

# Proclamation!

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FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS



RICK LANGER 6

## The Tree: Are you connected?





## My Father is **faithful** RICHARD TINKER

**When I was fired, I had no savings account to fall back on. For the next two months we scraped by. I kept a running tally by my computer showing how much was left in the checking account. But we had enough!**

**T**his issue of *Proclamation!* marks the one year anniversary of my being fired from Loma Linda University for my participation in this ministry. A year ago I was busily working on an implant dentistry educational DVD, even staying overtime as my supervisor had requested. But in a moment, that part of my life was over. God had a new assignment for me—one which didn't

have a secure paycheck, a retirement account, sick pay, or health insurance. But it has something far better: a place for me to help advance my Father's kingdom.

My Father in heaven has supplied all our needs. When I

was fired, I had no savings account to fall back on. For the next two months we scraped by. I kept a running tally by my computer showing how much was left in the checking account. But we had enough!

When the board of Life Assurance voted to contract with me for my services, it was for an amount less than I was paid at Loma Linda University—but stuff just seems to cost less. And now one year has passed—a year filled with exciting challenges and advances. Through it all, our faithful Father has supplied even more than we could hope for.

Within weeks of my losing my job, this ministry was handed the opportunity to reach a much larger audience with this magazine. And the Lord doesn't ever do things half-way. The funding for this expansion was soon to follow. This issue is the fourth *Proclamation!* to be sent to nearly 40,000 Adventists and former Adventists, as well as interested Christians, ministries, and libraries. We also have readers that were part of Armstrongism and other deviations from Biblical Christianity.

With an increase in readers came an increase of work, so the board of Life Assurance voted to contract with Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff to lend their full-time knowledge and experience to this work. It's been awesome to watch how the funds increased when the need increased.

As we have grown, the exposure of this outreach has increased in non-English speaking

groups. We decided to begin our multi-cultural thrust with a Spanish language version of the magazine. Galen and Joan Yorba-Gray, professional Spanish translators for a large Christian publisher, agreed to take on the job. We plan to make *Proclamation!* available in many more languages as the funds become available.

God has called us to go to every nation for a witness. It's exciting to see the growth of the work in Africa. Healthy Christian churches are now planted in Uganda and Kenya by former Adventist pastors, and the effects of their ministry are being felt in other parts of that continent.

As I stated at the beginning, it has been far better to be in a place of helping to advance our Father's kingdom. But what will He do next? We have ideas. More audio and video content is needed. A better web presence would really help those who are searching for answers about Adventism. As God continues to lead us, our job is to follow—and hang on for the ride!

Advancing the kingdom is every Christian's job. Thank you for praying for us as we dedicate this ministry to do what God has called it to do.

Our cover feature, "The Tree, Are you connected?" is by our former associate pastor at Trinity, Rick Langer. He presented this important topic at our recent Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) weekend.

My friends Martin and Sharon Carey share their faith story, which was also presented at the FAF weekend this year. It has been really exciting to watch them discovering the depths of the Good News in Jesus.

Ramone Romero, a frequent contributor on the forum at FormerAdventist.com, writes from Japan about the Japanese tradition of keeping a *butsudan*, or Buddhist family altar, even when the family has become Christian. He compares this practice to reformed and progressive Adventists "updating" their beliefs instead of leaving them.

The question, "Do Adventists worship a different Jesus?" is thoughtfully covered in my wife's article, "Discovering the Adventist Jesus."

May this issue of *Proclamation!* be a blessing and encouragement to you as you seek to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). †

### **Proclamation!**

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# Alive and at rest

MARTIN AND SHARON CAREY

**MARTIN:** Both Sharon and I were raised in the Seventh-day Adventist church. At our last Adventist church, Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda, we were both active. I was the editor of their newsletter for a year, and later on, a leader in the men's ministry.

There had always been a secular-religious divide in my mind which began with my parents. My mother was always Christian, and a rather rebellious Adventist. She was driven from several Adventist churches for being a "Brinsmead agitator" back in the 60's and 70's, but she was not easily intimidated. In the early 1970s, Brinsmead's discovery of justification by faith alone was a powerful experience that I never forgot.

My dad, on the other hand, became an atheist when I was small, and like him, I left the Christian faith after college. Both of us adopted a worldview that elevated reason and dismissed the supernatural. I studied philosophy and psychology and learned to distrust any source of inspiration. Unable to dismiss God, I kept searching for a reconciliation of faith and science. I was proud of my self-made philosophy, but also depressed by it. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit and my mom were bigger influences than I realized.

Somehow, God prodded me into an Adventist church where he was keeping Sharon for me, and we were married. I decided then to be a "mere Christian" without the Adventist extras.

During our eight years at Campus Hill Church, I became the disgruntled one. I worried about my lack of desire to attend church and read the Bible. At times I was inspired by church, but I felt uneasy keeping my name on the church books and allowing others to think I was Adventist. I did not live like one; I just wanted to belong to Christ. I kept reading about faith and reason, seeking reason's cold comfort. Faith could make few claims, because one must avoid having a "God of the gaps," at any cost. I both doubted and desired God.

**SHARON:** I was born into Adventism, but my parents had converted to the SDA church in 1965. I attended Loma Linda Academy all 12 years and felt a loyalty to the Campus Hill Church in particular since I had been a member there for as many years. My

questions started in high school when I would get confused about the "Investigative Judgment"—and when my folks detected some accounting problems within the SDA institution. As a college student I sometimes attended other denominational churches but missed the familiar "Sabbath" rituals, so eventually I returned as an "evangelical" Adventist. I prided myself on eating and drinking what I pleased while continuing to worship on the "right" day.

After Martin and I were married, I was excited to return to my "home church" where there now seemed to be more gospel and less of an emphasis on Mrs. White's writings. I helped out as Sabbath school secretary, occasional teacher, Pathfinder parent, cookbook coordinator, assistant in a teen mothers' ministry, and an active fundraiser. I also involved our little boy, teaching him proudly and publicly to sing, "God Has a Plan for my Life." We gave generously to the church, both financially and physically.

While I was so involved, I never felt completely Adventist. I never felt that Mrs. White was a prophet, and worse—I never felt like I understood the Bible.

When a pastor boasted, "We know better how to live!" I shuddered. The mocking of other Christians made me uncomfortable. The sermons often were not feeding my spiritual needs, and I had little desire to study on my own during the week. My early identity of feeling "special" and "separate" as a Christian in the Adventist church now just felt "uninformed" yet "busy."

I am still unsure if it was the spirit within me, or the spirit within our church that began to change. Where we used to hear the gospel being preached, the emphasis now seemed to be on giving, conquering territory, and creating a show (complete with television

**Martin and Sharon Carey** grew up in Adventist homes. They both work in the public school system in Southern California; Sharon teaches first grade, and Martin is a school psychologist. They have two sons; Nick, 19, and Matthew, six. They have been attending Trinity Church in Redlands, California, since October 22, 2006.



# Awesome realizations dawned: our Creator's love is so incredible, so patient, and so trustworthy; Jesus Christ is equal to God; we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus. Wow!

cameras and timed sermons). I worried about my lack of desire to read and understand the Bible, and though I loved Jesus, I didn't really know Him or have the deep desire to let Him take control.

**MARTIN:** Then this past August, I was discussing the Investigative Judgment with Sharon's brother who was attending Andrews seminary. He mentioned Dale Ratzlaff as part of the opposition. When I got home, I Googled Dale's name and found Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine. I had suddenly dug up treasure. I was taken back to the gospel we had been thrilled by in the 70's. I delved into the back issues, printing them out, taking them with me everywhere, including church services. In fact, I became so obsessed, Sharon started worrying.

One night while reading John 5:24, I realized that the moment of judgment for the believer is the hearing of the gospel. The two events are one. I then sensed that Jesus Himself was saying quietly, "Follow Me."

"You're asking me?"

"Yes." That moment, I could feel His presence in the room, gently offering life. I answered Him, "Thank you for your life, Lord, and save me from this miserable unbelief!" In the days after, I felt like a little kid, submitting myself to Jesus in even stupid little things. No longer an abstraction, Jesus was someone I now loved.

I started reading the Bible intensely as a book with power; everything pointed to Jesus Christ and His finished work. The day we hear His voice and believe, we have eternal life and will not be condemned. I had many internal debates, thinking, where's the mental obstacle course to pass the test? The answer came, "He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (II Cor. 1:21b-22).

I shared my excitement about the New Covenant with Sharon. She was amazed at II Cor. 3, where Paul compares the ministry of death written in stone with the surpassing glory of the new covenant. We started reading the Bible together, and our "veil" was taken away. The book of Hebrews became such a delight with its magical phrase, "once for all." Christ's blood never defiles, but has blotted out our sins once and for all. We received the final verdict of judgment the day we heard His voice and didn't harden our hearts.

One discovery that gave me joy was finding that believers are given a living spirit that will never die, just as Jesus told Martha after Lazarus had died. I say joy, not only because I lost my mom in 2004; now I could finally abandon the spirit-crushing materialism I held in common with the atheists. We are more than just animated meat with a little "sanctified DNA." We hold treasure in jars of clay.

Now an ordinary Christian, my illusion of intellectual respectability is damaged. After I told a friend about submitting my reason to faith in God's word, he told me, "You have taken a path of no return, I beg you to reconsider." There is no going back; simple trust is His gift. I've now become something I used to dread: an emotional, Bible-toting Jesus Nutter! .

**SHARON:** By late August I was worried because Martin would stay up really late reading.

I was concerned because he seemed to be getting too "reli-

gious." I was worried that he might lead us into territory that I wasn't ready for. The *Proclamation!* articles pointed to Scripture, and Martin shared his discoveries with me.

Meanwhile, God knew I wasn't proud to say I was Adventist. God knew I had holes in my soul that needed to be filled with the incredible love that only Jesus Christ can fill. God knew that in my heart I longed to be free of the legalism and self-reliance I had touted for so much of my life.

