

Reform, Reformation – Protest, Protestant Adventist Terminology and Rhetoric

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“Perceptions of the Protestant Reformation in Seventh-day Adventism”

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From their beginnings, Seventh-day Adventists have developed not only a peculiar theology and culture, but also a language of their own. Some elements in the terminology and rhetoric of the Adventist community were, of course, inherited from antecedent movements – the Puritans, the restorationist Christian Connection, and revivalists of various backgrounds.¹ Others were borrowed from the Holiness movement, which advanced in parallel steps with the young SDA denomination, and, later, from North American Fundamentalists. But a significant part of the phraseology in the burgeoning Seventh-day Adventist community was home-made; its roots were mostly biblical apocalyptic passages, and phrases often became dear to the Advent people as their leaders used them over and over again.² Unsurprisingly, the huge Adventist supply of magazines produced a similar phenomenon, with recurring vocabulary such as the many “Heralds,” “Messengers” and “Signs.”

An exception to these common patterns in Adventist publishing was a paper that appeared only for seven years: *The Protestant Magazine*. Published from 1909 to 1915 by the General Conference Religious Liberty Department,³ the title page announced its main orientation: “The Protestant Magazine. Advocating Primitive Christianity. Protesting against Apostasy. Human Authority vs. Divine Revelation.” This magazine and its name remained a short-lived⁴ and rather unique experiment,⁵ but

¹ Cf. Bryan W. Ball, *The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief* (Cambridge: Clarke, 1981); Jonathan Butler, “Seventh-Day Adventism’s Legacy of Modern Revivalism,” *Spectrum* 5.1 (1973): 89–99; and (on the Adventist-Christian Connection linkage and the SDA move away from it) Stefan Höschele, “Constructions of Catholicity and Denominational Particularity: Key Stations in the Seventh-Day Adventist Doctrinal Journey,” in *Christliche Traditionen zwischen Katholizität und Partikularität / Christian Traditions between Catholicity and Particularity*, ed. Leo J. Koffeman (Frankfurt a.M.: Lembeck, 2009), 131–147.

² Examples abound, so a few terms will suffice: “present truth,” “Loud Cry,” “Spirit of Prophecy,” “remnant church,” “investigative judgement,” “third angel’s message.” A longer list is found in Taiko Takaya, “A Bilingual (English-Japanese) List of Seventh-Day Adventist Terminology with Suggestions for Use” (M.A. thesis, Loma Linda University, 1968).

³ It appeared quarterly from 1909 to October 1912 and monthly from November 1912 to 1915 and was published under the leadership of W. W. Prescott.

⁴ The fact that the magazine was not continued beyond 1915 may be attributed to several factors: the circulation Manager, A. J. S. Bourdeau, died in 1915, and apparently the subscription situation was not very good. Whether the war had any impact cannot be ascertained, but evidently after seven years of publication, the major themes were exhausted – some had been repeated several times – especially when a magazine was to be published monthly.

its existence *and* discontinuance imply important insights on the denomination's self-understanding, its view of Protestantism, and its relationship to the Protestant world at large. More observations on this episode will be presented later; at this point it should suffice to note that *The Protestant Magazine* illustrates (1) the Adventists' will to present their movement as the most consistent form of Protestantism, (2) the fact that this tendency became stronger towards the end of the denominational pioneers' period, and (3) a certain degree of uneasiness that remained in identifying with Protestantism at large.

In this paper I intend to give an overview of the way in which Adventists talked about the terms "Reformation" and "reform," about "Protestantism" and "protest" – in short, about the manner in which their perception of their reformation origin and of others in the large Protestant family revealed itself in their discourse. Different from the denomination's inbred vocabulary, these words reached Adventists with meanings and ascriptions that had their roots centuries earlier and that had already developed a life of their own. This inheritance, then, led to constructions enriched with strands of typically Adventist thinking. I should add immediately that it is impossible to present a truly comprehensive account of this subject; a thorough evaluation would certainly need serious and systematic discourse analysis with a scope of no less than a Master's thesis or even two. Another preliminary observation that needs to be kept in mind is that all of these terms – reform/ation, protest/ant – are non-biblical. Like the term "revival," the canon offers but a weak foundation with regard to this terminology, which may be one reason why Adventists took time to appropriate some of it with positive theological connotations and some degree of differentiation.

1. Protestantism as Babylon: The Earliest Adventists

The Millerite revival had largely been an intra-Protestant movement, but the Millerites' attitudes to their denominations of origin was complex. With their generally anti-sectarian perspective, their future-orientation and particularly after the increasingly conflictual developments in 1843, the roots in Reformation history that they shared with other Evangelicals seemed largely irrelevant. Miller remained a Baptist, but his scepticism of denominationalism translated into interpreting the existence of so many Protestant "sects" as "conclusive sign by which we may know we live on the eve of finishing the prophecies."⁶ In general, Miller used "Protestant" in a neutral manner

⁵ With one exception: In Germany, there was also a magazine entitled *Der Protestant* from 1910 to 1914, with an emphasis on religious liberty issues, Roman Catholicism, and articles on what Protestantism entails. The title page said, "The Protestant. Quarterly for the Liberty of Faith and Conscience as well as Fostering True Protestantism." Possibly this paper was inspired by the American Adventist *Protestant Magazine*.

