



*"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

SO MUCH IN COMMON

A Document of Interest in Conversations Between the WCC and the SDA Church

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So Much in Common is a booklet published by the World Council of Churches in 1973, and co-authored by Dr. Lukas Vischer, then Director of the Faith and Order Secretariat of the WCC, and Dr. B. B. Beach, now head of the Public Relations and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference.

This "dossier" is divided into two parts: Part I - "Where conversation begins," and Part II - "How conversation moves." Under Part I can be found the following sections:

1. Questions and Answers about the World Council of Churches.
2. Constitution of the World Council of Churches.
3. The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches.
4. The Seventh-day Adventist Church.

[Here is a key section. It is an Essay presenting the Seventh-day Adventist Church to an ecumenical audience. It first appeared in 1967 in the Ecumenical Review, official organ of the WCC. At

the time, this Essay formed the basis of an editorial response in the Review written by R. F. Cottrell, then associate editor. (Review & Herald, March 23, 30, and April 6, 1967) The result of this exchange led to the appointment of Dr. Earle Hilgert of Andrews University to the Faith and Order Commission. The Essay in the Ecumenical Review was drawn largely from the book - Questions on Doctrine

5. Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists [From 1972 Yearbook]
6. Relationship [of SDA Church] to other [Missionary] societies.

[Here is quoted an action of the GC Executive Committee in 1926, which stated that the SDA Church recognizes "every agency that lifts up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world," and that the Church holds "in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ." Never mind to which Christ they are introduced.]

Part II contains the following sub-topics:

7. Seventh-day Adventist Questions regarding the World Council of Churches.
 8. Common Witness and Proselytism.
- [This is a study document published in 1971 by a Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC.]
9. Adventist Reaction to the foregoing Document.
 10. The World Council of Churches/Seventh-day Adventist Conversations Meetings 1965-1969.

Introductory Statement

At the beginning of the book, an "Introductory Statement" signed by both B. B. Beach and Lukas Vischer is to be found. The statement reads as follows: (All direct quotes from So Much in Common is by permission.)

"Regular conversations between representatives of the WCC and Seventh-day Adventists have been taking place on an annual basis in Geneva and Collonges since 1965. The participants in these meetings feel that the mutual comprehension engendered and the personal fellowship enjoyed have been beneficial.

"As a result of these international contacts, and also independently, contacts on national and local levels have been increasing in recent years. It is now felt that it would serve a useful purpose to make available to a wider constituency the results of the WCC/SDA Conversations.

"With the above purpose in mind, various documents and publications have been brought together in a "dossier." It is expected the information here contained will be welcomed by national councils of churches, SDA Union conferences and church officials or persons presently involved in or contemplating future conversations or contacts on a national or local level.

"The documents in this "dossier" are of various kinds. Some present SDA or WCC self-understanding and give basic information on the organization, basis and purpose of both bodies. Other documents represent summaries and analyses of the discussions or present statements that have emerged from the Conversations during the past eight years.

"The difference in the character of the documents dealing with the WCC and those presenting the SDA Church reflects the fundamental dissimilarity in the nature of the two partners in dialogue. As one document clearly points out: 'There is a fundamental difference in the nature of the organizations which precludes comparisons. While the SDA Church is a world church with established fundamental beliefs and one polity, the WCC is a council or fellowship of churches representing a great variety of theological beliefs, traditions and church politics.' This explains why the document deals with

SDA beliefs and teachings, but cannot represent the WCC in a comparable way.

"It is obvious that many more documents, articles or books having a bearing on SDA relations to the ecumenical movement could have been included in this "dossier." Rather than to increase the content of the "dossier," bibliographical reference to additional items interested parties may want to consult have been included in order to point to further useful sources of information.

"Those involved in the organization of the contacts on the international level do not expect these to now simply fade away in the wake of enlarged local or national liaisons. On the contrary, it is hoped that local or national conversations may provide added meaning and justification for possible future contacts on the world level and help establish a sound basis for conscientious cooperation in those areas where this would appear to be feasible and useful.

