

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Who are the Seventh-day Adventists?

DENNIS A. WRIGHT, D.MIN.

We begin with a profound question: Just who are the Seventh-day Adventists? Are they just another branch of Evangelical Protestant Christianity? Or are they, in reality, a cult of Christianity? Or are they something in between these two extremes? Another way of asking this question might be: Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians or not?

The answer to this conundrum is: “That depends!” In this article we will carefully examine these questions and hopefully arrive at a definitive answer that can be backed up by not only the evidence—both pro and con—but also by the Scriptures themselves. We will allow Seventh-day Adventists to speak for themselves, using pro SDA resources, as well as examining the evidence and concerns of those who have left the SDA Church.

We shall begin with Joe Carter’s excellent presentation (which is heavily footnoted with original sources):¹



NINE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

1. Seventh-day Adventists compose one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. adult population,² and 1.2 million people in the North America³ belong to the denomination. But around the world there are 18.1 million SDAs, making them a larger global presence than the Southern Baptist Convention (15.5 million)⁴, the United Methodist Church (12.8 million)⁵, or Mormonism (15.3 million).

2. Seventh-day Adventism (hereafter SDA) sprung up in upstate New York in the 1840s, an offshoot of the Millerite movement that arose during the religious revival known as

¹ © The Gospel Coalition. March 8, 2016. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-seventh-day-adventism>.

² <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/Religious-Composition-of-U.S.-Adults.pdf>

³ http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=D_NAD

⁴ <http://www.religionnews.com/2015/06/16/make-southern-baptists-declining-numbers-commentary/>

⁵ <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

the Second Great Awakening. At that time a Baptist preacher named William Miller⁶ predicted and preached that, based on his reading of Daniel 8:14, Christ would return sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. The failure of this prediction—known as the Great Disappointment⁷—led many Millerites to become disillusioned. But Hiram Edson claimed to have seen a vision of Jesus standing at the altar of heaven and concluded that Miller had been right about the time but wrong about the place. As Matt Slick explains⁸, “In other words, Jesus’s return was not to earth but a move into the heavenly sanctuary as is referenced in Hebrews 8:1-2.” The development of this doctrine, known as “Sanctuary/investigative judgment” (see below), influenced Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White, the founding pioneers of the SDA church.

3. SDAs claim the Bible as their “only creed” and consider the movement⁹ to be “the result of the Protestant conviction *Sola Scriptura*—the Bible as the only standard of faith and practice for Christians.” They hold “certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of Holy Scriptures,” doctrines known as the **28 Fundamental Beliefs**,¹⁰ which are organized into six categories—the doctrines of God, man, salvation, the church, the Christian life, and last day events.

4. The **28 Fundamental Beliefs** are considered descriptive of the church’s official position, but they are not prescriptive for membership. Baptism by immersion is the criteria for membership,¹¹ which is predicated on a public examination of candidates either before the entire congregation, a church board, or elders. The minister or elder can give the candidate one of two sets of baptismal vows, one consisting of 13 vows¹² or one consisting of the following three questions:

1. Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, and do you desire to live your life in a saving relationship with him?
2. Do you accept the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and do you pledge by God’s grace to live your life in harmony with these teachings?

⁶ <http://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Miller>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Disappointment

⁸ <https://carm.org/religious-movements/seventh-day-adventism/history-seventh-day-adventist-church>

⁹ <https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/>

¹⁰ <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

¹¹ http://web.archive.org/web/20060830083754/http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/church_manual/Seventh-day-Adventist-Church-Manual-17th-edition.pdf

¹² <http://www.investitureachievement.com/article/91/ranger-level/spiritual-discovery/baptismal-vows-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

3. Do you desire to be baptized as a public expression of your belief in Jesus Christ, to be accepted into the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and to support the church and its mission as a faithful steward by your personal influence, tithes and offerings, and a life of service?

5. Most of the **28 Fundamental Beliefs** are similar to doctrines professed by evangelical Protestant denominations. The three main SDA doctrines considered heterodox by evangelicals are Sabbatarianism (a required observance of the Sabbath, which they believe falls on Saturday)¹³, the gift of prophecy as “manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White,” and the Sanctuary Doctrine.

6. The Sanctuary Doctrine is the most distinctive Adventist doctrine. Orthodox Christians commonly hold that Jesus, as our high priest, intercedes for us at God’s right hand (Heb 4:14-16; 6:20; 7:25). But SDAs also believe that Christ entered the “sanctuary in heaven” and after a “prophetic period of 2,300 days” (ending in 1844) he entered the second and last phase of his atoning ministry, a work of “blotting out” sin. As Kenneth R. Samples explains,¹⁴

From his ascension until 1844, Jesus had been applying the forgiveness he purchased on the cross in the first compartment of the sanctuary, but in 1844, he entered the second compartment and began to investigate the lives of those who had received forgiveness to see if they were worthy of eternal life. Only those who passed this judgment could be assured of being translated at his coming. This doctrine gave rise to what later became known as the sinless perfection teaching (perfect commandment-keeping in order to find acceptance in the judgment). Following the investigative judgment, Christ would come out of the heavenly sanctuary and return to earth bringing to every man his reward, and ushering in the great and terrible day of the Lord. It is 1844, and the events described above, which mark the beginning of SDA.

7. The other unique belief of SDA is in the “prophetic” ministry of Ellen G. White¹⁵ (1827-1915). During her lifetime White produced more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books totaling some 25 million words. (SDAs claim, probably correctly, that White is the “most translated woman in literature.”) From the time she was 17 years old until she died 70 years later, she claimed to have had approximately 2,000 visions and dreams, ranging from less than a minute to four hours. The 27 Fundamental Beliefs states, “Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and

¹³ <https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/living/the-sabbath/article/go/-/is-saturday-the-sabbath/>

¹⁴ <https://christian.net/pub/resources/text/crj/crj-jrnl/web/crj0005b.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.” Some Adventist scholars claim that as much as 90 percent of White’s writings were plagiarized,¹⁶ though the White estate claims it is only about 2 percent.¹⁷

8. For about a hundred years—1840s to 1950s—many evangelical denominations considered SDA to be a non-Christian cult (like the Jehovah’s Witnesses). But dialogue with SDA scholars and apologists in the 1950s led to a reconsideration of that position by some evangelicals. As Kenneth R. Samples says,¹⁸ the dialogue convinced many that “SDA was not an anti-Christian cult, but rather a somewhat heterodox (i.e., departing from accepted doctrine) Christian denomination.” The Christian Research Institute¹⁹ provides a key example of the rationale for this view:

Since SDA does accept the foundational doctrines of historic Christianity (the Trinity, Christ’s true deity, his bodily resurrection, etc.) we do not believe that it should be classified as a non-Christian cult. It is our conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, etc., and be a practicing Christian in the biblical sense of the word; but it is possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and a true follower of Jesus, despite certain distinctive Adventist doctrines which we consider to be unbiblical.

Although few evangelicals today consider SDA a non-Christian cult, many still caution against embracing the denomination as an acceptable branch of Protestantism. As Nathan Busenitz says,²⁰ “In spite of the ecumenical spirit that has pervaded evangelicalism over the last few decades, there are still major deficiencies within official SDA theology that ought to give evangelical Christians serious pause.”

9. The question and answer sessions between evangelical and SDA scholars in the 1950s led to the release of the Adventist publication *Questions on Doctrine*,²¹ a document considered to be the origin of “Evangelical Adventism.” However, not everyone in the SDA church agreed with this book or its positions. Some considered it a watering down of “traditional” Adventist teachings to appease evangelicals. Those who endorse this

¹⁶ <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0005b.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/parallel.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0005b.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.equip.org/article/seventh-day-adventism/>

²⁰ <http://www.tms.edu/preachersandpreaching/evaluating-seventh-day-adventism/>

²¹ <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/qod/>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

view are sometimes referred to as subscribing to “Traditional Adventism.” Kenneth R. Samples identifies five positions commonly held by Traditional Adventists:²²

1. **Righteousness by faith:** Righteousness by faith included both justification and sanctification. Our standing before God rests both in the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ (God's work for me and in me). Justification is for sins committed in the past only.
2. **The human nature of Christ:** Jesus Christ possessed a human nature that not only was weakened by sin, but had propensities toward sin itself. His nature was like that of Adam after the fall. Because of his success in overcoming sin, Jesus is primarily our example.
3. **The events of 1844:** Jesus entered into the second compartment of the heavenly sanctuary for the first time on October 22, 1844, and began an investigative judgment. This judgment is the fulfillment of the second phase of Christ's atoning work.
4. **Assurance of salvation:** Our standing before God rests in both the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ; assurance of salvation before the judgment is presumptuous. As Jesus, our example, showed us, perfect commandment keeping is possible.
5. **The authority of Ellen G. White:** The spirit of prophecy was manifest in the ministry of Ellen White as a sign of the remnant church. Her writings are inspired counsel from the Lord and authoritative in doctrinal matters.

Overview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church²³ is widely considered to be a Protestant Christian denomination²⁴ which is distinguished by its observance of Saturday²⁵ (the seventh day

²² <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0005b.html>

²³ Herein afterwards abbreviated as SDA or SDA Church.

²⁴ Queen, Edward L.; Prothero, Stephen R.; Shattuck, Gardiner H. (2009). "Seventh-day Adventist Church". *Encyclopedia of American religious history*. 3 (3rd ed.). New York: Infobase Publishing. p. 913; Feichtinger, Christian (2016). "Seventh-day Adventists: An Apocalyptic Christian Movement in Search for Identity". In Hunt, Stephen J. (ed.). *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Movements, Institutions, and Allegiance*. Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion. 12. Leiden: Brill Publishers. pp. 382–401.

²⁵ More precisely, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset; see “When Does Sabbath Begin?” on the Adventist website. [Archived](#) 24 July 2011 at the Wayback Machine.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

of the week in Christian and Jewish calendars) as the Sabbath,²⁶ and its emphasis on the imminent Second Coming (advent) of Jesus Christ. The SDA denomination grew out of the Millerite movement in the United States during the mid-19th century and it was formally established in 1863.²⁷ Among its co-founders was Ellen G. White, whose extensive writings are still held in high regard by the church.²⁸ However, this reverence for Ellen G. White is waning among increasing numbers of SDA members as her writings and “prophecies” are undergoing increasing scrutiny.

It is important to understand that much of the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church corresponds to common evangelical Christian teachings, such as the Trinity and the infallibility of Scripture. Hence the commonly accepted belief that the SDA Church is just another branch of Evangelical Protestantism, albeit with some peculiar quirks in their stated belief system. Distinctive teachings include the concept of “soul sleep” (the unconscious state of the dead) and the doctrine of an “investigative judgment.” The SDA Church is also known for its emphasis on diet and health, including adhering to Kosher food laws, advocating vegetarianism, and its holistic understanding of the person.²⁹ It is likewise known for its promotion of religious liberty, and its conservative principles and lifestyle.³⁰

The world church is governed by a General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, with smaller regions administered by divisions, union conferences, and local conferences. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently "one of the fastest-growing and most widespread churches worldwide",³¹ with a worldwide baptized membership of over 17 million people, and 25 million adherents.³² As of May 2007, it was the twelfth-largest religious body in the world, and the sixth-largest highly international religious body. It is ethnically and culturally diverse, and maintains a missionary presence in over 215

²⁶ Feichtinger, "Seventh-day Adventists: An Apocalyptic Christian Movement in Search for Identity", pp. 382-401.

²⁷ "[Seventh-day Adventists—The Heritage Continues Along](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Archived from the original on December 6, 2006. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

²⁸ Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of health: a study of Ellen G. White* (3rd ed. 2008) pp. xxiii–xxiv.

²⁹ Panoff, Lauren (July 29, 2019). "Seventh-Day Adventist Diet: A Complete Guide". *Healthline*. Retrieved June 18, 2020; "Adventist-owned Food Company Relaunched Famed "CHIP" Lifestyle Program." [Archived](#) 2013-11-01 at the Wayback Machine Retrieved June 14, 2021.

³⁰ "Seventh-day Adventist Church Fundamental Beliefs." [Archived](#) 2006-03-10 at the Wayback Machine. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

³¹ Feichtinger, "Seventh-day Adventists: An Apocalyptic Christian Movement in Search for Identity", pp. 382-401.

³² Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics. "The Official Site of the Seventh-day Adventist world church". Retrieved June 14, 2021; "[Seventh-Day Adventism - ReligionFacts](#)". *www.religionfacts.com*. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

countries and territories.³³ The SDA church operates over 7,500 schools including over 100 post-secondary institutions, numerous hospitals, and publishing houses worldwide, as well as a humanitarian aid organization known as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

7

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is the largest of several Adventist groups which arose from the Millerite movement of the 1840s in the “burned over district” of upstate New York (a phase of the Second Great Awakening). William Miller predicted on the basis of his mistaken understanding of Daniel 8:14–16 and the so-called “day-year principle” that Jesus Christ would return to Earth between the spring of 1843 and the spring of 1844. However, when Jesus did not return by the spring of 1844, the Millerites (in the summer of 1844) came to believe that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844, understood to be the biblical Day of Atonement for that year. Miller's failed prediction became known as the “Great Disappointment”.

Sometime later, Hiram Edson and other Millerites came to believe that Miller's calculations were correct, but that his interpretation of Daniel 8:14 was flawed as he assumed Christ would come to cleanse the world. These Adventists came to the conviction that Daniel 8:14 foretold Christ's entrance into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary rather than his Second Coming. Over the next few decades this understanding of a sanctuary in heaven developed into the doctrine of the investigative judgment, an eschatological process that commenced in 1844, in which every person would be judged to verify their eligibility for salvation and God's justice will be confirmed before the universe. This group of Adventists continued to believe that Christ's Second Coming would continue to be imminent, however they resisted setting further dates for the event, citing Revelation 10:6, “that there should be time no longer.”³⁴

In the Beginning

The Seventh-day Adventist Church had its official beginning in 1863, when its first General Conference was held. William Miller (1782–1849), a lay Bible student (later a Baptist preacher), predicted that Christ would return to earth some time between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844. One of Miller's followers postponed the date to 22

³³ ["Statistical report. Annual council of the General Conference Committee, October 9–14, 2009"](#) (PDF). 2009-06-30. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

³⁴ Cottrell, R. F. (June 26, 1855). "Definite Time" (PDF). *Review and Herald*. Rochester, NY: James White. **06** (32): 5. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

https://adventistdigitalibrary.org/islandora/object/adl%3A348853/%3Fview_only%3Dtrue.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

October 1844. When Christ did not return on that day, however, there was “great disappointment”.

