

Who decides in these hermeneutical issues? Brinkman hinted to the correct answer with 'the catholicity of the church'. It is clearer to put it straight forward: the church decides based on its catholicity. The consequences of this for the existing protestant churches are enormous. It requires a fundamental rethinking of its catholicity also in terms of structures of the church. But this can only be the content of another contribution.

Constructions of Catholicity and Denominational Particularity

Key stations in the Seventh-Day Adventist doctrinal journey

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A. REINVENTING CHRISTIANITY? THE RESTORATIONIST BACKGROUND

Relating and reconciling universal and particular facets of the Christian faith have been delicate tasks since the inception of the church. The early 19th century provides a striking example of an attempt to actually deny and completely do away with the tension between catholicity and particularity: the Restorationist Movement in North America.¹ The Restorationist Movement is today often called "Stone-Campbell Movement" in reference to the names of the major figures of its early stages.² This movement is not very well known in Europe because its major impact was within the United States, where churches such as the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ and Independent Christian Churches with a total membership of more than two and a half million are today's heirs of this 19th century movement.³

The Stone-Campbell Movement is most interesting for the issue of catholicity and particularity because its very aim was to counter the proliferation of denominations that was typical of 19th century America. The Restorationists' conception of how denominationalism was to be eschewed was rather simple: turning to the Bible and re-establishing the Christianity of the first century. As the "Five Cardinal Principles

- 1 Major works on the movement include those of Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams (eds), *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), and Michael W. Casey and Douglas A. Foster (ed.), *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002).
- 2 Barton W. Stone (1772-1844), Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), and his son Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) were the leaders of major groups inside the larger Restorationist Movement.
- 3 Cf. C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988).

of the Christian Church” of one of the earliest Restorationist groups formulated in 1794:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party and sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament our only creed, and a sufficient rule of faith and practice.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of church fellowship and membership.
5. The right of private judgment, and the liberty of conscience, the privilege and duty of all.⁴

The zeal to re-create “mere Christianity” also included the anti-traditionalist impulse to reject all historical statements of faith, i.e., Protestant confessions and creeds of the first millennium alike. In short, the Restorationist approach to resolve the tension between catholicity and denominational particularity was to cut the Gordian Knot: for the sake of orthodoxy, do away with orthodoxy.

Today, we have the advantage of knowing that history, in its irony, ultimately made the movement add to the pluriformity of Christianity rather than uniting Christians as it had intended. Yet if the Stone-Campbell Movement does not appeal to some observers today—after all, some of its features may seem somewhat naïve—one must still acknowledge that Restorationists were sincere and radical. If Christians agreed to their philosophy, some major ecumenical problems could be solved.

Moreover, the movement is not only of interest for its immediate offspring. Restorationism was also of crucial importance for later movements,⁵ notably the Millerite Movement, an interdenominational,

apocalyptic revival which erupted a short time later and functioned as a Restorationist movement enhanced by a particular eschatology,⁶ and the major offspring of Millerism, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. James White (1821–1881) and Joseph Bates (1792–1872), two of the denomination’s three major founders (White’s wife Ellen [1827–1915], from a Methodist background, being the third), had belonged to the Christian Connection, a New England variety of Restorationism.⁷

This paper explores the ways in which the Adventists conceptualized the relationship between universal and particular facets of the Christian message in relation to their Restorationist heritage. For this purpose, six crucial stations in this denomination’s doctrinal journey have been chosen,⁸ which illustrate the way in which a denomination can struggle to relate the universal to the particular—or rather what was perceived to be universal and particular in respective eras. Adventism thus provides a case study for identity debates in various confessional bodies in the recent past,⁹ which commonly revolve around the very question of particular and universal aspects of Christianity.¹⁰