"It is, therefore, sincerely desired and hoped that there will be a regular feedback to the undersigned regarding the developments in this field. It is expected that possibly another meeting of the WCC/SDA Conversations will take place at some future date, when attention will be given to experiences on the national and local levels."

(In this Thought Paper, we shall begin with the reproduction of the section by Dr. B. B. Beach on "The World Council of Churches/ Seventh-day Adventist Conversations and Their Significance." (pp. 98-102) If we are unable to reproduce the whole of this article, we shall conclude it in the next issue. Our comments on the individual paragraphs will be in brackets.)

B. B. Beach's Analysis

"In view of the fact that informal conversations between the World Council of Churches and the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been taking place on a regular basis for over four years, it is not inappropriate to consider the significance of these contacts and take stock of what has been accomplished so far.

A. Historical Background

"Strange as it may seem, these yearly Consultations are an indirect by-product of Vatican II. In fact, while in Rome in connection with the Vatican Council a WCC staff member and an Adventist representative came to the conclusion that an informal meeting of a small group of Seventh day Adventists and an equal number of representatives from the World Council of Churches would fulfil a useful purpose - Adventists being insufficiently informed regarding the World Council of Churches, and the WCC staff and church leaders being equally in need of additional and more comprehensive knowledge regarding the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

[We are left with the assumption that the "Adventist representative" was B. B. Beach while the "staff member" of the WCC was Lukas Vischer. It should also be noted that the Consultations were conceived at the wrong place - in Rome at the Vatican II Council; and the justification for so doing - insufficient information regarding the WCC - is without foundation. All that a child of God needs to have enough knowledge of the WCC is to find out how God looks upon it. This is found in the book of Revelation. When, however, we abandon our trust in the sure word of prophecy, we go where we should not go - Rome - and enter into Consultations with those which prophecy designates as "the false prophet." What only can such an end be?]

"The first meeting was held in 1965, the participants being selected by the two organizers. Thus, the Conversations got under way on a completely informal basis and were held under the sole responsibility of the participants. Subsequently meetings have become somewhat more formal, in the sense that the employing bodies of the SDA participants have authorized and financed their presence and the executive committees of the three Adventist Divisions involved have given their blessing by facilitating the selection of the SDA representatives; the World Council of Churches has defrayed the expenses of its group. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been kept informed regarding the meetings, though it has taken no direct, active part in the Consultations, except through its three European Divisional branch offices. The November 24-26, 1969, Consultation was the fifth

in the series.

[In considering the involvement of the General Conference in these Consultations beyond the suggestion that they were "kept informed," one needs to understand the organizational structure of the hierarchy of the Church. The President of each of the Divisions, and who served as chairman of the executive committees which gave their blessing to the Consultations, is also a Vice President of the General Conference, and thus is answerable to the President and Executive Committee of the General Conference. Thus no Divisional Executive Committee would bless or authorize such a step which involved the Church as a whole unless approval had been forthcoming from the General Conference.]

B. Purpose of Conversations

"The original purpose in meeting together was quite simple, straightforward and unpretentious: to acquaint each side with the structure, functioning and thinking of the other side. This frank exchange of views was to be accompanied by a sincere endeavor to remove misconceptions and improve understanding. Because of the incontestable usefulness of the first meeting, it was felt by all participants that the Conversations should be continued on a regular basis. As a result, subsequent Consultations have been more in the nature of dialogue, by moving from the level of information to the niveau of serious theological discussion.

"It was made unmistakably clear from the very start, that there is no plan or expectation on the part of the Adventists of joining the WCC; nor is the WCC pushing for SDA membership, though, taking a long-range view, it may feel that this would be desirable. On the other hand, the Adventist partners in the Conversations do not expect their partners in the dialogue to become a part of the Advent Movement, though they may feel this would be apropos. It is of course appreciated by all engaged in the Conversations that there is a fundamental difference in the nature of the organizations which precludes comparisons. While the SDA Church is a world church with established fundamental beliefs and one polity, the World Council of Churches is a council or fellowship of churches representing a great variety of theological beliefs, traditions

and church polities, each church preserving its own doctrines, ecclesiology and that measure of complete independence which it feels called upon to exert. The World Council is not empowered to legislate for its member churches.

