

The Crisis Of Faith In Western Europe

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Forum:

This newsletter comes to you with considerable delay, largely due to the fact that I was out of the country for a couple of weeks. Upon my return I found myself overwhelmed with a pile of correspondence and over 2000 email messages in my mail box. I spent much of this past week trying to catch up. Perhaps I should warn you that the same thing will happen later in September when I will be away for three weeks lecturing in New Zealand and Australia. I thought to mention this so that you will be prepared for some temporary delays in receiving this newsletter.

My comments on the weekly Sabbath School Lesson will start again with the next issue. I cannot guarantee that I will be able to prepare them on a regular basis. If you are a Sabbath School teacher, please do not depend on receiving my comments on a regular basis. My problem is time.

The inspiration to address "The Crisis of Faith in Western Europe" in this newsletter came to me during my recent lecture tour in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. What I saw and heard during my travel, constantly reminded me of Christ's question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

The contemporary scene, especially in Western European Protestant countries, indicates that if Christ were to come back today He would find very little faith in these countries. Surprisingly this is especially true in those Protestant countries that were the heartland of the Reformation, like Switzerland and Germany. If the great Reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, were to rise from their grave, they would be shocked to see that the reformatory movement and spiritual revival they began at great personal sacrifices, has long ended. The great Protestant cathedrals have become silent monuments to a faith that has largely died. The spiritual descendents of the Reformers no longer PROTEST against theological heresies and moral abuses. Instead, they themselves reject today the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith and embrace the anti-Christian values and world view of humanism, secularism, materialism, and agnosticism.

The principle of SOLA SCRIPTURA has long been replaced in Protestant countries by that of SOLA CULTURA. The Biblical belief in God, has been substituted by the humanistic belief in oneself and in the human ability to construct a better tomorrow without the need of a divine intervention in human history. Indeed, for most people living today in the Protestant European countries God is dead, or if alive, He is irrelevant to their lives.

I was made forcefully aware of this stark reality as soon as I landed in Zurich. As we made our way to three media interviews I was briefed on the tragic religious situation of the country by the two SDA leaders of the German-Swiss Conference who had arranged for such interviews. They informed me about the prevailing secularistic, humanistic, and atheistic mentality of the people. They specifically told me that the vast majority of the Swiss people have no interest in the Christian faith, because for them Christianity is passé, that is, a thing of the past. In view of this fact they advised me to avoid discussing the Biblical and theological aspects of my research on the Lord's Day because people are not interested in a religious Holy Day, whether it be Saturday or Sunday. They counseled me to focus instead on the social, physical, marital, and ecological benefits of a weekly Day of Rest for our tension-filled and restless society.

During the three interviews with the media, it became immediately evident that the concern of the brethren was justified. The two journalists and the radio-speaker who interviewed me, informed me that there is no interest for religion in their society. Contrary to America where all sorts of religious programs are aired both on radio and TV, especially on a Sunday morning, in Switzerland there are no religious evangelistic programs on radio or TV. The reason is that people are no longer interested in religion. Even the weekend edition of their newspapers, have no religion section-a feature so common in American newspapers. What is true for Switzerland is also true for Germany and for the Protestant countries of Northern Europe.

It is surprising that while most Catholics in Western Europe (including Switzerland and Germany) still hold to a superstitious form of religion, (though they may go to church only when they are hatched, matched, and dispatched), most Protestants have largely abandoned all forms of religion. They have adopted instead a secularistic, humanistic, and materialistic life-style which leaves God completely out of the picture. This means that the apostasy from the Christian faith is more evident in countries or sections thereof, with a Protestant heritage, than in those with a Catholic culture.

The gravity of the religious apostasy in Western Europe, has caused me to do some thinking, especially since we noted in ENDTIME ISSUES No. 20 that Jesus predicted and Paul clarified the manifestation of a climactic endtime apostasy before Christ's return. What we are witnessing in Western Europe today represents in my view an unprecedented fulfillment of the endtime apostasy. Before addressing the question of the crisis of faith in Western Europe, let me briefly mention some highlights of the trip.