- 6 On the Millerites, see Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (eds), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and George Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1993). Joshua V. Himes, the outstanding organizer in the Millerite Movement, belonged to the Christian Connection; on some similarities in the way the Christian Connection and Millerism functioned, see Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 84–85 and 267.
- 7 The Restorationist/Seventh-day Adventist connection has been discussed by Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2000), 27–30, and Bert Haloviak, “A Heritage of Freedom: The Christian Connection Roots to Seventh-Day Adventism,” unpublished manuscript (1995), online: <http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/AST/ChrConn95.pdf>, accessed on 01-04-2008.
- 8 This paper is interpretative in its focus and therefore does not aim at presenting an overview of doctrinal or theological developments in Adventism, which is found in Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*. Pöhler also develops a distinct theory and typology of doctrinal development alongside his interpretation of Adventist theological development; cf. his book *Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine*, Frankfurt: Lang, 1999.
- 9 Due to its strong leaning towards organizational unity and theological uniformity, the Adventist Church has hardly faced any problems with national theological particularities. However, the denomination’s particularity vis-à-vis other confessional traditions is noticeable from its beginning. It seems that either national or denominational particularities almost constantly accompanied Christian churches in their history.
- 10 On identity discussions, see, e.g., Dagmar Heller, „Wo stehe ich und kann auch

4 Wilbur E. MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church in the South* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1910), 121–122. This early group, which emerged under the leadership of James O’Kelly, was first known as “Republican Methodists” and then simply as “Christians.”

5 For the whole period, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), is an indispensable interpretation. Hatch draws lines between the political and religious development of the United States in the 19th century and explains many of the dynamics in the emergence of new movements and the changing religious landscape of the period.

All the issues in the six stations to be explored are related to Restorationist heritage;¹¹ therefore, this paper argues that Restorationist views can serve to enlighten the Adventist story and indeed several major issues that divide Christianity. Moreover, the Adventist example may shed light on similar dynamics in other churches, especially minority churches which emerged after the 16th century Reformation, notably those of the 19th and 20th centuries. Baptists, Holiness Churches, New Apostolic Churches, Pentecostals and various other free churches have tried to reinvent Christianity in one way or another and yet all struggled to reconcile their particular interpretations of the original Christian faith with theological tradition and with a reality far removed from the first century.

B. DEVELOPING DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES: THE 1840S

The Millerite Adventist Movement of the 1830s and 1840s, from which Seventh-day Adventism developed, in one way carried Restorationism further: The slogan, “The Bible, and the Bible alone” led to apocalyptic fervour based on a biblicist and exceedingly optimistic hermeneutic. These early Adventists were sure that almost all of the Bible could be accurately understood;¹² and since they considered most of its content to be plain and unambiguous, they became especially interested in the apocalyptic writings, which they viewed as a puzzle yet

anders? Überlegungen zur Frage nach der konfessionellen Identität im ökumenischen Miteinander“, *Una Sancta* 57 (2002), 234–241.

¹¹ This connection has not yet been analysed in depth. However, Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*, 123–134, hints at it when he interprets Adventist doctrinal change as follows: (1) from flexible and simple to fixed and compound, (2) from heterodox to orthodox doctrines, (3) from distinctive to fundamental truths, and (4) from legalism to evangelicalism. All of these developments may be summarized as a movement away from Restorationist heritage, except the third, which is nevertheless linked with Restorationism in that it emphasizes the Restorationist ethos of focusing on the universal in a denominational setting.

¹² On Millerite hermeneutics, see Kai Arasola, ‘The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament’, Ph.D. diss., University of Uppsala, 1989. The underlying thinking is closely related to Scottish common sense philosophy, an approach that also heavily influenced Restorationists; cf. Carisse Mickey Berryhill, ‘Common Sense Philosophy’, in Foster *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 230–231.

to be solved. William Miller and his followers first proclaimed the near second advent of Jesus Christ based on their observations drawn from the books of Daniel and Revelation and they finally became persuaded through various calculations that Jesus would come in the year 1844. As a multi-denominational revival movement, the Millerites did not even ask the question of how to relate the particular to the universal. They thought of their message as coming straight from the Bible and therefore being universal (thus representing “catholicity” as they constructed it). As among the Restorationists (many of whom had joined the Millerite ranks) all denominational differences became unimportant in view of the expected coming of the Lord.