The *Proclamation!* magazine articles my husband was reading addressed questions that I had had my entire life. The biggest question for me was, how did the Sabbath relate to end times? Happily I found plenty of testimonies and articles that addressed this issue for me. I read well-written studies supported by Bible texts. I discovered documented problems with the Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White. Until that point, my problems with her seemed to be just "my problems." I finally felt a tiny bit of understanding and began really to pray.

I felt a paradigm shift when I read texts that I had heard all my life that only now started making sense, and discovered ones I didn't even know existed. I started enjoying Paul's letters and found them to be so clear and convicting. A fluttery kind of feeling got inside me, the kind you have when you've found a new love—only better. Awesome realizations dawned: our Creator's love is so incredible, so patient, and so trustworthy; Jesus Christ is equal to God; we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus. Wow!

We first visited Trinity Church on October 22nd, 2006, the day that used to symbolize disappointment. My only disappointment was that Sunday took so long to come back around. By our third sermon at Trinity church I was so moved by Pastor Gary's sermon on the Sabbath that it suddenly hit me. I had been worshiping my day and not my God. Saturday Sabbath had been such an issue (although it seemed subtle at times) that I had no rest at all. In fact, it dawned on me that to find real rest in Jesus, I had to physically, mentally, and emotionally leave the seventh-day Sabbath. This, the Holy Spirit convinced me, was to be my personal "test"! I had to leave my reliance on Sabbath, my "what ifs", and my comfort zone in order to enter into true rest.

The tears were ridiculous. I didn't need to think a second more. This is what I needed to do. I put all my trust in Jesus, and only Jesus. He says that we only need to believe in him. He says we have been adopted and will be heirs to the kingdom. He says he loves us and asks us to follow the commandment to love one another. The peace I feel from giving all my trust to Him is what I wish all my Adventist friends could feel.

I still have so much to learn, but I put my trust in Jesus. My oldest brother wanted to know how we know we are doing the right thing, and without missing a beat Martin replied, "Because I ask for God's guidance all of the time, and I know He isn't going to trick me."

Thank you, God, for such a man who is the leader of our household.

Thank you, Life Assurance Ministries, for helping our family. And most of all: thank you, Jesus, for true rest.

†



# The ethics of darkness and light

**Q: Can I stay in the church and “make a difference” by teaching the gospel and ignoring the practices and doctrines with which I don’t fully agree?**

A: In the '80s when I was doing thorough study into my Adventist roots and the issues then facing the church, I lived in the state of cognitive dissonance for many months. At the time I believed Ellen White was an inspired messenger of God to the remnant church. At the same time I read her statements regarding the teachings of William Miller.

Many shepherds of the flock, who professed to love Jesus, said that they had no opposition to the preaching of Christ’s coming, but they objected to the definite time.

Ministers who would not accept this *saving message* [the acceptance of a “definite time”] themselves hindered those who would have received it. The blood of souls is upon them. Preachers and people joined to oppose this message from heaven and to persecute William Miller and those who united with him in the work (*Early Writings*, p.233-234).

I was unable to harmonize these statements with the reality of truth. My conclusion was that the pastors who rejected the date setting of Miller were following the teachings of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> yet according to Ellen White, Jesus turned away from these pastors. She made the acceptance of date setting a “saving message” that was “from heaven.” This discovery along with many months of study on the sanctuary doctrine convinced me that I could no longer teach at least one of Adventism’s Fundamentals of belief.

These mental conflicts led me into what I now see as an encounter with the “ethics of darkness.” Because of my position as pastor in the Adventist church I had to present the “image” of being fully in harmony with Adventist teachings. After living in this state for some time I decided I could no longer be silent about my conclusions. One of my elders suggested that we see the Chairman of the Department of Religion at Loma Linda University as he had “all the answers.” I, with my elders, had a five hour conversation with this person who suggested that all the Conference President wanted was my loyalty. He asked if there was some way I could carefully choose my words so that it would “appear” I was in harmony with all the doctrines of the church but put my own interpretation on them so I could be honest with my convictions. I was shocked at his suggestion. I now realize that “fronting”—pretending to be something you are not—is a subtle move into the ethics of darkness.

From personal conversations with many Adventist leaders at all levels of church organization I can tell you that this

“fronting” is rampant. It is so subtle and has become so inbred and modeled in the Adventist ministry that it has become the accepted “ethical structure” and thus it often goes unnoticed.

Yes, for many months I lived in the tension of conflicting “truths”<sup>2</sup> and started down the road into the ethics of darkness. It is not my intent to condemn those who may be living with cognitive dissonance or who are projecting an image that is not fully congruent with their inner core of convictions. Rather, it is my prayer that if you find yourself facing these very subtle thoughts and practices that you give serious consideration to the reasons behind the conflicting “truths” and realize the danger of starting down the road of ethical darkness. Ask yourself if you are projecting the idea that you are in full harmony with all the teachings of Adventism when secretly you know there are imbedded errors. Do you renounce these errors or simply put them out of sight into the dark, secret basement of your soul?

I know the spiritual stress this creates. And thank God, I also know the joy and freedom experienced when my outward projections match my inner convictions. May God help us each to walk in the transparent light of Christ without cognitive dissonance using only the ethics of light.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

...keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith (1 Tim. 1:19).

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house (Mt. 5:14-15).

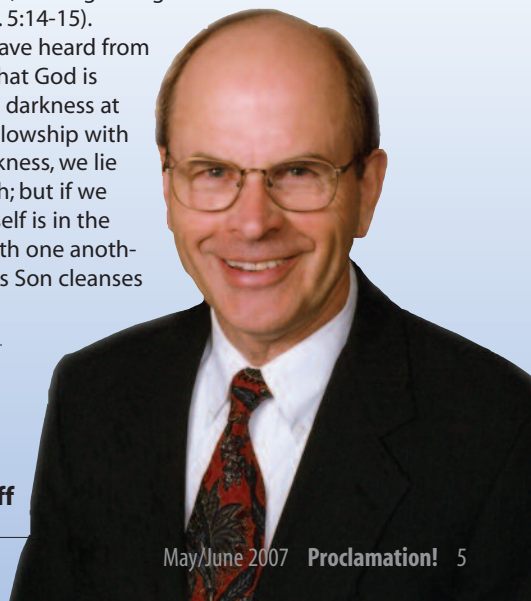
This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:5-7).

## Endnotes

1. Mt. 24:36, 42.

2. In my case I found that both “truths” turned out to be error.

**Dale Ratzlaff**





# The Tree: Are you connected?

RICK LANGER

One of the challenges of modern Christianity is sorting out the incredible diversity of denominations, sects, cults, and heresies. Particularly in the Protestant world, there is no single authoritative body which determines what teaching is orthodox and what teaching is heterodox. To say that our only rule of faith and practice is the Scripture is to ignore the problem rather than to solve it. What is needed is an authoritative interpretation and application of Scripture to the puzzling array of modern religious beliefs. Simply claiming that Scripture is authoritative is not enough.

Though I do not hope to solve this problem completely, I would like to suggest a way of viewing the history of the church and the development of doctrine that may help solve the problem of discerning truth and error in Christian life and practice.

What are the distinguishing marks of authentic Christianity? I will suggest three:

**Apostolic foundation:** The first mark of the authentic church is that it is built upon the right foundation. And indeed, from the perspective

of the New Testament writers, there is only one true foundation: the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as cornerstone (Eph 2:20). This is the bedrock of the Christian faith: the work of Christ as proclaimed by the apostles. We are all called to be builders (1 Cor 3:10-15), but all of our building must be done on a single foundation, for “no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 3:11).

**Core confessions:** Another distinguishing mark of the authentic church is the beliefs which it confesses. As Paul suggests, it is only by the Spirit of God that one confesses “Jesus is Lord.” Jude identifies false teachers as those “denying our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.” Those who will be saved are those who “confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead.” (Rom 10:9) These statements build around a single touchstone belief which distinguishes all authentic Christianity: a belief in the deity of Christ.

There are also further refinements of this belief offered in the pages of the New Testament. It is not enough merely to believe in



# The perseverance of the church through the millennia is a testimony to the providential grace of God, not to the brilliant leadership of those who have received the faith and passed it on.

Jesus; it is also important to clarify what one believes about Jesus. Authentic faith confesses Jesus to have come in the flesh, to have died, and to have been resurrected (1 John 4:2, 1Cor 15:3-5). The resurrection of Christ is usually a bridge to belief in Christ's return (1Cor 15:51-52) and final work of judgment. Such core beliefs worked their way into formal credal confessions of the early church—first as parts of baptismal statements memorized by catechumens, and later they were expressed in more technical language in creeds associated with the great councils.

**Canon of Scripture:** It is also clear that authentic faith was associated with a belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture. During the life of Christ and during the initial years of apostolic proclamation, the Scriptures were the Hebrew Old Testament. Apostolic preaching understood the life and ministry of Christ as a culmination and fulfillment of a work of God begun long ago in the life of the nation of Israel. The prophetic utterances which came to Israel were the very words of God—Jesus did not come to abolish this past work of God but to complete and fulfill it (Matt 5:17). In the course of events, the apostolic proclamations were themselves written down both in systematic fashion and in response to particular needs and occasions in the life of the fledgling church. As the apostles began to die, these writings became increasingly important—they were the only direct link we had to the apostolic foundation. And so the New Testament was compiled and joined with the Old in what quickly became the authoritative written documents of the Christian faith.

Though other elements might be suggested, such as the sacramental practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper, these were generally regarded as expressions of the faith rather than definitions of the faith. Authentic believers did these practices, but the faith itself was defined by its beliefs. To these worship practices could also be added a host of moral and personal behaviors which were also distinctive of Christians, but nonetheless not actually part of the foundation of the faith itself.