⁶ William Miller, *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, about the Year 1843* (Boston: Himes, 1842), 112. Miller interpreted the division of Protestantism as the fulfilment of the predicted "scattering of the holy people" (Dan 12:7); see *ibid.*, 113.

when explaining fulfilled prophecy, but with a negative connotation when utilized as a synonym to the “worldly,” “popular churches.”⁷

The earliest sabbatarian Adventists’ view and use of “Protestantism” was shaped by the fact that they all originated in the radical Bridegroom (or Shut-Door) Adventist group. This means they initially considered not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but even the moderate Adventists beyond hope of salvation. It is, therefore, not surprising that the earliest references to Protestantism among them – in Bates’s 1847 pamphlet *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps* – are consistently negative.⁸ The paradox of this treatise is, however, that it represents the first quasi-salvation historical approach to theological thinking by a future Seventh-day Adventists and thus indirectly opened the way for later theological constructions in which the Reformation played a positive role.

But for the time being, a dark picture of Protestantism prevailed. With her few fellow believers, Ellen White expected an imminent persecution of Sabbath keepers while “the churches [i.e. Protestants and Catholics] and nominal Adventists” were “enraged” because of the sabbatarian proclamation.⁹ In the same period, an expectancy of “false reformations” designed “to deceive God’s people” developed in White’s writings, thus marking the first uses of the term “reformation” as negative.¹⁰ Among sabbatarian Adventists of the period, Protestantism was universally viewed as part of apocalyptic Babylon; the only difference among the movement’s leaders was the question of whether Protestants were *equal* to “Babylon” or merely formed *part* of it.¹¹ James White held the former view, which implied that prophecies were fulfilled in the very present and, therefore, slightly increased the urgency of proclaiming the need for separation from them. With regard to perspectives on Protestantism in general, these two varieties made little difference: all the churches had “fallen” (Revelation 14:8).

⁷ See, e.g., William Miller, *William Miller’s Works*, vol. 3 (Boston: Himes, 1842), 77, where he says: “Yea, they that work wickedness are SET UP [sic]. This is certainly the effect, more or less, of all our Protestant sects at this time.” Cf. also William Miller, *Remarks on Revelations Thirteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth* (Boston: Himes, 1844), 38, 40.

⁸ Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps, or, A Connected View of the Fulfillment of Prophecy, by God’s Peculiar People from the Year 1840 to 1847* (New Bedford: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), has seven references to Protestants (pp. 22, 24, 25, 27, 28). The two 1846 publications by Bates do not contain the term “Protestant” or “Reformation”/“reform,” nor does the important booklet by James White, Joseph Bates, and Ellen G. White, *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (Brunswick: [By the Authors], 1847).

⁹ Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs: James White, 1851), 17 (reference to 1847: p. 15).

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* [vol. 1, no. 3], August 1849, 22; similar wording is found in her booklet *A Sketch of the Christian Experience*, 27. The same idea appears in her letter “My Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* [vol. 1, no. 8], March, 1850, 64, where she adds the shut-door explanation that “[t]he excitements and false reformations of this day do not move us, for we know that the Master of the house rose up in 1844, and shut the door of the first apartment of the heavenly tabernacle.”

¹¹ For details, see Samuel Kibungei Chemurtoi, “James White and J. N. Andrews’ Debate on the Identity of Babylon, 1850–1868” (M.A. thesis, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2005).

The logical consequence was that developments, activities and even revivals in Protestant denominations had to be considered spurious.¹² In 1857–58, when an evangelical revival spread from New York to other cities,¹³ sabbatarian Adventists quickly rejected it as deceptive.¹⁴ Such awakenings or “reformatations,” as they were also labelled,¹⁵ had to be non-genuine. After all, Protestants were in an apostate condition;¹⁶ thus argued Uriah Smith, the editor of the sabbatarian Adventist paper *Review and Herald*, in 1859,

we know of course that they cannot recover from that condition [of being fallen], until they first repent of the steps that led them to it – until they grieve for their past neglect, and walk up to the abundant light that now shines forth from the word of God. Nothing of this kind have they done; and yet they claim that a wonderful revival has taken place among them.¹⁷

In its earliest period, therefore, Sabbath-keeping Adventists quite consistently used the term “Protestant” and reports connected with it in a negative manner. There were scant exceptions – such as a case when James White claimed that originally “the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants” and called this “the Protestant principle.”¹⁸ But even in this instance the argument was that the churches originating in the Reformation had actually turned away from the Sabbath. Thus references to them generally implied the reproach of having dishonoured God’s law, the verdict of having fallen from God’s favour, and the expectation of a soon-coming crisis, in which they would stand opposed to God’s faithful. This view of “Protestantism” was more or less unconsciously built on earlier traditions of anti-sectarianism, which were particularly powerful in in in the restorationist movements such as the Christian Connection, but received its strength through the appeal to apocalyptic passages of the Bible and sabbatarianism.

¹² Already in 1847, Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks*, 53, argued, “How can you have faith in Babylonish revivals, after Babylon has fallen?” In 1854, a *Review* reader applied Ellen White’s statement on “false reformatations” to a local revival; see E. R. Seaman, “Can Ye not Discern the Signs of the Times?,” *Review and Herald [RH]*, February 21, 1854, 37.

¹³ Cf. Kathryn T. Long, *The Revival of 1857–58: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ See, e.g., “Extracts from Letters,” *RH*, February 4, 1858, 103; Jesse Dorcas, “Exhort One Another,” *RH*, June 17, 1858, 37. For further source references, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-Day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 184–185.

¹⁵ A. S. H., “Reformatations in the Nominal Churches,” *RH*, March 11, 1858, 136.

¹⁶ Cf. a Millerite pamphlet republished in 1854 by Sabbath-keeping Adventists, Robert Atkins, *A True Picture or Description of the State of the Churches* (Rochester: Advent Review Office, [1854]): “Apostasy, apostasy, apostasy is engraven on the very front of every church” (ibid., 6). The significance of Atkins’s pamphlet and the views it propagated is seen in the fact that Ellen White quotes material from it in her 1888 and 1911 editions of *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Oakland: Pacific Press, 1888), 387–388; 1911 edition: 388.

