completing” or “continuing” the Reformation in the logic of Pietism and Methodism. It is a call to extend the “reform” agenda beyond doctrine (and “justification”) to the life of the church and individual Christians (to “sanctification”)—in effect, to add “sanctification” to “justification”. Thus I tend to view the movements that led to the “shaking of Adventism” (attempting to give a “Lutheran” reading of the tradition) as fundamentally mistaken. I would wish that Adventism had been more careful in its cultivation of its own heritage and logic. If it had done so, it might have anticipated themes of the “new perspective on Paul” and helped us all break out from under the Lutheran reading of the New Testament. Here I find clues to what I consider the fundamental theological calling of Adventism.

I have already suggested above that, contrary to the style of Walter Martin and others concerned to refute the “sects” and “cults,” our first response should be to listen carefully for clues to problems in the classical tradition. It seems to me to be significant that Adventism protested against a non-eschatological reading of Christian Faith a century before this insight reemerged in the twentieth century under the influence of Albert Schweitzer and Wilhelm Wrede—and was summarized in the slogan of Ernst Käsemann that “apocalyptic is the mother of Christian Theology.” In a similar way Adventism anticipated the revolt against the Lutheran hegemony over the reading of the New Testament.

For me, the fundamental question that Adventism raises has to do with the status of Judaism and the Old Testament in Christian theology. I have been increasingly concerned that the classical “ecumenical consensus” of the fourth century too radically cut these roots in its contextualization to Greek metaphysics and culture—with disastrous results for Western culture. One has only to contemplate the virulent anti-semitism of the late Luther or to reflect on the period of the holocaust where the German culture denigrated the Old Testament and Jewish law as a “primitive” form of religion. I cannot help but view these themes as consequences of the Lutheran view of the “law” (whether intended or not). One of the great theological problems of our time is to redress this situation and rethink the Christian relationship to the Old Testament in more positive terms. I find it striking that many of the new religious movements that I study

(Seventh-day Adventism, Oneness Pentecostalism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) are carriers of this theme, though often in an exaggerated and overstated manner.

I would then call Adventism to explore its own sources for insights to enable the larger Christian tradition to redress these questions. The Adventist rejection of the doctrine of the "immortal soul" is a significant step in this direction. I have already indicated my sympathy for the extension of this work in the "open theism" of Clark Pinnock and Rick Rice and their efforts to take the biblical text seriously in the formulation of a doctrine of God and escape from a form of metaphysics that requires us to dismiss many of its features as crude "anthropomorphisms." Adventism should have anticipated the "new perspective on Paul" and helped the larger tradition correct its flaws. This is certainly a higher calling than the efforts to "assimilate" to the evangelical tradition that seem to dominate such discussions as the QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE. I fear that Adventism may sell its heritage for a mess of pottage.

