

October 5, 1950

To the Members of the Special Committee,

Dear Brethren:

In the manuscript recently presented to you, Brother Short and I have endeavored to give the reasons why we felt it proper to write the letter which we did at the recent General Conference session. We hold no mental reservations concerning our faith which we have not tried to express fully therein. Though we have possibly made some statements that will appear to be very strong, yet we assure you that we have not made them in a condemnatory spirit. We felt and feel that we as a people have indeed come to a crisis hour in the history of Israel. We agree with the following sentiments fully:

"God's call to us now is to an experience much deeper than we have even yet thought of having. . . We have talked about it a great deal but most of us have never known it. . . Most of us are devoid of it, and we cannot go on that way. A mighty change must come, and it ought to come now." (General Conference Bulletin, 1950, p. 91).

"In a time of unprecedented world crisis and great perplexity, . . the church seems to be going on as if nothing had happened. . . To this clear understanding of the issues which we face in the tragic spiritual lack in our lives and in our ministry must be joined a new realization of the supreme danger now facing the church.

"If this is done, we shall find very quickly that it is entirely wrong for us to continue to conceal facts or to camouflage the state of the church and each one of our lives before the all-seeing eye of God. The art of camouflage is. . . used to cover up facts that should be known about ourselves to ourselves. Statistics, for instance, can dangerously disguise a situation." (Ibid., p. 92).

"This meeting (1950) should mark a new epoch in Seventh-day Adventist history. . . We cannot disappoint our people—nor God. . . We may well ask, Why are we so tardy with our task?" (Ibid., pp. 51, 52.)

"We are entering upon what I conceive to be the most serious period, not only in the history of the world, but especially in connection with the history of this work." (Ibid., p. 56).

"The Hour Has Struck for a Mighty Conviction to Grip the Advent People. . . The sobering fact is that there are more unwarned souls in the world today than there were when our pioneers began to preach the message. . . The vast majority of this milling mass of humanity has not yet heard the glad tidings of a soon-coming Saviour.

Our task grows bigger with each passing year. Its size is staggering. . . A new experience must come to the Advent Movement. (Ibid., pp. 19, 21).

Our experience in the mission field has taught us to believe those words. It was because of that conviction that we dared to write in a way which would not ordinarily have been considered politic or expedient. We sincerely felt that a crisis situation made it permissible for us to use frank, honest, plain speech, albeit with love.

There are a few other points that we wish to call to your attention, which we did not wish to include in the MS. I shall be as brief as possible:

(1) In the "Outline of Procedure" presented in our first interview, we were requested to show how any modern teaching amongst us is traceable to the pantheism errors of Dr. Kellogg's day. You will note in the MS a brief discussion of the alpha as being a lesson to Israel, to prepare for the omega. As an illustration of confused thinking which is similar in principle to that of the alpha heresies (though we do not think it identifiable as the omega), we would call your attention to a sermon presented at the recent Session, found on page 201 of the Bulletin, concerning "marching in step with the stars." We are unable to repress our first convictions as we listened to that sermon that there was presented to us a strange mixture of mysticism and astrology. We wrote a letter to the General Conference Committee concerning it, on July 17, during the session but refrained from sending it to you. I note that one statement which I took down in notes that morning as nearly verbatim as I could, has been omitted from the record as it appears in the Review (as many statements must be for the sake of brevity):

Abraham was called out of his tent, "looked into the pattern of the stars, and prayed, 'O God, what is Thy pattern for me?' So should we pray."

There were frequent expressions, such as:

"Heaven's fated will", "stars a perfect pattern of God's leading," "unyielding, bright shining, following of God's leading," "people look up and seek the pattern—think the thoughts of God and seek the plans of God," "onward we go in step with the stars," "marching in step with the stars", we must "be men who have interlocked their destiny with destiny of God," "we must discover which way God is moving, and move that way," "what happens to us along the way not important—what is important is our attitude toward what happens to us", "stars will bear down on us in certain defeat," etc. So

Several delegates seated near us remarked about the sermon sounding like astrology. We would not like to take a superficial view of it, and conclude that it was that. The speaker, we are certain, had no such intent whatsoever. But the fact remains, we feel, that a most unfortunate impression was conveyed. Actually, Living Temple contained sentiments very similar, except that the veiled thought then was pantheism rather than astrology. By carefully reading the report of this sermon, and comparing it with the picture presented in Living Temple, one finds similar impressions conveyed:

- (1) God is impersonal.
- (2) His leading is the decree of Fate, as impersonal and therefore unloving as the laws of celestial bodies appear to be.
- (3) Our surrender to God emphasized as the bowing to decreed fate, accepted rather philosophically, rather than yielding the heart to the love of God.
- (4) Abraham read his "pattern" in the stars. A synthesis between astrology and Christianity would as easily utilize that passage of Scripture as a synthesis between pantheism and Christianity would use those quoted by Kellogg.
- (5) Where we go does not matter—what "attitude" we take toward our fate is more important. This is uncomfortably close to Stoicism.