¹⁷ [Uriah Smith,] “The Recent Revivals,” *RH*, April 21, 1859, 172. For a similar view of similar phenomena in Ireland, see [Uriah Smith,] “The Revival in Ireland,” *RH*, November 24, 4.

¹⁸ James White, “Twenty Reasons for Keeping Holy in Each Week the Seventh Day instead of the First Day,” *Present Truth* [vol. 1, no. 3], August 1849, 23.

2. Moral Reform Everywhere: E. G. White and the Incipient Denomination

It is only with the background of this general picture that another line of development can be appreciated. It started in the mid-1850s. For a few years, the fledgling sabbatarian Adventist movement had experienced years of enormous numerical growth and developed first local organizational arrangements. When the first dissidents threatened to split the body of Sabbath keepers in 1853–54,¹⁹ the need for solid leadership structures became more evident, and slowly a self-understanding as “church” evolved. This was visible both in increasing calls for “gospel order” and in the first publications that utilized the term “church” in a positive way. Heretofore “the churches” had been synonymous to “Babylon” and “Protestantism”; now the singular began to denote sabbatarian Adventism.²⁰

This subtle change of self-understanding can be noticed in Ellen White’s writings as well. She started her *Testimonies for the Church* series in late 1855, addressing what she viewed as the dearth of spirituality and dedication to the cause in “the Church” – i.e., Adventist Sabbath keepers.²¹ The parallels to the Adventist criticisms of “Protestantism” are striking! Further “Testimonies” were full of reproof and exhortation for fellow sabbatarians as well, focusing on moral behaviour, family issues, general commitment, church life, health and dress.²² One expression that steadily gains significance in these admonitions is “reform.” Appearing in individual instances in the 1850s and denoting a change of individual attitude or lifestyle, the term acquires crucial importance in the 1860s and connects particularly frequently with “dress” and “health.” Ellen White used it about 100 times in what was to become the first *Testimonies* volume.

In fact, at this juncture “reform” was soon found almost everywhere. While the official church papers continued focusing on theological issues, on exegetical questions, the Sabbath and eschatology, it appears that Ellen White re-formed the general Adventist discourse almost single-handedly and moved it into the direction of Christian ethics. What is of fundamental importance in her use of terms is that “reform” and “reformation” are actually synonymous;²³ to her, both terms imply seriousness, the

¹⁹ On the “Messenger Party” as well as the Stephenson and Hall split in Wisconsin, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2000), 89.

²⁰ One notable example – apparently the first to use “church” in a positive way in a publication title of the movement – is a 64-page booklet by Merritt E. Cornell, *The Last Work of the True Church* (Rochester: Advent Review Office, 1855).

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church* (Battle Creek: Advent Review Office, 1855), contains strong words of rebuke, which resemble the evaluation of other Protestant bodies: “I saw that the Spirit of the Lord has been dying away from the Church [i.e. Sabbath keepers]” (1); “I asked the angel why simplicity had been shut out from the Church” (2); “I saw that the spirit of sacrifice was almost gone from the Church” (3); “The Church have nearly lost their spirituality and faith” (8).

²² In vol. 1 of Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), containing her *Testimonies* from 1855 to 1868, these were the issues addressed in five or more sections.

²³ Some examples from vol. 1 of her *Testimonies*: 1857: “reformation in the life” (154); “Beg of God to work in you a thorough reformation” (158); 1863: “when the truth is believed by them from the heart, it will work an entire change in their lives. They will immediately commence the work of reformation”

willingness to pursue a totally ethical lifestyle, and courage in a world that opposes faithful Christian conduct.

It is against this backdrop of the equality of “reform” and “reformation” that Ellen White’s first comments on the Reformation of the 16th century can be best understood. Both in her 1863 *Testimonies* and in the first version of her *Great Controversy*, the volume *Spiritual Gifts* published in 1858, the Reformation is largely depicted as the clash of those who represented faithfulness to God and those who indulged in or supported a worldly, sinful church. In other words, the Reformation was about ethics – it was an event in which morality triumphed. In the short chapter devoted to the 16th century in *Spiritual Gifts* (covering only five rather small pages), White mentions the conflict, protest, or disgust regarding the sins of church leaders no less than seven times in addition to two other major recurring themes: the courage and zeal of Luther and an ecclesiology of purity, i.e. a church which consisted only of the faithful. These stood in opposition to the “priests ... [who] did not wish to be reformed. They chose to be left in ease, in wanton pleasure, in wickedness. They wished the church kept in darkness.”²⁴ To Ellen White, the Great Controversy was, even in Reformation times, essentially a moral controversy.

Such mid-19th century interpretations of 16th century events were certainly coloured by American reform attitudes and figures of thinking. It is consistent, therefore, that a few years later Ellen White asserted about Adventists at large, “We are reformers.”²⁵ The main aim of her messages was evidently to encourage Sabbath-keeping Adventists to uphold this reform spirit: to remain faithful and active, to attract others to their convictions by standing firm. In this thinking, Luther was a reformer rather than a theologian, and not so much a herald of justification but a lover of the Bible, and more of a bold protester than a university professor.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Ellen White’s second major reference to the Reformation (in her *Testimonies* in 1863, a message directed to Adventist preachers) echoes the same orientation. “Ministers who are preaching present truth,” the prophet insisted, were not nearly as zealous as Luther and his contemporaries. Like the reformers, they were to display the character and boldness needed for God’s cause. Even here, “Reformation” essentially meant a protest against the fallen church, the insistence on God’s truth, a life of true Christian values, and the moral courage to stand for what is right.²⁶

Interestingly, Ellen White included one reference to the actual content of Luther’s gospel understanding in her 1858 book. According to her, he “was not satisfied until a

(415); “unpleasant necessity of individual reformation and exertion” (441); 1865: “A reformation is needed among the people, but it should first begin its purifying work with the ministers” (469); “Many professed Sabbathkeepers will be no special benefit to the cause of God or the church without a thorough reformation on their part” (533).

