

What were the main factors in the Seventh Day Adventists' transition from an alternative to a mainstream theology?

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The Seventh Day Adventists (hereafter SDAs) are a Restorationist Christian sect with a membership of ~16 million worldwide.¹ From its beginnings during the Second Great Awakening, the SDA church upheld doctrines and practices at odds with Christian orthodoxy, tolerating doctrinal pluralism while claiming a prophetic ministry and defining themselves as God's faithful remnant in opposition to the apostasy of Christendom.² These characteristics led mainstream Christians to brand the sect heretical and cultic. Today, however, SDAs are widely considered evangelical and criticism is largely restricted to the fundamentalist fringe.³

BeVier (1992, pp. 80-95) claims, 'The Seventh-day Adventists have long sought acceptance by Evangelical Christianity.'⁴ Yet the reality is very different. Rather than

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics*. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: <http://www.adventist.org/world-church/facts-and-figures>

² 'A few faithful men arose from time to time to proclaim new truth and expose long-cherished error, but the majority, like the Jews in Christ's day, or the papists in the time of Luther, were content to believe as their fathers believed, and to live as they lived.' White, E. G. 1947. *The Story of Redemption*. (354). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Hagerstown, MD.

³ 'Seventh-day Adventists quite naturally become annoyed at being branded a cult when they believe in the Trinity, the full divinity of Christ, his incarnation and resurrection, the need for salvation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and so on. Unlike many other Christian offshoots, they have not redefined these terms in their own way and their theology, on the whole, is straightforward mainstream Christian.' Barrett, D. V. 1996. *Sects, 'Cults' and Alternative Religions*. (72). Cassell PLC: London.

⁴ BeVier, W. 1992, 'Current Trends of the Everchanging Cults', *Michigan Theological Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 80-95.

moving towards evangelical Christianity, SDAs found evangelicals reaching out to them as it became clear that SDA theology was not strictly monolithic. Seventh Day Adventism remains one of very few heterodox sects to be successfully 'rehabilitated' into mainstream Christianity.⁵ This paper will examine the causes of the SDAs' advancement from fringe sect to mainstream denomination, showing that the transition was not facilitated by explicit theological changes but by the longstanding breadth of the SDAs' doctrinal spectrum.

To understand how and why SDAs achieved rapprochement with evangelicals it is necessary to review their history. Officially founded as a distinct body in 1863, SDAs originated as an offshoot of William Miller's Adventist group (known as the Millerites) which collapsed into schism when a date predicted for the Second Advent passed without incident.⁶ The resulting pool of disillusioned believers finally coalesced into three rival groups; the smallest led by Hiram Edson, who claimed to have received a vision which at least partly vindicated Miller's prophecy.⁷ This was quickly taken up by the community's more adaptable scholars. Sabbath observance was adopted during

⁵ Others include the Campbellites (now known as Churches of Christ) and Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God (now known as Grace Communion International).

⁶ '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 October 1844. When Christ did not return on that day, however, there was 'great disappointment'.¹ Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. 2000. *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed.) (637). InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL.

⁷ 'A few, however, continued to believe that the end was near. One of these, Hiram Edson, saw a vision of Christ entering the second compartment of heaven. This proved to Edson that Miller's prophetic calculations were correct, though the event foretold was not the Second Advent, but the opening of an investigative judgment in heaven to determine who among the dead are worthy of resurrection.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church*. (899). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

the final year of the Millerite movement, shortly before or after the Great Disappointment or concurrently with Edson's vision (depending on the source).⁸ Edson retained it and formed alliances with similarly minded post-Millerite groups at a series of conferences held between 1848-50. It was from his faction that the church now known as Seventh Day Adventists emerged.

Edson's contribution notwithstanding, the name most commonly associated with Seventh Day Adventism is that of Ellen Gould White, who claimed to receive divine visions and was largely responsible for refining the church's distinctive features.⁹ Historically female Christian leaders have tended to emerge within the context of a charismatic theology and an egalitarian ethos.¹⁰ White's experience was the exact opposite. Born to Methodist parents and raised within a strictly patriarchal society she founded a conservative, non-charismatic church which upheld traditional Protestant views on the involvement of women in ministry.

