

November/70.



"Watchman,
what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

"THE CRISIS OF THE CHURCH"

The title of this thought paper is borrowed from an article appearing in *Christianity Today*.¹ Written by the editor, Dr Harold Lindsell, it sets forth certain forces at work in society and in the church itself which have produced the crisis. According to the editor, theistic evolution, ethical relativity, humanism, liberalism, syncretism, and universalism have mounted heavy assaults on the simplicity of the gospel and its basic objectives. Sadly, one must admit that these same forces - somewhat diluted - are at work in various segments of the Remnant Church. However, it is not the objective of this paper to document these trends, but to observe the solution offered by Dr. Lindsell, and paraphrase it so as to apply to us, and our need.

The editor stated in his final sentence - "Only if the churches are *purified* will they find renewal and new life, and a new dynamic."² Paraphrased for us it would say - "Only when the Seventh-day Adventist Church is purified will it find its true objective - the preparation of a people to stand in the day of the Lord." This challenge recalls some comments from the pen of Inspiration. One comment states prophetically:

The days of the purification of the church are hastening on apace. God will have a people pure and true. In the mighty sifting soon to take place, we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel. The signs reveal that the time is near when the Lord will manifest that His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor.³

Another admonition reads:

Let the churches who claim to believe the truth, who are advocating the law of God, keep that law and depart from all iniquity. Let the individual members of the church resist the temptations to practice evils and indulge in sin. Let the church commence the work of purification before God by repentance, humiliation, deep heart searching, for we are in the antitypical day of atonement - solemn hour fraught with eternal results.⁴

This purification of the church involves the message of righteousness by faith. While this message is declared to be the beginning of the loud cry,⁵ and while we have primarily considered it an evangelistic thrust, our denominational history teaches us that this message was carried first to the churches to arouse them. This was to have been the first phase of the loud cry - but to this fact we have closed our eyes.

Following the General Conference Session of 1888, Sister White joined with Elders A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner in general meetings for the church ranging from South Lancaster in Massachusetts to Ottawa, Kansas. The message of righteousness by faith was presented, and the response was a genuine revival and reformation in the churches. Writing of the South Lancaster meeting, which was typical, Elder S. N. Haskell stated:

The religious meetings. . . were characterized by the outpouring of the Spirit of God. There was no urging, and not even was there a call made for those who desired to come forward for prayers; and no excitement was noticeable in any of the meetings, but an intense self-examination on the part of nearly all in attendance. The most prominent feature was the deep conviction resting on many because of their sins. Grievances of long standing, known only to the parties themselves, were removed; confessions and restitutions were made in many instances. Much of the work was done in a quiet manner, between those who were concerned, so that nothing was known of it until the confession or restitution was made; and then testimony would be borne in meeting, telling of the sin committed and the course pursued. To such confessions the Spirit of God came in and witnessed in a manner to make it evident that God was walking in the midst of His people.

The great desire manifested was for purity of heart, and all seemed to realize that we are in the investigative judgment, and that every thing should be made right with God and with our brethren. The work went deep and thorough. There was a freedom in confession that is seldom witnessed, and nothing appeared to be forced. No pressure was

brought to bear on any; but when sin was confessed, the song of praise and thanksgiving which followed was refreshing indeed.⁶

We cannot escape the fact that our greatest need today is for a repeat of this experience. To set forth on a great evangelistic crusade, and add to our numbers merely for the sake of the record thus to prove statistically that God is with us, without first meeting the conditions which God prescribes is to deceive ourselves. We may mouth revival and reformation and yet in heart be far from the program that God designs should characterize the work of the church. To follow such a form of mere lip-service is to invite spiritual disaster, and then in desperation to seek to force an evidence of spiritual power would only produce a false latter rain experience. The question is asked - "When sin is making its march upon the people who claim to be elevating the moral standard of righteousness, how can we expect God to turn His power in our behalf and save us as a people that did righteousness?"⁷

Where then must the work *begin*? Not in large evangelistic crusades; nor in calls for money to finance massive public efforts; but in simply working for the purification of the church. "Let us *as a people*, as far as possible, *cleanse the camp* of moral defilement and aggravating sins."⁷ This is not a pleasant, or a welcome work, nor an easy task. Therefore, it is presently shunned by pastors and church administrators. This writer has conducted in various churches where he has served, revivals with results similar to those described as taking place at South Lancaster in 1889. He has also seen those who resisted the Spirit at such meetings go to the conference with the objections that the standards were being placed too high, and the people were becoming discouraged and disheartened. In most instances, this writer's experience has been that the conference leadership would sympathize with these obstructionists. A crisis would result. Either the minister had to deny the working and guidance of the Spirit in his ministry,

or else finds himself at odds with the brethren. To maintain his integrity, and the conviction of the working of the Holy Spirit with his labors, would produce a division; and the conference leadership under most circumstances is quick to place the blame on the minister rather than recognize that false sympathy produced the division. On the other hand when such was not the attitude of the conference brethren, and they placed their influence behind a genuine revival and reformation, the work moved forward.

We, today, are hearing much about revival and reformation, but it is being interpreted to mean more evangelism - more numbers - and without a true revival and reformation, evangelism motivated by a surface thrust for mere adherents will continue to dilute the spiritual effectiveness of the church. We have gone so far down the road, that the return to be what God would have us be, so that we can truly give the loud cry - in its second phase to the world - will require travail of soul, and a deep unmoveable conviction. There will be *in the church* a terrible conflict - a crisis! We read:

Everything may move forward amid *apparent* prosperity; but Satan is wide-awake, and is studying and counseling with his evil angels another mode of attack where he can be successful. The contest will wax more and more fierce on the part of Satan; for he is moved by a power from beneath. *As the work of God's people moves forward with sanctified, resistless energy, planting the standard of Christ's righteousness in the church*, moved by a power from the throne of God, the great controversy will wax stronger and stronger, and will become more and more determined. Mind will be arrayed against mind, plans against plans, principles of heavenly origin against principles of Satan. Truth in its varied phases will be in conflict with error in its ever-varying, increasing forms, and which, if possible, will deceive the very elect.⁸

Where will we stand; how shall we stand? We often think that these things are in the future; but that future has become present, and we seem to know it not. In this very hour, the struggle is going forward in the church! Unless the forces for truth and righteousness prevail, and more than a mere mouthing of revival and reformation is realized, we shall see a false revival sweep through

our church accompanied by emotionalism, and many decisions produced by psychological and hypnotic means.

What is needed for this hour? "The ministry, the pulpit, and the press demand men like Caleb, who will do and dare, men whose eyes are single to detect truth from error, whose ears are consecrated to catch the words from the faithful Watcher."⁸

Where may such be found?

When trees without fruit are cut down as cumberers of the ground, when multitudes of false brethren are distinguished from the true, then *the hidden ones will be revealed to view*, and with hosannas range under the banner of Christ. Those who have been timid and self-distrustful, will declare themselves openly for Christ and His truth. *The most weak and hesitating in the church, will be as David - willing to do and dare.* The deeper the night for God's people, the more brilliant the stars. Satan will sorely harass the faithful, but, in the name of Jesus, they will come off more than conquerors. *Then will the church of Christ appear "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."*⁹

¹Harold Lindsell, "The Crisis of the Church", Christianity Today, September 11, 1970, pp. 4-6

²Ibid., p. 6

³Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 80

⁴Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk ii, p. 378

⁵Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, November 22, 1892

⁶S. N. Haskell, "The General Meeting at South Lancaster, Mass.", Review and Herald, January 29, 1889

⁷Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk ii, p. 379

⁸Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 407

⁹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 81-82

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Nov 1970 (III-11)