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1: *The Great Controversy between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels* (Battle Creek: James White, 1858), 121–122.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 159. Here the context is educational reform; the original text is from the year 1872.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 372–376. A thematic analysis of this text yields these four major emphases, with each being addressed four times (except protest against the fallen church, which is mentioned three times).

gleam of light from heaven drove the darkness from his mind, and led him to trust, not in works, but in the merits of the blood of Christ; and to come to God for himself, not through popes nor confessors, but through Jesus Christ alone.”²⁷ This experiential description (combined, again, with some protest language) remains the only place where something like a sola gratia notion occurs in this earliest section on the Reformation – yet even here redemption, with its language of merit that implies a satisfaction model of atonement, appears as having a strong moral slant.

3. Protestantism-Reformation Dialectic: The Second Generation

The organizational changes that sabbatarian Adventism experienced in the 1860s not only went hand in hand with theological development – particularly in the field of ecclesiology – but also influenced the use of terminology in various realms. As Seventh-day Adventists organized themselves into a denomination, their intense apocalypticism was balanced by an increasing ecclesial consciousness, which both provided and demanded a theology with a certain measure of stability. It is salvation historical thinking, which built on Miller’s interpretations, had been present in Joseph Bates’ earliest Adventist theologizing and appeared in Ellen White’s first version of the *Great Controversy*, which evolved into a framework that could serve this demand of stability. This development would soon also be felt in the Adventist discourse on “Protestantism.”

On the one hand, “Protestantism” continued to represent the “fallen churches,” those who had become “Babylon” in 1843 or at least belonged to apostate Christianity because of their “moral fall” or general state. It is logical, therefore, that the persecution scenario that Adventist Sabbath keepers had referred to already in the late 1840s continued to be referred to and even became a crucial part of Ellen White’s 1884 version of the *Great Controversy*. Her now famous words implied a continuing mistrust of “the churches” among Adventists in spite of the fact that they had become a denomination themselves:

Protestantism will yet stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of Spiritualism; she will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, our country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.²⁸

The Protestant churches ... are now adopting a course which will lead to the persecution of those who conscientiously refuse to do what the rest of the Christian world are doing, and acknowledge the claims of the papal Sabbath.²⁹

On the other hand, the same book by Ellen White contained four chapters on Luther and the German Reformation; in addition, one deals with “Early Reformers” (John

²⁷ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, 120.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4: *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Controversy* (Oakland: Pacific Press, 1884), 405.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 409–410.

Wycliffe and Jan Hus) and one with “Later Reformers” (Tyndale, Knox, the Wesleys, and the English Seventh Day Baptists). If the logic inherent in this chiasmic scheme is extended, the Waldenses, who “planted the seeds of the Reformation,” with a separate chapter before the “Early Reformers,” correspond to William Miller, who is also called one of the “reformers.”³⁰ With this significant attention given to key figures of Protestantism and other reform personalities, a perception that strikingly differed from the end-time expectancy of turmoil was present in the writings of the foremost leader in Adventism after James White died.

The double perspective of extolling the Reformation and condemning Protestant churches was a tension that could not easily be upheld in the following period. Both “apostate Protestantism” and “courageous reformers” were figures of thought that had existed alongside each other, but as time went by, the inherent dialectic in this interpretation³¹ was difficult to uphold. One area in which this is visible was the issue of mission. Starting with an anti-mission shut-door ideology, Adventist Sabbath keepers were initially utterly sceptical regarding the missionary activities of other Protestant bodies. To them mission, like attempts of Evangelical revivalism, was a futile endeavour at best³² and anti-biblical at worst – for it was frequently linked with what was then called “the world’s conversion,” the postmillennialist vision of an entirely christianized globe.³³

After some time, however, this opposition to Protestant mission activities mellowed, and when Adventists had begun serious international missionary activities of their own in the 1870s, they commended the mission efforts of other Protestant denominations.³⁴ In a few instances, Protestant mission projects were even depicted as exam-

³⁰ Ibid., 202. Ellen White actually puts him in line with “many other reformers.” Cf. also the table of contents, where a part of this chapter is thus summarized: “The World Opposes Reformers” (ix).

³¹ Ellen White’s assessment of what happened in the generations following the Reformation was the following: “Thus the spirit inspired by the Reformation gradually died out, until there was almost as great need of reform in the Protestant churches as in the Roman Church in the time of Luther. There was the same spiritual stupor, the same respect for the opinions of men, the same spirit of worldliness, the same substitution of human theories for the teachings of God’s word. Pride and extravagance were fostered under the guise of religion. The churches became corrupted by allying themselves with the world. Thus were degraded the great principles for which Luther and his fellow-laborers had done and suffered so much.” Ibid., 194.