THE MEDIA INTERVIEWS

The three interviews I had on Friday June 25 near Bern and Basel, offered a unique opportunity to introduce our Seventh-day Adventist church to the media. The first interview was conducted by Mr. Fritz Imhof, who is a religion correspondent for the International Catholic News Agency and the Reformed Press Wire Service. Mr. Imhof had in front of him a fax apparently sent by Catholic authorities, with specific questions to ask me. We were told that the interview would eventually be posted in both the Catholic and Reformed wire news services, which are accessible to news organizations around the world.

The interview lasted over an hour. Two important points I was to make during the interview are the importance of the Lord's Day to revitalize the Christian life today and the difference between Sabbathkeeping and Sundaykeeping. Regarding the first point, I pointed out that the crisis of faith in Western Europe is to a large extent related to the crisis of the Lord's Day. It is estimated that only about 5% of Catholic and Protestant go to church on Sunday. The prevailing secularization of Sunday is indicative of the spiritual decline, because after all Christianity is a relationship with God. Christians who ignore God on the day they call the Lord's Day, ultimately they ignore God every day of their lives. Thus the crisis of faith in Western Europe is largely reflected in the crisis of the Lord's Day.

Regarding the difference between Sabbath and Sunday, I argued that the difference is not merely one of names or numbers, but of origin, meaning and experience. It is the difference between a HOLY DAY in which we give priority to the Lord in our thinking and living during the 24 hours of the seventh day, and a HOLY HOUR in which some Christians go to church on Sunday morning and then spend the rest of the day pursuing their own pleasure or profit.

A point that I emphasized in all the three interviews is that the value of the Sabbath rest lies not in the physical rest per se the day provides, but in the theological orientation of such rest. Our rest experience on the Sabbath is unique because we rest "unto the Lord" (Ex 20:10), and not unto ourselves. We stop our work on the Sabbath to allow God to work in us. Thus, through the Sabbath our restless lives can find rest in God, because inner peace and rest is to be found not through magic pills or fabulous

places, but in the right relationship with our Lord who says: "come unto me and I will give you rest." The Sabbath is the weekly invitation to come to the Lord and find rest in Him.

In the other two interviews I covered much of the same ground. The interview with Eduard Abel, a news reporter for the Swiss Radio, Second Program, lasted 90 minutes. I sensed that Mr. Abel was deeply impressed by my attempt to articulate the values of the Biblical Sabbath for the Swiss people today. In fact, at the end of the interview he specifically asked me what could be done to help the Swiss people rediscover the importance and the blessings of God's Holy Day. I told him that there is no easy solution, because people in Switzerland and Western Europe as a whole, have for long time forgotten to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The result is that today they are more interested in secular holidays than in a sacred Holy Day. The church faces an formidable challenge in summoning people to remember what they have long forgotten.

Overall I was very pleased with the interviews, because I sensed that in spite of the secular mentality, there was a keen awareness that our tension-filled and restless society needs, not merely more time to rest, but a special time to find rest in God by experiencing the awareness of His presence, peace, and rest in their lives. And this is what Sabbathkeeping is all about.

THE SITUATION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Our Seventh-day Adventist Church in the countries I visited shows both positive and negative signs. On the positive side, I found that our members are eager to deepen their understanding and experience of Biblical truths. An indication is the fact that some of our members drove five hours from Frankfurt, Germany, to attend the meetings in Zurich, Switzerland. Our Central SDA Church in Zurich which seats about 350 persons, was packed on the Sabbath and almost full on Sunday morning.

