

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Is Seventh-day Adventism a Cult?

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We must now turn to a question which has been considerably discussed of late: whether Seventh-day Adventism is to be considered as belonging to the cults, or as a denomination which may be classed with the evangelical churches. In a series of articles which appeared in *Eternity* magazine from September, 1956, to January, 1957, Donald G. Barnhouse and Walter R. Martin advanced the view that Seventh-day Adventism is not a cult, as had long been believed, but a branch of evangelical Christianity, though distinguished from other churches by certain peculiar ideas. In 1960 Martin published his *Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*,<sup>1</sup> in which he reasserted this position. In this volume he discusses and criticizes such Adventist teachings as “the sleep of the soul,”<sup>2</sup> the annihilation of the wicked, the seventh-day Sabbath, the investigative judgment, the scapegoat doctrine, the remnant church, and the recognition of Mrs. White as the “spirit of prophecy.” In spite of his strictures on the above teachings, however, he asserts, “Not one of the deviations in Seventh-day Adventism is a deviation from the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith which are necessary to salvation” (p. 229). Martin therefore pleads with the members of the evangelical denominations to exercise spiritual fellowship with Seventh-day Adventists:



We hope that many who have looked upon Adventists as dangerous non-Christian cultists will revise this view. In the providence of God, and in His own good time, we trust that evangelical Christianity as a whole will extend the hand of fellowship to a group of sincere, earnest fellow Christians, distinguished though they are by some peculiar views, but members of the Body of Christ and possessors of the faith that saves (pp. 236–37).

<sup>1</sup> Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 248 pp.

<sup>2</sup> As has been pointed out, however, this is not an accurate way of describing Seventh-day Adventist teaching, which affirms, not that the soul sleeps after death, but that after death the soul ceases to exist (see above, p. 136).

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By including Seventh-day Adventism in a volume entitled *The Four Major Cults*, I have already implied that I do not share the evaluation of this movement given by Barnhouse and Martin. While not denying that the Adventists teach certain doctrines in common with evangelical Protestant churches and in distinction from most of the cults (for example, the doctrine of the full deity of Jesus Christ), I am of the conviction that Seventh-day Adventism is a cult and not an evangelical denomination. In support of this evaluation, I propose to show that the traits which we have found to be distinctive of the cults do apply to this movement.

(1) **An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority.** Seventh-day Adventists do have an extra-Scriptural source of authority in the writings of Ellen G. White, which are accepted by them as “inspired counsels from the Lord” (see above, p. 103). That this is so has been shown on pages 100–108, above; the argumentation there given will not be repeated here. The reader is further invited to page through such Seventh-day Adventist publications as *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, *Principles of Life from the Word of God*, and *Questions on Doctrine*<sup>3</sup> to note how frequently a doctrinal position or the exegesis of a Scripture passage is based on a quotation from Mrs. White. We conclude that Seventh-day Adventists interpret the Bible in the light of the writings of Mrs. White, and that the books and testimonies of Mrs. White are for them, therefore, a source of authority superior to the Bible. This type of procedure, however, as we have seen, is a distinctive mark of the cult.

(2) **The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone.** Here we encounter one of the real problems involved in evaluating Seventh-day Adventist teachings: the baffling fact that the Adventists often theoretically take a certain position but then proceed to repudiate that position in the further elaboration of their theology. Regarding the doctrine in question, we find Seventh-day Adventists theoretically agreeing that we are justified by grace alone and not at all by obedience to law (see above, p. 123). Yet we also find them teaching that one’s forgiveness can be cancelled after it has been bestowed, and that forgiven sins are not immediately blotted out because subsequent deeds and attitudes may affect the final decision (see above, p. 119). Adventists further teach that it is possible for a person through subsequent sinful deeds and attitudes to lose the justification he once received. This teaching implies that one can only be sure of retaining his justification if he continues to do the right kind of deeds and to maintain the right attitudes throughout the rest of his life (see above, p. 125).