The speaker declared that what he presented in his sermon was what he considered to be the "fundamental principle of the Christian life." The service was referred to from the desk as "very inspiring".

Dare we, as a people believe this doctrine when it is followed to its logical ends? Mrs. White's objection to Living Temple was its ultimate influence, if followed. Dare we, as a people, give the impression that we believe that astral influences brought about Sisera's defeat, as well as the fluctuating successes and failures of the military campaigns of Tiberias, Napoleon, Hitler, etc.? Dare we to entertain for a moment the impression that astral influences have been guiding this Advent movement, for weal or for

woe? Yet that is precisely what this study implied. (The margin for Judges 5:20 refers to Joshua 10:11. Is not that the true explanation of Sisera's "stars" that fought against him? And if so, does it not completely alter the impression conveyed in this mystic Bible study?) The sermon referred to above unwittingly employed astrological terms in reference to God, terms that, to my knowledge, are never used in inspired writings concerning our relationship to God. (See What Do the Astrologers Know, by Robert Leo Odom, pp. 9-11).

II. Grattan Guinness attempted a synthesis between astrology and Christianity, as did others. A Sabbath-keeper in 1898 wrote a book upholding both the seventh-day Sabbath truth and "Christian" astrology, working out a weird synthesis of the two. (See Cyclic Law, by Dr. Thomas Reed, 1898, in Review and Herald Library). Henry Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World was referred to by the speaker as upholding the views presented in the sermon under consideration. We believe that that famous book contributed toward the confusion of the alpha days. There are some serious revelations of the "Christian" use to which virtual astrology is put in an authoritative book in the Seminary library by Frans Cumont, Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and the Romans. May I quote a few sentences:

"Stoicism proved by facts. . . that fatalism is not incompatible with a manly and active virtue. . . Some modern thinkers, like Schliermacher, have made true religion consist in the feeling, on the part of the creature, of absolute dependence on the infinite Cause of the universe.* (Schliermacher was a "Christian" pantheist). Its professors elevate to a duty complete resignation to omnipotent fate, cheerful acceptance of the inevitable. . . This passionate surrender, this eagerness to submit to divine Fate inspired certain souls of old with feelings so fervent as to recall the rapture of Christian devotion. . . Siderial determinism. . . Thus belief in fate not only (1) became a source of moral inspiration to noble minds, but also (2) provided a justification of the necessity of positive worship." (pp. 155-161).

* Insert: "Astrology, by strengthening this feeling of dependence, has been a source of real piety."

The recent General Conference Session was a time of intercession for a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit to surpass even that of Pentecost. Indeed, the time is at hand for such an outpouring. But could such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit be given us to vindicate such confusion as this sermon presented, about astral influences?

We join with the ministry of this movement in an earnest desire and prayer that God may pour out upon this people the rich blessings of the Holy Spirit which alone will bring about the finishing of the work. Not the slightest thought of disunion with such a prayer inspires our attitude. We would point out that precisely because we do desire to see that outpouring, ~~that~~ we call attention to conditions of thought among us which, if persisted in, can only hinder our prayers.

(2) We note with real alarm the definite tendency in the Seminary and the Ministerial Association to introduce among our ministers the concept of psychological "spiritual counseling" borrowed from John Sutherland Bonnell, Norman Vincent Peale, and others. We believe that as ministers, we ought to be prepared to give personal help to our people, as the Spirit of Prophecy repeatedly urges. But we would point out that this concept being emphasized today is subtly erroneous, and very dangerously so. I realize that this statement will seem shocking, for I myself was intrigued by Bonnell's book when I read it in Uganda, and was almost completely beguiled by it. Upon careful study, it is evident that Bonnell's concept of "spiritual counseling" is based upon the following idea:

This objective (in training ministers) has been partially attained in the Roman.