The Millerite Movement disintegrated after October 22, 1844, the day that had been envisioned for the *parousia*. However, the Restorationist approach continued among a group that soon embraced sabbatarian teachings and a few other non-traditional views (e.g., death as a “soul sleep,” a distinctive view of a sanctuary in heaven, and the prophetic gift in the church)¹³ in addition to persevering in the hope that Jesus would come back soon. From this small group of but a few dozen individuals there developed a growing community of sabbatarian Christians who intended to carry Restorationism to the end by attempting to re-establish a first-century sabbatarian non-creedal and non-denominational type of Christianity based on the scriptures alone.

From a later perspective, this sabbatarian Adventist movement with its distinctive doctrines was clearly an incipient denomination, but at its own time, it was firmly committed to a non-denominational identity. In fact, in this movement, Restorationist, anti-denominationalist persuasions merged with the bitter experiences of the Millerite Movement—Millerites had mostly been disfellowshipped by their former churches. It is, therefore, not surprising that to many sabbatarian Adventists, any type of organization that pointed toward a denominational identity was considered as a “Babylon.” Restorationists denied the

¹³ Cf. Merlin D. Burt, ‘The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White’s Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849’, Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2002.

necessity and acceptability of denominations, and sabbatarian Adventists did the same by viewing their particular emerging identity, one that would soon become a denominational identity, as *identical* with true Christianity. In other words, in this period, other Christians were not considered *true* Christians as long as they clung to their particular views and traditions.

C. DESIGNING DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURES: THE 1860S

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today is a world communion with 16 million baptized members, but in the second half of the 1850s the fewer than 2000 persons belonging to the movement were not sure whether or not they should actually form another church organization. In fact, for most of the decade, the opinion was clearly against establishing denominational structures. In view of the imminent coming of Jesus, was it not a sign of disbelief in this “blessed hope” to create a permanent organized body? Restorationist concepts continued to be held among sabbatarian Adventists, and one of the major hallmarks of the Stone-Campbell Movement had been to reject denominations.

At the same time, this small company of believers developed ecclesiological thoughts derived from the Old Testament tradition of the faithful remnant and its use in Revelation 12:17. Identifying this “remnant” with their own concerns—the faith of Jesus (interpreted to be *doctrinal* faith) and the keeping of the commandments (Rev 14:12)—led them, after some time, to the persuasion that they had a mission to the world, a mission that sooner or later posed the question of denominational organization once more. In the context of a few newly found doctrines leading to a strong group identity, the next logical step was to establish a formal structure with conferences, a denominational name, and the like.¹⁴ In spite of some who left the movement because of their rejection of denominationalism,¹⁵ sabbatarian Adventists initiated a new church

organization between 1860 and 1863, thus reversing the anti-denominationalism of the Restorationists. For what resulted from this move was clearly a church with a pronounced sense of its denominational legitimacy and mission.

From the distance of a century and a half, this may seem to be an obvious matter, but one should remember that many religious movements, even Christian ones, never reach this stage. Only the existence of particularities that gave sabbatarian Adventists a distinct identity can explain the establishment of a permanent body of believers separated from other denominations organizationally. It should thus not come as a surprise that early Seventh-day Adventists conceived their denominational, self-understanding mainly as the *correct interpretation* of the Christian faith. Thus, in the early Seventh-day Adventist thinking, there was still no differentiation of general “Christian” and specific “denominational” aspects of catholicity and particularity. Rather, their own interpretation of Scripture was viewed as the highest level of truth at their own time; the tension between catholicity and particularity would simply not enter their consideration.