The following three groups of ‘Millerites’ later combined to form the Seventh-day Adventist Church: first, the group around Hiram Edson (1806–82), who on the morning after ‘the great disappointment’ had a vision of Christ entering a heavenly sanctuary — which he interpreted to be the real meaning of Miller’s prophecy; second, a group who followed Joseph Bates (1792–1872), a retired sea captain, who through his study of the Bible became convinced that the seventh day was the proper sabbath; third, the followers of Ellen G. White (1827–1915), who began to have visions confirming various teachings later to be adopted by Adventists, and who was recognized as having a prophetic gift.

Though the first headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1903 they were moved to Takoma Park, a suburb of Washington, DC. World membership was 4,863,047 in 1985. Four out of five Seventh-day Adventists reside outside of North America. The Adventists maintain an ambitious missionary programme, and are very active in educational and medical enterprises.

Seventh-day Adventists share with evangelicals such doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, Christ’s atoning work and his second coming. They also hold teachings which set them apart from evangelical Christianity. One of these is the teaching that the proper Christian day of rest is the seventh day. Another is the doctrine of the so-called ‘investigative judgment’ — that after a person’s death there will occur an investigation of his life to determine and reveal whether he or she will be deemed worthy to have a part in the ‘first resurrection’ (the resurrection of believers). It is further taught that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the ‘remnant church’ — that is, the last remnant of God’s commandment-keeping people. One of the marks of the remnant church is said to be the gift of prophecy which was given to Ellen G. White; her teachings are still considered authoritative for Adventist theology. Many dietary laws are observed; the strictest Adventists are vegetarians.

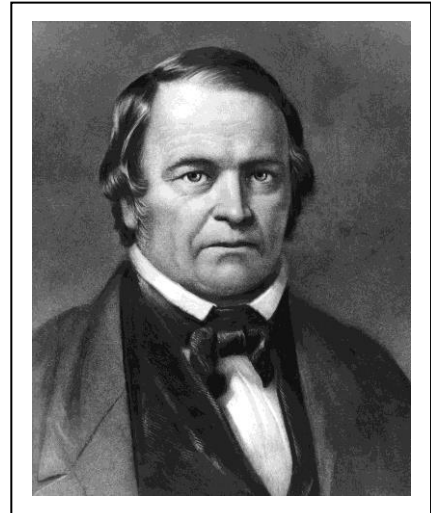
Is Seventh-day Adventism to be considered a branch of evangelical Christianity? This is not at all clear. The Adventist claim to be the remnant church implies that all other Christians are walking in some degree of darkness. Mrs White once said that the observance of the seventh-day sabbath distinguishes God’s loyal subjects from transgressors. Many Adventists today would like to be thought of as evangelical Christians, and in recent years there has been considerable internal discussion on central

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

doctrinal issues. But the doctrine of the remnant church, still official Adventist teaching, would seem to make identification with main-stream evangelicalism impossible.³⁵

William Miller

Though William Miller (1782–1849) never joined the seventh-day Adventist movement, the history of Seventh-day Adventism has its roots in Miller's prophecies. Miller was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1782. While he was still young, his family moved to Low Hampton, New York, close to the Vermont border. Though he had been reared in a Christian home, Miller became a complete skeptic, rejecting the Bible as divine revelation. After a term in the army he turned to farming, and became a respected member of the Low Hampton community. In 1816 he was converted from his skepticism. During the next two years he studied the Bible intensively with the aid of *Cruden's Concordance*, but



without the help of commentaries. In 1818 he wrote down the conclusions to which he had arrived, which ended with this statement: "I was thus brought, in 1818, at the close of my two-year study of the Scriptures, to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time [1818] all the affairs of our present state would be wound up."³⁶ In other words, Miller concluded from his Bible study that the world would come to an end in 1843.

Hesitant about publicizing so startling a conclusion, he undertook four more years of Bible study, which confirmed his previous judgment. In 1831, at the request of a friend, he publicly stated his views. This led to frequent requests to speak, so that in 1834 he became a full-time Baptist preacher. As can be understood, he preached chiefly on prophecy and the Second Coming of Christ. As can also be understood, he soon had quite a following.

Involved in the "winding up" of the affairs of the world was, of course, the expected return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. Miller did not at first set an exact date for Christ's return, but affirmed that this event would occur "about 1843." Later, however,

³⁵ Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. I. (2000). In *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed., p. 637). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³⁶ Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1954), IV, 463.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

he specified that this return would take place some time during the Jewish year running from March 21, 1843 to March 21, 1844.³⁷

How did Miller arrive at this date? In Daniel 9:24–27 he found the prophecy of the “seventy weeks” which are there predicted as extending from the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem (v. 25) to the time when the anointed one shall be cut off (v. 26). Miller took the starting point for these seventy weeks to be the decree of Artaxerxes spoken of in Ezra 7:11–26 which permitted Ezra to go back to Jerusalem, this decree being dated in his Bible (according to the Ussher chronology) as having been issued in 457 BC. He assumed that in prophetic writings of this sort a day stood for a year.³⁸ On this basis seventy weeks, which would be equivalent to 490 days, would represent 490 years. And 490 years after 457 BC brings us to AD 33, the year when, according to Ussher, Christ was crucified.

In Daniel 8:14 there is a reference to 2300 evenings and mornings which must elapse before the sanctuary shall be cleansed. Miller assumed that the cleansing of the sanctuary alluded to in this prophecy meant Christ’s return to earth. In agreement with the principle stated in the preceding paragraph, he took the 2300 evenings and mornings as standing for 2300 years. He also assumed that the 2300 years started at the same time as the 70 weeks. And 2300 years after 457 BC brings us to AD 1843, the year when, according to Miller, Christ would return.³⁹

It should be noted at this time that this calculation rests on five unproved assumptions:

1. that a day in prophetic writings always represents a year;
2. that the 70 weeks and the 2300 days began at the same time;
3. that this starting date was 457 BC;⁴⁰

³⁷ Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1945), p. 169.

³⁸ Froom, *op. cit.*, IV, 473.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Seventh-day Adventists still follow Miller’s method of calculation—see *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), pp. 268–95. The only difference is, as we shall see, that they have a different interpretation of the cleansing of the sanctuary than Miller did.

⁴⁰ If we were inclined to engage in this type of calculation (which most of us probably are not), it should be noted that the decree of Artaxerxes spoken of in Ezra 7 had nothing to do with the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Yet Daniel spoke of the “commandment” (literally, “word,” *dabhar*) to restore and to build Jerusalem. It would seem that Artaxerxes’ decision to permit Nehemiah to go back to the city of his fathers’ sepulchres, so that he might rebuild it (Neh. 2:5–8), would be much more to the point. But this happened thirteen years after 457 B.C., in 444 B.C. Seventh-day Adventists, however, still defend Miller’s choice of 457 B.C.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

4. that in figuring the *terminus ad quem* we need make no allowance for the fact that March 21, 0 BC, would actually be March 21, AD 1, thus throwing the calculation off by one year; and
5. that the cleansing of the sanctuary spoken of in Daniel 8:14 stands for Christ's return to earth.⁴¹

When the designated year arrived, however, the Lord did not return, and there was intense disappointment in the ranks of the so-called "Millerites." Miller, though dumbfounded at the failure of his calculations, was still sure that he had been right. He said,

Were I to live my life over again, with the same evidence that I then had, to be honest with God and man, I should have to do as I have done... I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door; and I exhort you, my brethren, to be watchful, and not let that day come upon you unawares.⁴²

In August of 1844, however, Samuel S. Snow, one of the Millerite leaders, launched the so-called "seventh-month movement." He had become convinced that the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 were to end not in the spring of 1844, as Miller had supposed, but in the fall of that year. Specifically, he predicted that Christ would return on October 22, 1844, which would be our calendar equivalent of the Jewish Day of Atonement for that year.⁴³ The "seventh-month movement" — so called because Tishri, the month in which the Day of Atonement fell, was the seventh month of the Jewish ecclesiastical year — rapidly gained momentum; before long virtually all the followers of Miller had accepted this re-interpretation of the 2300-day prophecy, including, finally, even Miller himself.⁴⁴ As October 22 approached, excitement mounted. Groups of Millerites gathered in their homes and in their meeting-places, expecting the Lord to return some time that day. As October 22 ended, however, and Christ did not return, the disappointment of the Millerites was overwhelming. In fact, this day is usually referred to in their history as the

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the word translated "cleansed" in the King James Version of Dan. 8:14 is actually the Niphal form of the Hebrew verb *tsadaq*, which means to be right or righteous. Hence the RSV renders the last part of the verse, "then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state"; and the Berkeley version has "then the rights of the sanctuary shall be restored." Many commentators accordingly understand the passage as a prediction of the recovery of the Jerusalem temple from Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas Maccabeus in 165 BC.

⁴² Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, p. 256; quoted in Nichol. *The Midnight Cry*, p. 171.

⁴³ From, *op. cit.*, IV, 799–800.

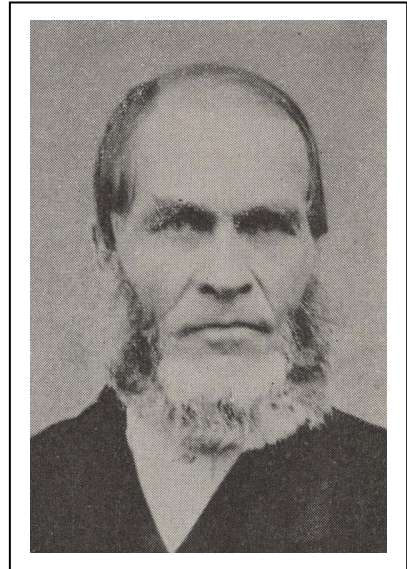
⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 818–20.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

day of “The Great Disappointment.”⁴⁵ Many now gave up the “Advent” faith; but others still clung to it.⁴⁶

Hiram Edson

As we continue our discussion of the history of Seventh-day Adventism, we must further take note of three individuals who played key roles in the development of this movement. The first of these is Hiram Edson of Port Gibson, New York (not far from Rochester). A group of “Millerite” believers met at Edson’s house, about a mile south of Port Gibson, on October 22, 1844, to wait for Christ’s return. Among those closely associated with Edson at that time were a physician, Dr. Franklin B. Hahn, and a student in his early twenties, O. R. L. Crosier. On the following morning most of the believers, greatly disappointed, returned to their homes. With those who remained, Edson went to his barn to pray. They prayed until they felt assured that light would be given them and that their disappointment would be explained.⁴⁷



After breakfast Edson decided to go out to comfort the other Adventists with the assurance they had received through prayer. Edson and a companion (who is surmised by most Adventist writers to have been Crosier) walked across the corn field adjoining the farm on their way to their first destination. At this point I quote from a manuscript written by Edson himself:

We started, and while passing through a large field I was stopped about midway of the field. Heaven seemed open to my view, and I saw distinctly and clearly that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, He for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that

⁴⁵ Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), p. 29.

⁴⁶ Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 89–92). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴⁷ Arthur W. Spalding, on pp. 91–105 of his *Captains of the Host* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1949), gives a vivid account of this entire episode and of the events connected with it.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

sanctuary; and that He had a work to perform in the most holy before coming to this earth.⁴⁸

Edson told his companion about his vision, which appeared to both of them to be the Lord's answer to their prayer of that morning. In the light of this vision, Edson now realized that there was a heavenly sanctuary corresponding to the Old Testament earthly sanctuary which had been patterned after it, and that there were two phases in Christ's heavenly ministry, just as there had been two phases in the sanctuary ministry of Old Testament priests. In other words, the light now dawned upon him that, instead of Christ's having come out of the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary to this earth at the end of the 2300 days, he had simply for the first time passed from the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary into the heavenly holy of holies. So Miller had not been wrong in his calculations, but simply in thinking that the sanctuary which was to be cleansed at the end of the 2300-day period was a sanctuary on earth—or, perhaps, the earth itself.

During the next several months Edson, Hahn, and Crosier set themselves to earnest Bible study, particularly with regard to the sanctuary ministry as described both in the Old Testament and in the book of Hebrews. Crosier wrote up his conclusions on the subject in an article which appeared in the Cincinnati *Day-Star*, an Adventist publication, under date of February 7, 1846. Froom, in his *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, gives a digest of this article.⁴⁹ Crosier explained that we must see in the work of Christ a fulfillment of the work of the Old Testament priests. In the daily work of these priests, when they presented the daily offerings to God and brought the blood of these offerings into the holy place, sprinkling it before the veil or applying it to the horns of the altar of incense, they were only transferring iniquity from the people to the sanctuary (p. 1232).⁵⁰ On the Great Day of Atonement, however, the sanctuary was cleansed. This happened, so Crosier continued, when the high priest entered the holy of holies and sprinkled the blood of the slain goat upon the mercy seat (p. 1232).⁵¹ After the sanctuary had been cleansed, the sins of the people were then put on the head of the scapegoat which was sent away into the

⁴⁸ From a fragment of a manuscript on his life and experiences, by Hiram Edson; quoted by Nichol, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 458.

⁴⁹ Vol. IV, pp. 1228–34. He also gives his own understanding of the views of Crosier and Edson, expanding somewhat on the Crosier article, on pp. 896–900.

⁵⁰ Froom gives his own interpretation of the meaning of these actions when he says, "Thus in symbol the sins of the people were borne into the sanctuary, to the entrance of the Most Holy, thus 'polluting' the sanctuary" (pp. 896–97).

⁵¹ The reader will note at this point a most peculiar inconsistency. Whereas the application of sacrificial blood to the altar of incense in the holy place is said to *pollute* the sanctuary (since the sins of believers are thus brought into the sanctuary), the application of sacrificial blood to the mercy seat in the holy of holies is said to *cleanse* the sanctuary. Why should the same ritual procedure pollute in the one case and cleanse in the other?

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

wilderness (p. 1232). There were thus two phases in the ministry of the Old Testament priests: the first (the daily ministry, which had to do with the holy place) led to the forgiveness of sins; the second, however (the yearly ministry, which had to do with the holy of holies), led to the blotting out of sins (p. 1232).⁵²

These two phases of priestly ministry, Crosier continued, are also to be seen in the work of Christ. Throughout the centuries of the Christian era Christ had been doing a work comparable to the daily ministry of the priests, which work resulted in the forgiveness of sin but not in the blotting out of sin (p. 1233). The process of blotting out sin began on October 22, 1844, when Christ entered the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary, an action which was comparable to the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. However, since the cleansing of the sanctuary was not complete until the sins of the people had been laid on the scapegoat—who, Crosier explained, typified not Christ but Satan—the last act of Christ’s priestly ministry will be to take the sins from the heavenly sanctuary and to place them on Satan (pp. 1233–34). Only after this has happened will Christ return (p. 1234).⁵³

Later in Adventist history the concept of Christ’s having entered the heavenly holy of holies was to be expanded into the so-called “investigative judgment” doctrine, which we shall examine later. Already at this time, however, Adventists had found a solution to the “Great Disappointment,” and had laid the groundwork for their later teachings on Christ’s present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.⁵⁴

Joseph Bates

A second person prominent in the early history of Seventh-day Adventism was Joseph Bates. This man, during twenty-one years at sea, had advanced from cabin boy to captain and ship owner. He had been converted to Christianity on board ship. After retirement he took up residence in Fair Haven, Massachusetts, where he joined the Christian Connection Church. From 1839 onward Bates was in the forefront of the Advent movement. Through the reading of an article on the Sabbath by Thomas M. Preble in the

⁵² This distinction between forgiveness and blotting out should be carefully noted; it plays an important part in subsequent Seventh-day Adventist theology.