(i) **The Investigative Judgment.** It has already been shown that the Adventists’ doctrine of the investigative judgment (a doctrine which has no basis in Scripture) is not consistent

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<sup>3</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*

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with their claim that they teach justification by grace alone (see above, pp. 117–20, 126–27, 157–58). This is actually the Seventh-day Adventist position: (a) The investigative judgment *determines* who of the myriads sleeping in the dust are worthy of a part in the first resurrection.<sup>4</sup> (b) What is examined in the investigative judgment are the lives of the individuals in question: particularly their faith in Christ, their confession of every single sin, and their faithfulness in keeping the law's requirements.<sup>5</sup> (c) What therefore determines whether a person will be saved is not *primarily* what Jesus Christ has done for him on the cross, but *primarily* what the individual has done in his life. He must have kept the law's requirements, must have continued to do the right kinds of deeds so that his forgiveness has not been cancelled, and must have confessed every single sin. It is thus clear that *what determines whether one is saved is the kind of life the investigative judgment reveals him to have lived*, particularly his blameless keeping of the law's requirements. And this position contradicts the Scriptural assertion that one is justified by grace alone.

How can anyone “faithfully keep the law's requirements”? Do we not all fall very far short of keeping these requirements? Does not the Apostle John say, “If we say that we have no sin [and to have sin means to fail in some respects to keep the law's requirements], we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8)? The Apostle Paul, in fact, makes it unmistakably clear that no one can ever “faithfully keep the law's requirements” when he says, in Romans 3:19 and 20:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God; because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin.

He then goes on to say, “But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe ...” (vv. 21, 22). He ends this brief exposition of the way of salvation by saying, “We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (v. 28). Elsewhere Paul tells us that he counted all things to be loss that he might gain Christ, “and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith

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<sup>4</sup> *Fundamental Beliefs*, Article 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 443; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 482, 490; William H. Branson, *Drama of the Ages* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Co., 1950), p. 351. Note particularly Branson's statement: “A Christian who through faith in Jesus Christ has faithfully kept the law's requirements will be acquitted; there is no condemnation, for the law finds no fault in him. If, on the other hand, it is found that one has broken even a single precept, and this transgression is unconfessed, he will be dealt with just as if he had broken all ten.” It will be remembered that Mr. Branson was president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 1950–1954.

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in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). Paul, therefore, knew that he was saved, not on the basis of a future heavenly investigation of his keeping of the law, or of his own personally achieved righteousness, but on the basis of the righteousness which he had received from God through faith! How, then, can Seventh-day Adventists teach that man is saved on the basis of his "faithful keeping of the law's requirements" as revealed by the investigative judgment?

The doctrine of justification by grace alone teaches that a person is saved because of what Christ has done for him. The doctrine of the investigative judgment, however, teaches that Christ does not know whether a given individual has been justified until his life has been investigated. If, as the Bible teaches, "the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19), and the Good Shepherd knows His own (Jn. 10:14, 27), why should Christ not know apart from this investigative judgment who are to be raised in the resurrection of the just? The only possible answer is: because he does not fully know what kind of lives these individuals have lived. But if this is so, what is decisive in determining whether one is to be saved is his faithful keeping of the law's requirements. This position, however, vitiates the doctrine of justification by grace alone!

(ii) **The Keeping of the Sabbath.** It has also been shown above that Seventh-day Adventist teaching on Sabbath-keeping is inconsistent with the doctrine of justification by grace alone (see above, pp. 125–28). The Adventist position, briefly, is as follows: In the last days, after the world shall have been enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, anyone who shall still refuse to keep the seventh day as the Sabbath shall receive the mark of the beast and be lost. It is clear that at that time at least, salvation will not be determined only by faith in the atoning work of Christ, but by faith plus works—specifically, the work of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

Let us see how Mrs. White describes the crucial role of Sabbath-keeping in the drama of the latter days. Just previous to Christ's return, so she writes, there will appear in the sky a hand holding two tables of stone folded together. In this way "that holy law, God's righteousness, that ... was proclaimed from Sinai as the guide of life, is now revealed to men as the rule of judgment."<sup>6</sup> The hand opens the tables, the words of which are so plain that all can read them. This public display of God's law brings consternation to the hearts of those "who have trampled upon God's holy requirements"; what is particularly called to the reader's attention, however, is the despair of those who "have endeavored to compel God's people to profane His Sabbath." "Now," it is said, "they are condemned

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<sup>6</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 639.