## The Family Tree

With these three elements of authentic Christianity in mind, let us imagine the religious world as a sort of forest of beliefs in which the Christian tree has been planted. As you walk through the forest you notice that there are many trees, not just one. Some trees look similar to one another, and others look distinctively different. Some trees are nearby, and others are distant. Some branches are distant from each other but surprisingly are attached to the same trunk. On the other hand, you also notice that some branches are very close to each other but are actually attached to different trees. Some trees are withering and dying, others seem to have just sprung up.

How do we make sense of this forest of belief? Allow me to suggest three "horticultural" observations about Christian orthodoxy:

**Orthodoxy is not determined by the proximity of the branches but rather by the trunk to which they are attached.** Let me consider a specific example. I am often asked about the Church of Latter Day Saints by people who are casual observers of Christianity. People are struck by the fact that Mormons are often good people who pray and look just like other evangelical Christians. The conclusion often drawn is that, deep down, there is really no difference. But in reality, all that people have done is looked at the branches and found them to be nearby

one another. Orthodoxy, however, is not a matter of the branches but of the trunk. If you want to know if the Church of Latter Day Saints is orthodox, you need to trace the branch back down the trunk and see if it is attached to the "faith once for all delivered to the saints."

If we consider the three marks of the "trunk" of authentic Christianity, it quickly becomes clear where the Church of Latter Day Saints attaches. Though they may say that Jesus is God, they may profess belief in the apostles, and they may read the Bible, there is an obvious problem. They believe that Jesus is a certain sort of god—the sort of god that we also will one day become. Indeed, a common Mormon confession is that "as man is, god once was. As god is, man can become." This is an understanding of god that has its roots in Joseph Smith, not historical Christian monotheism. They believe in apostles, but it does not appear that the foundation of the prophets and apostles was "laid once for all." Rather, the apostolic work of Joseph Smith, most importantly, and the ongoing work of the 12 apostles who form the highest leadership of the church are the essential foundation on which the Latter Day Saints build their church. Similarly, they may believe in the Bible, but only so far as it has been accurately transmitted and translated as determined by the writings and revelations of Joseph Smith. The trunk to which the branch of the Latter Day Saints attach is the trunk of Joseph Smith, not the trunk of apostolic preaching, credal confessions and the canon of Scripture.

## The tree was never killed, though many branches have died.

I have noticed that one of the most common strategies for "marketing" a heterodox set of beliefs is to claim that they are really the authentic and original beliefs. In the course of history, these beliefs were lost. But now, through the ministry of a leader, a prophet, or a charismatic teacher, they have been restored.

The most obvious and disconcerting problem about this approach is the unnerving sense of spiritual pride. There is something problematic about the assertion that this particular group alone, of all of Christendom, has the truth; that 2000 years of Christians have misunderstood Christ entirely, but now in these last days, a new group has found the truth once more. These are the sorts of claims of which I am generally suspicious—no matter if they are made in a religious, historical, or philosophical context. However, in the context of the current discussion, there is a more fundamental problem. Christ himself promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). Was this promise kept or was it not? Did the gates of hell prevail for 2000 years? Will the gates of hell prevail again? What happened to the foundation laid and the faith given once for all? It appears that the foundation has to be re-laid and the faith has to be given once more.

There is something quite different in these statements than what is found, for example, in the teachings of the Reformers. Though extremely critical of the existing Roman Catholic Church, Luther set out to reform the church, not restart it. The assumption that drove him was that the tree of the church needed to be pruned. Certain branches were dead and keeping other branches from growing. But there was no question that he was drawing on the ongoing life of the authentic church to fulfill this task. He did not discover or write new revelation; he translated already given revelation into a language that the people could understand. The reformation understanding of the church was *semper reformanda*, the church reformed and always reforming. It is an

## ...salvation is accomplished by a return to the Jewish law—though generally with an emphasis on a pre-flood diet that abstained from eating meat.

almost perfect description of the life of a tree—old leaves falling off but new leaves forming; old branches dying even as new branches are growing on another part of the tree. The branches and leaves come and go, but the life of the tree never dies.

**Renewal is a work of the branches.** Finally, renewal of the church always begins on a branch. Though we love to talk about going back to the “trunk” of the New Testament church, this is unrealistic. We do not receive our faith in a cultural and historical vacuum. The faith once for all delivered to the saints is also the faith generation by generation delivered by the saints. We receive our faith as a gift—transmitted to us by those who have gone before. We may want to distance ourselves from unsavory leaves which are further down our branch. I often feel this way when I read about the Crusades, the Inquisition, or the Anabaptist persecutions. There are parts of my family tree that I would rather not acknowledge. But honestly, there are parts of me and parts of my church that I am sure future generations will not want to acknowledge either. Attaching ourselves to a branch with a long though problematic history is somewhat humbling. I would rather attach myself to the pristine trunk with Paul, Peter and John as my near neighbors. But humility is appropriate. The reason the church is always being renewed and reformed is that we are always getting one thing or another wrong. Our weakness reveals God’s strength. The perseverance of the church through the millennia is a testimony to the providential grace of God, not to the brilliant leadership of those who have received the faith and passed it on.

One final note about the forest of religious belief. There are many, many trees in this forest that are far beyond the scope of this brief article. However, there are some near neighbors to the tree of orthodoxy—the shrubs, as it were, that grow in its shadow. These are worth noting because they have a way of returning time and time again, in slightly different form, but clearly growing from the same seed. Three of the shrubs merit specific mention:

**The shrub of Gnosticism:** This most ancient of heresies denies first the humanity of Christ. This is a specific consequence of a more general error—a denial of the goodness of material creation in any form. Gnosticism associates material creations with the works of fallen gods and lesser gods—and indeed it often characterizes the God of the Old Testament as just such a lesser god. Since the material world is bad and

the spiritual world is good, Christ can be God (a spirit) but he cannot be human. Interestingly, the consequences of this theological heresy quickly manifest themselves in either of two moral failures: ascetic legalism or unbridled moral license. The ascetic branch of Gnosticism assumes

that since the material creation is bad it should be shunned as much as possible. The logic is clear enough. The other branch of Gnosticism follows a slightly more complicated line of thought. Since the body is bad, it doesn’t really matter what you do with it. It cannot be made any better, but it really cannot be made any worse either. Therefore, one is actually free to indulge in any sort of physical activity—sexual promiscuity included. What counts is the spirit, not the body. The weeds of Gnosticism grow constantly in the church—sometimes in mild forms which involve disregard of ordinary human activities such as work and marriage because they are not spiritual, to more complete forms of Gnosticism which loom behind aspects of the New Age movement and modern interest in explicitly Gnostic writings.

**Arianism:** This involves the denial of the deity of Christ, and in this sense is a sort of logical counterpoint to Gnosticism which denies the humanity of Christ. Arianism is characteristic of both of the Church of Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. It is commonly associated with a doctrine of salvation that emphasizes human works rather than the work of Christ. The logic of this is relatively transparent—we tend to worship a Savior who is only as large as our sin. If our sin is comparatively small, we tend to think we can solve it ourselves or that it can be solved by another person, albeit an exceptional person. On the other hand, if human sin is fundamental, deep and pervasive, we are hopelessly lost and our salvation requires divine rather than human intervention.

**Ebionites:** Though this heresy is far less widely known than Gnosticism and Arianism, it is important in its own way. It generally shares with Arianism the denial of the deity of Christ, and not surprisingly it views salvation as a human work. In this particular case, salvation is accomplished by a return to the Jewish law—though generally with an emphasis on a pre-flood diet that abstained from eating meat. The connection with Adventism is obvious, but I actually identify the Ebionite “shrub” for a different reason. It was also characteristic of the Ebionites that they rejected large portions of the New Testament (particularly everything written by Paul) and had a special reverence for the book of Matthew. Notice that their denial of a core doctrinal belief such as the deity of Christ is accompanied by a rejection of some of the apostolic foundation of the church and the canon as well. All three elements of the authentic Christian trunk are called into question.

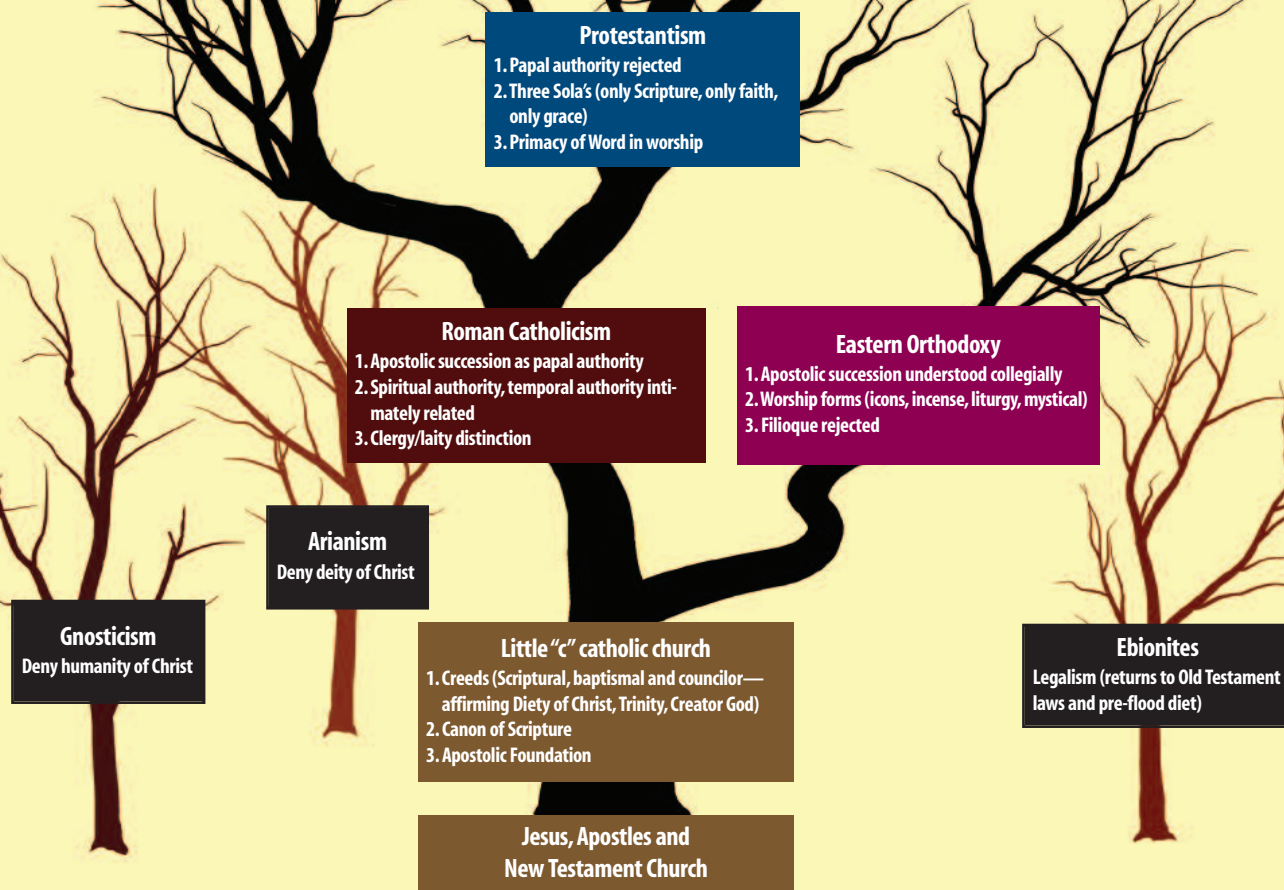
In summary, knowledge of church history is an invaluable aid in discerning contemporary theological errors. A good rule of thumb is to check a belief by seeing if it attaches to the apostolic foundation, the credal confessions, and the canon of Scripture. If all or parts of this connection are absent, you are looking at a set of beliefs that have departed from historical orthodoxy. If the only connection to the authentic trunk is mediated through some other prophet, teacher, or written revelation, you immediately know that the real point of attachment is to that other prophet, teacher or revelation. They have chosen to build on a new foundation rather than the one that was laid once for all. †