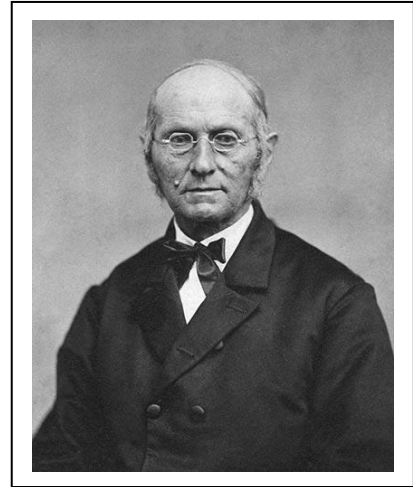
⁵³ Froom adds that the Crosier article represented the views, not only of Crosier himself, but also of Edson and Hahn. He further states that the article was endorsed by such prominent Adventist leaders as Joseph Bates and Ellen G. White; it may thus be taken as representative of Adventist thought at this time.

⁵⁴ It should be noted at this time that William Miller, who died in 1849, never accepted Crosier’s teachings about Christ’s sanctuary ministry (Froom, *op. cit.*, IV, 828–9). It is also significant to note that Crosier himself later repudiated his earlier teachings on the sanctuary (*Ibid.*, p 892, n. 18). Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 92–94). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Portland (Maine) *Hope of Israel* of February 28, 1845, Bates became convinced that the seventh day was the proper Sabbath for Christians to observe.⁵⁵

Previous to this time a group of Adventists in Washington, New Hampshire, had been influenced by some Seventh-day Baptists to embrace the seventh day as the Sabbath. This all began through the influence of a woman—Mrs. Rachel Oakes. She, having become a Seventh-day Baptist, was attending an Adventist communion service in Washington one Sunday in the winter of 1843. After the preacher, Frederick Wheeler, had called upon all his hearers to “obey God and keep His commandments in all things,” Mrs. Oakes almost arose to object. Afterwards she told the preacher that she had wanted to ask him to put the cloth back over the communion table until he was willing to keep *all* the commandments of God, *including the fourth*. Knowing that Mrs. Oakes was a Seventh-day Baptist, Wheeler promised her that he would do some serious thinking and earnest studying on the Sabbath question. In March of 1844 he arrived at the conclusion that the seventh day was the proper Sabbath, and began to observe it. Shortly afterwards the leaders of the Adventist group in Washington accepted this view, and began to observe the seventh day. The Washington, New Hampshire, Adventists were thus the first Adventists to observe the seventh day.⁵⁶



After Joseph Bates had arrived at his conclusions about the Sabbath Day, he heard about what had happened at Washington, New Hampshire, and visited the leaders there, including Frederick Wheeler. This visit strengthened Bates’s convictions about the Sabbath Day.⁵⁷

Early in 1846 Bates wrote a forty-eight-page tract entitled *The Seventh-day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*. In it he argued that the seventh-day Sabbath had been prefigured in creation, ordained in Eden, and confirmed at Mount Sinai. In 1847 he wrote a second edition of this tract, in which he discussed the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12. The third angel mentioned in this passage threatens dire punishments upon those who worship the beast and his image, and who receive his mark on their foreheads (v. 9). Identifying the beast with the Papacy, and arguing that it was the Papacy which had changed the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first, Bates concluded that those

⁵⁵ Froom, *op. cit.*, IV. 953–55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 944–47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 947–48.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

who still kept the first day as the Sabbath were worshiping the papal beast and would thus receive his mark. The obedience to God's commandments required by the third angel, Bates continued, was to consist particularly in the observance of the seventh day.⁵⁸

In January, 1849, Bates issued a second tract, entitled *A Seal of the Living God*. Noting that, according to Revelation 7, the servants of God were sealed on their foreheads, Bates concluded that the seventh-day Sabbath was the seal of God here spoken of. From the fact that the number of the sealed spoken of in this chapter is 144,000, Bates drew the conclusion that the "remnant" who keep the commandments of God—in other words, the faithful Adventists—would number only 144,000.⁵⁹

Thus there was added to the Adventist movement an emphasis on the keeping of the seventh day as the Sabbath. Though at first Bates's argument on the Sabbath did not appeal to Ellen Harmon and James White (who were to become prominent Adventist leaders), later they also accepted this position.⁶⁰ It was therefore now taught by Adventists that the keeping of the seventh day was the "seal of God," the characteristic mark of all of God's true children. The observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day, however, was interpreted as an action which would make one liable to receive the "mark of the beast," and to drink the cup of God's anger.⁶¹

Ellen G. White

The third important figure who played a leading role in the history of Seventh-day Adventism was Ellen G. White (1827–1915). Ellen Gould Harmon was born in 1827 in Gorham, Maine, some ten miles north of Portland. While Ellen was still a child, her family moved to Portland. Here they were members of the Chestnut Street Methodist Church. When Ellen was nine years old, while going home from school, she was struck in the face by a stone thrown by an older girl. She was unconscious for three weeks; her nose was broken and her face was disfigured. "... The shock to her nervous system and the illness which followed, with succeeding complications, continued for years to make her an invalid and to present a constant threat to her life."⁶²

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 956–58.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 958. Walter Martin indicates, however, that this early restriction of the remnant to 144,000 has been repudiated by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination (*The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, p. 34, n. 12).

⁶⁰ Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 959.

⁶¹ Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 95–96). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁶² Spalding, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics



In 1840 and in 1842 William Miller lectured in Portland on the Second Advent. After having attended these lectures, the Harmon family accepted Miller's teachings, and were, as a result, disfellowshipped from the Methodist church. It was after the Great Disappointment of 1844 that Ellen had her first vision: in December of that year, while visiting with some other Adventist women at the home of a friend, and while kneeling in prayer, she saw in a vision the Advent believers traveling along a lighted pathway until they reached the shining City of God. Jesus was the guide and leader of this group, which grew to become a great company.⁶³ Shortly after this, a second vision revealed that, though she was bound to encounter disbelief and

calumny, she must now tell others what God had shown her.⁶⁴ She now began a life of public witnessing, counseling, teaching, and writing. On August 30, 1846, she married James White, a young Adventist preacher who had been active in the Millerite movement. From this union four sons were born.⁶⁵

Soon there was a sizable group of Advent believers around Portland, Maine, who began to recognize that Mrs. White was being uniquely guided by the Holy Spirit—that, in fact, she was a true prophetess, whose visions and words were to be followed. Others in the Advent movement came to accept Mrs. White's leadership.

Mrs. White's husband stated that during the earlier part of her ministry she had from one hundred to two hundred "open visions" in twenty-three years. These "open visions," however, decreased as the years passed, later guidance coming to her through messages in her waking hours or through dreams. Almost every aspect of the belief and activity of the Seventh-day Adventists was encouraged or inspired by a vision or word from Mrs. White. Thus, in February of 1845, she had a vision of Jesus entering into the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary, confirming Hiram Edson's vision received in October of the preceding year.⁶⁶ On April 7, 1847, she had a vision in which she was taken first into the holy place, and then into the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary. There she saw the ark and the Ten Commandments in the ark, with a halo of glory around the Sabbath

⁶³ Froom, *op. cit.*, IV, 979, 981–82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 980.

⁶⁵ Francis D. Nichol. *Ellen G. White and her Critics* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1951), p. 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

commandment.⁶⁷ This vision, therefore, confirmed Joseph Bates's teachings about the seventh day. In her voluminous writings Mrs. White commented on such diversified subjects as salvation in all its phases, sacred history, Christian doctrine, the home and society, health, education, temperance, evangelism, finance, world missions, the organization of the church, and the inspiration of the Bible.⁶⁸

The attitude of present-day Seventh-day Adventists toward Mrs. White is well expressed in the following statement, in which Francis Nichol describes the second of two distinguishing marks which set the Advent movement apart: "The belief that God gave to this movement, in harmony with the forecast of prophecy, a manifestation of the prophetic gift in the person and writings of Mrs. E. G. White."⁶⁹ Still more official is the following statement, taken from Article 19 of the "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists":

That the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church.... They [Seventh-day Adventists] recognize that this gift was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.⁷⁰

In a later section of this paper we shall examine this claim in order to see what light it sheds on the question of the source of authority for Seventh-day Adventism.⁷¹

Development of Sabbatarianism

As the early Adventist movement consolidated its beliefs, the question of the biblical day of rest and worship was raised. The foremost proponent of Sabbath-keeping among early Adventists was Joseph Bates. Bates was introduced to the Sabbath doctrine through a tract written by Millerite preacher Thomas M. Preble, who in turn had been influenced by Rachel Oakes Preston, a young Seventh Day Baptist. This message was gradually accepted and formed the topic of the first edition of the church publication *The Present Truth* (now the *Adventist Review*), which appeared in July 1849.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189, n. 2.

⁶⁸ Froom, *op. cit.*, IV, 985–86.

⁶⁹ *Ellen G. White and her Critics*, p. 22.

⁷⁰ *Questions on Doctrine* (this abbreviation will be used from now on for the book, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*), p. 16.

⁷¹ Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 96–98). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁷² Maseko, Achim (2008). *Church schism & Corruption: Book 6 other church organisations*. Durban. p. 134.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Organization and Recognition

For about 20 years, the Adventist movement consisted of a small, loosely knit group of people who came from many churches and whose primary means of connection and interaction was through James White's periodical *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. They embraced the doctrines of the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary interpretation of Daniel 8:14, conditional immortality, and the expectation of Christ's premillennial return. Among its most prominent figures were Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen G. White. Ellen White came to occupy a particularly central role; her many visions and spiritual leadership convinced her fellow Adventists that she possessed the gift of prophecy.

The church was formally established in Battle Creek, Michigan, on May 21, 1863, with a membership of 3,500.⁷³ The SDA Church headquarters were later moved from Battle Creek to Takoma Park, Maryland, where they remained until 1989. The General Conference headquarters then moved to its current location in Silver Spring, Maryland.⁷⁴

The denomination in the 1870s turned to evangelism through missionary work and revivals, tripling its membership to 16,000 by 1880 and establishing a presence beyond North America during the late 19th century. Rapid growth continued, with 75,000 members in 1901. By this time the denomination operated two colleges, a medical school, a dozen academies, 27 hospitals, and 13 publishing houses. By 1945, the church reported 210,000 members in the US and Canada, and 360,000 elsewhere; the budget was \$29 million and enrollment in church schools was 140,000.⁷⁵

The church's beliefs and doctrines were first published in 1872 in Battle Creek Michigan as a brief statement called "A Synopsis of our Faith".⁷⁶ The church experienced challenges as it formed its core beliefs and doctrines especially as a number of the early Adventist leaders came from churches that held to some form of Arianism⁷⁷ (Ellen G. White was not

⁷³ ["Seventh-day Adventists—The Heritage Continues Along". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists](#). Archived from the original on December 6, 2006. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁷⁴ Melton, J. Gordon; Smylie, James Hutchinson. "Adventism". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Retrieved 31 January 2020.

⁷⁵ ["Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions. The Eighty-third Annual Report Year Ending December 31, 1945, pp. 2, 4"](#) (PDF). *adventistarchives.org*. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁷⁶ Damsteegt, Pieter Gerard. ["Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission"](#). Ellen G. White Estate. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁷⁷ **Arianism:** A movement in the early church that distinguished the divinity of God the Father from the divinity of Christ by arguing that Jesus was a created being. The movement derived from the teachings of Arius. In the early fourth century ad, the church was still debating the nature of Christ and his relationship to God the Father. Arius taught that Christ was a created being—the first one created by God

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

one of them).⁷⁸ This, along with some of the movement's other theological views, led to a consensus among conservative evangelical Protestants to regard the SDA Church as a cult.⁷⁹ According to Adventist scholars,⁸⁰ the teachings and writings of White, ultimately proved influential in shifting the church from largely semi-Arian⁸¹ roots towards Trinitarianism.⁸² Adventists, for the most part, credit her with bringing the Seventh-day Adventist church into a more comprehensive awareness of the God-Head during the 1890s. The Adventist Church adopted Trinitarian theology early in the 20th century and began to dialogue with other Protestant groups toward the middle of the century, eventually gaining wide recognition as a Protestant church. *Christianity Today* recognized the Seventh-day Adventist church as "the fifth-largest Christian communion worldwide" in its January 22, 2015, issue.⁸³

the Father. This view made Christ subordinate to the Father and set off what is often called the "Arian controversy." Church leaders opposed Arianism because they felt it denied full divinity to Jesus. The debate over Arianism raged throughout the fourth century, but the now-orthodox view that Christ was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father was strongly defended by the Cappadocian fathers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianus, and Gregory of Nyssa. The orthodox view was ultimately accepted as the official position of the Church at the Council of Constantinople in ad 381. [Barry, J. D., Bomar, D., Brown, D. R., Klippenstein, R., Mangum, D., Sinclair Wolcott, C., ... Widder, W. (Eds.). (2016). "Arianism," In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.]

⁷⁸ Jerry A. Moon (2003). "[The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1: Historical Overview](#)". *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. Andrews University Press. 41 (1).

⁷⁹ Kenneth Samples (1988). "[From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism](#)". Christian Research Institute; Anthony A. Hoekema (1963). *The Four Major Cults*. William B. Eerdmans; Adventist historian George R. Knight notes several other leading evangelicals who considered Adventist doctrine to be heterodox; these included Donald Barnhouse (prior to 1950), Norman F. Douty, Herbert S. Bird, E. B. Jones, Louis B. Talbot and M. R. DeHaan. See "*Questions on Doctrine, annotated edition*". Andrews University Press. 2003: xiii–xxxiii; See also Julius Nam. "[The Questions on Doctrine saga: Contours and Lessons](#)" (PDF). Retrieved June 14, 2021, and Kenneth Samples. "[Evangelical Reflections on Seventh-day Adventism: Yesterday and Today](#)" (PDF). Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁸⁰ Two sources give reason to doubt that these Adventist scholars have stated a universal scholarly truth: Bull, Malcolm; Lockhart, Keith (2007). [Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream](#). Indiana University Press. p. 75. Guy, Fritz (11 April 2014). "[Theology](#)". In Dopp Aamodt, Terrie; Land, Gary; Numbers, Ronald L. (eds.). *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*. Oxford University Press. p. 144.