"In addition to generating increased mutual understanding, the exploration of possible areas of Christian cooperation and concrete, practical Christian service has become another valuable intent of the Conversations.

C. Style of Meetings

"The Conversations have been conducted in a rather free, informal and friendly atmosphere, under the joint chairmanship of the WCC and SDA conveners. Approximately 15-20 participants have taken part each time. WCC participants have included members of the WCC staff (especially from the Faith and Order Secretariat) and representatives of various Christian traditions. The SDA group has included SDA church leaders and educators. There has been a greater turnover of participants on the WCC side. The Consultations are held on the basis of equal footing, each yearly meeting taking place part of the time at the WCC headquarters in Geneva and the rest of the time at the nearby *Seminaire Adventiste* at Collonges, just across the border in France. The core of each Consultation centers around the presentation and discussion of papers dealing with the subject matter chosen for the meeting. In addition, time has been given over to general discussion and exchange of views regarding questions and developments of mutual interest or concerning matters needing clarification.

[The names of the Seventh-day Adventist leaders and educators who participated in these Consultations should be made available to every member of the Church. I would suggest you write to the General Conference President and ask to be supplied with these names. The answer you receive back should be most interesting. We will appreciate your sharing with us these answers.]

D. Subject Matter of Conversations

"The 1965 Conversations started with a broad tour d'horizon and concentrated on discussion of the organizations, beliefs

and aims of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the consideration of the organization, basis and aims of the World Council. The questions of proselytism and religious liberty were briefly touched upon. Subsequent Consultations dealt with the following areas: law and grace, Sabbath versus Sunday, proselytism and religious liberty, prophecy. The November, 1969, Conversations pin-pointed the 1968 general discussions of prophecy by coming to grips with specific exegesis of Revelation 13, 14; Matthew 24, and II Thessalonians 2, passages which Seventh-day Adventists believe have a real relevance to Christianity today.

[At this point we are faced with a conundrum. To our knowledge, there has not been an official release of any transcript of the 1969 Conversations, nor of the papers presented by the Adventist participants in regard to Revelation 13, or II Thessalonians 2. Assuming that the Adventist conferees did present the historic Adventist position on II Thessalonians 2, that "that Wicked" (verse 8) represents the Papacy as "the man of sin" and "he in whom all iniquity has fixed its abode" (Thayer) - the subsequent actions of the Adventist convener, B. B. Beach, forms the basis of the conundrum. Growing out of these dialogues, there developed a set of circumstances wherein B. B. Beach presented to Pope Paul VI a medallion as a "gold-covered symbol of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." (Review, August 11, 1977, p. 23) See Documentary - Pope Paul VI Given Gold Medallion by Adventist Church Leader. How one believing historic Adventist teaching regarding "the man of sin" could present the Church in "symbol" into the hands of the Antichrist is unbelievable.]

"Without endeavouring to present here a full summary of the subject matter of the Conversations, a few general observations can be made. In the discussion on law and grace there was considerable agreement. If there was a difference, it was mostly one of emphasis, the WCC representatives possibly laying greater stress on the superiority of grace and the SDA participants giving more emphasis to the compatibility of law and grace.

"In the discussions dealing with the Sabbath and Sunday, the incongruity of views,

as could be expected, was quite substantial. For the Seventh-day Adventists the seventh-day Sabbath is a weekly memorial of God's creative act as recorded in the Old Testament, and of Christ's redemptive act in the New Testament. The fourth commandment, therefore, has continuing, heterocentric significance for modern man. The WCC participants connected the Sabbath more with Mosaic social legislation than with creation and felt that the present-day Christian(?) Sunday is tied to the resurrection and eucharistic service, and has only a remote connection with the Sabbath requirement of the Decalogue. In regard to the related question of calendar reform, the discussions revealed that Seventh-day Adventists have no objection to a fixed Easter date in the present Gregorian calendar, but strongly oppose calendar reform of the "blank" day type, which would disrupt the orderly succession of the weekly cycle by interposing from time to time extra days. This would cause the first (Sunday) or seventh (Sabbath) day of the week to fall on other days. Some WCC participants expressed similar opposition to this type of new calendar suggested in some circles.