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# The Family Tree of the Christian Church



In the course of the millennia, the tree of church history has taken on a rather distinctive branching pattern. There are, at present, three major branches. First, there are the branches of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. They split gradually over time, with the source of the division having to do with the way in which apostolic succession is understood (the Roman Church affirming a singular head in the person of the Pope, the Eastern Church affirming that all bishops are essentially equal). There were also doctrinal differences on comparatively minor points, as well as differences in worship practices. These differences gradually compounded over time and ultimately led to what is called the "Great Schism" in 1054. Notice, both branches share a common attachment to the trunk, but have different ways of understanding how this attachment should be expressed.

In 1517, there was a further division in the Roman Catholic branch of the tree which we refer to now as the Protestant Reformation. This reform movement, initiated by Martin Luther, has given rise to the vast array of modern Protestant denominations. Though there are a

multitude of differences between denominations, their unity is impressive as well. They all share a common attachment to apostolic preaching, the core credal confessions of the church and to the same canon of Scripture. They are distinct from the Roman Catholic Church in how they understand apostolic succession—generally rejecting not only the papacy but also the special significance of human bishops. The core expression of apostolic authority is found in the Bible itself; human leadership of the church is human—all too human and all too fallible. The worship practices of Protestant denominations are generally expressive of this emphasis, focusing strongly on the Bible and biblically-based preaching.

Please notice, that this brief summary is told in such a way as to maximize the continuity of the church and to minimize the differences. I believe this is an important corrective to how we commonly think of the radical (almost chaotic) diversity between Christian churches. However, the differences between branches of Christianity are real and profound. I simply want to make sure that the similarities are equally appreciated.





# Discovering the Adventist Jesus

COLLEEN TINKER

JEREMY GRAHAM, RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

I don't remember exactly the moment I first heard someone say that as an Adventist, she had believed in a different Jesus from the one she had come to know as a no-longer-Adventist Christian. I do remember that I felt a mixture of emotions when I heard those words.

My dominant response was, "Different Jesus? I believed in the same Jesus all Christians know." Adventism endorses an orthodox statement about Jesus and the Trinity, after all! I had always believed Jesus was God.

At a deep level that was hard to articulate, however, I realized that I resonated with that person's admission. I knew that my experience with Jesus as an Adventist was completely different from my experience with Him as a born-again Christ-follower. I also was discovering that Jesus was—well, more "God-like" than I had ever thought He was.

A different Jesus? No, I didn't think so. At the same time, I knew something significant was different about the Lord I had come to know from the Jesus of my past.

## Jesus IS salvation

It was May, 1996, when Richard and I attended an Adventist Forum meeting in San Diego, California, and heard Dale Ratzlaff explain that the New Covenant, unlike the Old Covenant, was an unconditional promise. Where the Old Covenant promised Israel blessings in exchange for obedience, the New Covenant unilaterally promised that God would write His law on human hearts. This covenant did not depend upon promises or obedience from me. Dale explained that Jesus fulfilled the covenant obligations on behalf of humanity by fulfilling the law, by dying for sin, and by

conquering death. In the New Covenant, God's blessings are ours when we place our trust in Jesus. Our own behavior and performance are not involved in our acceptance into the New Covenant. God Himself makes and keeps the terms of the New Covenant. Jesus represents humanity before the Father, and New Covenant blessings are ours when we are in Christ.

My entire worldview changed at that moment. Jesus was no longer a piece of the salvation puzzle. Instead, He IS salvation. In order to be saved, all I needed was Jesus. A flood of emotion overflowed in tears, and I felt something completely new: awe, reverence, and love for Jesus.

At various times I had felt God's presence in my life, and sometimes I had felt deep gratitude to Him, but always my reactions had been to a generalized concept of "God." I had never been aware before of feeling any emotion (except for a vague discomfort) for Jesus, but there I was, struggling not to weep in public, overwhelmed by the Person I now knew was my Lord. This was not an amorphous "God" that I was meeting as if for the first time. This was, instead, Jesus—my Redeemer, Prince of Peace, Mighty God—Who had revealed Himself to me.

This Jesus was not the meek, mild, abused human-stripped-of-divine-power who had no advantage I don't have with whom I had grown up. This Jesus didn't die because He felt sorry for me and volunteered to be a sacrifice, nor did He die to show me how far He would go to prove His love. This Jesus saved me because He was God. This Jesus had the power to command my attention and my loyalty. This Jesus was Someone Who could—and would—demand that I leave my familiar world for His sake. This Jesus didn't feel sentimental about me; He loved me. And I loved Him.



### What's the difference?

As the months and years have passed since that day, I have struggled to understand why the Jesus I know is so different from the Jesus I thought I knew in my past. He seems like a completely new Person to me now.

One of the first changes I noticed after realizing that Jesus was all I needed for salvation was that I no longer felt embarrassed saying His name. As I reflected on my experiences in Adventist schools and churches, I realized that people spoke of "God" far more frequently than they spoke of "Jesus"—especially once a person moved past early elementary school-age. If one did need to speak of His work, it was far more common to use the title "Christ" than to say the name "Jesus."

I began to experience Jesus, both in Scripture and in my life, as a much "bigger" Person than I had ever before understood Him to be. I had always known that Jesus was "divine"; that He was "God"; but there had always been an underlying perception of Jesus as somehow "less than" the Father. He was merely the Son. Jesus was the part of God whom children could understand. As I grew older and more sophisticated, the more nebulous "God" was less embarrassing to mention than the human, suffering, bleeding, and dying Jesus.

Jesus seemed weaker than "God"—almost a demi-god. Jesus was messy; His blood and that clumsy cross always made Him seem pathetic. Further, he evoked an uncomfortable sense of pity. I knew I needed to accept Him—whatever that really meant—yet it was hard to admire a torn-flesh-and-bleeding Jesus whose sacrifice was supposed to be a deterrent from sin.

To be sure, Jesus was essential—but accepting Him was just the first step in being saved. He wasn't ALL I needed—He was like the "down payment" on salvation. Yet these life-long understandings began to fade as I discovered God's sovereign power and the honor and glory of Jesus as the Head over all creation, visible and invisible.

### Non-Trinitarian Founders

As I began to experience Jesus as my Life and my Redeemer, however, I began to look more closely at where my previous understanding of Jesus originated. I discovered that the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church did not believe in the Trinity. James White and Joseph Bates had both been members of the Christian Connection, a group which organized in 1820. This early group was composed largely of people from two sources: those who left Methodism because of their opposition to bishops and autocratic church government, and those who left the Calvinist Baptist tradition because of opposition to closed communion and Calvinist theology.<sup>1</sup> The Stone/Campbell movement eventually grew out of the Christian Connection, and from that movement descended the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Church of Christ.