⁸¹ Jerry Moon. "[Were early Adventists Arians?](#)". Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁸² Jerry A. Moon, [The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 1: Historical Overview](#) and [The Adventist Trinity Debate Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White](#). Copyright 2003 Andrews University Press. Retrieved June 14, 2021. See also "[The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer Archived](#)" by Erwin Roy Gane. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁸³ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra. "[The Season of Adventists: Can Ben Carson's Church Stay Separatist amid Booming Growth?](#)". *Christianity Today*. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Although Ellen G. White's husband claimed that her visions did not support the Trinitarian creed,⁸⁴ her writings reveal a growing awareness on the "mystery of the God-Head".⁸⁵ Adventists, for the most part, credit her with bringing the Seventh-day Adventist church into a more comprehensive awareness of the God-Head during the 1890s. Through continued Bible study, and decades-long debate, the denomination eventually concluded that Scripture does explicitly teach the existence of a triune God, and it affirmed that biblical view in the non-credal **28 Fundamental Beliefs**.⁸⁶

Seventh-day Adventist Theology

The official teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination are expressed in its **28 Fundamental Beliefs**. This statement of beliefs was originally adopted by the General Conference in 1980, with an additional belief (number 11) being added in 2005.⁸⁷ Acceptance of either of the church's two baptismal vows is a prerequisite for membership.

Adventist doctrine resembles trinitarian Protestant theology, with premillennial and Arminian⁸⁸ emphases. Adventists uphold teachings such as the infallibility of Scripture, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of the dead and justification by faith alone, and are therefore considered evangelical.⁸⁹ They believe in baptism by immersion and creation in six literal days. The modern Creationist movement started with Adventist George McCready Price, who was inspired by a vision of Ellen White.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Bull, Malcolm; Lockhart, Keith (2007). *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*. Indiana University Press. p. 75.

⁸⁵ <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane13.htm>.

⁸⁶ Knight, George, ed. (2003). *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Annotated ed.). Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press. p. 5.

⁸⁷ *World Church: Growing in Christ, New Belief Statement, Voted*, Adventist News Network, 2005-07-03.

⁸⁸ **Arminianism** — A doctrinal system based on the teachings of Arminius that emphasizes humanity's free will and holds that predestination to salvation is based on God's foreknowledge of who will believe. Arminian doctrines are often discussed in contrast to Reformed or Calvinist doctrines because the two systems have fundamentally different starting points for answering the same theological questions. [Mangum, D. (2014). *The Lexham Glossary of Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.]

⁸⁹ "Adventism" in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* by Randall Balmer, p. 7 describes Seventh-day Adventists as "an evangelical denomination." The Christian Research Institute claims "mainstream Adventism is primarily evangelical" in the sense that "the great majority of Adventist scholars, teachers and pastors that [the author has] spoken with believe firmly in salvation by grace through faith alone." "[Seventh-day Adventism: Christian or Cultic?](#)" from the Christian Research Institute.

⁹⁰ Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

There is a generally recognized set of "distinctive" doctrines which distinguish Adventism from the rest of the Christian world, although not all of these teachings are wholly unique to Adventism:⁹¹

- **Law** (fundamental belief 19): the Law of God is "embodied in the Ten Commandments", which continue to be binding upon Christians.
- **Sabbath** (fundamental belief 20): the Sabbath should be observed on the seventh day of the week, specifically, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.
- **Second Coming and End times** (fundamental beliefs 25–28): Jesus Christ will return visibly to earth after a "time of trouble", during which the Sabbath will become a worldwide test. The Second Coming will be followed by a millennial reign of the saints in heaven. Adventist eschatology is based on the historicist method of prophetic interpretation.
- **Holistic human nature** (fundamental beliefs 7, 26): Humans are an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit. They do not possess an immortal soul and there is no consciousness after death (commonly referred to as "soul sleep").
- **Conditional immortality** (fundamental belief 27): The wicked will not suffer eternal torment in hell, but instead will be permanently destroyed.
- **Great Controversy** (fundamental belief 8): Humanity is involved in a "great controversy" between Jesus Christ and Satan. This is an elaboration on the common Christian belief that evil began in heaven when an angelic being (Lucifer) rebelled against the Law of God.
- **Heavenly sanctuary** (fundamental belief 24): At his ascension, Jesus Christ commenced an atonement ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. In 1844, he began to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary in fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.
- **Investigative Judgment** (fundamental belief 24): A judgment of professed Christians began in 1844, in which the books of record are examined for all the universe to see. The investigative judgment will affirm who will receive salvation, and vindicate God in the eyes of the universe as just in his dealings with mankind.

⁹¹ "[About us](#)". *Providence Hispanic*. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- **Remnant** (fundamental belief 13): There will be an end-time remnant who keep the commandments of God and have "the testimony of Jesus".⁹² This remnant proclaims the "three angels' messages" of Revelation 14:6–12 to the world.
- **Spirit of Prophecy** (fundamental belief 18): The ministry of Ellen G. White is commonly referred to as the "Spirit of Prophecy" and her writings "speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church",⁹³ though ultimately subject to the Bible.

Source of Authority

The first question we take up as we begin to study the doctrinal teachings of Seventh-day Adventism is that of their source of authority. The main teachings of Seventh-day Adventists are summarized in a set of twenty-two statements entitled "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists."⁹⁴ Article 1 of these *Fundamental Beliefs* reads as follows:

That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine is a recent exposition of the teachings of this church, prepared by "a representative group of Seventh-day Adventist leaders, Bible teachers, and editors." The authors explain that the book contains answers to questions which have been raised about Seventh-day Adventist teachings and that these answers are given within the framework of the *Fundamental Beliefs* to which reference has just been made. They add, "In view of this fact, these answers represent the position of our denomination in the area of church doctrine and prophetic interpretation" (p. 8). It is further stated that the officers of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists have endorsed this volume, and have recommended it for general use (p. 10). Hence we shall consider this book to be an authentic and reliable source of information about Seventh-day Adventist teachings. Let us now note what the authors have to say about the matter of the source of authority:

Seventh-day Adventists hold the Protestant position that the Bible and the Bible only is the sole rule of faith and practice for Christians. We believe that all theological beliefs must be measured by the living Word, judged by its truth, and

⁹² Revelation 12:17.

⁹³ "[Fundamental Beliefs](#)". Seventh-day Adventist Church. Retrieved June 14, 2021.

⁹⁴ These can be found in the *Church Manual*, the *Yearbook*, and also in *Questions on Doctrine*.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

whatsoever is unable to pass this test, or is found to be out of harmony with its message, is to be rejected.⁹⁵

So far, therefore, it would appear that Seventh-day Adventists agree with all conservative Protestants in accepting the Bible as the sole rule of faith and life, and as the ultimate source of authority.

When the question is asked, “Do Seventh-day Adventists regard the writings of Ellen G. White as on an equal plane with the writings of the Bible?”, the answer given begins as follows:

1. That we do not regard the writings of Ellen G. White as an addition to the sacred canon of Scripture.
2. That we do not think of them as of universal application, as is the Bible, but particularly for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
3. That we do not regard them in the same sense as the Holy Scriptures, which stand alone and unique as the standard by which all other writings must be judged.⁹⁶

In further explication of this point, the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*⁹⁷ go on to say:

Seventh-day Adventists uniformly believe that the canon of Scripture closed with the book of Revelation. We hold that all other writings and teachings, from whatever source, are to be judged by, and are subject to, the Bible, which is the spring and norm of the Christian faith. We test the writings of Ellen G. White by the Bible, but in no sense do we test the Bible by her writings.⁹⁸

In fact, these authors support their contention by quoting statements from Mrs. White herself, such as the following:

I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁹⁷ *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90. To the same effect are statements by Francis D. Nichol, leading Seventh-day Adventist apologist, in *Ellen G. White and her Critics*, pp. 87–90.

⁹⁹ *Early Writings*, p. 78; quoted in *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 90.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.¹⁰⁰

As we have previously noted, however, Seventh-day Adventists do claim that Mrs. White had the gift of prophecy, and that this gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church.¹⁰¹ From Revelation 12:17 (in the King James Version) they gather that this remnant church has “the testimony of Jesus Christ”; and from Revelation 19:10 they learn that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Since, now, the Spirit of prophecy (at this point, contrary to the King James Version, they capitalize the word *spirit*) manifests Himself in the gift of prophecy, and since, as they believe, Mrs. White had this gift of prophecy, they conclude that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination must be the remnant church of which Revelation 12:17 speaks.¹⁰² Though not placing Mrs. White into the same category as the writers of the canon of Scripture, the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* compare her to the “prophets or messengers who lived contemporaneously with the writers of the two Testaments, but whose utterances were never a part of Scripture canon.”¹⁰³ The Seventh-day Adventist evaluation of Mrs. White is summed up in the following words:

While Adventists hold the writings of Ellen G. White in highest esteem, yet these are not the source of our expositions. We base our teachings on the Scriptures, the only foundation of all true Christian doctrine. However, it is our belief that the Holy Spirit opened to her mind important events and called her to give certain instructions for these last days. And inasmuch as these instructions, in our understanding, are in harmony with the Word of God, which Word alone is able to make us wise unto salvation, we as a denomination accept them as inspired counsels from the Lord.¹⁰⁴

We are thankful to note that Seventh-day Adventists *claim* that they do not add any writings to the Sacred Scriptures, and that in this way, theoretically at least, they distinguish themselves from a group like the Mormons. It must be said, however, that their use of Mrs. White’s writings and their avowed acceptance of her “prophetic gift”

¹⁰⁰ *Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903; quoted in *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 93. The implication is that Mrs. White herself is the “lesser light.”

¹⁰¹ See above, p. 98.

¹⁰² *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 95–96.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91. Among the examples given of this type of person is John the Baptist. It will be recalled, however, that some of his utterances did become a part of the canonical Scriptures: e.g., Mt. 3:2, 7–12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

are not consistent with this claim. In substantiation of this judgment I offer the following considerations:

1. Though Seventh-day Adventists claim that they test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible,¹⁰⁵ they assert, on another page of the same volume, that the instructions which she gave the church are in harmony with the Word of God.¹⁰⁶ The latter statement is not qualified in any way; they do not say that *most* of her instructions were in harmony with the Bible, or that her instructions were *generally* in harmony with God's Word—they simply state: "these instructions, in our understanding, are in harmony with the Word of God..." This latter assertion, however, actually nullifies the former. How can one honestly claim to test the writings of a person by the Word of God when one already assumes, as a foregone conclusion, that these writings are in harmony with that Word?
2. Though Seventh-day Adventists claim to test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, they call her writings "inspired counsels from the Lord," and say that "the Holy Spirit opened to her mind important events and called her to give certain instructions for these last days."¹⁰⁷ If this is so, however, who may criticize her writings? If they are inspired, they must be true. If her instructions come from the Holy Spirit, they must be true. How, then, could anyone dare to suggest that any of her instructions might be contrary to Scripture? Could messages come from the Holy Spirit which would be contrary to the Word which that same Spirit inspired? Could "inspired counsels from the Lord" be in contradiction to the Lord's Scriptures? Again we must conclude that by describing Mrs. White's instructions as they do, Seventh-day Adventists negate their assertion that they test her writings by the Bible.
3. Though Seventh-day Adventists claim to test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, they insist that the gift of prophecy which she possessed, and with which she therefore enriched their group, is a mark of the "remnant church."¹⁰⁸ This means that this gift sets the Seventh-day Adventists apart from all other groups. But other Christian groups also have the Bible. What, therefore, sets the Seventh-day Adventists apart is what they have in addition to the Bible, namely, the gift of prophecy as manifested in Mrs. White. But if they test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, as they say, and if the Bible is really their final authority, what do they

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96. The question of what they understand by this "remnant church" will be taken up in greater detail when we examine their doctrine of the church.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

really have which sets them apart from other groups? It is quite clear at this point that Seventh-day Adventists do not really test Mrs. White's writings by Scripture, but use them alongside of Scripture, and find in their use a mark of distinction which sets them apart from other groups.

4. Though Seventh-day Adventists claim to test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, they maintain that these writings "are not of universal application, as is the Bible, but [are] particularly for the Seventh-day Adventist Church."¹⁰⁹ But, we ask, why are they not of universal application? If her writings are tested by Scripture, there should be nothing in them which is contrary to Scripture; if this is so, why should not all her writings be of universal application? Why should not all Christians be bound to accept them, as all Christians are bound to accept the Bible? If her instructions were from the Holy Spirit, why were they not for everyone? Does the Holy Spirit ordinarily work this way? Does He give instructions and counsels for one body of believers only, which are not binding on others? Putting the question another way, if these instructions are not of universal application, are they really from the Holy Spirit? Are they really in perfect agreement with Scripture?

At this point Seventh-day Adventists really claim to have a special source of divine guidance which is not shared by other groups of believers. Is this really much different from the claims of the Mormons?

5. Though Seventh-day Adventists claim to test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, their actual usage of her writings nullifies this claim. Instead of testing her writings by the Bible, they use statements from her writings to substantiate their interpretation of Scripture. Typical of their method, for example, is their treatment of the Investigative Judgment, one of the key doctrines of their faith. Under the heading, "Investigative Judgment as Part of the Program of God," the necessity for this investigative judgment (made by Christ before the end of the world) is "proved" by a reference to two passages of Scripture which are ordinarily taken to refer to the final judgment at the end of time (Dan. 7:10, and Rev. 20:12). No attempt is made to explain these passages; they are, in fact, not even quoted—a simple reference is considered sufficient. Soon, however, a passage from Mrs. White is quoted in full, to prove that there must be an "investigative judgment" prior to the final judgment:

There must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works.¹¹⁰

Is this, now, testing Mrs. White’s writings by the Bible? Or is this interpreting the Bible by the writings of Mrs. White?