"The agreement in the discussions about religious liberty was very substantial indeed. Increased cooperation in this area is considered by both sides to be desirable. Concerning proselytism, there was a large measure of mutual understanding. Agreement was complete regarding methods, the SDA Church having since 1926 an official policy which in its provisions [See page 1] closely resembles the 1961 WCC document entitled "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty." Both sides fully agreed that conversion can only come by uncoerced faith and sharing of Christian conviction is not only a right, but a duty. Conversations did reveal some divergence of views regarding relationships and the ecumenical implications of Christian witness. Seventh-day Adventists have a deep conviction that it is their duty to proclaim their distinctive witness to all men, and the church therefore consistently stands aloof from territorial comity arrangements. There was some discussion regarding the proper use of the term

"proselytism." Both sides admitted that the expression is somewhat ambiguous, because the word has received in ecumenical circles a definitely perjorative connotation, implying corrupted witness, which does not harmonize with the common dictionary definition of proselytism.

"The Faith and Order Secretariat has prepared an excellent analysis of the discussions regarding "Apocalyptic Prophecy". Suffice it to say here that while exegesis of particular passages does not by any means always lead to disagreement, there are some marked differences in the respective understanding of the prophetic and apocalyptic texts. The Conversations indicated that the SDA approach tends to be more "systematic" (looking for inner coherence and parallels between various apocalyptic texts) and the WCC approach more "situational" (looking for the original purpose and situation for which the texts were written). The WCC side greatly underlined the "paranetic" nature of prophecy, while the SDA representatives dwelt at greater length upon the "predictive" dimension of the apocalyptic writings.

E. Results obtained

"Measured within the framework of the avowed purposes of the Conversations, it can be said that their results have been definitely positive and useful. There have been no measurably negative outgrowths. In order to clearly see the substantial number of accomplishments, it would appear helpful to succinctly list some of the major results that have emanated from the Conversations:

1. Personal acquaintance and fellowship

"The discussions have been beneficial on the plane of personal relationships, with consequent better understanding and appreciation of the Christianity and humanity of the participants. Friendships have been formed and fellowship experienced.

2. Information and Understanding

"Without doubt the Conversations have enabled the participants to gain accurate information and a better understanding of the background, approach, thinking, developing trends, aims and expectations

of the other side. Mutual knowledge has increased and erroneous views, based on prejudice have decreased.

3. Channels of communication

"While prior to 1965 the channels of communication between the SDA Church and the WCC were non-existent, they were very weak and spasmodic. Today, largely as a result of the Consultations, a number of actively used channels of communication are entertained, especially with the General and Faith and Order Secretariats. Information once ignored or difficult to come by, is now regularly communicated. In addition the SDA/WCC Conversations were at least partly instrumental in opening new channels for contacts between the SDA Church and other confessional bodies or churches.

4. WCC Statement concerning SDA Church

"A very useful product of the Conversations is the statement regarding the SDA Church which was published in the January, 1967, issue of the Ecumenical Review. While the statement was prepared by the Faith and Order Secretariat, the SDA participants in the 1966 Conversations had the opportunity to discuss the draft statement and make some useful observations. After incorporating some relatively minor suggestions, the document was published substantially as originally written. The statement has had a wide distribution, not only through the Ecumenical Review, but as a Faith and Order paper. Seventh-day Adventists consider this article as one of the fairest and finest statements published by non-Adventists about Adventists.

[See, p. 1, col. 1, under #4 as to how Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership reacted to this article. One further point needs to be noted in regard to the article in the Ecumenical Review. The authors of the article queried:

"Of particular interest to WCC members is the question of how Adventists would react to the WCC basis. As revised at New Delhi this reads as follows:

'The WCC is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father,

Son and Holy Spirit.'