³² Uriah Smith argued that evangelism would not have any significant results anyway: “He who fore-saw the end from the beginning, has told us that goodness and virtue should gradually cease to find an abode in the hearts of men; that wickedness and vice in most hideous forms, should increase and flourish.” Only as a result of the Adventist proclamation “a few may be saved.” See [Uriah Smith,] “Evangelizing the World,” *RH*, November 6, 1856, 8. Cf. also J[oseph] B. Frisbie, “The World’s Conversion,” *RH*, August 19, 1858, 105, who argued that conversions were “of a doubtful character” anyway, and, later, “Converting the Heathen,” *RH*, June 9, 1868, 396; “Missionaries in Asia: Anglican Exclusiveness in India,” *RH*, July 21, 1868, 70–71; and “Missionary Work in Africa,” *RH*, July 19, 1881, 61.

³³ Cf. the six-part article series in 1865 by R. F. Cottrell, “The World’s Conversion,” *RH*, June 27, 29; July 11, 45–46; July 18, 53; July 25, 61; August, 1, 69; and August 15, 84; see also “Evangelizing the World,” *RH*, December 20, 1870, 5.

³⁴ Cf. the fourteen-part series on mission in the *Review and Herald*, starting January 4, 1881, 12, and ending April 26, 1881, 268. In the January 11, 1881, issue, for instance, the author noted, “true piety and Christian simplicity have characterized the early history of all Christian denominations” (28).

ples for Adventists.³⁵ The climax of these new bouts of sympathy came with the non-denominational Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) in the 1890s.³⁶ An Adventist report on an SVM World Convention insisted,

[T]he Student Volunteer Movement is one which merits the full sympathy and co-operation of Seventh-day Adventists. Unselfish, unsectarian (so far as concerns Protestant sects), animated by pure zeal and devotion to the cause of Christ, and seeking only to bring the sound of his gospel to the millions whose ears it has never reached, it is a part of the great gospel work which God is doing for the world in this last generation of its history, and in which it has pleased him to assign us so wonderful a part.³⁷

With regard to mission, Protestants appeared to revive the reformers' ethos, and the SVM with its non-denominational course and identity as a "movement" appealed to the anti-sectarian feelings that underlay the original Millerite Adventist reasoning. Thus Seventh-day Adventists could, for the first time, view contemporary Protestantism in an utterly positive manner – at least with regard to its dedication to worldwide gospel proclamation.

It appears that Ellen White's role was crucial in steering a course that would lead to a differentiated Adventist view of Protestantism. Her learning experiences in Europe in the 1880s, her contributions to the Christocentric turn in 1888 (albeit with little reference to the Reformation and its core)³⁸ and her calls for caution in relating to other Christians³⁹ combined into a direction that upheld the unique Adventist mission while acknowledging praiseworthy elements among other Protestants. In fact, in her thinking of the period, Adventists were to be the truest Protestants *and* Reformers; her confidently anachronistic 1886 reflection on *Christ* as "Reformer" and "Protestant"

³⁵ See, e.g., M. L. R., "A Mission Established by the Baptists," *RH*, January 24, 1882, 55; "Beginnings of Protestant Missions," *RH*, February 4, 1890, 70; "The Pioneer of Chinese Missions," *RH*, March 25, 1890, 182.

³⁶ Cf. Michael Parker, *The Kingdom of Character: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1886–1926* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998).

³⁷ L. A. S[mith], "The World's Convention of Student Volunteers for Foreign Mission," *RH*, March 17, 1891, 168–169, here 169. Cf. also "International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement," *RH*, February 17, 1891, 102, where the authors states, "We know of no enterprise for the advancement of foreign mission work, that we indorse more heartily than the Student Volunteer Movement. It is un-denominational in character, but has sympathy and encouragement from all Christian bodies."

³⁸ In Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), among the dozens of references to "reform" or "reformation" (which almost all refer to change in conduct or attitude), only one alludes to the issue of justification viz. grace, and even here the theme is couched in 19th century holiness language: "Christ's followers must walk in the light of his glorious example, and at whatever cost or labor or suffering, must maintain the purity of the soul and spirit through the grace of Christ, yielding complete allegiance to the reformatory doctrines of the gospel of Christ, without mingling self with the work. Keep self subdued, and keep Jesus ever lifted up, and push the triumphs of the cross of Christ. Let it be your work while life shall last to extend the borders of his kingdom, and wage a daily war against all sin and ungodliness, whatever others may think of you" (969; from an 1891 letter to S. N. Haskell).

³⁹ For a collection of these statements, see Stefan Höschele, *Interchurch and Interfaith Relations: Seventh-Day Adventist Statements and Documents*, *Adventistica* 10 (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2010), 21–30.

even implies that to Adventists this terminology effectively indicated eternal principles, not references to specific periods of history:

Christ was a protestant. He protested against the formal worship of the Jewish nation, who rejected the counsel of God against themselves. ... The Reformers date back to Christ and the apostles. They came out and separated themselves from a religion of forms and ceremonies. Luther and his followers did not invent the reformed religion. They simply accepted it as presented by Christ and the apostles.⁴⁰

4. Reform Movement or Protestant Church? The Early 20th Century

Ellen White's merger of "Reformer" and "protest/Protestant" language indicates a shift that would manifest itself in an even more pronounced manner in the early 20th century. Adventists increasingly began to present themselves as Protestants or even the *true* Protestants. *The Protestant Magazine*, mentioned in the introduction of this paper, was only one visible indication of this trend. Theologically, Adventists moved significantly closer to the Evangelical mainstream in the 1890s and the 1900s in terms of soteriology and Christology as well as the gradual adoption of trinitarianism.⁴¹ It is as if the somewhat isolated Seventh-day Adventist denomination now sought allies rhetorically in its immediate religious neighbourhood; after all, it also began to form some kind of coalitions where this seemed opportune, as in the student mission movement, the temperance cause,⁴² and anti-Catholic activism, the latter being a major thrust of *The Protestant Magazine*.