The "Connection" was non-Trinitarian, as was James White, who was ordained as a minister in the organization. In 1842 James heard William Miller preach "and became an enthusiastic adherent of the Second Advent faith."<sup>2</sup>

James White published the following statement in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1852: "To assert that the sayings of the Son and his apostles are the commandments of the Father, is as wide from the truth as the old Trinitarian absurdity that Jesus Christ is the very and Eternal God."<sup>3</sup>

In 1877 he published a tract entitled *Christ in the Old Testament*. In it he made this statement:

The work of emancipating, instructing and leading the Hebrews was given to the One who is called an angel. Exodus 13:21; 14:19, 24; 23:20-23; 32:34; Numbers 20:16; Isaiah 63:9. And this angel Paul calls "that spiritual Rock that followed them," and he affirms, "That Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). The eternal Father is never called an angel in the Scriptures, while what angels have done is frequently ascribed to the Lord, as they are his messengers and agents to accomplish his work.<sup>4</sup>

James White was not the only early Adventist to hold anti-Trinitarian beliefs. Most of the early pioneers, in fact, denied the Trinity. J.N. Andrews, for whom the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, is named, wrote this in 1855:

The doctrine of the Trinity was established in the church by the council of Nicea, A.D. 325. This doctrine destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous measures by which it was forced upon the church—which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.<sup>5</sup>

R.F. Cottrell published this statement in 1869:

But to hold the doctrine of the trinity (sic)<sup>6</sup> is not so much an evidence of evil intention as of intoxication from that wine of which all the nations have drunk. The fact that this was one of the leading doctrines, if not the very chief, upon which the bishop of Rome was exalted to the pope-dom, does not say much in its favor.<sup>7</sup>

Cottrell's concern that the Trinity was a fabrication of the Catholic Church was echoed by other early Adventist pioneers as well, and today there is a growing movement within Adventism to return to the non-Trinitarian position of the early Adventist church. Their primary reason for their return to this position is that it is the true Adventist view because it was the official doctrine of the founders.<sup>8</sup>

### Ellen White: from Arian to tritheist

While Ellen White grew up believing in the Trinity, she changed her views in adulthood. No doubt James influenced this change, but she claimed that her visions established her unorthodox beliefs. Early in her career she was overtly Arian, and although her later views endorsed "a heavenly trio," she never taught an orthodox Trinity. Following is a representation of her statements about Jesus and the Trinity:

While some of the angels joined Satan in his rebellion, others reasoned with him to dissuade him from his purposes, contending for the honor and wisdom of God in giving authority to his Son. Satan urged, for what reason was Christ



endowed with unlimited power and such high command above himself! He stood up proudly, and urged that he should be equal with God. [...] At length all the angels are summoned to appear before the Father, to have each case decided. Satan unblushingly makes known to all the heavenly family, his discontent, that Christ should be preferred before him, to be in such close conference with God, and he be uninformed as to the result of their frequent consultations. God informs Satan that this he can never know. That to his Son will he reveal his secret purposes, and that all the family of Heaven, Satan not excepted, were required to yield implicit obedience. Satan boldly speaks out his rebellion, and points to a large company who think God is unjust in not exalting him to be equal with God, and in not giving him command above Christ. He declares he cannot submit to be under Christ's command, that God's commands alone will he obey."<sup>9</sup>

The above quote details Ellen White's belief that Jesus was not always God, but that the Father exalted Him to that position—implying also that Jesus remained less than the Father. Further, she clarifies that Satan believed he had equal rights to be thus exalted, and he became angry because the Father chose Jesus over him. The following statement from *Early Writings* emphasizes this view:

"Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to

nel whereby the love of God could be communicated to a fallen world, and his grace and power imparted to those who came to Christ in penitence for their sin."<sup>11</sup>

The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind."<sup>12</sup>

Adventists say, however, that Ellen White grew in her understanding and, in her later years, changed and adopted an orthodox view of God. This general understanding, though, is not supported when we look at all the evidence.

### Not an orthodox Trinity

Dr. Jerry Moon from the Adventist seminary at Andrews University has documented Ellen White's shift from a non-Trinitarian to a "Trinitarian" viewpoint in a paper entitled, *The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White's 'Heavenly Trio' Compared To the Traditional Doctrine*. In this paper he documents James White's dismissal of the Trinity, and he shows that not until 1946 did the Seventh-day Adventist church adopt its first statement explicitly professing the "Trinity". In the succeeding 60 years, Moon points out, "a Trinitarian view of God has remained dominant among Seventh-day Adventists—despite the general awareness since E. R. Gane's M.A. thesis in 1963 that

most of the earliest Adventist leaders were non-trinitarian."

Then he says this:

The view that Ellen White was a Trinitarian has recently come under attack from a few writers who advocate a return to the semi-Arian position of some early Adventist leaders. [...]

Ellen White's view did change—she was raised Trinitarian, came to doubt some aspects of the Trinitarianism she was raised on, and eventually came to a different Trinitarian view from the traditional one. [...] In her earliest writings she differed from some aspects of traditional Trinitarianism

and in her latest writings she still strongly opposed some aspects of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. It appears, therefore, that the Trinitarian teaching of Ellen White's later writings is not the same doctrine that the early Adventists rejected. Rather, her writings describe two contrasting forms of Trinitarian belief, one of which she always opposed, and another that she eventually endorsed."<sup>13</sup>

Moon explains that the purpose of his article is to "clarify more fully the similarities and differences between Ellen White's view of the 'heavenly trio' and the traditional doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>14</sup>

### Definitions matter

In other words, Ellen White shifted from being non-Trinitarian to being Trinitarian—but the Trinitarianism she eventually espoused was NOT the same doctrine of the Trinity



**As I began to experience Jesus as my Life and my Redeemer, ...I began to look more closely at where my previous understanding of Jesus originated. I discovered that the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church did not believe in the Trinity.**

Christ.[...] He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God."<sup>10</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that the publication of the book *The Desire of Ages* in 1898 marked the turning point when Ellen White left Arianism and non-Trinitarianism behind and espoused the full deity of Jesus. Yet both in the years immediately preceding the publication of this book as well as in following years she published numerous statements that continued to reveal her lack of understanding that Jesus was fully God and uncreated, and that the Trinity is an expression of one God in three persons. In 1894 and 1895 she stated that Christ "was made equal with God" and "made in the express image of [God's] person":

But every such plea was cast aside when Christ died as a substitute for the sinner. He who was made equal with God bore the sin of the transgressor, and thereby made a chan-



**While Ellen White grew up believing in the Trinity, she changed her views in adulthood. Early in her career she was overtly Arian, and although her later views endorsed “a heavenly trio,” she never taught an orthodox Trinity.**



that the Christian church historically endorsed.

As I grew up in Adventist schools, I learned that we believed in one God who existed in three Persons. Only recently have I discovered that my understanding of the Trinity reflected Ellen White's definitions—and those definitions did not agree with Christianity's general understanding. As an example, her “Trinity” is clear in the following quote:

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three holy dignitaries of heaven, have declared that they will strengthen men to overcome the powers of darkness. All the facilities of heaven are pledged to those who by their baptismal vows have entered into a covenant with God (MS 92, 1901).<sup>15</sup>

This quotation presents at least three problems. First, Ellen White refers not to God but to the “three dignitaries of heaven.” This wording describes not a triune God who is One Being but a tritheism—three “gods” who comprise a unit called “God.” Adventists argue that her view of these three beings is not a tritheism because the three beings never oppose each other, compete, nor disagree. Nevertheless, these three “dignitaries” describe a tritheism—three separate divine beings.

Second, she describes these dignitaries as strengthening humans to “overcome the powers of darkness.” The Bible describes Jesus as having already overcome the powers of darkness at the cross for our sakes—not for His own sake, as He had no sin (Colossians 2:14-15)—and of bringing those who trust Him out of the domain of darkness into His kingdom where we are already seated in Him at the right hand of God—not by our overcoming, but by faith in Jesus (Colossians 1:13, Ephesians 2:1-9). Being seated at God's right hand, however, does not mean God has a literal right hand or that Jesus and we physically sit next to Him. “The phrase ‘at the right hand’ was a figurative expression in Semitic cultures in biblical times, signifying a position of authority.”<sup>16</sup>

Third, this quote states that we come into “covenant with God” NOT on the basis of placing our faith in Jesus' shed blood and resurrection, but by the act of baptism. The Bible is clear that God brings us into the New Covenant Himself “because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14). The Holy Spirit confirms this promise to us by saying, “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Hebrews 10:16).

Two more quotations follow, written in 1905 and 1906 respectively:

There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

In the name of whom were you baptized? You went down into the water in the name of the three great

Worthies in heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. [...] Those who have been baptized can claim the help of the three great Worthies of heaven to keep them from falling, and to reveal through them a character that is after the divine similitude. [...] You are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. You are raised up out of the water to live henceforth in newness of life—to live a new life. You are born unto God, and you stand under the sanction and the power of the three holiest Beings in heaven, who are able to keep you from falling. [...] When I feel oppressed and hardly know how to relate myself toward the work that God has given me to do, I just call upon the three great Worthies, and say: You know I cannot do this work in my own strength,<sup>18</sup>

In her later years Ellen White consistently expressed the Trinity in tritheistic terms—as if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three separate beings united in a group known as “God.” Further, she repeatedly expressed the idea that these three “Worthies,” “dignitaries,” or “living persons of the heavenly trio” would assist, help, and otherwise co-operate with humans in their efforts to live holy lives. The burden of perfection always lay with the human; the “heavenly trio” was there to help them develop a “character that is after the divine similitude.”

### What is tritheism?

In contrast with these representative Ellen White quotes, the orthodox teaching of the Trinity affirms three things: 1. God is three persons. 2. Each person is fully (not a part of) God and is of the same nature. 3. There is one God.

Tritheism, on the other hand, will acknowledge that God is three persons and that each person is fully God, but it will not say there is one God. Instead, tritheism affirms three separate beings who are gods. This belief has similarities to the ancient pagan religions that had multiple gods, and it destroys the sense of “ultimate unity in the universe; even in the very being of God, there would be plurality but no unity.”<sup>19</sup>

Adventism, however, sees Jesus as one-third of the group called God, not as fully God as defined by the Trinity, nor as a completely independent god as defined by tritheism. It is a confusing hybrid which hides behind the almost-orthodox Adventist fundamental belief about the Trinity.

Ellen White played with her definitions. While she altered her non-Trinitarian stance, she did not embrace an orthodox understanding of the Trinity. She persisted in holding the belief in three separate beings, all of whom were God.



**In her later years Ellen White consistently expressed the Trinity in tritheistic terms—as if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three separate beings united in a group known as “God”.**

Further, her understanding of Christ’s nature and identity was never clear. While some of her publications did affirm Jesus as eternal, others referred to Him as an angel, as the one made in God’s likeness, and as one God exalted in heaven.

According to Jerry Moon, Ellen White based her particular understanding of God on her visions. In 1850 she wrote that she had “often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person.” Further, she asked Jesus if His Father had a body like His, and He told her, “I am in the express image of My Father’s person.”