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by that law which they have despised.”<sup>7</sup> It is therefore particularly failure to keep the seventh-day Sabbath which will be the unpardonable sin of the last days!

To the same effect are the following words:

The enemies of God’s law, from the ministers down to the least among them, have a new conception of truth and duty. Too late they see that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God. Too late they see the true nature of their spurious sabbath, and the sandy foundation upon which they have been building. They find that they have been fighting against God. Religious teachers have led souls to perdition while professing to guide them to the gates of Paradise.<sup>8</sup>

The point is clear: religious leaders have led souls to *perdition* by failing to teach them to observe the seventh-day Sabbath! They and their people, therefore, will be consigned to perdition, not because they failed to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and as the Atoner for sin, but because they failed to keep one of the ten commandments!

Next, according to Mrs. White, there comes the voice of God from heaven which declares the day and hour of Jesus’ coming and delivers the everlasting covenant to His people. “And when the blessing is pronounced on those who have honored God by keeping His Sabbath holy, there is a mighty shout of victory.”<sup>9</sup> Thus the primary reason why God’s true people, here called “the Israel of God,” are blessed is not that they have trusted in Christ as their Savior, but that they have properly kept the fourth commandment!

Even if we should grant (which we do not) that Seventh-day Adventists are right in observing the seventh day as the Sabbath, we would still emphatically reject their contention that a sin against one of God’s commandments, committed by people who have always trusted in Christ for salvation and have always tried to serve Him sincerely, can be the basis for their everlasting perdition—since this is a sin committed in ignorance, and a sin which is repented of.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, neither is it in harmony with Scripture to affirm that one must keep at least the fourth commandment perfectly in order to be

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 639–640.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Both of these points are implied in the quotations just given from pp. 639–40 of *The Great Controversy*. These individuals, it is there said, “have a new conception of truth and duty,” implying that they did not understand the truth or know their duty before this time. If these people are true believers, they will repent of their sin as soon as it is pointed out to them. Further, since it is specified by Mrs. White that these individuals will include ministers and religious teachers, we may assume that these are people who have been faithfully worshiping God on the first day of the week all their lives. Do Seventh-day Adventists mean to say that such people will be sent to perdition solely because, though they did keep the fourth commandment, they unintentionally kept it on the wrong day?

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saved.<sup>11</sup> For the Scriptures teach that we all continue to fall short (*husterountai*, a present indicative), of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and that no one can keep God's commandments perfectly (1 Jn. 1:8). We are saved, not because of our faithfulness in keeping any of God's commandments, but because of what our Savior has done for us, and because His perfect righteousness has been imputed to us! We conclude that, though Seventh-day Adventists claim to teach justification by grace alone, their doctrine of the investigative judgment and their views on the Sabbath command are inconsistent with that claim.

(3) **The Devaluation of Christ.** At this point we must first acknowledge with gratitude that Seventh-day Adventists do not, like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Scientists, deny the full deity of Jesus Christ or the doctrine of the Trinity. Though some earlier Adventist writers had contended that the Son was not wholly equal to the Father, Seventh-day Adventists today affirm Christ's complete equality with the Father, and the pre-existence of the Son from eternity (see above, pp. 112–13). Adventists also accept the doctrine of the Trinity, and that of the personality and full deity of the Holy Spirit (see above, pp. 108–9).

As far as the work of Christ is concerned, Seventh-day Adventists teach the vicarious, substitutionary atonement of Christ (see above, p. 115). Yet there remains some ambiguity in their teachings on the question of whether the atonement has been finished on the cross, since Mrs. White says on more than one occasion that Christ is making atonement for us today and frequently refers to a "final atonement" after the one completed on the cross (see above, pp. 115–17).