After a full day of meetings on the Sabbath, I did not anticipate too many people to show up on Sunday morning at 10:00 a. m. My experience has been that very few Adventist show up in America for a Sunday morning meeting. What a pleasant surprise to see the church practically full on Sunday morning. The people listened attentively for almost three hours, in spite of the German translation which dampened somewhat the liveliness of the presentation. A gage of the interest is the amazing number of books the people ordered on Sunday morning, in spite of their limited knowledge of English. Truly I can say I received more orders from 200 members in Zurich than I usually receive from 1000 members in America. This indicates that our people are eager to learn and experience more fully those vital Biblical truths which God has revealed for our Christian life today. The challenge we face is to help our people understand, experience, and share more fully present truths.

On the negative side, our SDA church in Western Europe has been slightly but consistently declining in membership during the past thirty years. Furthermore, our members now are mostly older people. Young people are conspicuous for their absence. Even in Hamburg, I saw very few young faces in what is supposed to be the largest church in Germany. I was told that the reason our young people do not attend church services, is because they find them totally irrelevant to the issues they face in their daily lives.

It could also be that church services in Germany tend to be too traditional and "stiff" for the taste of our young people. A brother complained that I did not read the texts directly from the Bible. Another told me that there was too much humor in my presentation. One thing is certain, our German fellow believers do not hesitate to tell the preacher at the door how they feel about his presentation.

It seems to be part of the German culture to look serious and solemn in church. I looked in vain for smiling faces. Presumably, members are expected to have long faces in the church as if they were attending a funeral service. I tried hard in Hamburg to interject

some humor to make the audience smile, but I had little success with the Germans. The only ones who smiled were foreigners from Ghana, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc..

It is a sad reality that in most Western European countries we have lost almost a whole generation of young people. Had our SDA church been able to retain our young people during the past 30 years, today our membership would be double the current one. The problem is not only the fact that church services do not appeal to the younger generation, but also that there are few church schools available for our youth. Surprisingly even the few church schools available are gradually closing down. In Italy, for example, at one time we had several church schools and a junior college in Florence where I had the privilege to study for four years. Today we have no church schools and I was saddened to learn that even our Junior College was closed this past school year. The only program that still operates is the ministerial program which attracts a handful of young people.

The challenges we face in Western Europe are enormous both inside and outside our church. Inside our church there is a need for a spiritual revival, a rekindling of the flame of faith and love. Outside our church there is the challenge of reaching secularly minded and self-satisfied people who sense no need for God in their lives. To reach such people with the Good News of the Gospel poses a formidable challenge. We need to pray that the Lord will give our leaders the wisdom and courage to develop new strategies to meet such a challenge.

I was pleased to learn that this Fall in several European countries our people will produce their own satellite evangelistic programs, designed to meet the thinking of their own people. This new initiative was inspired by NET 98 which offered to our leaders and members a new vision of how satellite technology can be used to proclaim simultaneously our endtime message in different parts of the country.

UPDATE ON PASTOR DAVID HILL

Those of you who have been following the conversion story of Pastor David Hill will be pleased to learn that he was baptized together with his wife and two former bishops of the Church of the Living God, on June 26, at the New Jersey Conference Campmeeting. In a telephone conversation he informed me this morning that another baptism is planned for 11 former pastors of the Church of the Living God. On July 26 three groups belonging to his former church will meet with the Columbia Union President, Elder Harold Lee to explore the possibility of joining our SDA church.

I asked Pastor Hill specifically what impact has the Adventist message in general and the Sabbath in particular have made on his life and ministry. He replied that these new found truths have made an enormous impact on his life, by leading him closer to the Lord. In fact, he felt that after accepting these new truths, he ought to renew his commitment to the Lord by being rebaptized. As I mentioned earlier this event which took place on June 26 at the New Jersey Conference Campmeeting.

Pastor Hill informed me that his ministry has two basic objectives. The first, is to help Sundaykeepers, especially his former fellow pastors and members, to discover the meaning and blessings of the Sabbath for their Christian life. The second, is to inspire Sabbathkeepers to make a greater commitment to the Lord by honoring Him in a special way on His Holy Sabbath Day. On August 14 Pastor Hill will participate with me at the Sabbath Enrichment Seminar to be held at the City Tabernacle SDA Church in New York City. On Sabbath afternoon he will share his testimony about God's providential leading in his life. If you live close to New York city, don't miss this event. It will be for you a memorable experience.