Thus her visions confirmed what her husband had written in 1846, that the Father and the Son are ‘two distinct, literal, tangible persons.’ The visions also disproved, to her mind, the claim of the Methodist creed that God is ‘without body or parts.’ Thus these early visions steered her developing view of God away from credal trinitarianism...<sup>20</sup>

While the church affirmed that Ellen White had embraced Trinitarianism during the later part of her career, this affirmation was only in name. The Adventists’ use of the word “Trinity” to describe Ellen White’s understandings has kept millions of Adventists confused about God’s sovereignty, about the true nature of Jesus, and about the identity of God as one Being, not “three great Powers.” In spite of a fundamental belief about the Trinity worded to conceal the understanding of the three-part “God” (“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons...,”<sup>21</sup>), the influence of Adventism’s and Ellen White’s semi-Arian and non-Trinitarian foundation still obscures the truth about Jesus and the sovereignty of God in the lives of members.

### **Current understanding of the Trinity**

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the pervasive, continuing misunderstanding within Adventism of God’s identity is to quote some current publications.

The second quarter adult *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for 2006 states: “Our views on the Holy Spirit stem from the concept of the Trinity as a unity of three coeternal Beings.”<sup>22</sup>

Lionel Matthews, associate professor of Sociology at Andrews University says this in his paper “Sociology: A Biblical Perspective”:

In spite of its clear monotheistic ring, the biblical account seems uncompromised on the idea of God as a group. While God has been declared to be one God (Deut. 6:4, 1 Tim. 2:5), He

has also been presented as a plurality of beings (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:5).[...]

What the notion of a triune (group) God seems to suggest is that the three members of the Godhead become joined in their relationship with each other, on the basis of their common purpose, values and interests.<sup>23</sup>

Samuele Bacchiocchi, retired professor of theology and church history at Andrews University explains the Trinity in his online

newsletter this way:

The exercise of power in most societies generally reflects the prevailing understanding of how God rules the universe. The tendency has been to represent God as the only all-powerful ONE, who rules the world as a monarch.[...]

The rediscovery of the biblical vision of the Godhead, as three Beings living as equal in a perfect, loving communion, has provided a much needed corrective for the autocratic and often abusive exercise of power in the church, state, and the family.<sup>24</sup>

Bacchiocchi also says this:

Thus the human maleness and femaleness reflect the image of God in that a man and a woman have the capacity to experience a oneness of fellowship similar to the one existing in the Trinity. The God of biblical revelation is not a solitary single Being who lives in eternal aloofness but is a fellowship of three Beings so intimately and mysteriously united that we worship them as one God.<sup>25</sup>

Speaker/evangelist for Adventism’s Amazing Facts and the new president of satellite broadcasting company 3ABN Doug Batchelor with Kim Kjaer has written the following explanations of the Trinity:

Most of the confusion regarding the number of beings composing the Godhead springs from a simple misunderstanding of the word ‘one.’ Simply put, ‘one’ in the Bible does not always mean numerical quantity. Depending on the Scripture, ‘one’ can often mean unity. [...]

We need to keep in mind that when Moses said, ‘The Lord is one,’ Israel was surrounded with polytheistic nations that worshiped many gods that were constantly involved in petty bickering and rivalry (Deuteronomy 6:4), whereas the God who created is composed of three separate beings who are perfectly united in their mission of saving and sustaining their creatures. [...]

The real risk in the redemption plan, besides the loss of man, was the breakup of the Godhead. Had Jesus sinned, He would have been working at cross-purposes with the Spirit and His Father. Omnipotent good would have been pitted against omnipotent evil. What would have happened to the rest of creation? Whom would the unfallen universe see as right? One sin could have sent the Godhead and the universe spinning into cosmic chaos; the proportions of this disaster are staggering. Yet the Godhead was still willing to take this fragmenting risk for the salvation of man.<sup>26</sup>

The above quotation contains multiple problems. First, the implication that Jesus—eternal God—could have



sinned is completely unbiblical (1 John 1:5). Contrary to Ellen White's assertions (reflected in this statement) that Jesus could not see beyond the portals of the tomb and that He did not know whether or not He would be successful and rise again, Jesus knew absolutely that he would be crucified, would be buried, and would rise on the third day and told his disciples in advance. (See Matthew 20:18-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-33.)

Further, the Bible does not suggest that any part of the universe is untouched by sin. Romans 8:19-22 explains that creation was subjected to frustration and is groaning, waiting to be delivered from "its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." In fact, God reconciled all things to Himself through Jesus, "whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:19-20).

Finally, Jesus is "before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Jesus did not cease, as a human, to be the One who held all creation together. While he emptied Himself by taking the form of a bondservant (Philippians 2:6-7), He did not cease to be God and to have all the divine power and qualities that are His nature. Even as the incarnate Christ He held the universe together. There was never any risk that Jesus would fail in his mission (He was the lamb slain from the creation of the world—Revelation 13:8) or that the Godhead or the universe would break apart and spin out of control.

The pervasive influence of Ellen White's and the founders' Arian and non-Trinitarian beliefs is emphasized in this statement from the church's Biblical Research Institute:

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church today espouses the doctrine of the Trinity [understood, as we have seen, as a "heavenly trio"], this has not always been so. The evidence from a study of Adventist history indicates that from the earliest years of our church to the 1890s a whole stream of writers took an Arian or semi-Arian position. The view of Christ presented in those years by Adventist authors was that there was a time when Christ did not exist, that His divinity is a delegated divinity, and that therefore He is inferior to the Father. In regard to the Holy Spirit, their position was that He was not the third member of the Godhead but the power of God.

A number of Adventist authors today, who are opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity, are trying to resurrect the views of our early pioneers on these issues. They are urging the church to forsake the 'Roman doctrine' of the Trinity and to accept again the semi-Arian position of our pioneers. [...]

In recent years a number of anti-Trinitarian publications have appeared in our church, for example, Fred Allaback, *No new leaders... No new Gods!*; Lynnford Beachy, *Did They Believe in the Trinity*; Rachel Cory-Kuehl, *The Persons of God*; Allen Stump, *The Foundation of Our Faith*; and others.<sup>27</sup>

## Confusion Cleared

I have finally understood why my perception of Jesus while I was an Adventist was substantively different from my experience with Him as a born-again Christ-follower. In spite of orthodox-sounding words, I was taught as an Adventist, at a functional and philosophical level, that Jesus was fallible. I was taught that He could have sinned. I was taught that He gave up (or refused to use) His divine power when he became a man. I was further taught that anything He did, I, too, could do—if I learned to access the Holy Spirit properly and resist sin as Jesus did. I was taught that He had no advantage I did not also have.

Although Adventism publicly declares words about Jesus and the Trinity that sound orthodox, in practice those words have different meanings than they have for most Christians. Ellen White's persistent Arianism and non-Trinitarian teaching permeate Adventist theology, and functionally Adventists are tritheists with a weak Jesus whom God exalted (to Satan's chagrin)—a Jesus who could have failed in His mission to earth and who may not have existed eternally as the Mighty God.

Rick Langer, associate professor in the biblical studies and theology department at Biola University, says in his article "The Family Tree" in this issue of *Proclamation!* that the church is like a tree. One cannot assume that the leaves entangled in the branches of a forest all stem from the trunk of the original apostolic root. One must trace backwards from the leaves, fol-

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low the stems and branches back down the trunk, and discover whether what looks like authentic leaves actually spring from the original root, or whether they have grown up from a look-alike root of heresy which has persisted in growing near the trunk of the true church.

Adventism's "leaves" have mingled well with the leaves of the true church. Most people today cannot tell that Adventist "leaves" are different from the church's. If one traces backward down the branches to the original root, however, Adventism will be seen for what it is: a shoot from the ancient heresy of Arianism. The reason the Adventist church cannot truly change, cannot teach the pure gospel, cannot introduce people to the eternal, powerful, sovereign God the Son is that the root of Arianism still nourishes it. No matter how Adventism

cleans up its public language and alters its doctrines, it is still an organization sprung not from the root of the apostolic church but from the look-alike root of heresy.

In addition, Ellen White's legacy ensures that the foundations of the church must remain. Her writings provide the structure on which the church's doctrines and practices are built. Even when people question the assumptions underlying the church's theology, Ellen White's own words remind them that to question Adventist tradition and the inspiration of their "messenger" is tantamount to questioning God:

Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people.<sup>28</sup>

### How are these things significant?

The pervasive infusion of tritheistic Arian ideas into Adventist theology has serious implications.

1. Adventists are taught that Jesus could have sinned. This possibility implies that He did not possess the perfection or eternity of Almighty God. A Savior who could have sinned can-

not offer an unshakable salvation; such a person would be weak or flawed, or less than God, not the perfect, righteous Lamb of God.

2. If our first Adam sinned and our Second Adam could have sinned, our eternal future is threatened. If Jesus was not greater than Adam, offering eternal righteousness to His creations, there would always be the possibility that sin might arise again.

3. If Jesus could have sinned, then His atonement is not substitutionary. It was merely a demonstration of what I, too, could do. If Jesus could have sinned but didn't, I, too, can achieve sinless perfection.

4. If Jesus is not eternally God who voluntarily gave Himself for His creatures, then the Father would be a barbaric child molester offering His only Son as a sacrifice as the ancient pagans offered their children to Molech.<sup>29</sup>

5. If Jesus is not the eternal Almighty God, His death could not atone for the sin of creation. He could not possess intrinsic eternal life, nor could He give us eternal life.

6. The underlying belief that Jesus and Satan once held nearly equal positions in heaven lends credibility to the Adventist idea that Satan is the scapegoat who carries the sins of the saved into the lake of fire where he is punished for causing their sin. Satan never bears humans' sin; Jesus bore our sin and died outside the camp (Hebrews 10:13).<sup>30</sup>

## A message from the founder and the president

DALE RATZLAFF, FOUNDER • RICHARD TINKER, PRESIDENT

In reviewing the history of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!*, we stand amazed at the way God has blessed and provided. Every month we trust God for the funds to print the next issue. We pray and keep on praying. On several occasions the money has not been provided until the week we needed it, and then the money has come. From a humble beginning of about 2,000 names, the mailing list is now nearly 40,000 and growing. The board of Life Assurance Ministries believes God has given this expanded ministry and has stepped out in faith.