While appreciating the Adventists' recognition of Christ as fully divine, however, we must reluctantly observe that there are aspects of Seventh-day Adventist teaching which detract from the splendor of Christ's deity and do in fact constitute a devaluation of Him:

(i) Christ is said not to have been able to blot out sins previous to 1844 but only to have been able to forgive them (see above, p. 117). The forgiveness of sins only means, however, that these sins remain on record in the heavenly sanctuary; this forgiveness may be cancelled later if a person's subsequent deeds and attitudes prove unacceptable (see

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<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, how can Seventh-day Adventists be so sure that all who do keep the seventh day as the Sabbath are properly keeping the fourth commandment? Would Jews who reject Christ as the Messiah but keep the seventh day thus be saved, while Christians who accept Christ as Savior but keep the first day are lost? Christ Himself often severely rebuked the Pharisees for their misinterpretation of the Sabbath command, even though they did observe the seventh day (Mt. 12:1–8 and parallel passages; Mt. 12:9–14 and parallel passages; Lk. 13:10–17, 14:1–6; Jn. 5:10–18, 7:22–24, 9:13–16). Surely, therefore, no one may naively assume that the mere observance of the right day (if Adventists are correct about the day) in itself guarantees the proper keeping of the fourth commandment!

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above, p. 119). This view, which was discussed and criticized in Appendix B (see above, pp. 151–53), robs Christ of His divine prerogatives. The Pharisees accused Jesus of speaking blasphemy when He said to the paralytic, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” “For,” they said, “who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Lk. 5:20, 21). In Romans 8:33 and 34, moreover, we read, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?” The clear implication of the latter passage is that when God the Father has forgiven a sinner, his sins have been permanently blotted out; no one can bring charges against him any more. If the forgiveness of sins which Christ could bestow, however, only meant the placing of such transgressions on record in the heavenly sanctuary and did not mean the complete blotting out of those sins, Christ’s power to forgive was considerably less than the Father’s. By this teaching, therefore, Seventh-day Adventists are guilty of devaluating Christ.

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(ii) Jesus Christ does not know who are His, since He must conduct an investigative judgment to determine “who ... are worthy of a part in the first resurrection...”<sup>12</sup> In Appendix B it was pointed out that this Seventh-day Adventist teaching leaves us with a Christ who must do homework before he can determine who are entitled to the benefits of His atonement (see above, pp. 155–57). Surely this doctrine, too, robs Christ of His sovereignty and thus devaluates Him.

(iii) The very nature of the investigative judgment implies, as we have seen, that it is not one’s unbreakable connection with Christ that determines whether one is saved, but one’s deeds while on earth. In Seventh-day Adventist teaching, therefore, what is ultimately determinative for salvation is not Christ’s work but man’s work. This teaching, too, devaluates Christ.

(iv) The crucial importance attached to the keeping of the fourth commandment after the final enlightenment likewise detracts from the saving power of Christ. To quote Mrs. White once more, “When the blessing is pronounced on those who have honored God by keeping His Sabbath holy, there is a mighty shout of victory.”<sup>13</sup> What is here all-important and all-determinative for salvation is not the atoning work of Christ in our stead, but the keeping of the fourth command! This exaltation of Sabbath-keeping and minimizing of the work of Christ also constitutes a devaluation of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

(v) Seventh-day Adventists teach that the sins of all men will be laid on Satan just before Christ returns, and that only in this way will sin finally be “eradicated” or “blotted out”

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<sup>12</sup> *Fundamental Beliefs*, Article 16.

<sup>13</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.

<sup>14</sup> For it is presumed that thousands of those who at this time receive the mark of the beast for failing to keep the seventh day did believe in Christ as their Savior.

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of the universe. This teaching also detracts from the all-sufficiency of Christ. While we appreciate the Adventists' insistence that Satan is not a sin-bearer and that he does not make atonement for sin, it must be pointed out that they do, however, assign to Satan an indispensable role in the blotting out of sin from the universe (see above, pp. 120–22). But this, as was also pointed out in Appendix B (see above, pp. 158–60), is to ascribe to Satan what should only be ascribed to Christ: the obliteration of our sins. If Christ completely bore our sins in His body on the tree, as 1 Peter 2:24 tells us, why should Satan still have to help eradicate these sins from the universe?