D. RE-EMPHASIZING PROTESTANT IDENTITY: 1888

With its emphasis on keeping the commandments and perfecting holiness, the newly formed Adventist denomination clearly focused on aspects of the Christian faith that were typical of heirs of Puritanism and of 19th century America in general. A somewhat legalistic bent was characteristic for many of the Christian movements of the period. An utter seriousness underpinning Christian living was also the rule in much of the Restorationist Movement: people who wanted to re-establish first century Christianity and who believed that to do so was possible were naturally single-minded in how they viewed religion.

While Stone-Campbell soteriology generally stressed the centrality of grace together with what was called the “obligations of grace” or

¹⁴ On the history of Adventist church organization, see Barry D. Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present and Future* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ The denominational magazines show evidence of lively discussion and considerable

dissent on church organization and the choice of a denominational name; cf. Godfrey T. Anderson, ‘Make Us a Name’, *Adventist Heritage* 1 (1974), 28-34.

the “imperatives of the gospel”,¹⁶ the Christian Connection, which influenced Adventism most, was outstanding in emphasizing *imparted* as opposed to *imputed* righteousness. As this movement’s mid-19th century historian J. R. Freese expressed it:

The Christian connection, generally, rejects the popular theology that teaches that “Christ died to reconcile his Father to us.” ... The true doctrine, as conceived by the Christian, is that Christ’s death placed the world in *salvable* ground, while it releases us from no obligation of obedience, and annuls no threat of damnation denounced against the obdurate. This view of the subject leaves justice with God, free moral agency with man, and faith and good works, with the grace of God, as the only means, whereby to secure eternal life.¹⁷

With their Sabbath teaching and the concomitant strong emphasis on the Decalogue, early Adventists slightly modified this semipelagian tendency but were still in clear continuity with it, only that they viewed themselves as the foremost restorers of a commandment-keeping Christianity. With such concepts enshrined in their remnant ecclesiology, it is not surprising that the denomination’s soteriology of the period also laid considerably more stress on the human responsibility in the *ordo salutis* than on God’s free gift of grace. Thus, Adventist notions of salvation were clearly distinct from Lutheran and Calvinist understandings.

One generation after the establishment of the denomination, however, Adventists went through their most severe theological crisis. In a protracted debate fought out through different church papers and finally a discordant General Conference meeting in 1888, two theological factions emerged. Their main difference was soteriological: while many of the older ministers advocated an emphasis on the role of obedience in securing eternal life, a few younger leaders and the movement’s ageing prophetess, Ellen G. White, stressed the centrality of faith in salvation

¹⁶ Paul M. Blowers and William J. Richardson, ‘Grace, Doctrine of’, in Foster *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 364–367.

¹⁷ J.R. Freese, *A History and Advocacy of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Christian General Book Concern, 1852), 68–69 (quoted in Haloviak, ‘A Heritage of Freedom’, 10; emphasis in the original).

and sanctification.¹⁸ A major reason why the conflict became so intense was that the more traditionally minded were fearful that Adventist denominational identity, especially its emphasis on obedience to the Decalogue, was at stake.

Ultimately, Ellen White’s Wesleyan understanding of the Pauline gospel prevailed; the denomination adjusted its theology, re-emphasizing its Protestant identity and thus reconciled the heritage of different strands of Restorationism—and, indeed of Christianity. This episode not only became a turning point in Adventist theological thinking, but also demonstrated how denominational identities may be *in conflict* with larger Christian identities (in this case, with crucial aspects of Protestant teaching) and ultimately may be *reconciled with* them. In fact, this development illustrates that confessional bodies undergo the same tensions as Christianity at large, which points to a pluriformity inherent in the Christian faith.