We thank God for the families and individuals on our mailing list who support this ministry. He has continued to bless this outreach with generous partners. Further, as we continue to walk through the providentially opening door of expanding ministry, we are trusting God to bring more partners. We thank Him for what He will accomplish.

From your many letters and phone calls we know you have been blessed by *Proclamation!* and the gospel message it presents: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (Jn. 6:47). "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). Your prayers and financial support at this time, should God lead you to partner with this ministry, will mean that



**Richard Tinker, president and Dale Ratzlaff, founder, of Life Assurance Ministries, the publisher of *Proclamation!* magazine.**

many thousands of others will learn the truth of the simple Gospel of Christ.

We have experienced the Lord taking a little and making it much for His glory. Again, we thank you for the opportunity to serve you, for your continued prayer, and for your support as we step up to the ministry opportunities before us. We appreciate you, care for you, and pray that God will richly bless you.

If you are being led to become a partner of Life Assurance Ministries, fill out the attached envelope and mail it with your donation. And whether you are a partner or a reader, we pray for you that you will know Jesus and experience His forgiveness and His freedom.

†



7. Adventism's foundational Arianism still keeps its members from understanding that Jesus' sacrifice was not able to fail, and no observance or behavior on their part will figure into their salvation.<sup>31</sup> It keeps them thinking of Jesus primarily as an example whose death was a down payment on salvation instead knowing Him as their substitute whose death paid the full purchase price. It keeps them struggling to follow the example of a fallible Jesus whose death and resurrection do not ensure believers' salvation.

Adventists have hope, however: the Bible. They have access to the truth. God used His word in my life to set me free from the confusion and dissonance of trying to be saved by following the example of a fallible Jesus.

The Word of God is eternal, and it is sufficient for teaching us the truth about God. He asks us each to be willing to humble ourselves before Him, to ask Him to teach us by His Spirit through His word. He asks us to lay aside all our presumptions and understandings about Jesus and to submit to the truth He will reveal through His word alone.

The name of Jesus no longer embarrasses me. Jesus is the mighty God, the Creator and Reconciler of all the universe. He cannot fail, and He is completely faithful.

Jesus is my Lord, and I praise Him for being my God. †

## Endnotes

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29. About 14 years ago I was a guest at a gathering of "WomenChurch," a group of Adventist women who met in the Loma Linda area to discuss theological topics. The evening I attended, the facilitator was Cheryl McMillan, then the interim pastor at the Corona Seventh-day Adventist church. The evening's discussion explored the idea presented in an article they had previously read that women need a better symbol of salvation than the cross. The cross, they opined, was a symbol of divine child abuse. No woman would sacrifice her child as God did. No woman, therefore, could be expected to respond with anything but abhorrence to the symbol of the cross.
30. Leviticus 16:6-10 describes the selection of the scapegoat. Two goats (or lambs could also have been used) were selected for a sin offering (note the singular form of the word), and the priest cast lots to determine which one would be the sacrificial offering and which would be the scapegoat. Either could have served either function. Satan could not have been the sacrificial offering for our sins—at no time was a choice made between Jesus and Satan for any purpose. There has never been any confusion or competition between them, in spite of what Ellen White's writings say. The Bible does not support such an idea. The scapegoat and the sacrificial lamb represented two aspects of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice.
31. They are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), and their sign of "remembering" is communion which celebrates the new covenant in Jesus' blood (Matthew 26:26-29) instead of the Sabbath which pointed toward a coming Savior and a New Covenant (Hebrews 4:1-11).



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# Giving up the family altar

RAMONE ROMERO

Recently I've been reading some discussions written by progressive Adventists. Their comments cover much doctrinal territory, and I confess it's becoming difficult for me to read these exchanges. I am increasingly perceiving these comments to be these progressives' attempts to invent their own definition of Adventism. That attempt may bring some peace to them, but what is the reality of "Adventism"?

The Gospel is a very simple thing: Christ has saved us. So in the midst of all these progressive discussions of Adventism, I've found that my heart wants to cut straight to the meat and ask, "What about the Gospel?"

The difficulty every progressive Adventist faces is the attempt to harmonize the gospel with historic Adventism—the foundation of Adventist identity. Although many progressive Adventists do not believe and do not actively teach the "old things," in order to remain Adventists they must carry these "old things" along, giving them a place and some occasional but firm assent.

## The Japanese family altar

Why would they hang onto old teachings even when they no longer believe them? I've found this phenomenon eerily similar to the Japanese tradition of keeping a *butsudan* in the house. A *butsudan* is a large, highly-decorated family altar to one's ancestors (with a Buddha in the center). It gets passed down to the eldest in the family, and the eldest has to take it. If he/she does not, the refusal would amount to dishonoring the ancestors, and the rest of the family would be very upset.

The question of the altar has been an issue in church families in Japan; once a person becomes Christian, what does he/she do with the *butsudan*? Some have kept it quietly, and others have thrown theirs away (often we hear testimonies of spiritual lightness and/or healing which come right after throwing away a family *butsudan*). From a Biblical perspective, having a giant physical altar to Buddha and one's ancestors in

one's home is an incredibly clear issue. Yet the nature of the territorial spirit in Japan obscures and confuses such otherwise obvious things. Sadly, many Christian families keep their family altars and attempt to harmonize them with the true God. Many claim not to believe in what the *butsudan* represents. There are even some who do not care for the altar, neglect it, or keep it closed in some corner of the house. But the one thing they do not do is throw it out. It must be kept.

I find it significant that no matter how "progressive" one becomes within Adventism, in order to stay Adventist, one has to keep the early Adventist things somewhere "in the house," just like a Japanese family needs to keep the family *butsudan* to avoid offending the family or being cut off. The Adventist foundational beliefs demand the same revered position in the "house of God." One may disagree with them and neglect them, just as progressives do. But to call them into question and suggest throwing them out produces the same effect in the Adventist "family" that throwing out the *butsudan* produces in the Japanese family: the family gets highly upset and a person can find himself or herself ostracized.

## Doing the unthinkable

By the time a *butsudan* is passed down to the eldest in a family, often there aren't many older family members left living to get upset. Yet still it is nearly unthinkable to throw the altar away. The reason behind this reverence for the *butsudan* is the deeply embedded belief within the Japanese culture that one's ancestors continue on after death, and the *butsudan* is the place to honor them. Understood at this deeper level, a *butsudan* becomes much more than an idol, altar, or family heirloom; after the people are gone, it is the representation of one's family. To throw out the *butsudan* is to throw out, insult, and disown one's family.

In the same way, the Adventist "identity" cannot seem to exist without its historical foundation—the beliefs, writings, and claims of the early Adventists to a unique calling, message,





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and special truth. The Adventist identity is tied to these things like a Japanese family to a *butsudan*. The “unique messages” of Adventism become what define it. Adventists can’t let them go completely. If they do, they lose their identity.

So just like the *butsudan*, the Adventist heritage “altar” is passed down from one generation to the next. Just as Japanese take it theologically for granted that their ancestors continue to exist in it as spirits, Adventists take it theologically for granted that the Holy Spirit is the founding and guiding spirit of Adventism’s heritage. To suggest that the Holy Spirit might not have been the founder of Adventism is like telling traditional Japanese that their ancestors are actually not still existing as disembodied spirits—neither group would be able to believe anything other than what they’ve always believed.

### Keeping it quietly

For a Japanese family to become Christian and completely sever ties with demonic powers and strongholds, it means throwing out the *butsudan*, risking the anger of the living family, and letting go of a comforting belief they’ve always had. These potential losses explain why many Japanese Christians quietly keep their *butsudans*. They may want to continue honoring their family, or they may think the altar is merely “cultural” and not “religious.” They don’t notice that for one reason or another, they are unable to throw away the altar—it has a power over them. Many Christian pastors and members see no problem with keeping a *butsudan* and perhaps can cite theological rationalizations to explain such a decision. But these rationalizations are rooted in the desire to harmonize with the culture and avoid offending people by taking the Bible too literally. (Interestingly, my wife informed me that the “no problem” view of keeping a *butsudan* is very common among members in Japanese Seventh-day Adventism, even among “conservative” Adventists.)

Similarly, most liberal and progressive Adventist churches “quietly keep the altar” of Adventism.

As I talked about these things with my wife, she commented on the typical Japanese attitude toward a *butsudan*: “We just don’t have the idea of getting rid of it,” my wife said. “Leaving it closed, putting it away somewhere, or even replacing it is okay, but not getting rid of it.” As she spoke, my wife suddenly remembered that when she took Adventist baptismal classes, the pastor pulled out a large blue book. He explained many things from it about the “sanctuary,” few of which my wife understood. Before that moment, she had never heard of those things (and afterward seldom heard them again, except from American missionaries). Those foundational Adventist beliefs can be neglected like a *butsudan*, but on special occasions they are brought out.

Interestingly, she said that it is acceptable to replace the *butsudan*. This practice parallels the way many reform-minded and progressive Adventists update the old beliefs. The old beliefs, they think, are outdated and irrelevant. It is completely permissible to re-interpret or alter them to an extent, but like a *butsudan*, it is unthinkable to throw them completely away.

### A new identity

Throwing out the altar—whether one is a cultural Japanese or an Adventist—means truly starting over. It means letting go of one’s old identity, even if one’s family becomes upset. One finds a new identity, however—child of God. This new identity is not defined by ancestors nor forefathers, nor is it defined by who we are. Rather, our identities are defined by who Christ is. Through the cross, He received our sins and punishment, and we receive His name and inheritance. Through the cross, His inheritance and position before His Father become our inheritance and position before our Father. His perfect life becomes our heritage. We find Him—instead of our religion—to be the unique and special One.