We conclude that, in these various ways, Seventh-day Adventists are guilty of devaluating Christ, and that the full deity which they officially ascribe to Christ is overshadowed by certain teachings which detract from His majestic sovereignty.

(4) *The Group as the Exclusive Community of the Saved.* Here again, we appreciate the insistence of the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* that Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that they alone constitute the true children of God, or that they are the only true Christians in the world, or the only ones who will be saved.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, the Adventists do call themselves the *remnant church*, for two reasons: because they keep the commandments of God, particularly by observing the seventh-day Sabbath; and because they have the “spirit of prophecy” in the person of Ellen G. White (see above, p. 128).

At this point we should ask ourselves exactly what Seventh-day Adventists mean by the *remnant church*. It was pointed out above, on pages 128–29, that according to Adventist teachings the remnant church means the last segment of the true church left on earth. This judgment is confirmed by a statement found in a Seventh-day Adventist Bible-study textbook: “What, then, would be the ‘remnant church’? The last church, what is left at the end of time of God’s church on earth.”<sup>16</sup> If this is so, the Seventh-day Adventist claim that they are the *remnant church* really means: we are the last true church left on earth, and all other groups which claim to be churches are not true but false churches.

Do Seventh-day Adventists actually teach that they are *the true church of God*? Yes, they do. This will become evident from the following quotations from the writings of Mrs. White, their inspired prophetess:

The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by King Ahasuerus against the Jews. Today the enemies of

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<sup>15</sup> Pp. 187, 191–92; (see above, p. 129).

<sup>16</sup> *Principles of Life from the Word of God* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1960), p. 395.



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*the true church* see in the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment, a Mordecai at the gate.<sup>17</sup>

I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between *the true Israel of God* and unbelievers; and that the Sabbath is the great question to unite the hearts of *God's dear waiting saints*.<sup>18</sup>

When the final warning shall be given, it will arrest the attention of these leading men through whom the Lord is now working, and some of them will accept it [the message about the seventh-day Sabbath], and will stand with *the people of God* through the time of trouble.<sup>19</sup>

To those who reverence His holy day the Sabbath is a sign that God recognizes them as *His chosen people*. It is a pledge that He will fulfill to them His covenant.<sup>20</sup>

The keeping of the Sabbath is a sign of *loyalty to the true God*.<sup>21</sup>

As the Sabbath was the sign that distinguished Israel when they came out of Egypt to enter the earthly Canaan, so it is the sign that now distinguishes *God's people* as they come out from the world to enter the heavenly rest. The Sabbath is a sign of the relationship existing between *God and His people*, a sign that they honor His law. It distinguishes between *His loyal subjects* and transgressors.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of the above statements, what conclusions must we draw with respect to the other churches of Christendom? We are compelled to conclude that, according to Mrs. White, these other churches are not part of the true church, are not the true Israel of God, are not God's chosen people, are not loyal to the true God, are not God's loyal subjects, but transgressors. In fact, Christians who belong to churches which keep the first day as the Lord's Day are said to be the victims of one of Satan's most intensive campaigns against God's law: "Satan strives to turn men from their allegiance to God, and from

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<sup>17</sup> *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1917), p. 605 [italics mine, in this and in the next five quotations].

<sup>18</sup> Taken from a letter to Joseph Bates written on April 7, 1847; found in *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (1847), pp. 18–19.

<sup>19</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

<sup>20</sup> *Testimonies*, Vol. VI, p. 350; quoted in *Principles of Life from the Word of God*, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 438.

<sup>22</sup> *Testimonies*, Vol. VI, p. 349; quoted in *Principles of Life from the Word of God*, p. 135. It is to be noted that statements like these do not agree with what is said by the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, "we do not believe that we *alone* constitute the true children of God—that we are the only true Christians—on earth today" (p. 187). Since the statements quoted above were made by Mrs. White, Seventh-day Adventists cannot in good conscience repudiate them.