And there were even more pronounced versions of Adventist self-identification with "Protestantism." Alonzo Jones, for instance, who had left Adventism in the context of the Kellogg crisis but remained doctrinally attached to his former faith, wrote a large monograph to explain what the Reformation "meant then" and "what it means now."⁴³ To Jones, it implied the most far-reaching religious freedom possible and, consequently, minimal ecclesial authority. The Protestant principle, to him, was to proclaim and defend "the full and complete liberty of every individual, himself alone ... the sole and complete responsibility of the individual soul to God only, in all things pertaining to religion or faith."⁴⁴ The Bible was, of course, to be the basis, "all-sufficient in all

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, "Visit to the Vaudois Valleys," *RH*, June 1, 1886, 2 [338].

⁴¹ Rolf Pöhler's thorough study of Adventist theological development evaluates these changes as indicating a movement from "heterodox to orthodox," from "distinctive to fundamental" and from "legalism to evangelicalism"; see his "Change in Seventh-Day Adventist Theology: A Study of the Problem of Doctrinal Development" (Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 1995), 285–288 (section headings).

⁴² Cf. Yvonne D. Anderson, "The Bible, the Bottle and the Ballot: Seventh-Day Adventist Political Activism, 1850–1900," *Adventist Heritage* 7.2 (1982): 38–52, and Richard Rice, "Tempered Enthusiasm: Adventists and the Temperance Movement," *Spes Christiana* 25–26 (2014–2015): forthcoming.

⁴³ Alonzo T. Jones, *The Reformation, 14th–16th Century: What It Meant Then; What It Means Now* (N. p.: By the author, 1913).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

things pertaining to religion and faith,”⁴⁵ but denominations were not to introduce any restrictions “on the full preaching of the word of God, even on ‘controverted points,’ to every creature everywhere and always.”⁴⁶ This reformation view and its concomitant advocacy of extreme individualism, which was reminiscent of the somewhat chaotic Millerite post-disappointment phase, did evidently not match the generally uniform SDA approach to faith in the period. It arose, however, from a typically Adventist impulse – an apocalyptic and individualist transformation of radical strands of Protestantism.

A line of thought and action that took the Adventist “reform” philosophy one step further into another direction was born in the crisis of World War I. The heightening of apocalyptic expectations, debates on ethical questions such as military service – especially on the Sabbath day –, the Adventist tradition of strictness in the context of diversified responses to burning issues, and the absence of a prophetic voice after the death of Ellen White all contributed to a novel movement that aimed at taking up the cause of reform. The Reform Movement (or Reformation Movement, as its adherents preferred to call themselves) aimed at carrying the traditional Adventist logic of a pure, “reform” church to the end – and thus paradoxically reversed some of the steps towards Protestantism that Seventh-day Adventists had travelled.

In the 1910s the SDA denomination had, in fact, transformed from a protest movement to a Protestant church. Its protest ethos was still alive, at least rhetorically; but the necessities of establishing and safeguarding the denominational organization and building its missionary machinery shaped it in such a way that analogies with other Protestant churches were ubiquitous. It is, therefore, natural that close contacts in the so-called mission field finally led to an Adventist recognition of other Protestant mission agencies as part of God’s involvement in the history of the world. In the context of mission rivalry and cooperation in China, Seventh-day Adventist leaders of the Eastern Asia Division issued a declaration entitled “Our Relationship to Other Societies” in 1919,⁴⁷ which included the following statements:

1. We recognize every agency that lifts up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.
2. Wherever the prosecution of the gospel work brings us into touch with other societies and their work, the spirit of Christian courtesy, frankness, and fairness should at all times guide in dealing with mission problems.

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⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁷ W. A. Spicer – [J. L.] Shaw, March 21, 1919, Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GCA), 21/1919/Spicer; first publication: *RH*, August 19, 1920, 5–6 (1061–1062). For a more detailed account on the background of this declaration, see Stefan Höschele, “From Mission Comity to Interdenominational Relations: The Development of the Adventist Statement on Relationships with Other Christian Churches,” *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honour of Dr. Jan Paulsen*, ed. Børge Schantz and Reinder Bruinsma (Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2010), 389–404.

3. As to the matter of territorial divisions and the restriction of operations to designated areas, our attitude must be shaped by these considerations:

a. As in generations past, in the providence of God and the historical development of his work for men, denominational bodies and religious movements have arisen to give special emphasis to different phases of gospel truth, so we find in the origin and rise of the Seventh-day Adventist people, the burden laid upon us to emphasize the gospel of Christ's second coming as an event 'even at the door,' calling for the proclamation of the special message of preparation of the way of the Lord as revealed in Holy Scripture.

This declaration, which would soon become part of the denomination's *General Conference Working Policy*⁴⁸ was a long way from the earlier insistence on Protestantism being wholly apostate. While it did not actually amount to the "comity statement" of mutual non-interference that the other mission societies desired, and did not mention Protestant missions (as opposed to Catholics), it is evident that the text almost exclusively aimed at fellow Protestants: the China Continuation Committee (CCC) of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, to whom it was sent, consisted solely of such organizations. Whatever the wording, the significance of the text is Seventh-day Adventists publicly expressed, for the first time, how much they appreciated the ministry of other denominations, especially those that were fellow heirs of the Reformation.

5. Observations on the Discourse in the Post-Pioneer Period

The Adventist use of "reform" and "protest" rhetoric and of the terms "Reformation" and "Protestant" in the post-pioneer period constitutes a large field of research of its own; here only a few observations can be presented, which indicate how the inherited discourses continued and were reinforced or modified.