As a matter of fact, Seventh-day Adventists quote more from Mrs. White than from any other author. *Questions on Doctrine* is virtually studded with quotations from Mrs. White. To give an example, Chapter 6 of *Questions on Doctrine*, dealing with “The Incarnation and the ‘Son of Man,’ ” contains the following number of quotations from Mrs. White: one on page 51, one on page 53, two on page 54, five on page 55, one on page 56, four on page 57, one on page 58, three on page 59, ten on page 60, eight on page 61, two on page 62, one on page 63, and two on page 65! The same practice characterizes other Seventh-day Adventist writings. Walter Martin quotes a statement from Wilbur M. Smith which reads in part as follows:

I do not know any other denomination in all of Christendom today that has given such recognition, so slavishly and exclusively, to its founder or principal theologian as has this commentary [the new Seventh-day Adventist commentary] to the writings of Ellen White. At the conclusion of every chapter in this work is a section headed, “Ellen G. White Comments.”¹¹¹

As a further illustration of the actual usage of Mrs. White’s writings made by Seventh-day Adventists, I instance their recent publication entitled *Principles of Life from the Word of God*.¹¹² This is a textbook on Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal teachings, intended for classroom use. The method used is that of questions and answers. Usually the question is answered by a reference to a passage from the Bible, followed by a quotation from one of Mrs. White’s writings. Frequently, however, no Scripture passage is given in answer to a question; there is only a quotation from Mrs. White. One can hardly turn a page of this book without finding several quotations from Mrs. White; she is virtually the only

¹¹⁰ *The Great Controversy*, p. 422. The above discussion will be found on pp. 420–422 of *Questions on Doctrine*.

¹¹¹ From a letter to Martin, quoted in the latter’s *Truth About Seventh-Day Adventism*, pp. 95–96. At this writing, Mr. Smith is Professor of English Bible at Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹¹² Prepared by the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and published by the Pacific Press Publishing Association of Mountain View, Calif., in 1952. It was reprinted as recently as 1960.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

authority quoted, alongside of the Bible. Quite in agreement with the plan of the book, a paragraph from the introductory statement to the student reads as follows:

This new book, “Principles of Life From the Word of God,” has been written for the express purpose of giving you the facts upon which to make your everyday decisions and to solve life’s complex problems. It is written for you. The greater part of the evidences cited are from the Bible or the spirit of prophecy—our two main sources of divine wisdom.

29

The expression, “the spirit of prophecy,” in the last sentence above is intended to designate the writings of Mrs. White. When these writings are thus described as one of their “two main sources of divine wisdom,” are not Seventh-day Adventists actually recognizing Mrs. White’s teachings as a second source of authority alongside of Scripture?

It is also significant to note that nowhere in Adventist literature do we read the admission that Mrs. White may have been in error on any point of doctrine. Francis D. Nichol, in *Ellen G. White and her Critics*, goes to great lengths to defend Mrs. White from various types of charges made against her, but nowhere in his 703 pages admits that Mrs. White could have been in error on a doctrinal matter. He does grant in one instance that she was wrong, but this was not a doctrinal matter; it was, so Nichol explains, an exercise of private judgment.¹¹³ Does it seem reasonable to hold that a woman who wrote as many volumes of Scriptural exposition and doctrinal comment as Mrs. White did could never be wrong?

In further substantiation of the point which is being made, I quote from D. M. Canright, who was a Seventh-day Adventist for twenty-eight years, but left the movement because he became convinced that it was in error. Mr. Canright, who was personally acquainted with both Mr. and Mrs. White, and who therefore had first-hand knowledge of the movement, has set forth his objections to Seventh-day Adventism in a volume entitled *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.¹¹⁴ In this book he quotes a statement by Mrs. White in which she equated her writings with those of the prophets and apostles: “In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days he speaks to

¹¹³ In the matter of advising the construction of the Battle Creek Health Reform Institute (pp. 495–504). Martin attacks the assertion that this was merely a matter of “private judgment,” since, so he contends, the point on which she admitted she was wrong had been introduced with the formula “I was shown”—the customary way of indicating something which came to her through the “Spirit of prophecy” (*op. cit.*, pp. 105–107).

¹¹⁴ Originally published in 1889 by Fleming H. Revell, later published by B. C. Goodpasture, and reprinted in 1961 from the 1914 edition by Baker Book House of Grand Rapids.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

them by the Testimonies of his spirit.”¹¹⁵ Canright further quotes a statement from the *Advent Review* of July 2, 1889, to this effect: “We [Seventh-day Adventists] will not neglect the study of the Bible and the *Testimonies*.” He adds the following comment:

This illustrates the place they assign her [Mrs. White’s] writings, viz., an appendix to the Bible. She occupies the same relation to her people that Mrs. Southcott did to hers, Ann Lee to the Shakers, and Joe Smith to the Mormons.⁶⁷

Mr. Canright goes on to say that anyone in the Advent movement who rejects or opposes the “testimonies” of Mrs. White is branded as a rebel fighting against God.⁶⁸ He observes:

There is not a doctrine nor a practice of the church, from the observance of the Sabbath to the washing of feet, upon which she has not written. That settles it. No further investigation can be made on any of these matters, only to gather evidence and construe everything to sustain it. How, then, can their ministers or people be free to think and investigate for themselves? They can not, dare not, and do not.¹¹⁶

On a previous page he says:

Among themselves they [the Seventh-day Adventists] quote her [Mrs. White] as we do Paul. A text from her writings is an end of all controversy in doctrine and discipline. It is common to hear them say that when they give up her visions they will give up the Bible too, and they often do.¹¹⁷

Is it any wonder, then, that Canright feels compelled to assert: “Thus they [the Seventh-day Adventists] have another Bible, just the same as the Mormons have. They have to read our old Bible in the light of this new Bible.”¹¹⁸

One can understand, of course, that Mr. Canright would be very critical of a movement which he himself had left. Even if we allow for some overstatement in his utterances, however, the statements made by Seventh-day Adventists in their recent doctrinal volume, and the actual use they make of Mrs. White’s writings, are sufficient to establish the conclusion that Seventh-day Adventists do actually place Mrs. White’s writings above the Bible, even while claiming that they do not. What is really determinative for their

¹¹⁵ Testimony No. 33, p. 189; quoted by Canright on p. 135. “Testimonies” was the name commonly given to Mrs. White’s specific instructions for the church.

⁶⁷ *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1961 printing), p. 135.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–37.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

theological position is not careful, objective, scholarly searching of the Scriptures, but the teachings and visions of Ellen G. White, which are, for them, the court of final appeal. On the question of their source of authority, therefore, we must reluctantly insist that Seventh-day Adventists do not bow before the Scriptures as their ultimate authority in matters of faith and life.¹¹⁹

The Theological Spectrum

As with any religious movement, a theological spectrum exists within Adventism comparable to the fundamentalist-conservative-moderate-liberal spectrum in the wider Christian church as well as in other religions. A variety of groups, movements and subcultures within the church present differing views on beliefs and lifestyle.

The conservative end of the theological spectrum is represented by Historic Adventists,¹²⁰ who are characterized by their opposition to theological trends within the denomination, beginning in the 1950s.¹²¹ They object to theological compromises with Evangelicalism, and seek to defend traditional Adventist teachings such as the human post-fall nature of Jesus Christ, investigative judgment, and character perfectionism.¹²² Historic Adventism

¹¹⁹ Needless to say, the relationship of this group to Mrs. White has crucial bearing on the question, much discussed of late, of whether Seventh-day Adventism is to be considered a cult, or whether it is to be classed with the historic Christian churches. The inclusion of Seventh-day Adventism in this volume already indicates the author's judgment on this matter. This question will be taken up in detail, however, in Chapter 6. Hoekema, A. A. (1963). *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (pp. 100–108). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

¹²⁰ **Historic Adventism** is an informal designation for conservative individuals and organizations affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church who seek to preserve certain traditional beliefs and practices of the church. They feel that the church leadership has shifted or departed from key doctrinal "pillars" ever since the middle of the 20th century. Specifically, they point to the publication in 1957 of a book entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*; which they feel undermines historic Adventist theology in favor of theology more compatible with evangelicalism. Historic Adventism has been erroneously applied by some to any Adventists that adhere to the teachings of the church as reflected in the church's fundamental beliefs such as the Sabbath or the Spirit of Prophecy. They misapply those who hold to mainstream traditional Adventist beliefs as synonymous with Historic Adventist. Historic Adventists have tended to promote their message through independent ministries, some of which have had a strained relationship with the official church. "Last Generation Theology" shares some elements with Historic Adventism, yet considers itself to have "expanded" the beliefs of Adventism to their logical conclusion. Historic Adventists are seen as at the opposite end of the Adventist theological spectrum from Progressive Adventists. Prominent figures supporting some of the historic views include M. L. Andreasen, and Colin and Russell Standish.

¹²¹ Corson, Ron (2002). "[Progressive and Traditional Adventists Examined](#)". *Adventist Today*. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

is represented by some scholars,¹²³ is also seen at the grassroots level of the church¹²⁴ and is often promoted through independent ministries.

The most liberal elements in the church are typically known as Progressive Adventists¹²⁵ (progressive Adventists generally do not identify with liberal Christianity). They tend to disagree with the traditional views concerning the inspiration of Ellen White, the Sabbath, a seven-day Creation, the doctrine of the remnant and the investigative judgment.¹²⁶ The progressive movement is supported by some scholars¹²⁷ and finds expression in bodies such as the Association of Adventist Forums and in journals such as *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*.

Who Are the “True” Adventists?

Dale Ratzlaff (a former fourth generation Adventist minister) explains that the answer to this question is not an easy one. Within the Seventh-day Adventist church are several streams of theological understanding.¹²⁸ While the following descriptions are an oversimplification, and many Seventh-day Adventists would not precisely fit any of these categories, they will serve for purposes of communication. The three main branches

¹²³ Pipim, [“Excerpts from chapter 1 of Receiving the Word”](#). Archived from the original on March 28, 2008. Retrieved June 15, 2021. Pipim is just one example of a conservative scholar.

¹²⁴ [“GYC is a grassroots Adventist movement organized and led by young adults from diverse backgrounds.”](#) Archived May 6, 2010, at the Wayback Machine.

¹²⁵ **Progressive Adventists** are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who prefer different emphases or disagree with certain beliefs traditionally held by mainstream Adventism and officially by the church. While they are often described as **Liberal Adventism** by other Adventists, the term “progressive” is generally preferred as a self-description. Terms such as **Evangelical Adventism**, **Cultural Adventism**, **Charismatic Adventism**, and **Progressive Adventism** and others are used and are generally related but have distinctions.

Progressives typically disagree with one or more of the church's basic beliefs such as the Sabbath or “distinctive” beliefs such as the investigative judgment, the remnant, a future global Sunday-law, or a use of Ellen G. White's writings. They also tend to question some of the denomination's **28 fundamental beliefs**: with debate arising on the nature of the Trinity, perpetuity of the Law of God, the Nature of Christ, the Gift of Prophecy, Creation or observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.” It also has many similarities with the ecumenical **emerging church movement**, as both are characterized by their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church. Perceptions and definitions of it may differ somewhat depending on the author, although much in common is also clearly discernible.

¹²⁶ Corson, Ron (2002). [“Progressive and Traditional Adventists Examined”](#). *Adventist Today*. Retrieved June 15, 2021. Koranteng-Pipim, Samuel (1996). *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle*. Berrien Springs, Michigan: Berean Books. pp. 198–200.

¹²⁷ Pipim, [“Excerpts from chapter 1 of Receiving the Word”](#). Archived from the original on March 28, 2008. Retrieved June 15, 2021. Pipim, a conservative scholar, describes this constituency as “liberal”

¹²⁸ See the journal, *Adventist Today*, January/February 1994.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

of Adventist theological understanding we will call: Historic Adventism,¹²⁹ Liberal Adventism, and Evangelical Adventism.

Historic Adventists

Historic Adventists continue to hold to the “unique truths” that were “given” to Adventism. They believe that the SDA church was raised up by God to proclaim a special message to the world. This unique message is the three angels’ messages taken from Revelation 14:6-12. This is a judgment hour proclamation of the “eternal gospel;” a warning to come out of “Babylon,” which they believe to be the “fallen” Protestant churches of Christendom.¹³⁰ The Sabbath for SDAs is the seal of God, and Sunday worship, they believe, will become the mark of the beast. Therefore, the seventh-day Sabbath holds a place of vital importance in their thinking and message. They see the hand of God moving in SDA history as the light of God’s “truth” for the last days keeps unfolding before their view. Historic Adventists believe the writings of Ellen G. White are “a continuing and authoritative source of truth.” They believe Ellen White was a messenger of God, and her writings are often considered an “inspired commentary” on Scripture. Very few “good Adventists”¹³¹ would ever admit that Ellen White’s writings contradict the Bible, or contain serious theological error. This group strongly supports the doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment.

Liberal Adventists

Within Adventist circles Liberal Adventism is often used to describe those who hold the “moral influence theory” of the atonement. This stream finds its center in the Loma Linda area of Southern California. It teaches that the substitutionary, forensic view of the atonement is primitive and does not correctly represent the character of God. Liberal Adventists would say that the forensic view of the atonement served its purpose in Bible times, but is inadequate today. Paul taught this view because it was a framework the people of his day could understand. Modern Christians, however, have progressed in their understanding of the character of God to the place where the sandbox models are no longer adequate. To picture God requiring a blood atonement, they would say, is to see Him in barbaric terms. The forensic model of the atonement is no longer valid.

¹²⁹ Some would call this group Traditional Adventism.

¹³⁰ Those who teach the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness and/or reject the “truth” of the seventh-day Sabbath.

¹³¹ A term often used by Historic Adventists to refer to those who observe all the lifestyle rules laid down by Ellen White.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Rather, Liberal Adventists teach that salvation is to *know God*.¹³² Their emphasis is on understanding the character of God. The cross of Christ, they say, proves that men could do whatever they wanted to the Son of God, and He would love them still. In other words, there is no reason to be afraid of God. Knowing His character engenders trust, and this trust in God is really what God is looking for. When we truly trust God enough, then we are “safe to save.” One recurring theme of the Liberal Adventists is that God is not going to punish the wicked. They revolt at the very idea of a painful destruction of the wicked, to say nothing of an ever-burning hell. Communicating to others the loving character of God is to them the proclamation of the gospel. Often, these Liberal Adventists use the writings of Ellen White—at least portions of them—to support this theology.¹³³

Evangelical Adventists

Evangelical Adventists are more gospel-centered than either Historic Adventists or Liberal Adventists. In fact, most Evangelical Adventists do not believe in a literal interpretation of several points in the *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh Day Adventists*. Evangelical Adventists do not believe SDAs will be the only people saved in the last days. They do not see the Seventh-day Adventist church as the only true remnant church. And most importantly, Evangelical Adventists believe the gospel of grace. Justification by faith is their keynote. Good works will follow the genuine experience of faith in Christ, but these works do not enter into the foundation for salvation.

Evangelical Adventists are in disagreement in their understanding of Ellen White. Some continue to believe that Ellen White demonstrated the true gift of prophecy, while at the same time disagree with many of her statements. Others, at least in private, reject her writings as an inspired source of truth.

Most Evangelical Adventists do not believe that all Christians must, or will, observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Some still see the seventh-day Sabbath as important, but non-essential, others hold that the old covenant Sabbath prefigured the true “rest” of grace revealed in the gospel.¹³⁴ This latter group is gaining influence at the grass-root level within the SDA church and poses a serious threat to Historic Adventism.