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rendering obedience to His law; therefore he directs his efforts especially against that commandment which points to God as the Creator [the fourth]."<sup>23</sup>

We go on now to ask: Does Seventh-day Adventist teaching about the remnant church mean that those who are not members of this remnant group cannot be saved? In other words, do Seventh-day Adventists believe that their group is the exclusive community of the saved?

With respect to people who will be living on earth after the great enlightenment about the Sabbath day has been given (see above, p. 127), when the final test of loyalty with regard to Sabbath-keeping shall have come,<sup>24</sup> the Adventists do teach that all who then remain outside their group will be lost. Seventh-day Adventists contend that “before the final hour of crisis and testing all God’s true children—now so widely scattered—will join with us in giving obedience to this message [the one brought by the Seventh-day Adventist movement], of which the seventh-day Sabbath is a basic part.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, those who then refuse to join the remnant church in keeping the seventh-day Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and be lost:

... When Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God.... As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—“the mark of the beast.”<sup>26</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that Seventh-day Adventists do consider that their group will be the exclusive community of the saved at the time of the end, since all who then remain

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<sup>23</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 54. We appreciate the fact that the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* seem not to wish to draw all these conclusions. Yet what is said in the above paragraph is clearly implied by the statements of Mrs. White quoted previously. The authors of *Questions on Doctrine* will therefore either have to admit that Mrs. White was mistaken when she made these statements, or that her words did not mean what she apparently intended them to mean. On the question of the attitude of Seventh-day Adventism toward other churches, see N. Douty, *Another Look at Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), pp. 193–203.

<sup>24</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

<sup>25</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 195–96.

<sup>26</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 449, quoted in *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 184. See also *The Great Controversy*, p. 605. Since those who receive the mark of the beast, according to Rev. 14:9–11, will be tormented with fire and brimstone, we conclude that people who fall into this category will be eternally lost.

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outside their group will be lost. We conclude that at this point the Adventists do reveal one of the distinctive traits of the cult.

With respect to people who are living now, the question is more complicated. It will be remembered that, according to Adventist teaching, those who fail to keep the seventh day as the Sabbath are transgressing the most important commandment of the decalogue (see above, p. 127). The question now arises: Can Christians who repeatedly break this most important commandment still be saved?

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Seventh-day Adventists answer: yes, since these Christians who are members of the other churches of Christendom are breaking this command in ignorance. For it is said by the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, "Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe that God has a precious remnant, a multitude of earnest, sincere believers, in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who are living up to all the light God has given them."<sup>27</sup> The implication is that these Christians do not have the full light on the Sabbath question which God has given to the Adventists and hence can be temporarily excused from the obligation of keeping the fourth commandment properly. Note the following statement by Mrs. White:

But not one is made to suffer the wrath of God [visited upon those who shall refuse to keep the Creator's rest day] until the truth has been brought home to his mind and conscience, and has been rejected. There are many who have never had an opportunity to hear the special truths for this time. The obligation of the fourth commandment has never been set before him in its true light.<sup>28</sup>

According to this statement, one cannot be punished for failing to keep the Sabbath law until the truth about this law has been brought home to his mind and conscience and has been deliberately rejected.

This means, then, that Christians outside the Seventh-day Adventist communion today can be saved even though they continually break the fourth commandment because they are still transgressing this command in ignorance of the truth which is recognized and taught by Seventh-day Adventism. This, however, puts the so-called recognition of the universal church of Christ by Seventh-day Adventists in a rather uncomplimentary light: there is such a universal church, to be sure, but it is completely in error in its understanding of and obedience to the most important commandment of the decalogue!

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<sup>27</sup> P. 192.