"While only the General Conference itself could state its reaction to this basis, in the light of the first three articles of Adventist 'Fundamental Beliefs' it would appear that there is no obstacle to a positive evaluation." (So Much in Common, p. 58)

There was no obstacle to a "positive evaluation." The hierarchy placed the very wording in the 1980 Statement of Beliefs, and the delegates went along! (See Documentary - History of Our Statement of Beliefs.)]

5. Participation in Meeting of World Confessional Families

"Since 1968 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been actively represented at the annual meeting of "Secretaries of World Confessional Families." This participation is largely the result of the WCC/SDA Conversations and contacts that were made at the time of the Uppsala Assembly. It is hoped that expanded cooperation will ensue between the World Confessional Families in the vital realm of religious liberty.

[Dr. B. B. Beach represented the General Conference at these annual meetings. He finally became Secretary of the "Secretaries of World Confessional Families," and in this capacity met with the Pope in private audience giving to him the gold medallion as a "symbol of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."]

6. Observer and Advisor Status

"Since the Conversations got under way, it has become the accepted procedure for the SDA Church to be represented at various WCC meetings, including the Assembly, by observers. These observers have not just been present pro forma, but have taken an active interest in the meetings they attended. An additional step was taken when the General Conference, as a world confessional body, or church, was represented by an advisor in Canterbury at the 1969 meeting of the WCC Central Committee."

[This paragraph alone tells you how deeply the hierarchy of the SDA Church is involved with the World Council of Churches]

To be continued

SO MUCH IN COMMON
AVAILABLE IN LIMITED SUPPLY

We placed an Order with the Publication Office of the World Council of Churches for a supply of this Document for resale to our readers. The WCC Office discovered the supply on hand was less than we had ordered, so they sent all they had in stock. We have proportioned these into three categories covered by the Thought Paper - USA, Canada, and Overseas. We will send them postpaid first class mail at the following rates:

The States & Canada --- US \$5.00
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Priority will be given to those ordering who are in regular correspondence with the Foundation. One book to a customer, and please do not place any request for additional publications with the order for So Much in Common. If order cannot be filled as supply is exhausted, we will return check or money order.

LETTERS

"What is going to happen next? I went for a visit out to [SDA Church], Sabbath. I went into shock. A man in Catholic garb had the service [and] talked about unity, get together."

Oregon

[From a letter sent to Lakona Park to the Curia on the Sligo]

"This last fall, I received a brochure from the Adventist Review offering a free trial offer. In this brochure was this statement: 'Frankly, we're excited about what is happening in the Adventist church.' WHAT A STATEMENT! The apostasy in Australia, the official abandonment of our historic beliefs, uncertainty about the nature of Christ, the Davenport scandal, huge stock-market-gambling losses. Excited?

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"How better to close this letter than to paraphrase Isa. 5:20. 'Woe to them that depend upon the stock-market gambling instead of free-will offerings, that put intellectual degrees in place of wisdom from on high, that entertain the flock of God instead of admonishing holiness, that consider muck-raking the quintessence of scholarship.'"

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"THE LAST WORDS"

At the 1909 General Conference Session in Washington D. C., Ellen G. White "came to the platform, on the last day of the session to speak a farewell word to the delegates who had come in from the four quarters of the earth. She felt impressed that she would never attend another General Conference; and she never did. What would be the last message by personal presence, in such an assembly, by one who had been so many years the agent through whom the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy had come? Mrs White spoke a few words of good cheer and farewell, and then turned to the pulpit, where lay a Bible. She opened the Book, and held it out with hands that trembled with age. And she said:

"Brethren and sister, I commend unto you this Book.'

"Without another word, she closed the book and walked from the platform. It was her last spoken word in the world assembly of the remnant church. Well was it symbolic of the lifelong ministry through this gift, ever exalting high, supreme above all, the Holy Scriptures as the foundation of the faith of the people of the advent movement." (W. A. Spicer, The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement, p. 30. #

The pioneers believed that - "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of His will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practise." - 1914 Yearbook.