THE CRISIS OF FAITH IN WESTERN EUROPE

In ENDTIME ISSUES No. 20 we noted that in His Olivet Discourse Christ predicted an endtime apostasy, saying: "And then many will fall away, and betray one

another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold" (Matt 24:10-12; cf. 24:24).

Paul recognized that the predicted endtime apostasy was "already at work" (2 Thess 2:7) in his own time, but he makes it abundantly clear that "the apostasy," that is, the well-known pre-Advent rebellion, had not taken place yet. The latter is indicated by the use in Greek of the definite article, "**the** apostasy," and by the statement that this event must occur before ("first"-2 Thess 2:3) the Second Advent.

The rebellion "already at work" in Paul's time was not the final, endtime apostasy about which he had instructed the church orally (2 Thess 2:5), but only the prelude to it. The Apostle recognized that apostasy was already occurring, but he believed and taught that there was yet to come a final, climactic manifestation of it just before the Return of Christ.

Is the final, apocalyptic apostasy predicted by Jesus and clarified by Paul taking place in Christendom today? The tragic situation of the Christian church especially in Western Europe suggests that this endtime sign is being fulfilled today in an unprecedented way. According to the WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA, in the Western world "net defections from Christianity-converts to other religions or to irreligion-are now running to 1,820,500 former Christians a year."¹

The total number of apostasies, however, is much higher if the meaning of "apostasy" is broadened to include not only formal defectors from the Christian faith but also nominal Christians who may go to church few times during their lifetime because view religion primarily as a cultural heritage, which does not really affect their moral values, world view, and life-style.

A Look at Some Causes of the Crisis of Faith

What are the causes for the crisis of faith that is so evident especially in Western Europe today? How could the heartlands of the German and Swiss Reformation have largely renegated their Protestant religious heritage to the point of becoming even hostile to the Christian faith and values? How could these alarming developments have occurred during the past half a century?

In his insightful book THE GREAT EVANGELICAL DISASTER, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the most influential Christian thinker of our time (born in Switzerland and author of over 20 books), expresses his astonishment at the current crisis of faith, saying: "It is a horrible thing for a man like myself to look back and see my country and my culture go down the drain in my lifetime. It is a horrible thing that sixty years ago you could move across the country and almost everyone, even non-Christians, would have known what the gospel was. A horrible thing that fifty to sixty years ago our culture was built on the Christian consensus, and now this is no longer the case."²

Numerous factors have contributed to the decline of the Christian faith, especially in Western Europe. The most significant is the influence of the intellectual movement known as the "Enlightenment" that reached its climax in Germany in the eighteenth century. The movement emphasized the sufficiency of human reason and rejected Catholic and Protestant teachings, treating them as the legacy of spiritual darkness that has deprived humanity of its rational faculties.

The ideas of the Enlightenment gradually began to radically transform Christianity especially through the acceptance of the "higher critical" methods of interpreting the Bible. These methods were developed in Germany in the nineteenth century and since then they have spread throughout the Christian world. Schaeffer notes that "there was a span of approximately eighty years from the time when the higher critical methods originated and become widely accepted in Germany to the disintegration of German culture and the rise of totalitarianism under Hitler."³

For those less familiar with the higher critical method of interpreting the Bible, one can say that such method largely consists in the denial of the supernatural in the Bible. The application of such method has resulted in the rejection of such fundamental Biblical teachings as a fiat creation, the Fall, the Deity of Christ, His atonement and resurrection, the occurrence of miracles, and the Second Advent. These and other cardinal Biblical beliefs have been "demythologized" by liberal, higher critical theologians, in order to reconcile them with a humanistic view of history which excludes supernatural, miraculous activity.