E. RETURNING TO CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY: THE 1890S AND 1900S

The soteriological turn of Adventism took place one generation after its organization as a church. In the following years, the movement went through another period of less intensely debated but equally significant theological adjustment. From an ecumenical perspective, this may even have been the most important change experienced by the denomination in all of its history, for it concerned the doctrine of God, Christology, and the understanding of the Holy Spirit, the major innovation being the acceptance of trinitarianism.¹⁹ Without the acceptance of these marks

¹⁸ The actual conflict erupted due to different interpretations of the law as παιδαγωγός in Galatians 3:24. The young proponents of the centrality of faith included the Decalogue in the interpretation of this verse; the older leaders entirely rejected this view. On the debates in 1888 and their importance for Adventist history and theology, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2000), 175–188; cf. also Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1992), 158–246.

¹⁹ The shift to trinitarianism is well documented by Jerry A. Moon, ‘The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 1: Historical Overview’, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41.1 (2003): 113–129, and Id., ‘The Adventist Trinity Debate, Part 2: The Role of

of Christian orthodoxy, Adventists would probably have hardly found common ground with many other Christian denominations in subsequent generations.

Because of the strong Adventist emphasis on doctrines particular to their movement and a few other Christian bodies, there was less discussion, in comparison, about more universal aspects of the Christian faith, such as creation, the Godhead, or Christology. In fact, Adventists were united, almost without exception, in rejecting trinitarian views until the 1880s. Likewise, semi-Arian concepts were held by many Adventists throughout the 19th century, and the orthodox two-nature Christology was strongly disputed in the same period. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Adventists also largely considered the Holy Spirit a divine energy, not a person of the trinity, until the 1890s.²⁰ The changes to a trinitarian position around the turn of the century were mainly due to Ellen White, who made trinitarian statements in her 1898 book on the life of Jesus, *The Desire of Ages*.²¹

Again the Restorationist Movement was the ground on which the earlier Adventist persuasions had grown. Alexander Campbell was no outright anti-trinitarian like the Unitarians and Deists of his epoch, but he had an “aversion to the traditional Niceno-Constantinopolitan language of the one divine *essence* (*ousia*) in three co-eternal ‘Persons’ (*hypostaseis*).” Barton Stone may be described as a non-trinitarian (he openly criticized trinitarianism), and the Christian Connection was actually clearly anti-trinitarian.²² Thus, when Adventists moved to the classical Christian position, they again rejected a prominent strand of Restorationism, one that actually best illustrated the objection to traditional creeds. Since Adventism thus developed away from the Restorationist

Ellen White, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41.2 (2003): 275-292.

²⁰ Ibid. and Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*, 36-50.

²¹ Ibid. and Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 669), 671. A few other church leaders had started to write positively on the personality of the Holy Spirit, the dual natures of Christ, and the trinity in the years before, but Ellen White's support for these concepts appears to have been decisive.

²² Paul M. Blowers, ‘God, Doctrine of’, in Foster *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 356-359 (quotation on p. 357); Thomas H. Olbricht, ‘Christian Connection’, in *ibid.*, 190-191.

approach to understanding the Christian faith, its denominational identity—conceived at first as consisting of distinctive doctrines—was increasingly *broadened* by more universal Christian teachings. Clearly particular persuasions were no hindrance for accepting catholicity in beliefs that early Christian confessions of faith had already contained, even if these doctrines used extra-biblical language. This was a manifest shift from the Restorationist concept that terms not explicitly contained in scripture should be viewed with suspicion.²³

F. CRAFTING DENOMINATIONAL ORTHODOXY: 1931

Equipped with a threefold identity—denominational distinctiveness, Protestant persuasions, and the chief characteristics of Christian orthodoxy, the Seventh-day Adventist Church entered the post-World War I period as a self-confident movement whose clergy and members felt on par with leaders and adherents of other Christian churches. While retaining their somewhat exclusivist self-image as God's pre-eminent instrument in the world, they began to participate in major Christian meetings such as the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, set up their own extensive and international missionary enterprise, and began to view themselves as part of a greater movement which brought the gospel to the whole world. Clearly the renewed emphasis on Protestant soteriology and the return to trinitarian orthodoxy had made the denominational self-image develop.²⁴

It was precisely in missionary contexts that the question arose, “who is this denomination, and what do they teach?” Understandably, colonial governments and the people who received missionaries wanted to

²³ Cf. the “tripartite formula” of Thomas Campbell's famous *Declaration and Address*; it stressed the authority of “express terms” and “approved precedents” found in the Bible but cautioned that “inferences”, while being valuable, must not become laws for the church (*Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Washington, PA: Washington Christian Association, 1809), 4, 17, and *passim*).