<sup>28</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

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If, furthermore, the salvation of those outside Seventh-day Adventism depends on their remaining in ignorance of God's real Sabbath requirement, the implication would seem unavoidable that, if these people wish to be saved, they should remain in ignorance of the Sabbath law. As we saw above, Mrs. White said that no one shall suffer the wrath of God "until the truth has been brought home to his mind and conscience, and has been rejected." Suppose, now, that a Christian had heard the Seventh-day Adventist message about the seventh day but had concluded that this teaching was erroneous—could he after this still claim to be "transgressing" the fourth commandment in ignorance? In 1847 Mrs. White wrote, "And if one believed and kept the Sabbath and received the blessing attending it and then gave it up and broke the holy commandment, they would shut the gates of the Holy City against themselves, as sure as there was a God that rules in heaven."<sup>29</sup> The people here described were lost, obviously, because they "sinned" against better light. But what about people who have examined the evidence Seventh-day Adventists advance and have rejected it? Would not their salvation be equally in jeopardy?

If the situation is as the Adventists picture it, would it not be far better for those in the regular churches of Christendom to come out of those churches and to join the Seventh-day Adventists? This is precisely what is held before us as the goal toward which Christ is working: "The Great Shepherd of the sheep recognizes them [God's true children now outside the Adventist fold] as His own, and He is calling them into one great fold and one great fellowship in preparation for His return."<sup>30</sup> If this is Christ's great purpose, it is clear that true children of God now outside Adventism who have come into contact with Seventh-day Adventism and yet remain in their churches are going contrary to Christ's purpose.

We conclude that though theoretically granting that people outside their community can be saved Seventh-day Adventists actually undermine that concession by their teaching on the remnant church. Since they claim to be *the* remnant church, in distinction from all other Christian bodies, they do manifest the cultist trait under discussion, though in a somewhat ambivalent manner.

(5) *The Group's Central Role in Eschatology.* It will not be difficult to show that this distinctive mark of the cult is prominently and clearly discernible in Seventh-day Adventism. In analogous fashion to the other cults studied, Seventh-day Adventism claims to have been called into existence to fill a particular gap in the truth. Adventists assert that God raised them up "for the completion of the arrested Protestant Reformation

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<sup>29</sup> Letter to Joseph Bates, April 7, 1847. found in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* pp. 18–19; quoted in Douy, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 192.

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and for the full and final restoration of gospel truth.”<sup>31</sup> God has brought the Adventist movement into being, so they allege, to bring His last great message to mankind.<sup>32</sup> The rise of Seventh-day Adventism therefore marks the beginning of the final climax of sacred history.<sup>33</sup> This movement has been called into being in order to prepare the church of the last days to meet her returning Lord.<sup>34</sup>

As we look more closely at the Seventh-day Adventist delineation of the events preceding the return of Christ, we note that they place their own movement in the very center of the eschatological drama. We find these events pictured in great detail in the closing chapters of Mrs. White’s *The Great Controversy*. The announcement of the fall of Babylon (which designates various forms of apostate religion)<sup>35</sup> is followed by the call, “Come out of her, my people”; this is the final warning given to the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>36</sup> The various powers of the earth, including civil powers, Papists, and Protestants, now make a decree that all shall “conform to the customs of the church by the observance of the false sabbath.”<sup>37</sup> After this decree has been promulgated, all who, in opposition to Seventh-day Adventism, continue to observe “the false sabbath” [Sunday], shall receive the mark of the beast, whereas those who keep the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, will receive the seal of God.<sup>38</sup>

Those opposing the seventh-day Sabbath will now inaugurate a terrible persecution against keepers of the true Sabbath [Seventh-day Adventists and those who have joined them].<sup>39</sup> Now comes the “close of probation,” when Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, after which there is no further opportunity for anyone to receive mercy and be saved.<sup>40</sup> There now follows the “time of trouble” predicted in Daniel 12:1, during which frightful plagues will be poured out on the enemies of God’s people [that is, those who refuse to keep the seventh day].<sup>41</sup> Just when these enemies are about to wipe the Sabbath-

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 615.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 194, 195.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 617.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 615–617.

Full title: *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*.