Rudolf Bultmann, a renowned German theologian, for example, excludes the credibility of the accounts of Christ's resurrection because, as he plainly states, "a historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable."⁴ Seven English academics produced a symposium, published under the title THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE. As indicated by the title, the incarnation of Christ is treated as a myth, allegedly created by Samaritan converts in the fifties of the first century.

The Impact of Higher Criticism and Humanism

It is impossible to estimate and comprehend the impact of higher criticism and secular, humanistic ideologies upon religious and public education, the Christian faith, governmental policies, the media, and the moral values of our society. All that we can say is the impact of these ideologies is most evident in the crisis of faith mentioned above.

Humanistic ideologies have brought about a fundamental change in the way people have come to view the world and life as a whole. It is a change away from a world view that was essentially Christian, with God as the Creator and sustainer of this world, toward a world view which is materialistic, with impersonal matter or energy being the final reality that has shaped the present forms of life by impersonal chance.

Higher criticism has destroyed the unifying center of theological education. Having no longer an infallible divine guide in the Scripture, there is no longer a coherent Christian message and mission. Each member of seminary faculty sounds his own tune, thus creating a cacophonous orchestra where each musician plays a different concert. The echo of this cacophony produced by liberal theological education is heard especially in "mainline" Protestant denominations, where it is causing an alarming decline in membership and an erosion of basic Christian beliefs, especially in Western Europe.

Schaeffer notes that "Many young evangelical went out into the academic world, and earned their undergraduate and graduate degrees from the finest secular schools. But something happened in the process. In the midst of totally humanistic colleges and universities, and a totally humanistic orientation in the academic disciplines, many of these young evangelical began to be infiltrated by the anti-Christian world view which dominated the thinking of their colleges and professors. In the process, any distinctively evangelical Christian point of view was accommodated to the secularistic thinking in their disciplines and the surrounding world spirit of our age. To make the cycle complete, many of these have now returned to teach at evangelical colleges where what they present in their classes has very little that is distinctively Christian."⁵

The humanistic, higher critical theological education offered by many seminaries today is reflected in the preaching of their graduates. In Hamburg a SDA church leader told me: "The preaching in German Protestant churches is very philosophical and humanistic, with hardly any Biblical foundation." When churches choose to communicate secular humanistic values instead of divinely revealed principles and plans for human life, as aptly stated by Reginald Bibby, they "may well engage in self-liquidation, through finishing a distant second to superior secular competitors."⁶ The church must communicate beliefs, hopes, and values that transcend those of secular competitors. Only then will people find the church worthy of their commitment, worthy of transmitting it to their children and to others. Unfortunately, mainline Protestant churches are failing in this vital area, not only in Western Europe, but in North America also.

Erosion of Moral Values

The liberal and humanistic theologies of our time contributes also to the erosion of fundamental moral values. When belief in God and in His revelation is abandoned, all moral values become relative, because there is no longer a normative divine revelation to guide us in distinguishing right from wrong.

The doubts (if not outright denials) communicated by liberal religious leaders about God, the authority of the Scriptures, creation, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ, have encouraged the replacement of divine moral imperatives with individual permissiveness.

Human life for many has lost its sanctity, as indicated by the destruction of million of lives every year through abortion, criminal acts, war, and policies of dictatorial regimes. Human relationships also for many are no longer sacred, as evidence by the appalling number of marital contracts which are terminated every year.

Immoral connotations of illicit sexual acts are being eliminated through the introduction of new "softer" terms. Fornication is now referred to as "premarital sex," with the accent on the "pre" rather than on the "marital." Adultery is now called "extramarital sex," implying an additional experience, like an extra professional activity. Homosexuality has gradually been "softened" from serious perversion through deviation to "gay" variation.

This "softness" extends to literature and entertainment. Immoral films are shown to "mature" audiences. Pornographic books are available in "adult" bookstores. In his book, *WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?*, psychiatrist Karl Menninger perceptively points out that many "sins," once forgiven by confession of guilt and repentance, today have evolved into "symptoms" treatable by psychotherapy as illness-with responsibility placed on everything and everyone except the guilty person.