Despite never possessing an official title or role, White's spiritual authority and exhaustive literary output transformed her into a *de facto* leader, with an influence

⁸ 'About the time that Edson gained this new view of the sanctuary cleansing, an important theological change was taking place in a company of Adventists in Washington, New Hampshire. A number of them, under the endeavors of Rachel Oakes, a Seventh Day Baptist, began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.' Nichol, F. D. 1951. *Ellen G. White and her critics: An answer to the major charges that critics have brought against Mrs. Ellen G. White.* (172). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

⁹ 'Miller's preaching and Mrs. White's testimony of her own revelations formed the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which stresses a strong prophetic and eschatological note and health reform.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church.* (1043). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

¹⁰ Examples include the Montanist sect of the late 2nd Century, charismatic groups within the Swiss Anabaptist communities of the 16th Century, and the modern Holiness Pentecostal movement, which began in the late 19th Century.

that was overwhelming and permanent. Under her guidance the church began to formalise its theology. White's prophetic gift empowered her to make *ex cathedra* statements, but the relationship between her visions and the Bible required constant justification.¹¹ The SDAs' antipathy towards organised religion precluded the use of creeds,¹² a prejudice which also reflected the fear that any catechistic document restricted future guidance via divine revelation. It was exemplified by Ellen White's husband James, who declared his opposition to creedal theology at the Michigan Conference of 1861.¹³ He spoke for the majority, and their voices carried the day. Thus, when an official ecclesiology was adopted at the General Conference of 1863 it did not result in an SDA creed, leaving SDAs with the problem of defining orthodoxy without a written rule of faith. The solution was to accept Ellen White's visions as uniquely authoritative and her writings as *de facto* canon law, thereby sidestepping the dispute over creeds while acknowledging a body of literature that could largely perform the same function. The full implications of this approach would not be appreciated until

¹¹ 'She ever pointed to the Scriptures as the one source of truth and light, the Book that should be the Christian's first and chiefest source of spiritual instruction. "...If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would stand and the visions would be given up.'" Nichol, F. D. 1951. *Ellen G. White and her critics: An answer to the major charges that critics have brought against Mrs. Ellen G. White.* (pp. 87-88). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

¹² 'J. N. Loughborough declared that "the first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And fifth, to commence persecution against such.'" Douglass, H. E. 1998. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White.* (426). Pacific Press Publishing Association: Nampa, ID.

¹³ "'But suppose the Lord, through the gifts, should give us some new light that did not harmonize with our creed; then, if we remain true to the gifts, it knocks our creed all over at once. Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement... A creed and the gifts thus stand in direct opposition to each other. Now what is our position as a people? The Bible is our creed.'" Ibid. (427).

1955.

Towards the late 1860s SDAs were united on four points which distinguished them from evangelicals: (a) the authenticity of Ellen White's prophetic gift, (b) observance of the Sabbath (a perpetual institution), (c) a spiritual 'investigative judgement' prior to the Second Advent,¹⁴ and (d) perception of themselves as God's faithful remnant. Relations with other churches were poor to non-existent. However, in 1871 the SDAs entered communion with the Seventh Day Baptists (hereafter SDBs), a Sabbath-observant group which was doctrinally mainstream in every other way. This was the Seventh Day Adventists' first serious interfaith dialogue.

The two churches held a series of meetings over five years. In 1876 James White reported a positive outcome: (a) they agreed on the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; (b) they differed over immortal soulism (SDAs rejected it; SDBs accepted it); (c) there was tension between the SDBs' strict Trinitarianism and the SDAs' fluid Christology but this could be negotiated; (d) they agreed on the continuation of Holy Spirit gifts within the church. United on essentials, the two groups enjoyed full communion for an indeterminate period.¹⁵ Little known and largely overlooked, these events prove SDAs were sharing ecumenical fellowship

¹⁴ Derived from Hiram Edson's vision of 1844.