<sup>35</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 381.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 604. In the light of the entire context (see particularly pp. 606–607), it is obvious that Babylon here stands for churches which, among other things, continue to teach that Sunday is the day of the Lord.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 604; cf. p. 606.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 604; cf. p. 606.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 608–610.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 613–14. This “close of probation” is supposed to be indicated by Rev. 22:11 (p. 613). Cf. pp. 428, 490–91.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 613–34.

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keepers off the face of the earth, God sends deliverance, and strikes terror into the hearts of the would-be murderers.<sup>42</sup>

Now occurs the “special resurrection,” in which two special groups are raised from the dead: those who were responsible for the trial and crucifixion of Christ, and those who died in the faith of the third angel’s message—that is, faithful Seventh-day Adventists and others who have been keeping the seventh day who have died since 1846.<sup>43</sup> Note that at this point Seventh-day Adventists are given a special position of privilege: they shall be raised from the dead before other believers, so that they may be able to see Christ return to earth!

The doom of the wicked is now declared from heaven, producing consternation in the hearts of those who have been breaking the law of God.<sup>44</sup> God’s commandment-keeping people, however, who have sacrificed all for Christ, and have evinced their fidelity to Him, now sing a triumphant song.<sup>45</sup> Opponents of the true Sabbath realize too late that they were wrong, whereas blessing is pronounced from heaven on those who have honored God by keeping His Sabbath holy.<sup>46</sup> Now Christ returns,<sup>47</sup> and calls forth the other believers from their graves.<sup>48</sup> The living righteous are now transformed,<sup>49</sup> whereas the wicked are all put to death.<sup>50</sup> God’s people are now taken up to heaven for the millennium which follows (see above, pp. 140–41); after the annihilation of the wicked they will everlastingly inhabit the new earth (see above, p. 143).

For Seventh-day Adventists, therefore, eschatology is the arena in which the glorification of their own movement completes itself and in which they shall be completely vindicated over against their enemies. Since “the Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty” in the last days,<sup>51</sup> we see that the antithesis between God and Satan becomes in the end the antithesis between Seventh-day Adventism and those who refuse to follow its special teachings. We conclude that since Seventh-day Adventists do picture themselves as playing a central role in eschatology this distinctive trait of the cult is also clearly applicable to their movement.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 635–36.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 637; see above, pp. 139–40.

<sup>44</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 638.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 638–39.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 641.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 644; see above, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 657.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 605.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

*An Appeal to Seventh-day Adventists.* It is recognized with gratitude that there are certain soundly Scriptural emphases in the teaching of Seventh-day Adventism. We are thankful for the Adventists' affirmation of the infallibility of the Bible, of the Trinity and of the full deity of Jesus Christ. We gratefully acknowledge their teachings on creation and providence, on the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, on the absolute necessity for regeneration, on sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and on Christ's literal return. It is, however, my conviction that the Adventists have added to these Scriptural doctrines certain unscriptural teachings which are inconsistent with the former and undermine their full effectiveness. It is also my conviction that, because of the Adventists' acceptance of these additional teachings, Seventh-day Adventism must be classified, not as an evangelical church, but as a cult. The reasons for this judgment have been detailed above.

This does not mean, however, that there cannot be true children of God among the Seventh-day Adventists. This I would be the last to deny. What must be criticized, often severely, are the teachings of this group, not the individuals who hold to these teachings. Teachings we can and must evaluate in the light of God's Word; individuals we must leave to the judgment of God, who alone can read the hearts of men.

In a spirit of Christian love toward members of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, therefore, and with grateful recognition of the soundly Scriptural elements in their teaching, I plead with my friends, the Adventists, to repudiate the cultic features and unscriptural doctrines which mar Seventh-day Adventism and to return to sound, Biblical Christianity. Whether the Scriptural emphases in Seventh-day Adventism will eventually gain the victory over these unscriptural teachings, or whether those in the group who wish to be loyal to Scripture alone should come out of it, is a question which only God can answer. But false teachings which cast a shadow over the faith once for all delivered to the saints must be repudiated by all who truly love the Lord.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 388–403). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.