Decline in Church Attendance

The negative influence of the liberal and humanistic theologies of our time is most evident in Western Europe in the decline in church attendance. While in America about 45 per cent of Christians attend church on Sunday, in Western European countries church attendance runs between 2 to 10 per cent. In Switzerland, Germany, and Italy where I lectured few days ago I have been told that church attendance runs at about 5 per cent.

Could there be a correlation between the decline in church attendance, the prevailing skepticism about God and the abandonment of the Sabbath? It is significant that in his Pastoral Letter *DIES DOMINI* Pope John Paul II speaks of the Sabbath commandment as being "a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God."⁷ John Paul acknowledges that the Sabbath defines our faith by inviting us to worship God as our Creator, Redeemer and ultimate Restorer. It is unfortunate that after speaking so eloquently of the defining function of the Sabbath for the Christian faith, the Pope takes the liberty to make Sunday the Biblical Sabbath-an attempt that lacks both Biblical and historical support.

Could the faithful observance of the Sabbath have contributed to prevent the crisis of faith so prevalent in Western Europe today and gradually reaching the American shores? The answer is YES. Why? Simply because the Sabbath summons us weekly to remember what we easily forget, namely, that God is the perfect Creator of the heaven, the earth, and all the forms of life.

To celebrate the Sabbath means to confess our belief in God as the perfect Creator. It means to recognize that the existence of this world itself is an absolute gift from God. George Elliott eloquently writes that "Against atheism, which denies the existence of a personal God; against materialism, which denies that this visible universe has its roots

in the unseen; and against secularism, which denies the need to worship, the Sabbath is an eternal witness. It symbolically commemorates that creative power which spoke all things into being, the wisdom which ordered their adaptations and harmony, and the love which made, as well as pronounced, all 'very good.' It is set as the perpetual guardian of man against that spiritual infirmity which has everywhere led him to a denial of the God who made him, or to the degradation of that God into a creature made with his own hands."⁸

The triumph of scientific and rational thinking has resulted in the tendency to discard the whole concept of the existence of a supernatural God. A major contributory factor to this shift in human thinking from monotheism to agnosticism and atheism has been the theory of evolution, and its influence on the natural sciences. The attempt to explain the origin of life and of this world on a natural and rational basis has led not only secular thinkers but also many professing Christians to reject the Biblical teaching of a Divine fiat (spoken) creation. The prominent contemporary question is no longer, Who is your God? but rather, Is there a God? For many, especially in Western Europe, "God is dead" or, if He is alive, He has no direct involvement in the origin or subsistence of this world.

Why is there such a prevailing skepticism about God being the Creator of an originally perfect world? Why do many persons today have greater faith in the theory of spontaneous generation than in an original divine and perfect creation? Is it possible that the widespread abandonment of the seventh-day Sabbath-the weekly reminder of God's perfect creation-has facilitated such prevailing skepticism, especially in Western Europe? Ellen White provides an affirmative answer to this question when she writes: "Had the Sabbath been universally kept, . . . there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel."⁹ The statement needs some qualifications, since the mechanical observance of creation's memorial day does not guarantee per se the acceptance of God as Creator. It is possible to go through the motions of the observance of a day without understanding of or commitment to what is being celebrated. Yet the fact remains that skepticism can be an outgrowth of forgetfulness.

A person who neglects or rejects the Sabbath, the memorial of creation, is liable to forget and become skeptical about the God of creation. Is this not similarly true in human relationships? I was engaged to be married for four years, which to me seemed like an eternity, because much of the time my fiancé and I were separated by an ocean. During the prolonged separation I was tempted to forget and to doubt who my fiancé was and how much she loved me. How did I overcome my incipient skepticism? I would take time to read and reread her passionate letters and to look at her pictures. That helped me to overcome any doubt and to renew my commitment to her. In a similar fashion the Sabbath provides a weekly opportunity to overcome any incipient skepticism by inviting us to "remember" and thus to renew our faith in our perfect Creator.