Catholic seminaries through the confessional. . .for spiritual examination.
...All ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy, not excluding the pope, must seek at intervals a confessor.

I do not recommend that the Roman confessional be adopted in Protestant seminaries or churches. . .(but) In Protestant seminaries and churches an adequate and scriptural substitute for the Roman confessional should be found. (Spiritual Counseling, p. 19).

What Bonnell objects to in the R. C. confessional is not the end, but the means. He sees no harm in a "sinner" confessing to a Protestant minister, but rather good. Numerous instances in the book refer to his interviews with parishioners as being "detailed confessions" (see p. 96, 111, etc.), and reveal that Bonnell actually granted the essence of absolution (in principle, though not in word) to those who poured out such humiliating secret confessions to him. Followed to its logical ends, this idea in a few years time (if further encouraged) would provide Seventh-day Adventists with an "adequate and (un)Scriptural substitute for the Roman confessional". It would be tragic. Further, there is very little of use to be found in Bonnell and Peale if this "confession" idea is removed, because their concept of "spiritual counseling" is built upon it. It is a most subtle and cleverly disguised error, and we feel it ought to be exposed.

Norman Vincent Peale is becoming increasingly popular amongst us, his articles being found in Life and Health, Signs of the Times, etc. This man's concept of the Protestant minister's work is as follows:

The woman mentioned above told me her sin. She confessed it to me in my capacity as a minister of religion, it being her belief and mine that I acted for God. A sin may, of course, be confessed directly to God in prayer through faith, but experience has proved that confessing a sin to God through another person ~~who~~ who is trustworthy and understanding is more effective. (Faith is the Answer, p. 105).

Bonnell's view is substantially the same (See Spiritual Counseling, pp. 56, 57, 58). No Seventh-day Adventist minister should be encouraged to become a confidant of others' sins. Even though some well respected men amongst us in the past have been such, is it not true that the Spirit of Prophecy plainly points out a better way to help people? Jones' and "aggoner's message brought sinners to their knees, alone with God, through faith, and not psychological adjustments, or tearful katharsis in the presence of a "sympathetic" man with a magnetic personality. This idea of a "Protestant" confessional was the entering wedge of the Oxford or Tractarian movement in England, toward Rome. (See Secret History, by Walsh, p. 33).

(3) We have presented examples of confused teaching with the thought that they are only examples. Like geological thrusts exposing strata on the surface of the ground, they indicate the nature of what actually exists below ground, more generally than we would like to admit. We have been further perturbed at what must be the logical ends of the doctrine of receiving the Holy Ghost as taught at the recent General Conference Session. (See Bulletin, pp. 113-117). Pentecost is represented as having come after the disciples confessed individual "sins" and had "claimed" the promise of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Prophecy points out that Pentecost came after the disciples came to realize the significance of the Cross, and their own hearts were deeply humbled and broken by a true understanding of the atonement, not as a doctrinal theory, but as an experience of heart-broken love for the Lamb of God whom they themselves had so largely misunderstood. It was a far deeper work which they experienced in their hearts than we heard even alluded to in any of the sermons on the Holy Ghost at San Francisco. Though it may seem shocking to say so, we firmly believe that a second Pentecost will come to this people when they realize what the early disciples did,—that we ourselves, Seventh-day Adventists, as a people and particularly as "apostles", have been just as stupid, just as blind, just as unfeeling and unsympathetic toward the true Christ as those eleven men had been. The Repentance will precede the "loud cry", and in it is locked up a true

understanding of ourselves, which is revealed in the truth of Minneapolis and its aftermath. But the impression given repeatedly at San Francisco to the church is that we will get this gift of the Holy Ghost by believing that we have it, by making the experiment of "claiming that gift as mine along with the forgiveness of my sins". Does not such a doctrine come perilously close to our becoming holy by believing with a determined "experiment" or act of faith that we are holy? Does not such a doctrine give our people the impression that the reception of the latter rain depends, after all, in the final analysis, on their own act of appropriation, rather than upon the true faith aroused by a contrite reconciliation to God?

Please be assured, brethren, that we sincerely and loyally desire this long-promised outpouring of the Spirit, and we believe that it is going to be poured out upon us, not so much when God gets ready to do it (for He is ready now), as when we as a people and particularly as ministers, get ready. What we have said is not intended to be critical, or to find fault. We intend it as a conscientious appeal for closer investigation of these matters, in what we are all agreed is the most serious, crisis hour to which the Advent movement has ever come.

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

R. J. Wieland