²⁴ One important aspect of the theological development of Adventism in the first half of the 20th century cannot be discussed here in detail: the relationship of the denomination to the emerging fundamentalist movement. Although the denomination went through tensions between fundamentalists and moderates, as a whole it positioned itself very close to the fundamentalist camp.

obtain clear information about what kind of believers they were dealing with. However, the Restorationist heritage of anti-creedalism continued to exist, and only years after the last pioneers of the Adventist movement had died (Ellen White, one of the last eminent figures of the early period, lived until 1915) was the formulation of 22 “Fundamental Beliefs” undertaken in 1931.²⁵ While asserting that this was *no* creed—a claim that made the rupture with the non-creedal tradition appear less marked—the “Fundamental Beliefs” were in fact a confessional statement comparable in length and scope to the first part of the *Confessio Augustana* or the *Confessio Belgica* and thus constituted, at least to some degree, an equivalent of creedal statements in other churches.

One does not have to emphasize that the creation of “Fundamental Beliefs” effectively relativized Restorationism’s anti-creed principle. In fact, this development can also be viewed as a logical consequence of the threefold Adventist identity—denominational, Protestant, and doctrinally orthodox—in which the latter two elements were fully in accordance with creedal statements. After reverting from the Restorationist, non-denominational and non-trinitarian positions, abandoning the non-creedal stand was only another link in a chain in which Adventists discarded elements of their Restorationism heritage while embracing positions that belonged more to the “mainstream” of the period.²⁶ It is remarkable that they thus dispensed with one model of catholicity—the Restorationist one—and slowly approached another one: that of a denominationally differentiated catholicity.

It must be noted, though, that the “Fundamental Beliefs” did not constitute a departure from Adventist reasoning in the generation before; rather, it made the already existing Adventist denominational orthodoxy plain to members and the public alike. By combining the three strands of

²⁵ The Fundamental Beliefs were published in the *Seventh-Day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1931), 377–380, and subsequent editions of the *Yearbook*.

²⁶ Another major link with Restorationism—presumably the most important one—is biblical hermeneutics. In the 1960s and 1970s, some Seventh-day Adventist theologians began to interpret the Bible with novel hermeneutical approaches and thus initiated debates that are in full sway today. The discussion of this phenomenon with reference to Restorationism would demand an inquiry in its own right.

its identity into a confessional statement, the denomination understandably pursued a kind of “addition method”; after the death of the church founders, who had led the denomination thus far, anything less would have created a grave controversy. Therefore, the “Fundamental Beliefs” represent a unique combination of particularity *and* catholicity; basic Christian tenets of faith are *part of* denominational convictions, but at the same time, denominational identity remains clearly *differentiated* from Christianity as a whole.

G. ASSUMING AN EVANGELICAL IDENTITY: THE 1950S

Having positioned itself as part of orthodox Christianity, another question was likely to arise: “Where in Christianity do Adventists belong?” The answer would not have been altogether clear in the generations before. The Stone-Campbell Movement consisted of different strands and developed into enormously dissimilar groups and churches ranging all the way from fundamentalist to liberal. Adventists, likewise, came from many backgrounds. The main difference was that Adventism was more united organizationally and theologically, but after the gradual move back to orthodox Christianity it was possible for Adventists to look out for their closest relatives in the larger Christian sphere. In North America in the 1950s, these relatives were undoubtedly the Evangelicals.