During the week as we use and admire the many sophisticated man-made machines, we are tempted to place our trust in human achievements and resources. God was well aware of this very real danger that human beings may lose sight of their Creator and worship instead human creations. Therefore, in His divine concern and wisdom, He established the seventh-day Sabbath to safeguard His creatures from the disaster of self-worship. The abandonment of the Sabbath has contributed to the removal of this safeguard and to the spiritual disaster we face today.

The Great Evangelical Disaster

In his book THE GREAT EVANGELICAL DISASTER cited earlier, Francis Schaeffer sadly acknowledges that the evangelical world shares the responsibility for the moral break down of our society. He writes: "The last sixty years have given birth to a moral disaster, and what have we done? Sadly we must say that the evangelical world has been part of the disaster. More than this, the evangelical response itself has been a disaster. Where is the clear voice speaking to the crucial issues of the day with distinctively biblical, Christian answers? With tears we must say that largely it is not there and that a large segment of the evangelical world has become seduced by the world

spirit of the present age. And more than this, we can expect the future to be a further disaster if the evangelical world does not take a stand for biblical truth and morality in the full spectrum of life. For the evangelical accommodation to the world of our age represents the removal of the last barrier against the breakdown of our culture. And with the final removal of this barrier will come social chaos and the rise of authoritarianism in some form to restore social order."¹⁰

Schaeffer continues challenging Christians not to accommodate to the secular spirit of the world, but to take a Biblical stand on the crucial issues of the day. He writes: "We need a young generation and others who will be willing to stand in loving confrontation, but real confrontation, in contrast to the mentality of constant accommodation with the current forms of the world spirit as they surround us today."¹¹

The Feminist Subversion

Schaeffer calls upon Christians to take a Biblical stand especially against the feminist subversion of the Biblical teachings regarding marriage, family, divorce, sexual morality, homosexuality, and role distinctions. The last area deserves special attention because it affects currently our Adventist church in conjunction with the question of women's ordination. Those of you who have requested my review of the pivotal chapter of *WOMEN IN MINISTRY*, -a symposium produced mostly by pro-ordination teachers from the SDA theological seminary- have noted how the author argues that role distinctions of male-headship and female-submission are not divinely ordained at creation, but were introduced after the Fall, and are limited to the governance of the home, not to the community of faith.

Can this conclusion be drawn legitimately from the Bible? Are functional role distinctions between men and women a post-Fall phenomenon which apply exclusively to the home, and not to the church? Evangelical thinkers like Francis Schaeffer find this to be untrue. My study of the Biblical texts have led me to the same conclusion. Both male-female equality and role distinctions, properly defined, are part of God's creational design for the harmonious functioning of humanity. God created the man and the woman perfectly equal in their moral worth and spiritual status, but clearly distinct in their biological and functional roles. Simply stated, in the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, God created man to function in the servant headship role of husband/father, and women in the submissive role of wife/mother. These distinctive roles apply equally to the home and to the church, because from a biblical perspective the church is an extended spiritual family, often referred to as "the household of God" (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17; Gal 6:10).

It is unfortunate that some Adventist scholars and church leaders fail to recognize this fundamental Biblical teaching regarding the ontological equality and functional distinctions between men and women. By contrast, distinguished evangelical thinkers like C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer recognize and defend this fundamental Biblical principle. Schaeffer goes as far as to say that "the idea of equality without distinction" is the key to understand the feminist subversion of our time. ¹²

With extreme clarity Schaeffer writes: "The key to understand extreme feminism centers around the idea of total equality, or more properly the idea of equality without distinction. Here again we must have a balance. The Bible does not teach the inequality of men and women. Each person, man or woman, stands equally before God as a person created in his image, and at the same time as a sinner in need of salvation. And because of this, each person, whether male or female, has at the same time both infinite equality or worth before God and one another, and a total equality of need for Christ as Savior. But at the same time, this equality is not an equality of monolithic uniformity or 'sameness' between men and women. It is an equality which preserves the fundamental differences between the sexes and which allows for the realization and fulfillment of these differences."¹³