¹³² “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” John 17:3.

¹³³ This description is a summary of my personal talks with those who are considered Liberal Adventists. See also *Adventist Today*, January/February 1994.

¹³⁴ The information cited here comes from recent (1994-1996) personal conversations with Evangelical SDA pastors who wish to remain anonymous.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

A possible fourth group within Adventism

Some have said that there are four groups within the Adventist church, and have defined the fourth group as those who don't care about the issues and don't want to get involved in the discussion of them. They just want to keep peace. These we will call Social Adventists.¹³⁵

35

Fuzzy lines of demarcation

We should not think that the lines between these groups within the SDA church are always clear and distinct. I was born into a Historic Adventist home and fully believed the Adventist teachings. After I discovered the gospel,¹³⁶ my progress in moving from a Historic Adventist, to an Evangelical Adventist, and finally to a non-Adventist, was in small, incremental steps. From my recent conversations with other Adventists at various stages of the journey, I see the same thing taking place.¹³⁷

Theological Organizations

The Biblical Research Institute is the official theological research center of the church. The church has two professional organizations for Adventist theologians who are affiliated with the denomination. The Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) was formed to foster a community among Adventist theologians who attend the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and the American Academy of Religion. In 2006, ASRS voted to continue their meetings in the future in conjunction with SBL. During the 1980s, the Adventist Theological Society was formed to provide a forum for more conservative theologians to meet and is held in conjunction with the Evangelical Theological Society.¹³⁸

Culture and Practices

Sabbath Activities

Part of Friday might be spent in preparation for the Sabbath; for example, preparing meals and tidying homes. Adventists may gather for Friday evening worship to welcome in the Sabbath, a practice often known as Vespers.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ See *Adventist Today*, January/February 1994.

¹³⁶ I did not learn the clarity of the gospel from Adventist sources.

¹³⁷ Ratzlaff, Dale (2009). *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism: An Evangelical Wake-up Call*. Cape Verde, AZ: LAM Publications, pp. 25-29.

¹³⁸ Maseko, Akim (2009). *Church Schism & Corruption*. Lulu. p. 545.

¹³⁹ "[Sabbath Vespers – SDA Church](http://www.sdachurch.com)". *www.sdachurch.com*.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Adventists abstain from secular work on Saturday. They will also usually refrain from purely secular forms of recreation, such as competitive sport and watching non-religious programs on television. However, nature walks, family-oriented activities, charitable work and other activities that are compassionate in nature are encouraged. Saturday afternoon activities vary widely depending on the cultural, ethnic and social background. In some churches, members and visitors will participate in a fellowship (or "potluck") lunch and AYS (Adventist Youth Service).

Worship Service

The major weekly worship service occurs on Saturday, typically commencing with Sabbath School which is a structured time of small-group bible study at church. Adventists make use of an officially produced "Sabbath School Lesson", which deals with a particular biblical text or doctrine every quarter.¹⁴⁰ Special meetings are provided for children and youth in different age groups during this time (analogous to Sunday school in other churches).

After a brief break, the community joins together again for a church service that follows a typical evangelical format, with a sermon as a central feature. Corporate singing, Scripture readings, prayers and an offering, including tithing (or money collection), are other standard features. The instruments and forms of worship music vary greatly throughout the worldwide church.¹⁴¹ Some churches in North America have a contemporary Christian music style, whereas other churches enjoy more traditional hymns including those found in the *Adventist Hymnal*. Worship is known to be generally restrained.

Holy Communion

Adventist churches usually practice open communion four times a year. It commences with a foot washing ceremony, known as the "Ordinance of Humility", based on the Gospel account of John 13. The Ordinance of Humility is meant to emulate Christ's washing of his disciples' feet at the Last Supper and to remind participants of the need to humbly serve one another. Participants segregate by gender to separate rooms to conduct this ritual, although some congregations allow married couples to perform the ordinance on each other and families are often encouraged to participate together. After its

¹⁴⁰ "[Spectrum Magazine](http://spectrummagazine.org)". spectrummagazine.org.

¹⁴¹ "[A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music—Guidelines](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council. October 2004. Archived from [the original](#) on 2007-04-05. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

completion, participants return to the main sanctuary for consumption of the Lord's Supper, which consists of unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice.¹⁴²

Health and Diet

Since the 1860s when the church began, wholeness and health have been an emphasis of the Adventist church.¹⁴³ Adventists are known for presenting a "health message" that advocates vegetarianism and expects adherence to the kosher laws,¹⁴⁴ particularly the consumption of kosher foods described in Leviticus 11, meaning abstinence from pork, shellfish, and other animals proscribed as "unclean".

The church discourages its members from consuming alcoholic beverages, tobacco or illegal drugs. In addition, some Adventists avoid coffee, tea, cola, and other beverages that contain caffeine.

The pioneers of the Adventist Church had much to do with the common acceptance of breakfast cereals into the Western diet, and the "modern commercial concept of cereal food" originated among Adventists.¹⁴⁵ John Harvey Kellogg was one of the early founders of Adventist health work. His development of breakfast cereals as a health food led to the founding of Kellogg's by his brother William. He advertised bland corn flakes as a way to curb sexual desire and avoid the evils of masturbation. In both Australia and New Zealand, the church-owned Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing Company is a leading manufacturer of health and vegetarian-related products, most prominently Weet-Bix.

Research funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health has shown that the average Adventist in California lives 4 to 10 years longer than the average Californian. The research, as cited by the cover story of the November 2005 issue of *National Geographic*, asserts that Adventists live longer because they do not smoke or drink alcohol, have a day of rest every week, and maintain a healthy, low-fat vegetarian diet that is rich in nuts and beans.¹⁴⁶ The cohesiveness of Adventists' social networks has also been put forward as an explanation for their extended lifespan.¹⁴⁷ Since Dan Buettner's 2005 *National*

¹⁴² ["Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . The Lord's Supper: 27-15.htm"](http://www.sdanet.org). *www.sdanet.org*.

¹⁴³ ["Health"](#). Archived from [the original](#) on October 3, 2006. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Shurtleff, W.; Aoyagi, A. (2014). *History of Seventh-day Adventist Work with Soyfoods, Vegetarianism, Meat Alternatives, Wheat Gluten, Dietary Fiber and Peanut Butter (1863-2013): Extensively Annotated Bibliography and Sourcebook*. Soyinfo Center. p. 1081.

¹⁴⁵ Britannica.com

¹⁴⁶ Buettner, Dan (November 16, 2005). "The Secrets of Long Life". *National Geographic*. **208** (5): 2–27. [ISSN 0027-9358](#). Retrieved 2006-06-06. [Excerpt Archived](#) 2007-11-16 at the Wayback Machine. See also *National Geographic*, "[Sights & Sounds of Longevity](#)."

¹⁴⁷ Kolata, Gina (2007-01-03). "[A Surprising Secret to a Long Life: Stay in School](#)". *The New York Times*.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Geographic story about Adventist longevity, his book, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*, named Loma Linda, California a "Blue Zone" because of the large concentration of Seventh-day Adventists. He cites the Adventist emphasis on health, diet, and Sabbath-keeping as primary factors for Adventist longevity.¹⁴⁸

An estimated 35% of Adventists practice vegetarianism or veganism, according to a 2002 worldwide survey of local church leaders.¹⁴⁹ North American Adventist health study recruitments from 2001-2007 found that 54% of Adventists were meat-eaters, 28% were Ovo/Lacto-vegetarians, 10% were Pesco-vegetarians and 8% were vegans. 98.9% of the cohort were non-smokers and 93.4% abstained from drinking alcohol.¹⁵⁰

Adventists' clean lifestyles were recognized by the U.S. military in 1954 when 2,200 Adventists volunteered to serve as human test subjects in Operation Whitecoat, a biodefense medical research program whose stated purpose was to defend troops and civilians against biological weapons:

Although willing to serve their country when drafted, the Adventists refused to bear arms. As a result many of them became medics. Now the U.S. was offering recruits an opportunity to help in a different manner: to volunteer for biological tests as a way of satisfying their military obligations. When contacted in late 1954, the Adventist hierarchy readily agreed to this plan. For Camp Detrick scientists, church members were a model test population, since most of them were in excellent health and they neither drank, smoked, nor used caffeine. From the perspective of the volunteers, the tests gave them a way to fulfill their patriotic duty while remaining true to their beliefs.¹⁵¹

Marriage

The Adventist understanding of marriage is a lawfully binding lifelong commitment of a man and a woman. The Church Manual refers to the origination of the marriage

¹⁴⁸ [The Blue Zone](#) on YouTube.

¹⁴⁹ "[Three Strategic Issues: A World Survey](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2002. See question 26, on page 14 etc. [Archived](#) December 2, 2008, at the Wayback Machine. See also "The Myth of Vegetarianism" Keith Lockhart. *Spectrum* 34 (Winter 2006), p. 22–27.

¹⁵⁰ "[Adventist Health Study-2 | Adventist Health Study](#)". [adventisthealthstudy.org](#). Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁵¹ "The Living Weapon: Operation Whitecoat." American Experience. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/weapon-operation-whitecoat/>.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

institution in Eden and points to the union between Adam and Eve as the pattern for all future marriages.¹⁵²

Adventists hold that marriage is a divine institution established by God Himself before the fall. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:24). They hold that God celebrated the first marriage and the institution has as its origin the Creator of the universe and was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is "one of the two institutions that, after the fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise."¹⁵³

The Old and New Testament texts are interpreted by some Adventists to teach that wives should submit to their husbands in marriage.¹⁵⁴

Adventists hold that heterosexual marriages are the only biblically ordained grounds for sexual intimacy. Adventists do not perform same-sex marriages, and individuals who are openly homosexual cannot be ordained, but may hold church office and membership if they are not actively pursuing same-sex relationships. Current church policy states that openly homosexual (and "practicing") persons are to be welcomed into the church services and treated with the love and kindness afforded any human being.¹⁵⁵

Ethics and Sexuality

The Seventh-day Adventist Church considers abortion out of harmony with God's plan for human life. It affects the unborn, the mother, the father, immediate and extended family members, the church family, and society with long-term consequences for all. In an official statement on the "Biblical View of Unborn Life", the Church states that

1. God upholds the value and sacredness of human life,
2. God considers the unborn child as human life,

¹⁵² [Delegates Reinforce 'Man and Woman' Definition of Marriage](#), archived from [the original](#) on 2020-06-01, retrieved 2020-08-02

¹⁵³ *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Ekkehardt Mueller (2005). "[Submission in the New Testament \(Ephesians 5\)](#)" (PDF). Biblical Research Institute. Archived from [the original](#) (PDF) on September 27, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ "[Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality](#)". Seventh-day Adventist Church. 1999-10-03. Archived from [the original](#) on October 3, 2006. Retrieved 2006-10-18. "[Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions—A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage](#)". [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists](#). 2004-03-09. Archived from [the original](#) on January 10, 2007. Retrieved 2007-01-11.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

3. The will of God regarding human life is expressed in the Ten Commandments and explained by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount,
4. God is the Owner of life, and human beings are His stewards,
5. The Bible teaches care for the weak and the vulnerable, and 6. God's grace promotes life in a world marred by sin and death.¹⁵⁶

Adventists believe in and encourage abstinence for both men and women before marriage. The church disapproves of extra-marital cohabitation.¹⁵⁷ Adventists believe that scripture makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships, and its official position is opposed to it.¹⁵⁸

The Adventist church has released official statements in relation to other ethical issues such as euthanasia (against active euthanasia but permissive of passive withdrawal of medical support to allow death to occur),¹⁵⁹ birth control (in favor of it for married couples if used correctly, but against abortion as birth control and premarital sex in any case)¹⁶⁰ and human cloning (against it while the technology is unsafe and would result in defective births or abortions).¹⁶¹

Dress and Entertainment

Adventists have traditionally held socially conservative attitudes regarding dress and entertainment. These attitudes are reflected in one of the church's fundamental beliefs:

For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does

¹⁵⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee (October 16, 2019). "[Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and Its Implications for Abortion](#)". Archived from [the original](#) on December 2, 2019. Retrieved 2019-12-02.

¹⁵⁷ Miroslav M. Kiš. "[Seventh-day Adventist Position on COHABITATION](#)". Archived from [the original](#) on January 12, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ "[Homosexuality](#)". [www.adventist.org](#). Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ "[A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 1992-10-09. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ "[Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 1999-09-29. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁶¹ "[Statement on Ethical Considerations Regarding Human Cloning](#)". [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists](#). 1998-09-27. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit.¹⁶²

Accordingly, Adventists are opposed to practices such as body piercing and tattoos and refrain from the wearing of jewelry, including such items as earrings and bracelets. Some also oppose the displaying of wedding bands, although banning wedding bands is not the position of the General Conference.¹⁶³ Conservative Adventists avoid certain recreational activities which are considered to be a negative spiritual influence, including dancing, rock music and secular theatre.¹⁶⁴ However, major studies conducted from 1989 onwards found that a majority of North American church youth reject some of these standards.¹⁶⁵

Though it seems unbelievable to some, I'm thankful that when I grew up in the church [in the 1950s and 1960s] I was taught not to go to the movie theater, dance, listen to popular music, read novels, wear jewelry, play cards, bowl, play pool, or even be fascinated by professional sports.

— James R. Nix, "Growing Up Adventist: No Apologies Needed"¹⁶⁶

Adventists often cite the writings of Ellen White, especially her books, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, and *Education* as inspired sources for Christian deportment. The Adventist church officially opposes the practice of gambling.¹⁶⁷

Missionary Work with Youth

The Youth Department of the Adventist church runs age specific clubs for children and youth worldwide.

¹⁶² ["Fundamental Beliefs"](#). Seventh-day Adventist Church. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁶³ Roger, Coon (1987-12-10). "[The Wedding Band, Ellen G. White, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church](#)". Biblical Research Institute. Archived from [the original](#) on 2006-12-06. Retrieved 2007-01-11.

¹⁶⁴ "[Adventist students sanctioned for attending dance \(2001\)](#)". Associated Press. 2001. Retrieved June 15, 2021. Samuel Pipim. "Applause, Hand Waiving, Drumming, & Dancing in the Church". [drpipim.org](#). Archived from [the original](#) on 2010-07-11. Retrieved 2010-09-14.

¹⁶⁵ Case, Steve. "[Shall We Dance?](#)". Dialogue. Archived from [the original](#) on February 3, 2007. Retrieved 2007-01-11.

¹⁶⁶ Nix, James (2006). "[Growing Up Adventist: No Apologies Needed](#)". *Adventist Review*. Retrieved June 15, 2021. For a less restrictive account of an Adventist childhood in the 1970s, see *Growing Up Adventist* by Andy Nash.