The informal but significant dialogues of Adventist leaders with representatives of the Evangelical Movement in the mid-1950s and their outcomes are well documented through two dissertations.²⁷ For the first time since the Adventist church was formed—100 years after its inception—the denomination was engaged in a major dialogical process in which mutual understanding was the ultimate goal.²⁸ The result of the

²⁷ Paul Ernest McGraw, ‘Born in Zion? The Margins of Fundamentalism and the Definition of Seventh-Day Adventism (Walter Martin, Donald Gray Barnhouse)’, Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2004; Juhyeok Nam, ‘Reactions to the Seventh-Day Adventist Evangelical Conferences and “Questions on Doctrine”, 1955–1971’, Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2005.

²⁸ Similar conversations took place in Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s with representatives of the World Council of Churches; cf. *So Much in Common: Documents of Interest in the Conversations Between the World Council of Churches and the*

conversations was that Walter Martin, an eminent evangelical movement specialist of the period, declared Adventists to be a Christian church with the marks of orthodoxy.²⁹

The major publication that came out of the process in 1957, *Questions on Doctrine*,³⁰ attempted to achieve a most difficult task. On the one hand, it discussed forty-eight questions, most of which related to Adventist teachings that many Christians did not accept. At the same time, its thrust was conciliatory; in the very first section, it asserted that it was:

desirable and necessary for us to declare our position anew upon the great fundamental teachings of the Christian faith ... We are one with our fellow Christians of denominational groups in the great fundamentals of the faith once delivered to the saints. Our hope is in a crucified, risen, ministering, and soon-returning Saviour.³¹

Thus, in spite of the bulk of text that dealt with Adventist particularities, *Questions on Doctrine* clearly attempted to demonstrate how Adventists belonged to the Evangelical fold. The first question, “Doctrines We Share With Other Christians”,³² which immediately followed the “Fundamental Beliefs”, differentiated three groups of doctrines held by the denomination with the following headings:

Seventh-Day Adventist Church (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973). From the 1990s onward, the Seventh-day Adventist Church engaged in official dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Salvation Army, and other churches.

²⁹ W. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960). Both in the Evangelical world and inside Adventism, there was a good amount of dissatisfaction with this recognition. Many Evangelicals continued to consider Adventists as “cultic,” and a minority of Adventist theologians and leaders felt that some denominational distinctives had not been presented properly in the course of the discussions.

³⁰ *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief*, Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957). The book is commonly cited as *Questions on Doctrine* or QOD and was re-published with an extensive historical introduction: *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, rev. ed., Adventist Classic Library (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2003).

³¹ *Questions on Doctrine*, 31–32.

³² *Ibid.*, 21–25.

- I. In Common With Conservative Christians and the Historic Protestant Creeds, We Believe ...
- II. On Certain Controverted Doctrines Among Conservative Christians, We Hold One of Two or More Alternate Views. ...
- III. In a Few Areas of Christian Thought, Our Doctrines Are Distinctive With Us. ...

Interestingly, the first section contained nineteen items, the second twelve, and the third only five.³³ The fact that the largest number appear in the first and second sections certainly did not come about by chance. As the introductory text of this chapter says, “Practically all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs are held by one or more Christian groups. A few are distinctive with us.” Evidently, the whole presentation aimed at elucidating how Adventists fit into the larger picture of Christianity, and more especially of conservative Protestantism.

What clearly shines through the events of the 1950s is that the Adventist denomination increasingly viewed its particular identity as *part of* a larger Christian identity—with a clear profile but inseparably connected to the heritage shared with followers of Christ in other denominations, especially Protestants. As the North American situation had changed from 19th century Restorationist sentiments to mid-20th century Evangelical mobilization, it was only natural for a self-confident but minor denomination to reposition itself in the midst of what they thought to be the evangelical catholicity of its period.