¹⁵ 'We recommend, however, that there be no controversy between the two bodies. The differences between us are of such a nature, and we have in common so broad a field of labor with those who differ with us respecting the fundamentals, upon which hangs the destiny of a world lying in wickedness, that Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists cannot afford a controversy on doctrines which neither regard as tests of Christian character.' White, J. 1876, 'The Two Bodies: the relation which the S. D. Baptists and the S. D. Adventists sustain to each other.' *Review and Herald*, vol. 48, no. 15, p. 116. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/RH/RH18761012-V48-15__B.pdf

without any doctrinal amendments at least 80 years before evangelicals made their first overtures.¹⁶

Near the turn of the century, outsiders' perceptions of Seventh Day Adventism were still negative or ambivalent at best. Many SDAs had come from unconventional churches and imported their personal beliefs to White's new movement. Christology was a case in point, with Trinitarianism, Arianism, semi-Arianism and Unitarianism all tolerated under a broad doctrinal umbrella. White never used the word 'Trinity' and her writings lack any technical expression of the triune relationship. This ambiguity invited reinterpretation. Depending on the reader's preference White could be defended as Trinitarian, Arian, or even semi-Arian (at least until 1899). Modern SDA scholars describe her Christology as a work in progress.¹⁷ By contrast many other prominent leaders of the original SDA church were unequivocally non-Trinitarian,¹⁸ including White's husband. Evangelicals seized upon this as evidence that Adventists were heretical. But since the SDA church had no formal creed during the heterodox years while White's own views were still in flux, can any Christology from this period

¹⁶ The SDAs' doctrine of a 'faithful remnant' was never as exclusive as it is commonly portrayed; SDBs were considered part of the remnant despite their theological differences.

¹⁷ 'Her mature view developed through a 40-year process that can be extensively documented.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp 275-292.

¹⁸ 'The evidence as presented here indicates that prior to 1898 the prevailing opinion in the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the nature of God was anti-Trinitarian. It has been shown that a whole series of writers took this position. Those early Adventist writers who expressed themselves on the subject agreed on certain fundamental issues. Christ was consistently regarded as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as a mere influence.' Gane, E. R. *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer*. 1963. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane16.htm>

be regarded as definitive?

Today SDA historians accept that Adventist Christology was never homogeneous¹⁹ but gradually evolved into a Trinitarian consensus.²⁰ Remarkably the process was triggered by Ellen White herself, independent of her peers and against the popular mood.²¹ In 1899 Adventist publishers released White's latest book, *Desire of Ages*. Church leaders were stunned to find it replete with overtly Trinitarian statements.²² Her references to the deity of the Holy Spirit were particularly challenging and prompted a backlash among conservative SDAs, but once started there was no stopping the trend.²³ Trinitarianism gained ground because White endorsed it and

¹⁹ 'In 1846 James White dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as "the old unscriptural trinitarian creed." A century later, the denomination he co-founded voted its first official endorsement of a statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" that included reference to the Trinity. That a major theological shift occurred is no longer subject to debate.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp 275-292.

²⁰ 'The development of the doctrine of the Godhead in Seventh-day Adventism may be divided into six periods: (1) Antitrinitarian Dominance, 1846-1888; (2) Dissatisfaction with Antitrinitarianism, 1888-1898; (3) Paradigm Shift, 1898-1913; (4) Decline of Antitrinitarianism, 1913-1946; (5) Trinitarian Dominance, 1946-1980; and (6) Renewed Tensions, 1980 to the Present.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 1: Historical Overview', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp 113-129.

²¹ '...it is quite remarkable to observe the rich and profound anti-Arian Christology issuing forth from her pen starting as a gentle flow in the 1870's, becoming stronger in the 1880's and swelling to a torrent in the 1890's when all around her were influential men with differing views.' Webster, C. 1984. *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/webster>

²² 'M. L. Andreasen, who had become an Adventist just four years earlier at the age of eighteen, and who would eventually teach at the church's North American seminary, claimed that the new concept was so different from the previous understanding that some prominent leaders doubted whether Ellen White had really written it.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 1: Historical Overview', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp 113-129. Andreasen correctly observed her Christology had been modified, though his account overstates the case. White's simplistic articulation in *Desire of Ages* is imprecise, reflecting limited knowledge. ('Ellen White was not a trained theologian and, therefore, we cannot look for systematic treatment of spiritual truth.' (Webster, 1984)). It is likely she never fully understood creedal Trinitarianism but merely expressed what she believed it to be.