¹⁶⁷ "[A Seventh-day Adventist Statement on Gambling](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee. 2000.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

"Adventurer" (grades 1-4), "Eager Beaver" (Kindergarten), and "Little Lambs" (pre-K) clubs are programs for younger children that feed into the Pathfinder program.

Pathfinders is a club for 5th to 10th grade (up to 12th in Florida Conference) boys and girls. It is similar to and based partly on the Scouting movement. Pathfinders exposes young people to such activities as camping, community service, personal mentorship, and skills-based education, and trains them for leadership in the church. Yearly "Camporees" are held in individual Conferences, where Pathfinders from the region gather and participate in events similar to Boy Scouts' Jamborees.

After a person enters 9th grade, he or she is eligible to join Teen Leadership Training within Pathfinders. In the 11th grade, typically after being a member of a club, they can become a Pathfinder or Adventurer staff member and begin the "Master Guide" program (similar to Scout Master) which develops leaders for both Adventurers and Pathfinders.¹⁶⁸

Youth Camps

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates youth camps all over North America and many other parts of the world. Each camp varies in the activities they offer but most have archery, swimming, horses, arts and crafts, nature, high ropes challenge course, and many other common camp activities. In addition to regular camps some have specialty camps, or RAD camps, which vary in their activities such as a week of nature nuggets, surfing, waterskiing/wakeboarding, rock climbing, golf, skateboarding, whitewater rafting, mountain biking, cycling, or basketball.

Organization

Structure and Polity

The Seventh-day Adventist church is governed by a form of representation which resembles the presbyterian system of church organization. Four levels of organization exist within the world church.¹⁶⁹

1. The local church is the foundation level of organizational structure and is the public face of the denomination. Every baptized Adventist is a member of a local church and has voting powers within that church.

¹⁶⁸ *Adventist Manual*

¹⁶⁹ [Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual](#) (PDF). Hagerstown, Maryland: The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 2005. p. 26. Retrieved June 15, 2021. "[World Church Structure and Governance](#)". Archived from [the original](#) on April 4, 2007. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

2. Directly above the local church is the "local conference". The local conference is an organization of churches within a state, province or territory (or part thereof) which appoints ministers, owns church land and organizes the distribution of tithes and payments to ministers.
3. Above the local conference is the "union conference" which embodies a number of local conferences within a larger territory.
4. The highest level of governance within the church structure is the General Conference which consists of 13 "Divisions", each assigned to various geographic locations. The General Conference is the church authority and has the final say in matters of conjecture and administrative issues. The General Conference is headed by the office of President. The General Conference head office is in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Each organization is governed by a general "session" which occurs at certain intervals. This is usually when administrative decisions are made. The president of the General Conference, for instance, is elected at the General Conference Session every five years. Delegates to a session are appointed by organizations at a lower level. For example, each local church appoints delegates to a conference session.

Tithes collected from church members are not used directly by the local churches, but are passed upwards to the local conferences which then distribute the finances toward various ministry needs. Employees are compensated "on the basis of the church remuneration policy and practice in effect in the location or country in which they reside."¹⁷⁰

The Church Manual¹⁷¹ gives provisions for each level of government to create educational, healthcare, publishing, and other institutions that are seen within the call of the Great Commission.

Church Officers and Clergy

The ordained clergy of the Adventist church are known as ministers or pastors. Ministers are neither elected nor employed by the local churches, but instead are appointed by the local Conferences, which assign them responsibility over a single church or group of

¹⁷⁰ NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: Remuneration Scale. January 1, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.nadadventist.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2018%20Remuneration%20book.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (PDF). Hagerstown, Maryland: The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 2005. p. 26. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

churches. Ordination is a formal recognition bestowed upon pastors and elders after usually a number of years of service. In most parts of the world, women may not be given the title "ordained", although some are employed in ministry, and may be "commissioned" or "ordained-commissioned".¹⁷² However, beginning in 2012, some unions adopted policies of allowing member conferences to ordain without regard to gender.

A number of lay offices exist within the local church, including the ordained positions of elder and deacon.¹⁷³ Elders and deacons are appointed by the vote of a local church business meeting or elected committees. Elders serve a mainly administrative and pastoral role, but must also be capable of providing religious leadership (particularly in the absence of an ordained minister). The role of deacons is to assist in the smooth functioning of a local church and to maintain church property.

Ordination of Women

Although the church has no written policy forbidding the ordination of women, it has traditionally ordained only men. In recent years the ordination of women has been the subject of heated debate, especially in North America and Europe. In the Adventist Church, candidates for ordination are chosen by local conferences (which usually administer about 50–150 local congregations) and approved by unions (which serve about 6–12 conferences). The General Conference, through the representative votes of the world church in formal session rejected three requests from the more progressive North American Division to ordain women (1990, 1995, 2015). Based on these votes, the General Conference has requested that no local conferences ordain women, unless/until all parts of the world church accept the practice.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² See also [Seventh-day Adventist theology#Ordination of women](#). Laura L. Vance discusses gender issues in *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion*. University of Illinois Press, 1999. One review is by Douglas Morgan in *The Christian Century*, 22 September 1999; [reprint\[dead link\]](#). Possibly see also [Seeking a Sanctuary](#), chapter "Gender".

¹⁷³ [Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual](#) (PDF). Hagerstown, Maryland: The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 2005. p. 26. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ [An Appeal For Unity in Respect to Ministerial Ordination Practices](#). PDF download [Archived](#) August 20, 2012, at the Wayback Machine.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Membership

Membership

The primary prerequisite for membership in the Adventist church is baptism by immersion. This, according to the church manual, should occur only after the candidate has undergone proper instruction on what the church believes.¹⁷⁵

As of September 30, 2020, the church has 21,760,076 baptized members.¹⁷⁶ Between 2005 and 2015, around half a million people per year have joined the Adventist church, through baptisms and professions of faith.¹⁷⁷ The church is one of the world's fastest-growing organizations, primarily from membership increases in developing nations. Today, less than 7% of the world membership reside in the United States, with large numbers in Africa as well as Central and South America. Depending on how the data was measured, it is reported that church membership reached 1 million between 1955 and 1961, and grew to five million in 1986. At the turn of the 21st century the church had over 10 million members, which grew to over 14 million in 2005, 16 million in 2009, and 21 million in 2020.¹⁷⁸ It is reported that today over 25 million people worship weekly in Seventh-day Adventist churches worldwide.¹⁷⁹ The church operates in 202 out of 230 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations,¹⁸⁰ making it "probably the most widespread Protestant denomination".¹⁸¹

G. Jeffrey MacDonald, an award-winning religion reporter, and author of *Thieves in the Temple*, reports that the SDA church is the fastest-growing church in the United States. "Newly released data show Seventh-day Adventism growing by 2.5% in North America,

¹⁷⁵ [Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual](#) (PDF). Hagerstown, Maryland: The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 2005. p. 26. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁷⁶ ["Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics"](#). Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. December 2009. Archived from [the original](#) on 2012-09-19. Retrieved 2011-09-04.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* ["Adventist Church adds 1 million members sixth year in a row"](#) (Press release). Seventh-day Adventist Church. 2009-10-11. Archived from [the original](#) on November 24, 2009. Retrieved 2009-11-12.

¹⁷⁸ ["Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics 2020"](#). [www.adventist.org](#). Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁷⁹ ["World Church: San Antonio, Texas Selected As 2015 GC Session Site"](#) (Press release). Seventh-day Adventist Church. 2006-10-10. Archived from [the original](#) on 2007-10-13. Retrieved 2006-10-18.

¹⁸⁰ ["Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics"](#). Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. December 2009. Archived from [the original](#). Retrieved 2011-09-04.

¹⁸¹ [World Council of Churches – Seventh-day Adventist Church Archived](#) August 29, 2008, at the Wayback Machine.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

a rapid clip for this part of the world, where Southern Baptists and mainline denominations, as well as other church groups, are declining."¹⁸²

The church has been described as "something of an extended family",¹⁸³ enjoying close, "two-degrees-of-separation social networks".¹⁸⁴

Church Institutions

The [Biblical Research Institute](#) is the theological research center of the church.

The [Ellen G. White Estate](#) was established in 1915 at the death of Ellen White, as specified in her legal will. Its purpose is to act as custodian of her writings, and as of 2006 it has 15 board members. The Ellen G. White Estate also hosts the official Ellen White website whiteestate.org.

The [Geoscience Research Institute](#), based at Loma Linda University, was founded in 1958 to investigate the scientific evidence concerning origins.

Criticism

The Adventist Church has received criticism along several lines, including what some claim are heterodox doctrines, and in relation to Ellen G. White and her status within the church, and in relation to alleged exclusivist issues.¹⁸⁵

Doctrines

Critics such as evangelical Anthony Hoekema (who felt that Adventists were more in agreement with Arminianism) argue that some Adventist doctrines are heterodox. Several teachings which have come under scrutiny are the annihilationist view of hell, the investigative judgment (and a related view of the atonement), and the Sabbath; in addition, Hoekema also claims that Adventist doctrine suffers from legalism.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² MacDonald, G. Jeffrey (March 17, 2011). "[Adventists' back-to-basics faith is fastest growing U.S. church](#)". *USA Today*. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁸³ Jonathan Butler, "The Historian as Heretic" (introduction to Ronald Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*, 2nd edn onwards). [Reprinted](#) in *Spectrum* 23:2 (August 1993), pp. 43–64. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁸⁴ Nathan Brown, "Strange like Cooranbong". *Record* 115:6 (March 6, 2010), p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ "[Seventh-day Adventist Church profile](#)". ReligiousTolerance.org.

¹⁸⁶ Anthony Hoekema (1963). *The Four Major Cults*. pp. 115–128, 144–169.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

While critics such as Hoekema have classified Adventism as a sectarian group on the basis of its atypical doctrines,¹⁸⁷ it has been accepted as more mainstream by Protestant evangelicals since its meetings and discussions with evangelicals in the 1950s.¹⁸⁸ Notably, Billy Graham invited Adventists to be part of his crusades after *Eternity*, a conservative Christian magazine edited by Donald Barnhouse, asserted in 1956 that Adventists are Christians, and also later stated, "They are sound on the great New Testament doctrines including grace and redemption through the vicarious offering of Jesus Christ 'once for all'". Walter Martin, who is considered by many to be the father of the counter-cult apologetics movement within evangelicalism, authored *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists* (1960) which marked a turning point in the way Adventism was viewed:¹⁸⁹ "it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite heterodox concept".¹⁹⁰

Later on, Martin planned to write a new book on Seventh-day Adventism, with the assistance of Kenneth R. Samples.¹⁹¹ Samples subsequently authored "From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism", which upholds Martin's view "for that segment of Adventism which holds to the position stated in *QOD*, and further expressed in the Evangelical Adventist movement of the last few decades." However, Samples also claimed that "Traditional Adventism" appeared "to be moving further away from a number of positions taken in *QOD*", and at least at Glacier View seemed to have "gained the support of many administrators and leaders".¹⁹²

Ellen G. White and Her Status

Ellen G. White's status as a modern-day prophet has also been criticized. In the *Questions on Doctrine* era, evangelicals expressed concern about Adventism's understanding of the

¹⁸⁷ Kenneth Samples (1988). ["From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism"](#). *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1988, Volume 11, Number 1. Christian Research Institute. Anthony A. Hoekema (1963). *The Four Major Cults*. William B. Eerdmans.

¹⁸⁸ George R. Knight "A Search For Identity The Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Beliefs", Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000, Pg 165.

¹⁸⁹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" *Eternity*, September 1956, 7. Loren Dickinson (2006-11-02). "The Day Adventists Became Christians". *Spectrum*.

¹⁹⁰ Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, (Bethany House, Minneapolis, Minnesota), Updated edition 1997, p.517.

¹⁹¹ ["Evangelical Reflections on Seventh-day Adventism: Yesterday and Today, by Kenneth Richard Samples"](#). *andrews.edu*. Archived from [the original](#) on 2008-05-12. Retrieved 2009-07-10.

¹⁹² Kenneth Samples (1988). ["From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism"](#). *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1988, Volume 11, Number 1. Christian Research Institute.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

relationship of White's writings to the inspired canon of Scripture.¹⁹³ The Adventist fundamental beliefs maintain that "the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."¹⁹⁴

A common criticism of Ellen White, widely popularized by Walter T. Rea, Ronald Numbers and others, is the claim of plagiarism from other authors.¹⁹⁵ An independent lawyer specializing in plagiarism, Vincent L. Ramik, was engaged to undertake a study of Ellen G. White's writings during the early 1980s, and concluded that they were "conclusively unplagiaristic".¹⁹⁶ When the plagiarism charge ignited a significant debate during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Adventist General Conference commissioned a major study by Dr. Fred Veltman. The ensuing project became known as the "'Life of Christ' Research Project". The results are available at the General Conference Archives.¹⁹⁷ Dr. Roger W. Coon,¹⁹⁸ David J. Conklin,¹⁹⁹ Dr. Denis Fortin,²⁰⁰ King and Morgan,²⁰¹ and Morgan,²⁰² among others, undertook the refutation of the accusations of plagiarism. At the conclusion of his report, Ramik states:

It is impossible to imagine that the intention of Ellen G. White, as reflected in her writings and the unquestionably prodigious efforts involved therein, was anything other than a sincerely motivated and unselfish effort to place the understandings of Biblical truths in a coherent form for all to see and comprehend. Most certainly, the nature and content of her writings had but one hope and intent, namely, the furthering of mankind's understanding of the word of God.

¹⁹³ ["From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism"](#). *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1988, Volume 11, Number 1. Christian Research Institute.

¹⁹⁴ ["Fundamental Beliefs #18"](#). Seventh-day Adventist Church. Retrieved June 15, 2021. Kenneth Samples (1988).

¹⁹⁵ Canright, D. M. (1919). [Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted](#). Retrieved June 15, 2021. Rea, Walter T. (February 1983). *The White Lie*. Moore Publishing. Numbers, Ronald L. (1976). [Prophetess of health: a study of Ellen G. White](#). Harper & Row; Ronald L. Numbers (January 1977). ["An Author Replies to His Critics"](#) (PDF). *Spectrum*. 8 (2): 27–36. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁹⁶ [The Ramik Report Memorandum of Law Literary Property Rights 1790–1915](#). Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁹⁷ [General Conference Archives. Archived](#) 2010-07-15 at the Wayback Machine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

¹⁹⁸ ["Ellen G. White as a Writer: Part III – The Issue of Literary Borrowing"](#). *andrews.edu*.

¹⁹⁹ ["INDEX FILES on Charge of Plagiarism against E.G.White"](#). *50megs.com*.