Schaeffer continues noting that "we must affirm two things simultaneously: because men and women are both created in the image of God there is a common equality which has enormous implications for all life; and because men and women are both created with distinctions as complementary expressions of the image of God, this has enormous implications for all life-in the family, in the church, and in the society as a whole."¹⁴

The feminist movement which is so pervasive even in some evangelical churches, rejects the biblical teaching of equality and distinctiveness in expressing the image of God. Instead it promotes what Schaeffer rightly describes as "equality without distinction." "In the end," writes Schaeffer, "equality without distinction is destructive to both men and women because it does not take into account their true identity and their distinctives as well as the commonalities that are bound in what it means to be a man and a woman."¹⁵

The denial of role distinctions, which is gaining ground even in the Seventh-day Adventist church as attested by WOMEN IN MINISTRY, can have tragic consequences for human life and society. With almost "prophetic" insight Schaeffer states: "If we accept the idea of equality without distinctions, we logically must accept the ideas of abortion and homosexuality. For if there are no significant distinctions between men and women, then certainly we cannot condemn homosexual relationships. And if there are no significant distinctions, this fiction can be maintained only by the use of abortion-on-demand as a means of coping with the most profound evidence that distinctions really exist."¹⁶

The validity of Schaeffer's statement is attested by the ordination of homosexuals in those churches that in recent times have ordained women as pastors or priests. The rationale for this action is not difficult to comprehend. If women can be ordained to serve in the headship role of pastors because allegedly the Biblical functional distinctions do not matter, then homosexuals can also be ordained as pastors because allegedly the Biblical sexual distinctions also do not matter.

In our own SDA church homosexuals are gaining greater acceptance. In Adventist forums in the internet, "Adventist" homosexuals try to defend biblically the legitimacy of their life-style. Their senseless arguments cause distress and embarrassment to biblically committed Adventists. An Adventist sister who is a medical doctor, has been urging me repeatedly to research and write on the Biblical teaching regarding homosexuality, because in her own Adventist church homosexuals have formed their own Sabbath School and publish a paper which she has sent to me. God willing I plan to research and prepare a special ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER on this topic, because it is an endtime issue that we can no longer ignore.

Conclusion. This newsletter began by reporting and examining the crisis of faith especially present in some Western European countries but it ended by looking at the feminist subversion of such Biblical teachings as role distinctions that affects us in our home front. Perhaps this serves to remind us that after all the crisis of faith is a widespread phenomenon that is present in different forms everywhere. May God give us the courage, wisdom, and grace to stand in courageous and loving confrontation against the mentality of constant accommodation with the secular forms of our society. This is our Christian calling to live in this world without being squeezed into its mold.

NOTES

1. David B. Barrett, WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 4.
2. Francis A. Schaeffer, THE GREAT EVANGELICAL DISASTER (Wheaton, Illinois, 1995), p. 29.
3. Ibid., p. 35.
4. Rudolf Karl Bultmann, "NT and Mythology," in KERYGMA AND MYTH, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London, 1961), vol. 1, p. 42.
5. Schaeffer (note 2), p. 119.

6. Cited by Leslie K. Tarr, "The Incredible State of Canada's Largest Protestant Denomination," CHRISTIANITY TODAY (February 19, 1982), p. 28.
7. DIES DOMINI, paragraph 13.
8. George Elliot, THE ABIDING SABBATH (New York 1884), pp. 17-18.
9. Ellen White, THE GREAT CONTROVERSY (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 438.
10. Schaeffer (note 2), p. 141.
11. Ibid., p. 150.
12. Ibid., p. 134.
13. Ibid., p. 135.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 136.
16. Ibid.

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