²³ 'These and similar statements drove some to a fresh examination of the biblical evidence about the Godhead. Others, disbelieving that they could have been wrong for so many years, studied to bolster the old D. Burke 2011 #TCA102646

Adventists trusted her judgement.

Around the same time, a radical new Christian movement arose from the ranks of Baptist and Presbyterian clergy. Its adherents would later call themselves Fundamentalists;²⁴ they sought to turn the tide of modernism, higher criticism, and liberal Christianity.²⁵ Originally amillennial, the movement became overwhelmingly premillennial after two World Wars and the rebirth of the Jewish state, widely interpreted as fulfilling Bible prophecy. Key features included Young Earth Creationism, anti-evolutionism, Biblical inerrancy, strict morality, and a disdain for higher education.

The SDA Church proved an indispensable ally in the war against secularism. Ellen White had expounded a theory of Christian education, instituted charitable sanatoriums, and urged the benefits of healthy living through a strict regime of exercise and diet which prohibited popular stimulants.²⁶ Adventists supported

arguments. Ellen White's testimony, however, by calling attention to Scriptures whose significance had been overlooked, created a paradigm shift that could not be reversed.' Ibid.

²⁴ 'By 1918 the term "fundamentals" had become common usage, but "fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism" were coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, Baptist editor of the *Watchman-Examiner*... During a conference in Buffalo, New York, in 1920, Laws and his associates accepted the title.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church*. (396). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

²⁵ 'The roots of fundamentalism go back into the nineteenth century when evolution, biblical criticism, and the study of comparative religions began to challenge old assumptions about the authority of the biblical revelation.' Ibid.

²⁶ 'From the very inception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, temperance has been a major focus and the Church has played a key role in struggling against the inroads of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other drugs.' *Historic Stand for Temperance Principles and Acceptance of Donations Statement Impacts Social Change*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat26.html>

Prohibition,²⁷ confessed Biblical inerrancy, practised Biblical literalism, and maintained international charity networks.²⁸ Fundamentalists shared the same values.²⁹

In at least two key contexts Fundamentalist apologists reached for Adventist literature without hesitation and consequently absorbed some aspects of SDA theology. Against evolution they brandished the work of SDA scholar and amateur geologist George McCready Price, modern pioneer of Young Earth Creationism and 'flood geology'.³⁰ Price was a leading influence on Henry Madison Morris,³¹ founder of the Creation Research Society and Institute for Creation Research. In defence of

²⁷ 'In 1909 a General Conference Bulletin recommended that "our ministers, teachers, physicians, nurses, and people generally, engage in a vigorous campaign in behalf of total abstinence, by means of lectures, demonstrations, and the distribution of health and temperance literature, and that whenever consistent our people, by voice, pen, and vote, place themselves on record as favorable to its restriction and entire prohibition.'" Miller, J. 2011. 'Adventists, Prohibition, and Political Movement.' *Liberty*, November/December. Retrieved on October 15, 2011, from: <http://www.libertymagazine.org/index.php?id=1791>

²⁸ 'For example, during the relief services needed at the end of World War II, between 1946 and 1949, the General Conference relief organizations "provided more than 3,300,000 pounds of food and 1,100,000 pounds of clothing" to Europe alone.' Douglass, H. E. 1998. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. (367). Pacific Press Publishing Association: Nampa, ID.

²⁹ The resemblance between Fundamentalists and Seventh Day Adventists was more than superficial. Secular and religious began describing SDAs as a Fundamentalist sect, and this label is still applied by some today.

³⁰ 'During the first two thirds of the twentieth century, during which most Christian fundamentalists accepted the existence of long geological ages, the leading voice arguing for the recent creation of life on earth in six literal days was George McCready Price (1870-1963), a scientifically self-taught creationist and teacher.' *George McCready Price and 'Flood Geology'*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: <http://www.counterbalance.org/history/floodgeo-frame.html>

