

Information on the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement

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I. Origin

In many parts of the world field today Adventists are confronted by an organization calling itself the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement. Sometimes this group is designated as the “German Reform Movement” because it originated in Germany. Frequently, this organization is quite hostile, although some of its members have not severed all their emotional ties with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

From the beginning, Seventh-day Adventists in Europe experienced a number of difficulties, especially in the realm of Sabbath observance and military service. Children were required by law to attend school on Sabbath, and the work-week ended on Saturday afternoon. Adventist young men who complied with the required military service frequently went to prison for their refusal to work and fulfill their duty on Sabbath.

At the beginning of World War I, when the government placed additional pressure on our leaders, church leaders in Germany buckled and instructed church members to fulfill their military duties on Sabbath as other soldiers do on Sunday.

This position on combatant service, as well as doing duty on Sabbath, stood clearly in opposition to the traditional position taken by Adventists in the past. When the German members were confronted with this new position, many began to protest vigorously. Particularly in the city of Bremen the opposition became very vocal against the church’s leadership. This situation caused the leadership to react with further actions and they disfellowshipped the protesters.

The disfellowshipped members then began an open war against the Adventist Church, a

war which became very bitter at times. In 1919, before the disfellowshipped members had determined what stand the General Conference had officially taken on the matter of military service, they published 10,000 copies of a pamphlet describing the Adventist Church as the great apostate woman. In the document they attempted to prove from the writings of Ellen White that the words “Babylon is fallen” applied to Seventh-day Adventists, in spite of her clear statements to the contrary. “When anyone arises, either among us or outside of us, who is burdened with a message which declares that the people of God are numbered with Babylon, and claims that the loud cry is a call to come out of her, you may know that he is not bearing the message of truth. Receive him not, nor bid him Godspeed; for God has not spoken by him, neither has He given a message to him, but he has run before he was sent” (TM 41).

Apparently the early Reformers were ignorant of this statement. In 1919 the disfellowshipped members organized themselves into a church body under the name “International Missionary Society of Seventh-day Adventists.” Later when they found statements in the Spirit of Prophecy referring to a reform movement, they saw themselves as a fulfillment of these prophecies and changed their name to “Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement.”

In 1920, Elder Daniells, the General Conference President, traveled to Germany for talks with the German leadership and the leaders of the Reform Movement. Although Elder Daniells made it clear that the German leadership had made a mistake, his attempts to heal the breach between the two sides failed. Because the General Conference did not immediately disband the division and disfellowship the leaders as a punishment for their sins, the Reformers asserted that the General Conference became responsible for their mistakes.

Since the 1920 meeting, several attempts at reunion have been made, but they all have failed due to the unbending spirit of the Reform leaders who believe that Adventists must accept their views in order to be right with God.

II. Divergent Doctrines

Reformers believe that God called their movement into existence and that it was prophesied to come. Two events are cited as proof:

(1) In 1888, at the General Conference in Minneapolis, the church, they claim, rejected the message of Righteousness by Faith as proclaimed by Waggoner and Jones. God, therefore, raised up the Reform Movement to proclaim this message in clarity.

(2) The leadership, they say, overthrew the commandments of God in 1914 when it encouraged members to serve in the army and fulfill their duty on Sabbath. The Reformers opposed this move, hence they have the right to exist as a separate movement.

Several of their teachings cannot be supported by either Scripture or the Ellen G. White's writings:

Liberty of Conscience – The Reform Movement insists that the church must spell out and hold up strict and specific standards for the people to follow. In many cases the members themselves expect the church to specify every detail of how they are to act in any given situation, e.g., military service. Little room is given to an individual's conscience.

Military Service – Reform Adventists believe that no true believer could ever join the military, even in medical work. Seventh-day Adventists hold that church members may serve as noncombatants in the military.

Vegetarianism – They have made the question of vegetarianism a test of fellowship, despite the clear statement from Ellen White, “We are not to make the use of flesh food a test of fellowship” (9T 159).

144,000 – They accept this figure as a literal number. Hence only 144,000 will be redeemed through the preaching of the three angel's messages in the period extending from 1844 to the end of time. This provides a reason for their small number.

Closed Communion – Reform Adventists hold that since Christ held the Last Supper alone with his disciples, the Communion service is reserved only for members in good and regular

standing.

Divorce and Remarriage – The stand taken by the Reform Movement on this subject is that no matter what has taken place in a marital breakup, there is no possibility even for the innocent party to be restored to church membership if he or she remarries.

The Remnant – It is taught that there are three entities in Revelation 12:17, the woman, the seed, and the remnant. The woman is seen as a symbol for the Protestant churches, the seed is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the remnant refers to the Reform Movement.

The Laodicean Message – The warning addressed to Laodicea is believed to apply to the SDA General Conference leadership and indicates the rejection of the Adventist Church. In an attempt to find a biblical foundation for this view, they note that the message is addressed to “the angel of the church,” which they assume is the church’s leadership.