H. CONCLUSION

This paper could continue discussing further doctrinal and theological developments in Adventism until the present,³⁴ but its aim was to merely examine selected stations in the denomination’s doctrinal journey so as

³³ These five are a heavenly sanctuary, the investigative [pre-advent] judgment, the prophetic gift manifested in the ministry of Ellen White, the seal of God, and the three angels of Revelation 14.

³⁴ The formulation of a new set of 27 Fundamental Beliefs in 1980 must be considered another major station in the doctrinal journey; the addition of a 28th article to this set in 2005 (dealing with spirituality and the spirit world) is also noteworthy. However, it is too early to say a definite word on these developments.

to draw conclusions for the issue of catholicity and particularity. What has emerged from these different stations and their correlated stages is that Seventh-day Adventism can be better understood when its Restorationist Christian Connection background is taken into account. The Restoration Movement and its concept of universality, its Biblicism, and its suspicion of creed, dogma and denominations all contributed to the birth of Adventism. Seventh-day Adventists carried Restorationist ideas further, which first made them Restorationists of their own kind. Later, this very journey refined some aspects of the Restorationist paradigm, relativized others, and finally moved the denomination into Christian orthodoxy, notably in its conservative, Protestant variant.

The Stone-Campbell Movement is of enduring significance for the reflection on particular and universal facets of Christianity because its protagonists denied the very necessity to differentiate between catholicity and particularity. To them, particularities of any kind were to be rejected. Ironically, though, Restorationists did not realize that the very rejection of creeds and translocal church organization is precisely such a particularity. Still, the Restorationist Movement illustrates that a variety of catholicities may be imagined, and that some constructions of catholicity may actually contradict one another. Moreover, a rediscovery of Restorationist impulses would help focus dialogues between denominations and the search for universality to a few essentials of the Christian faith: an emphasis on Christ, the importance of the scriptures, liberty of conscience, the relativization of denominational tradition, and an emphasis on Christian living.

One question to be considered when trying to appreciate Restorationist thinking is Käsemann's famous thesis that the New Testament itself is actually the foundation for denominationalism³⁵ rather than the guarantor of unity within the church that is conceptualized either organizationally or in an anti-institutional manner. While Käsemann's insight is not to be construed as a reason to celebrate disunity, one must recognize

³⁵ Ernst Käsemann, 'Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?', *Evangelische Theologie* 11 (1951/52): 13–21 [English version: id., 'The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church', in id., *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 95–107].

that the scriptures are rich enough for different Christian groups to emerge and claim validity of their particular interpretations of parts of the very canon that represents catholicity.

The ensuing task for Christian denominations, therefore, is to reflect on the way in which their particularity relates to catholicity even if this catholicity cannot be fully defined. Rather, the latter is subject to permanent debate on the basis of the scriptural canon, with the consequence of minimalist versions like the one that Restorationism proposed and the more elaborate attempts as may be seen in the manifold confessional writings that were viewed as universally valid by their respective adherents.

Relating denominational identities to Christianity at large, i.e. catholicities of any kind, may lead to a variety of possibilities. Several of them have been visible in the Restorationist and Adventist histories; other relationships that one could imagine are denominational identities as *secondary* or *primary*, as *supplement* or *translation* of Christianity, as *influencing* Christianity as a whole or as *mutually influencing*—and further types of relations are also conceivable.

Altogether, denominations stand in a *dialectical* and *dialogical* relationship with Christianity at large. What is considered universal and particular always has to be re-negotiated on the basis of the canon and the affirmation that *Jesus Christ is Lord*. The very humanness of the catholicities that we construct and the limitations that our peculiarities entail are part of the world this side of the eschaton. Although we cannot rejoice in these imperfections and discrepancies, we must acknowledge them. At the same time, it is important to learn from Restorationism how preliminary human organizations and formulations are and to stress that we have one Lord, who judges our hearts and whose grace surpasses our human endeavours.

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