³¹ 'From the early 1960s through the 1990s the most influential voice in creationist circles was that of Henry M. Morris (b. 1918), a Baptist civil engineer from Texas... At first, he remained undecided about whether to attribute the fossil record to pre-Edenic activities or, following Price, to Noah's flood. Eventually he settled on the latter—and devoted the rest of his life to promoting flood geology, which about 1970 he renamed creation science.' *Creation Science - Henry M. Morris*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: <http://www.counterbalance.org/history/morris-body.html>

premillennialism Fundamentalists relied on Le Roy Edwin Froom, an SDA historian of prodigious ability. Froom's *magnum opus* was *The Historic Faith of Our Fathers* (1950), a four-volume study of eschatology defending the historicist model of prophetic interpretation as the original Christian prophetic paradigm.³²

Seventh Day Adventism became increasingly institutionalised in the post-war era, a development which brought many benefits. Bradford (2006, p. 176) argues that the founding of Adventist colleges during the 1940s steered the church away from Fundamentalism,³³ facilitated the training of professionally qualified clergy, and offered new opportunities for evangelism.³⁴ This may have increased the perception of legitimacy.

In 1949 Adventist elder Tobias Edgar Unruh was moved by a radio program featuring evangelical pastor Donald Grey Barnhouse and sent him a copy of Ellen White's book, *Steps to Christ*. Barnhouse published a brutally negative review and the two men corresponded until 1955, when Barnhouse commissioned evangelical apologist Walter R. Martin to write a book about Adventism. Martin had denounced SDAs as heretical with a single terse paragraph in his popular polemic *The Rise of the Cults* (1955) but

³² Sixty-one years later, Froom's work still commands respect among mainstream Christians and secular scholars.

³³ 'The accreditation of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions became a powerful influence in extricating the church out of its Fundamentalist mould.' Bradford, G. (2006). *More Than a Prophet*. (176). Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, Michigan.

³⁴ 'Once it was agreed that the college would seek accreditation, it followed that they needed to have students from other accredited church institutions. These students in turn would have to be taught by well-qualified teachers. The door was opened for higher education and the Seventh-day Adventist church began to make contact with the wider world of learning. The founding of The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary meant that the church would have better academic education for its ministry.' Ibid.

agreed to confer with Adventist elders before delivering his next broadside. Meetings took place between 1955-56. Martin, Unruh and Froom were the principal attendees; Barnhouse attended later, along with Walter E. Read and Roy A. Anderson (both highly placed members of SDA leadership).³⁵ All were aware their dialogue would prove controversial, but none could have predicted the outcome: in response to more than forty questions posed by their evangelical counterparts the SDA leaders consistently gave answers which fell within the parameters of traditional Christian orthodoxy. When Barnhouse and Martin suggested this was an idiosyncratic rendition of SDA theology the Adventists conceded some differences of opinion within their church, yet still insisted they spoke for the overwhelming majority. It was a gross exaggeration, but the evangelicals did not press further.³⁶

In 1956 Barnhouse published an article in *Eternity* magazine, which declared Seventh Day Adventists orthodox by evangelical standards. Evangelical responses were broadly divided along soteriological lines: since SDA is Arminian, Arminians tended to agree with Barnhouse while Calvinists did not. But the long term impact was favourable and

³⁵ '...Walter E. Read, Seventh-day Adventist General Conference field secretary and chairman of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Biblical Research Committee; and Roy A. Anderson, an experienced evangelist and the director of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association, and editor of *Ministry* magazine.' *Ibid.* (185).

³⁶ 'Martin and Barnhouse noted that there were some Adventist books still being sold in Seventh-day Adventist book shops that were saying some things different to what they were being told. Froom, Anderson, and Read replied that this was because the church does give some measure of freedom of expression and that what they had shared was held by all except a "lunatic fringe". This was a serious misrepresentation, although the answers given were generally held by Seventh-day Adventists. Yet there were a significant number of Seventh-day Adventists who did not hold to the positions that were presented.' *Ibid.* (186).

confirmed the opinions of evangelicals who already saw SDAs as fellow believers.³⁷ Though not overwhelmingly negative, the Adventist reaction was strong enough to divide conservatives (who opposed communion with evangelicals) and progressives (who supported it). Froom and his colleagues were widely accused of selling out.³⁸ Yet they had answered in good faith and could show that the theology presented to Barnhouse and Martin was generally consistent with SDA teaching. In any case, since the church had no written creed and Ellen White was now dead, who had the authority to say their theology was heretical – or not? SDAs universally regarded White's exegesis as the benchmark of orthodoxy, but as factional lines were drawn they discovered her writings could be invoked to support a range of views.