(1) Involvement with other Protestants in the missionary realm continued and expanded. The Seventh-day Adventist Church joined the (Protestant) Foreign Mission Conference of North America (FMCNA) in the 1930s, an organization that encompassed a very broad spectrum of churches: Fundamentalist-type denominations, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists, African American mission organizations, Pentecostals and (initially) even Universalists.⁴⁹ Soon Adventist served on a significant number of committees, thus indicating that at least in the support of mission,

⁴⁸ The text had been intended for use solely in Eastern Asia, but the first edition of the *General Conference Working Policy*, published in 1926, included it and thus raised its importance to a global level. In a slightly modified form, it is still part of the same *Working Policy* today.

⁴⁹ Cecil M. Robeck, "The Assemblies of God and Ecumenical Cooperation, 1920–1965," *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Robert Menzies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 110–112.

they did not distance themselves from Protestantism at large any more organizationally.⁵⁰

(2) In the context of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, Adventists clearly positioned themselves on the Fundamentalist side. In spite of uneasy relations with the Fundamentalist mainstream, which generally regarded Adventism as cultic, heretic, or at best odd, the SDA self-identification as the most genuine Fundamentalists⁵¹ squarely categorized them as Protestants – or, indeed, the *truest* Protestants of all.

(3) The Evangelical-Adventist conversations in the 1950s, which led to the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* (QOD), reinforced this general perception: Adventists presented themselves as conservative Protestants and emphasized what they held in common with other Christians and, particularly, Protestants.⁵² While these conversations and QOD caused quite a stir both within the Adventist community and the North American Evangelical world, the episode was indicative of a direction in thought that could not be reversed: “Protestantism” was now viewed, by a majority of Adventist thought leaders, as an ally rather than an enemy. While QOD mainly addressed a context shaped by Calvinism (and, therefore, only one type of Reformation heirs) and, therefore, the Reformation as such was not a major theme, it emphasized both the continuity with Protestantism and the Adventist will to “complete” the Reformation.⁵³

(4) Although Adventism did not produce many Reformation scholars, a few SDA theologians did develop interest in Reformation studies from the 1960s onward. This added a new dimension to the Adventist discourse on both Protestantism and the Reformation; scholarship helped to differentiate earlier perspectives and interpret historical and dogmatic developments in a more contextual manner. An outstanding researcher in this field was Kenneth Strand,⁵⁴ who edited several works on the Reformation, published a good number of articles on the subject (especially in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*)⁵⁵ and specialized in Reformation Bibles⁵⁶ – a

⁵⁰ For a more extensive account, see Stefan Höschele, “Between Ecumenism and the Eschaton: A Study of Seventh-Day Adventist Interchurch Relations” (Habilitation dissertation, University of Prague, to be submitted 2016), chapter 4.

⁵¹ Cf. F. M. Wilcox, “Forsaking the Foundations of Faith,” *RH*, November 28, 1929, 13–14 (here Adventists are called “the chief of Fundamentalists today”); William H. Branson, “Loyalty in an Age of Doubt,” *Ministry*, October 1933, 3 (“fundamentalists of Fundamentalists”). Cf. also Francis D. Nichol, “Modernism’s Inadequacy Is Our Opportunity,” *Ministry*, February 1936, 13–14, 22.

⁵² *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957), 21–25.

⁵³ Two quotations may suffice to illustrate this: “We definitely feel that we must emphasize certain neglected truths, must restore others that most Protestant bodies no longer stress, and must continue the work of the Reformation” (*ibid.*, 189). “We, as Adventists, profoundly believe that in these last days God is calling for the completion of the arrested Protestant Reformation and for the full and final restoration of gospel truth” (615).

⁵⁴ Another scholar is Johann Heinz, who wrote his dissertation on “Justification and Merit: The Interpretation and Evaluation of the Concept of Merit in Modern Catholic Theology in Relation to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification” (Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 1982).

⁵⁵ Strand contributed fifteen articles to *AUSS* on Reformation topics and, as an editor of the journal, initiated a special issue on Luther (1984).

fitting research niche for someone from a tradition that has a strong biblical emphasis.

(5) Another line of – mainly academic – discussion opened in the 1970s and came to flourish in the 1980: the historical and dogmatic relationship between Reformation churches and Seventh-day Adventism. New studies documented the significant connection between Puritanism and Adventism⁵⁷ and the link of Sabbath theologies in some strands of the Reformation with SDA thought⁵⁸ and thus reinforced the affirmation that Adventists were inheritors of Reformation elements. (Yet the peculiar Adventist view of the Reformation seems not to have been made a topic of research of any major study then and until the present, whence the current symposium.)

(5) The idea that Adventists were the true “heirs of the Reformation” is rooted in the movement’s 19th century self-reflection, but this particular formulation came up later. Leroy E. Froom used it in 1931, presumably for the first time in Adventist print;⁵⁹ his massive collections *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* and *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*⁶⁰ actually mirrored this self-understanding. In later decades, “Heirs of the Reformation” became a more frequent metaphor in Adventist publications.⁶¹

(6) In several interchurch dialogues taking place from the 1990s onward, Seventh-day Adventists continued to invoke significant continuity with the Protestant Reformation. Naturally, this emphasis appeared most strongly in the Lutheran-Adventist dialogue during the 1990s (“shared heritage from the Reformation”; “deep appreciation for the work and teachings of Martin Luther”; “heirs of the Protestant Reformation”; “children of Luther”).⁶² The report summarized,

⁵⁶ This all connected with his dissertation: Kenneth A. Strand, “A Low-German Edition of the Gospels and Book of Acts Based on Hieronymus Emser’s Version and Published by the Brethren of the Common Life at Rostock about 1530” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1958). Some of his significant publications are Kenneth A. Strand, *Reformation Bibles in the Crossfire* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1961); idem, *German Bibles Before Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); idem, *Introduction to the Religious Thought of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin* (Ann Arbor: Braun-Brumfield, 1974); idem, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans from the December Bible and Wittenberg Editions of 1530, 1534, and 1545* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1972), and idem, ed., *Essays on Luther* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1969).