²⁰⁰ ["Ellen G. White as a Writer: Case Studies in the Issue of Literary Borrowing"](#). *andrews.edu*. ["Untitled Document"](#). *andrews.edu*. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

²⁰¹ E. Marcella Anderson King and Kevin L. Morgan (2009). *More Than Words: A Study of Inspiration and Ellen White's Use of Sources in The Desire of Ages*. Honor Him Publishers.

²⁰² Kevin L. Morgan (2013). *White Lie Soap: For removal of lingering stains on Ellen White's integrity as an inspired writer*. Honor Him Publishers.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Considering all factors necessary in reaching a just conclusion on this issue, it is submitted that the writings of Ellen G. White were conclusively unplagiaristic.²⁰³

However, Kenneth R. Samples presents another viewpoint on these claims of plagiarism:

Undoubtedly, the most explosive issue that arose during this period was the disclosure of Ellen White's tremendous literary dependence. Adventist scholars such as Harold Weiss, Roy Branson, William Peterson, and Ronald Numbers all revealed historical research that showed that Ellen White had borrowed material from other nineteenth-century authors. The most controversial disclosure, however, came from an Adventist pastor named Walter Rea. Rea charged that as much as 80 to 90 percent of White's writings had been plagiarized. Because of the tremendous influence White's writings have had on the denomination, and because Adventists had been taught that her writings were taken directly from her visions (a view promoted by the denomination), this disclosure shook the very foundation of SDA.

Initially, the White Estate denied this evidence, but later admitted that sources were used in her writings. *Review and Herald*, the denomination's official organ, argued in White's defense that her literary borrowing was much less than Rea had alleged, and that her use of literary sources did not invalidate the inspiration of her writings. After all, they reasoned, some biblical writers used sources. Rea, who later thoroughly documented his charge in the book *The White Lie* (M. & R. Publications), was fired by the denomination.

The question of Ellen White's inspiration and authority has been a source of controversy throughout Adventism's history, but the plagiarism charge had brought about doubt as to her integrity and veracity. Some even charged that the White Estate had known about this problem for some time and attempted to cover it up. This issue was also important in regard to the question of Adventism's unique identity. Because many of the doctrinal distinctives had received confirmation through her prophetic gift, to question her was to question the uniqueness of SDA itself.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ [Also appears in Review article. Archived](#) 2007-12-14 at the Wayback Machine.

²⁰⁴ Samples, Kenneth R., "From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism." © Copyright 1993 by the Christian Research Institute. Originally published in the *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1988, Volume 11, Number 1, page 9.

<https://christian.net/pub/resources/text/crj/crj-jrnl/web/crj0005b.html> Retrieved June 15, 2021.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

One final thought on this point: Quite a number of former Seventh-day Adventists, such as former ministers Walter Rea and Dale Ratzlaff,²⁰⁵ have become critics of the church's teachings, and particularly Ellen G. White.

Exclusivism

Critics have alleged that certain Adventist beliefs and practices are exclusivist in nature and they point to the Adventist claim to be the "remnant church", and the traditional Protestant association of Roman Catholicism with "Babylon".²⁰⁶ These attitudes are said to legitimize the proselytising of Christians from other denominations. In response to such criticisms, Adventist theologians have stated that the doctrine of the remnant does not preclude the existence of genuine Christians in other denominations, but is concerned with institutions.²⁰⁷

We fully recognize the heartening fact that a host of true followers of Christ are scattered all through the various churches of Christendom, including the Roman Catholic communion. These God clearly recognizes as His own. Such do not form a part of the "Babylon" portrayed in the Apocalypse.

— *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 197.

Ellen White also presented it in a similar light:

God has children, many of them, in the Protestant churches, and a large number in the Catholic churches, who are more true to obey the light and to do [to] the very best of their knowledge than a large number among Sabbathkeeping Adventists who do not walk in the light.

— *Ellen White, Selected Messages, book 3, p.386.*

²⁰⁵ NOTE: These former members are generally branded as "apostates" by the SDA Church.

²⁰⁶ "[How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism](#)". General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee. 1997-04-15. Retrieved June 15, 2021. "[Seventh-Day Adventism](#)". Catholic Answers. Retrieved June 15, 2021. See also [Questions on Doctrine](#), chapters 20 and 21; and Anthony Hoekema (1963). *The Four Major Cults*. pp. 128–132.

²⁰⁷ Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (October 2002). "[The Remnant and the Adventist Church](#)". [Biblical Research Institute](#). Archived from [the original](#) on 2007-03-22. Retrieved 2007-02-05.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Independent Ministries, Offshoots, and Schisms

Independent Ministries

In addition to the ministries and institutions which are formally administered by the denomination, numerous para-church organizations and independent ministries exist. These include various health centers and hospitals, publishing and media ministries, and aid organizations. [Present Truth Magazine](#) is an independent online magazine for those claiming to be "evangelical" Adventists.

51

A number of independent ministries have been established by groups within the Adventist Church, who hold a theologically distinct position or wish to promote a specific message, such as [Hope International](#), which have a strained relationship with the official church, which has expressed concerns that such ministries may threaten Adventist unity.²⁰⁸ Some independent ministries, like many of the Protestant reformers have continued to emphasize the mainstream Adventist belief which identified the Roman Papacy as the Antichrist.²⁰⁹ The church has put out a statement clarifying the official position that it does not condone any behavior by members which may "have manifested prejudice and even bigotry" against Catholics.²¹⁰

Offshoots and Schisms

Throughout the history of the denomination, there have been a number of groups which have left the church and formed their own movements.

Following World War I, a group known as the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement²¹¹ was formed as a result of the actions of L.R. Conradi and certain European church leaders during the war, who decided that it was acceptable for

²⁰⁸ [Report on Hope International and Associated Groups](#), Adventist Review, 2000. [Archived](#) May 12, 2006, at the Wayback Machine.

²⁰⁹ ["Articles"](#). [whitehorsemedia.com](#).

²¹⁰ ["How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism \(official statement\)"](#). 15 April 1997.

²¹¹ The **Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement** is a Protestant Christian denomination in the Sabbatarian Adventist movement that formed from a schism in the European Seventh-day Adventist Church during World War I over the position its European church leaders took on Sabbath observance and on committing Adventists to the bearing of arms in military service for Imperial Germany in World War I.

The movement was formerly organised on an international level in 1925 at Gotha, Germany and adopted the name "Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement". It was first registered as a General Conference association in 1929 in Burgwedel, near Hanover, Germany. Following the General Conference association's dissolution by the Gestapo in 1936 it was re-registered in Sacramento, California, United States in 1949. Its present world headquarters are in Roanoke, Virginia, USA.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Adventists to take part in war. Those who were opposed to this stand and refused to participate in the war were declared "disfellowshipped" by their local Church leaders at the time. When the Church leaders from the General Conference came and admonished the local European leaders after the war to try to heal the damage, and bring the members together, it met with resistance from those who had suffered under those leaders. Their attempts at reconciliation failed after the war and the group became organized as a separate church at a conference that was held on July 14–20, 1925. The movement officially incorporated in 1949.²¹²

In 2005, in another attempt to examine and resolve what its German leaders had done, the mainstream church apologized for its failures during World War II, stating, we "'deeply regret' any participation in or support of Nazi activities during the war by the German and Austrian leadership of the church."²¹³

In the Soviet Union the same issues produced the group known as the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists.²¹⁴ This also formed as the result of a schism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe during World War I over the position its European church leaders took on having its members join the military or keep the Sabbath. The group remains active as late as 2010 in the former republics of the Soviet Union.²¹⁵

²¹² "[Origin of the SDA Reform Movement](#)". Retrieved June 15, 2021.

²¹³ "[Church Leaders Say 'We're Sorry': German and Austrian churches apologize for Holocaust actions](#)" by Mark A. Kellner. Retrieved June 15, 2021.

²¹⁴ The **True and Free Seventh-day Adventists** (TFSDA) are a splinter group formed as the result of a schism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe during World War I over the position its European church leaders took, whose most well known leader was Vladimir Shelkov. TFSDA members are part of the Sabbatarian adventist movement, and believe that as a result of the decisions the European church leaders took, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had apostasized and had become "Babylon".

²¹⁵ Sapiets, Marite "V. A. Shelkov and the true and free Adventists of the USSR", *Religion, State and Society*, Volume 8, Issue 3, 1980, pp. 201–217

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Well known but distant offshoots are the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist²¹⁶ organization and the Branch Davidians,²¹⁷ themselves a schism within the larger Davidian movement.²¹⁸ The Davidians formed in 1929, following Victor Houteff, after he came out with his book *The Shepherd's Rod*, which was rejected as heretical. A succession dispute after Houteff's death in 1955 led to the formation of two groups, the original Davidians and the Branches. Later, another ex-Adventist, David Koresh,²¹⁹ led the Branch Davidians, until he died in the 1993 siege, at the group's headquarters near Waco, Texas.

The Conclusion of the Matter

We began with a profound question: Just who are the Seventh-day Adventists? Are they just another branch of Evangelical Protestant Christianity? Or are they, in reality, a cult

²¹⁶ **The Shepherd's Rod** or **The Rod** or the **Davidians** is an American offshoot of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was founded in 1929 by Victor Houteff, its President and Prophet. Houteff joined the Seventh-day Adventist church in 1919, but was disfellowshipped in 1930 for promoting heretical doctrines. The official organization name was changed in 1942 to **Davidian Seventh-day Adventists**, but was still referred to as "The Rod" by both members and critics. The group was headquartered at a property known as the Mount Carmel Center near Waco, Texas and reached its peak in the early 1950s with thousands of adherents before splintering into various factions after Houteff's death in 1955. The name is a reference to Houteff's initial and most important publication, *The Shepherd's Rod*. The various groups claiming Houteff's theology continue to be known as the Shepherd's Rod and Davidians.

²¹⁷ The **Branch Davidians** (or the **General Association of Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists**) were a religious sect which was founded in 1955 by Benjamin Roden. They were an offshoot of the General Association of Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists, established by Victor Houteff in 1935. Houteff, a Bulgarian immigrant and a Seventh-day Adventist, wrote a series of tracts entitled the "Shepherd's Rod", which called for the reform of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After his ideas were rejected by Adventist leaders, Houteff and his followers founded the Davidians and settled on a tract of land on the western outskirts of Waco, Texas, United States, where they built a compound called the Mount Carmel Center and began preparing for the Second Coming. After Houteff's death in 1955, his wife Florence became the leader of the Davidians. That same year, Roden, a former follower of Houteff who called himself "the Branch", after the branch referred to in Isaiah 11:1, called for Davidians to come to Mount Carmel Center to hear his message. This was the beginning of the group that would be popularly known as the Branch Davidians.

²¹⁸ "[Fundamental beliefs of DSDA as compared with the ones of the Seventh-day Adventist Church](#)".

²¹⁹ David Koresh (born Vernon Wayne Howell; August 17, 1959 – April 19, 1993) was an American cult leader who played a central role in the Waco siege of 1993. As the head of the Branch Davidians sect, an offshoot of the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Koresh claimed to be its final prophet. Coming from a dysfunctional background, Koresh was a member and later a leader of the Branch Davidians, a movement originally led by Benjamin Roden, based at the Mount Carmel Center outside Waco, Texas. Here, Koresh competed for dominance with another leader, Benjamin Roden's son George, until Koresh and his followers took over Mount Carmel in 1987. The younger Roden was then jailed for contempt of court in 1988, and later committed to a mental hospital in 1989 for murdering Wayman Dale Adair (a man who Roden claimed was sent by Koresh to kill him).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

of Christianity? Or are they something in between these two extremes? Another way of asking this question might be: Are Seventh-day Adventists true Christians or not?

Anthony Hoekema would answer, “No, they are not Christians.” Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin would answer, “Yes, they are Christians” (even though they would be quick to point out that the SDA Church does, indeed, teach some heterodox doctrines. Many other scholars have taken one or the other of these opposing positions. So, the question remains: “Are Seventh-day Adventists authentic Christians? The answer to this conundrum is: “That depends.”

What we have seen in this study is that the SDA Church is a church in transition. There are now at least three major streams of thought among Seventh-day Adventists. There are the **Historic Adventists**—who are the conservative, old-school traditionalists—at one end of the spectrum. At the other spectrum, there are the **Liberal Adventists**—also known as Progressive Adventists—who revolt at some of the teachings of Ellen G. White. Then there are the **Evangelical Adventists**—who are more gospel-centered than either Historic Adventists or Liberal Adventists. In fact, most Evangelical Adventists do not believe in a literal interpretation of several points in the *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh Day Adventists*. Evangelical Adventists do not believe SDAs will be the only people saved in the last days. They do not see the Seventh-day Adventist church as the only true remnant church. And most importantly, Evangelical Adventists believe the gospel of grace. Justification by faith is their keynote. Good works will follow the genuine experience of faith in Christ, but these works do not enter into the foundation for salvation.

Evangelical Adventists are in disagreement in their understanding of Ellen White. Some continue to believe that Ellen White demonstrated the true gift of prophecy, while at the same time disagree with many of her statements. Others, at least in private, reject her writings as an inspired source of truth.²²⁰

In considering the question, “Are Seventh-day Adventists true Christians or not?” one must carefully examine the Scriptures. One could just as easily ask, “Are Baptists true Christians?” or, “Are Presbyterians true Christians?” or even, “Are Pentecostals true Christians?” One must always remember that **there is no such thing as Corporate Election**—Jesus does not save *groups of people*—Jesus only calls *individuals* (Romans 8:29-30). There are some Adventists who are true Christians, while others are not. The same is true among Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals and other denominations.

²²⁰ Ratzlaff, Dale (2009). *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism: An Evangelical Wake-up Call*. Cape Verde, AZ: LAM Publications, pp. 25-29.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Some might ask why Anthony Hoekema (and others) do not consider the SDA Church to be an authentic Christian church, while Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin (and many others) come to the opposite conclusion. The answer can be understood when one considers the tremendous changes taking place within the SDA Church and among her ministers and scholars. Remember, Hoekema wrote *The Four Major Cults* in 1963 before many of these changes became apparent. He also was focusing upon Ellen G. White and the historic teachings of the SDA Church. For over a hundred years there was almost no one who would consider the SDA Church to be anything but a cult. However, during the last 50+ years there have been many changes among SDA people regarding Ellen G. White and the historic doctrines of the SDA Church.

One final look at the question; “Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians or not?” Hence my answer: “That depends!” It depends upon whether one is placing his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation (Romans 8:29-30, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9) or whether he is relying upon Ellen G. White and her so-called visions and pronouncements.



One simple way to look at this answer is to realize that the farther one gets away from Ellen G. White the more likely he is to have heard the truth and have accepted it. The converse is true: the closer one gets to Ellen G. White and her rantings and scribblings, the more likely one is to be unsaved and eternally condemned.

“That depends!”