In 1957 Froom, Read and Anderson produced a book entitled *Questions on Doctrine* (hereafter *QOD*), an expanded version of their answers to Barnhouse and Martin,³⁹ intended for a wider evangelical audience.⁴⁰ It contained an 'official statement of

³⁷ In a review of Froom's eschatological masterpiece three years prior to the Barnhouse/Unruh meetings, Baptist historian Robert T. Handy had described Froom as, 'an evangelical Christian, a Protestant conservative.' (Handy 1952, pp. 551-553). This demonstrates the respect already commanded by SDA scholarship among evangelicals, but more importantly the recognition of SDAs *as* evangelicals on the basis of common theology.

³⁸ SDAs had apparently forgotten their church's communion with the Seventh Day Baptists, who were distinguished only from mainstream Christians by their Sabbath observance. Barnhouse and Froom were not doing anything that had not already been done with Ellen White's approval in 1876, yet their contemporaries found it shocking. Perhaps SDAs had unwittingly imbibed the Fundamentalists' intolerance of ecumenism, even as the Fundamentalists imbibed the SDAs' Young Earth Creationism, 'flood geology' and premillennialism.

³⁹ Despite strong opposition from some evangelical leaders, Martin supported Barnhouse's conclusion that SDAs were mainstream. He later replied to his critics in *The Truth About Seventh Day Adventists* (1960), reiterating his belief in the SDAs' orthodoxy on the proviso that they subscribed to the doctrines presented in *QOD*. This approach was well received and proved a tipping point for large numbers of undecided evangelicals. When Billy Graham invited SDAs to his preaching crusades, it was official: SDAs had come in from the cold.

⁴⁰ It also served as an apologetic to conservative SDAs outraged by their negotiation with evangelicals. But although nominally sanctioned by the SDA General Conference, *QOD* proved so controversial it was withdrawn
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fundamental beliefs' and a proviso emphasising the authority of General Conferences.⁴¹ Taken together they gave the impression that SDAs possessed a formal creed ratified by church councils. This may have been intentional. Strictly speaking, however, there was no 'official statement of fundamental beliefs' until the '27 Fundamentals' drafted by the General Conference of 1980. The 'official statement' provided in *QOD* was a list of acceptable parameters from the standard SDA church manual⁴² which had never been treated as a creedal document.⁴³ Despite widespread acceptance, *QOD* was bitterly opposed by influential SDA theologian M. L. Andreasen, who tried to prevent its publication and sparked an internecine war between conservatives and progressives which raged for decades.⁴⁴

from print in 1963. Formal approval of *QOD* was granted in 1983 by W. Richard Leshner, vice-president of the General Conference, and in 2003 it was finally republished by Andrews University, an SDA college.

⁴¹ '...because of the very nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization no statement of Seventh-day Adventist belief can be considered official unless it is adopted by the General Conference in quadrennial session, when accredited delegates from the whole world field are present. The answers in this volume are an expansion of our doctrinal positions contained in the official statement of Fundamental Beliefs already referred to. Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.' *Questions On Doctrine*, 1957. (pp. 8-9). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

⁴² The authors were open about the source of the list, but their description made it sound more authoritative than it really was.

⁴³ At the 1980 General Conference a genuinely official list of '27 Fundamentals' was finally drafted (a 28th point was added in 2005). SDAs consider the '28 Fundamentals' a descriptive document rather than a prescriptive creed. The preamble states, 'Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures... Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.' *Fundamental Beliefs*. Retrieved on October 16, 2011, from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>

⁴⁴ 'The church is still divided and the theology mapped out by M. L. Andreasen is a good example of the improper use of [White's] writings. Many of the ideas of Andreasen were later taken to their logical conclusion by an Australian, Robert Brinsmead, who caused havoc and division in the church during the 1960s... Both sides assumed you could do your theology through [White's] writings and that she would always be found to be consistent in her theological expressions... The frustrating fact was that both sides found powerful quotes
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The acceptance of SDAs by evangelicals was never a foregone conclusion and benefited from some timely coincidences. Beginning with Unruh's chance hearing of Barnhouse's radio presentation; facilitated by the unexpected dominance of progressives within SDA leadership; made easier by the SDAs' lack of a formal creed; legitimised by the involvement of highly influential evangelicals. Put simply, it happened at a time when circumstances were ideal for success.