⁵⁷ Cf. Ball, *The English Connection* (1981).

⁵⁸ See Richard Müller, *Adventisten – Sabbat – Reformation*, *Studia Theologica Lundensia* 38 (Lund: Gleerup, 1979).

⁵⁹ L. E. Froom, “Build upon the Foundations,” *Ministry*, November 1931, 7.

⁶⁰ LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950); idem, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966).

⁶¹ It even made its way into Geoffrey J. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), entitles his first chapter “Adventists: Heirs of the Reformation.” The popular book by Walter L. Emerson, *The Reformation and the Advent Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1983), is a book-length attempt at demonstrating the continuity between the (Radical) Reformation and Adventism. In a short history of Adventism in Europe of 1997, the “heirs” phrase actually serves as the book title: Hugh I. Dunton, Daniel Heinz, Dennis Porter and Ronald Strasadowsky, *Heirs of the Reformation: The Story of Seventh-Day Adventists in Europe* (Grantham: Stanborough, 1997).

⁶² *Lutherans and Adventists in Conversation: Report and Papers Presented 1994–1998* (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists; Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2000), 7, 8.

Adventists have a high appreciation for the Reformation. They see themselves as heirs of Luther and other Reformers, especially in their adherence to the great principles of *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solo Christo*. Teachings which others may view as distinctive of Adventists are seen by them as the continuation of the Reformation's recovery of Biblical truth.⁶³

While the SDA-Mennonite conversations of 2011–12 and the SDA-Evangelical dialogue of 2006–07 do not highlight aspects of the Reformation in their final reports,⁶⁴ Adventist “indebtedness ... to the Reformation heritage” is emphasized in the Reformed-SDA dialogue of 2001 as well.⁶⁵ The continuity with the Reformation, therefore, is what remains the most prominent legacy of earlier Adventist discourses in the 21st century.

6. Conclusion

Our walk through a section of the Adventist language landscape is ending here. Five major emphases have been discerned: (1) a *consistently negative* image of *Protestantism* during the earliest Adventist period, in which Protestants were equated to apostate Christianity (and pictured as future persecutors of the true believers); (2) a *consistently positive* view of *reform* in the period when the SDA denomination emerged and was organized; in it, the *moral reform rhetoric* of 19th century America combined with the theological emphases of the young movement and strongly col-

⁶³ Ibid., 16–17.

⁶⁴ It is somewhat odd that the SDA-Mennonite dialogue report mentions the Reformation but does not draw any conclusion for the common heritage and relationship of Adventists and Mennonites. See “Living the Christian Life in Today’s World: Adventists and Mennonites in Conversation, 2011–2012,” in *Living the Christian Life in Today’s World: A Conversation between Mennonite World Conference and the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, ed. Carol E. Rasmussen (Silver Spring: Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; N.p.: Mennonite World Conference, 2014), 263–270. In the report on the dialogue between the World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there is no reference to the Reformation, only the remark that “Adventists can subscribe to the WEA Statement of Faith,” thus placing the SDA Church in the Evangelical Protestant community. See “Joint Statement of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.” 2007. Online: <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/WEAAdventistDialogue20070809d.pdf>, accessed February 1, 2010 (published also in Höschele, *Interchurch and Interfaith Relations*, 157–160). A report on a lengthy series of conversations (from 2004 to 2008) with the Salvation Army does not refer to the Reformation, presumably because the two traditions are linked in Methodism rather than 16th century developments; see “Joint Salvation Army/Seventh-Day Adventist Statement Arising from 2004-2008 Bilateral Theological Dialogues,” Council on Interchurch/Interreligion Affairs, January 17, 2008, Religious Liberty Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

⁶⁵ “Report of the International Theological Dialogue between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches,” Jongny sur Vevey, Switzerland, 1–7 April 2001, online: <http://www.adventisten.de/fileadmin/downloads/Reform-Advent-englDial.pdf>, accessed May 1, 2016 . The report also says (about both traditions): “We acknowledge our debt to the Reformation with its biblical emphasis upon salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*).”

oured its interpretation of the Reformation as well; (3) the period from the 1880s onward, in which *Reformers* were seen as *precursors of Adventism*, moral examples to be followed, and in which even their other Protestant offspring appeared more acceptable than previously, at least with regard to their mission orientation; (4) a self-identification as the *true Protestants*, particularly in the early 20th century; and (5) a more *dialogical relationship with other Protestants*, implying a differentiated (and more academic) look at the Reformation and at Protestantism at large.

All of these five options have continued in Adventist discourses until the present. As contradictory as some may seem, and although some reflected ahistorical or unhistorical points of view, together these perspectives and their implied attitudes form a variegated tradition from which any approach can be retrieved by some subgroup of contemporary Adventism, especially because earlier sceptical views have persisted in the writings of Ellen White and other Adventist pioneers. Yet all in all, a clear development can be recognized: from a mainly negative view of Protestants and a fully positive use of “reform” to a differentiated and rather positive notion of both “Protestantism” and the Reformation.

N.B.

A revised version will be published as part of the symposium proceedings.