Progressive SDAs, pro-SDA evangelicals, and anti-SDA evangelicals all agree (albeit for different reasons)⁴⁵ that core SDA theology⁴⁶ has remained unchanged since the early years of the church. This can be demonstrated from *QOD*, conservative evangelical critiques of SDA theology,⁴⁷ and progressive evangelical justifications for regarding SDAs as Christian.⁴⁸ Where apparent ideological shifts had occurred,

to confront the opposition.' Bradford, G. (2006). *More Than a Prophet*. (pp. 187-189). Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, Michigan.

⁴⁵ Progressive SDAs needed to prove they had not changed doctrines to suit evangelicals. Pro-SDA evangelicals needed to explain why they had accepted SDAs without insisting on change. This was not difficult, as some of the SDAs' distinctive doctrines were gaining acceptance within mainstream Christianity (e.g. conditional mortality, later endorsed by Anglican scholars John Stott and Philip Hughes, among others), and Ellen White was neither the first nor the last modern Christian to claim some form of Spirit guidance. Anti-SDA evangelicals needed to show SDAs were still unorthodox *because* they had not changed their doctrines. The only dissenters were conservative SDAs, who insisted their version of orthodoxy had always been normative but was now being abandoned. Yet all the evidence was against them.

⁴⁶ Including conditional immortality, Sabbath observance and the prophetic inspiration of Ellen White. But evangelicals now took a more lenient attitude toward these teachings.

⁴⁷ 'Many Adventists today would like to be thought of as evangelical Christians, and in recent years there has been considerable internal discussion on central doctrinal issues. But the doctrine of the remnant church, still official Adventist teaching, would seem to make identification with main-stream evangelicalism impossible.' Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. 2000. *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed.) (637). InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. But although the 'remnant' doctrine is still current it has not prevented communion with evangelicals, as noted earlier in this paper.

⁴⁸ '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. ...a portion of it D. Burke 2011 #TCA102646

internal factors were invariably responsible: (a) lack of a formal creed, (b) toleration of heterodoxy,⁴⁹ (c) the evolution of Ellen White's own interpretations,⁵⁰ and (d) official adoption of teachings with significant apologetic value,⁵¹ at a time when Adventists needed them most.

Notwithstanding the many competing interpretations of SDA history, careful consideration leads to the conclusion that their transition from fringe sect to mainstream denomination was primarily the result of *defining* orthodoxy rather than changing it, with evangelical encouragement playing a later, supportive role as the influence of Ellen White seemed to recede and a more nuanced reading of SDA theology came to the fore. In the end, ecumenical fellowship between evangelicals and

is definitely out of the mainstream of historic Christian theology (e.g., Sabbatarianism, conditional immortality or soul sleep, annihilation of the wicked). Though we would adamantly disagree with Adventists regarding these above mentioned doctrines, it should be added that one could hold these views and remain a believing Christian.' Christian Research Institute, *Seventh Day Adventism*. Retrieved on October 17, 2011, from: <http://www.equip.org/articles/seventh-day-adventism>

⁴⁹ This frequently resulted in schism when doctrine was formalised, giving the appearance of theological innovation. But in such cases the church was simply granting special status to one of several widely accepted views, not replacing old theology with new.

⁵⁰ The emergence of White's explicit Trinitarianism in 1899 was only controversial because SDAs had consistently read their own Christology into her admittedly ambiguous writings, always assuming she believed as they did.

⁵¹ E.g. Young Earth Creationism, which became a mark of orthodoxy equal to Sabbath observance and remains current despite attempts by progressive SDAs to accommodate evolution. In 2004 an SDA committee set up to examine the relationship between Scripture and science affirmed, 'We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin.' ('An Affirmation of Creation', *The International Faith & Science Conferences 2002-2004 report of the Organizing Committee to the General Conference Executive Committee through the office of the General Conference President, September 10, 2004*. Retrieved on October 17, 2011, from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html>).

Adventists was not driven by doctrinal modification, but by a mutual desire for common understanding.

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