### Room for the Gospel

In Adventist churches where the “old things” are not taught, the gospel is given more room to breathe. Where more of the “old things” are taught, the gospel of God’s grace is given less room to breathe. The inversion is proportional. The further we move away from the family altar, the better. Why not let it completely go? Adventists fear the backlash they might receive from their spiritual family if they throw out the family altar. Further, the writings and beliefs of early Adventism are kept on the altar, so to speak, in a sacred place, and one’s identity is tied to them.

I do understand and sympathize with progressive Adventists’ reactions when they discover the truth about the things that formed Adventism in the beginning—“This is not

the truth. They thought he was just bitter and that his was a rare experience. They told him to keep his comments to himself and stop making trouble.

I understand that progressives may have embraced a “nicer” Adventism, a healthier theology with less extremism than that which frequently characterizes historic Adventism. They may have settled in more Gospel-friendly areas. Their experience represents “Adventism” to them. Yet for others, Adventism has been North Korea (figuratively speaking). Which is the “true” Adventism?

When looking at the historical literature and events of the founding of Adventism, we discover why the awareness of the Gospel decreases or increases in proportion to how much the “old things” are taught or left untaught; foundational Adventism was clearly gospel-hostile.

**Adventists take it theologically for granted that the Holy Spirit is the founding and guiding spirit of Adventism’s heritage. To suggest that the Holy Spirit might not have been the founder of Adventism is like telling traditional Japanese that their ancestors are actually not still existing as disembodied spirits—neither group would be able to believe anything other than what they’ve always believed.**

my Adventism!” When they go outside areas such as Southern California or travel to less industrialized countries and see Adventist “evangelism,” they see something that challenges their understanding of their church. It reminds me of the story of Kang Chol-Hwan.<sup>1</sup>

Kang spent the first half of his youth growing up in relative luxury with his family in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. During that time, if some North Korean defector had somehow come to his family and told him of the harsh conditions, famine, and thousands of political prisoners kept in concentration camps, Kang and his family would likely have thought the defector was just consumed with bitterness and blind hatred. However, Kang’s comfortable life and beliefs about his country were forever changed when he was nine years old, when he and his whole family were taken away and imprisoned in the Yodok concentration camp. After being released ten years later, he escaped to South Korea and there attended university. Shockingly, Kang encountered people at university who did not believe what he told them about the North. Because most people there had grown up without the difficulties faced in the North, some of them did not believe that Kang was telling

### Adventism compared to Buddhist altar

How dare I compare the early Adventist beliefs to a Buddhist ancestral altar? I do so by simply comparing the gospel—even as progressive Adventists know it—with the early beliefs of Adventism. The central truth of the gospel of God’s grace (justification by faith) was missing for the first forty years of Adventism—the time in which all of Adventism’s “unique truths” were completely formed. The early Adventists’ “good news” consisted of knowing the scripturally unsound “shut door” and Sanctuary teachings. As the “shut door” theory evaporated because Jesus did not return, the core doctrines expanded to include the keeping of the law correctly (particularly the seventh-day Sabbath). If a person disagreed with these core beliefs and became a non-Adventist Christian, that person was considered “apostate,” a member of “Babylon” and the “fallen churches.” He or she was worshiping “Satan impersonating Christ.” Such beliefs and teachings as these were given divine credentials because they were supported by Ellen White’s visions and instructions from supposed angel guides or Jesus Himself.

To summarize: 1. The gospel was missing from the first 40+ years of Adventism. 2. Anti-gospel beliefs were confirmed by a “prophet” who had visions and received instruction from “angel guides.” 3. The “angel,” the “prophet,” and the early Adventist teachings condemned those who clung to the gospel instead of to the new Adventist teachings.<sup>2</sup>

This reality adds up to the working of a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. Imagine you had a friend today who did not know the gospel, who received new “truths” from “angels” that contradicted the gospel, and condemned people who clung to the gospel instead of the new “truths.” Wouldn’t you pray for your friend’s deliverance? If you had a Marian-Catholic friend who prayed to Mary and received “answers” from her, wouldn’t you want your friend to be delivered from the false spirit and its teachings?

Keeping a *butsudan*—a Buddhist ancestral altar—in the house cannot fail to have an effect on a Japanese family. For example, many children and adults are choked at night by





spirits and cannot move. In the same way, keeping the 40+ years of teachings from an anti-Gospel spirit (that deceived our forefathers) in the Adventist “house” cannot be without effect—it chokes the gospel and the lives of Adventism’s children and adults. It is no wonder that there is such confusion about the gospel when people read the old literature. It is no wonder that progressives who disagree with the old things still have difficulty clearly saying the early things were simply wrong. Likewise, it is no wonder that Adventists have trouble envisioning their identity in Christ apart from the “unique” heritage of Adventist beliefs. It is not enough to embrace a partial teaching of Christ’s righteousness while keeping a different altar in the house — because the altar isn’t empty. It still holds a power over the household, and the family cannot throw it away.

### What kind of reform is needed?

Adventists can attempt to reform their modern churches and teach people how to read the “Spirit of prophecy” with one eye closed—re-interpreting it, taking the “good” and leaving the “bad.” It can try to grow “Southern California-styled” progressive communities throughout the Adventist world.

The problem, however, is that the fruits of historical Adventism—misunderstanding or distortion of the gospel, fear of the end times, cultic separation from other Christians, insecurity about one’s salvation, cognitive dissonance, the anxious pursuit of health and success—these things continue popping up like sucker shoots from the grafted root of a plant no matter how progressive the Adventist community tries to become. No matter how much “gospel” is grafted onto the root of Adventism, the bad fruits can still be produced because the old root remains intact. The gospel-hostile spirit of early Adventism is able to re-emerge simply because the family has kept an altar for it in the house and staked its identity on it, like a *butsudan* in a sacred place.

Just as some Japanese families attempt to hold onto both a *butsudan* and Christianity, trying to keep both identities, so many progressives may be trying to hold onto both the Adventist foundation and Christianity (perhaps calling this syncretism “diversity”). Their attempts to reform Adventism continually fall short because the family “altar” is left in place. Deep inside, even the most progressive Adventists know that the institution as a whole is still attached to its foundational beliefs which are written into the church’s doctrines, manuals and textbooks. The *butsudan* demands a place and must be given

it, even in progressive churches. It does not want to be removed.

The reform desperately needed is the one that looks the most painful at first: each of us must let the gospel break us apart and re-form us from our foundation. By letting go of the family altar, Adventists can discover their heritage solely in Christ and in the family of God.

The Adventists who risk this reform would tell a story of transformation: “I once was lost, but now am found; I was blind, but now I see.” Progressive Adventists can become even more truly “progressive” by continuing to “progress” away from the gospel-hostile spirit that shaped the beliefs of the denomination for more than 40 years. Many can easily disagree with the “old things,” but few are able to think of throwing out the altar. Though privately disagreeing with early Adventism, few progressives are able to say that Adventism “was once blind.” Only by recognizing their blindness and letting go of the family *butsudan* will Adventists discover God’s calling for them.

The many who already have dared to let go of the Adventist *butsudan*, have found awesome rest in a new identity: the uniqueness of bearing only the Lord’s name rather than of carrying a denominational name or a church history. Letting go of the altar and embracing the gospel alone has brought these people spiritual joy, peace, and freedom from the confusion of trying to harmonize the opposing beliefs of the gospel and Adventist history.

Here in Japan, families who’ve thrown out the *butsudan* for Christ can tell you that it is difficult at first. But finding their identity in Christ alone has been worth it all. They learned the truth of His words: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). And what a life is waiting to be found in Him! †

### Endnotes

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2. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 139, 232-234; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 136, 140, 142. See also, Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, “Right is Wrong, Wrong is Right.”



**Ramone Romero** was born a fourth-generation Adventist, grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, and served as a missionary for the Osaka Center Adventist Church. After meeting the Holy Spirit and being guided through the Gospel of God’s grace, he found his rest in Jesus. He is married to his wife, Yoko (also a former Adventist), and they live together in southern Osaka city with their newborn son, Timothy Tsuyoshi Romero.



## "Paid In Full" terrific

When I mailed in my monthly gift yesterday, I forgot to include the name of a long-time friend. She would certainly appreciate *Proclamation!* as we do. Send her the Easter special to begin. We are already devouring every page of it. Chris Lee's "Paid in Full" is terrific. It's like he's reading our collective minds. Love ya!

**Editor's note:** We have sent the Easter special to your friend. You may also read all the past issues at our website: [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org).

## Cannot praise enough

I cannot praise God enough for His goodness and mercy, for the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts and guiding us out of the depths of Adventism. This Easter season is so very beautiful—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our salvation brings unspeakable joy.

Thank you all for all your dedication and devotion to LAM. Finding [www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com) on the net was wonderful, and we both read it daily. May God continue to give you strength and courage and wisdom. He has not given you an easy task, but He has given it to people who can and will and are carrying it out. God bless you all!

## Take me off your list

[I] don't want to have anything to do with your kind.

## Life Assurance Ministries, Inc

### MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the New Covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

### MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

### MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

## Terrific issue

We deeply appreciate the issues of *Proclamation!* The recent issue is terrific. Even though the negative letters are probably hard to stomach, you all display a generous Christian spirit with the people who are steeped in the faulty Adventist theology. I've tried to influence Adventist relatives who live near your FAF [Former Adventist Fellowship] to embrace the gospel.

I was a fourth generation Adventist. I was around 60 years old when I saw the gospel. Who says you can't change when you get old?

Ellen White's flagrant disregard for literary ethics was appalling. As a college composition teacher, I would flunk anyone who plagiarized. It really "bugs" me how many Adventists would elevate her authority over Paul and other New Testament writers.

We love you guys.

## Pay the price for sins

My husband and I have been receiving your magazine for several months now. I am not sure where you got our name to put on your mailing list, but just want to let you know that we don't like the error that you preach. So please take us off your list. I have skimmed through your articles and also checked out what kind of background your writers have, and it saddens me to know that people who were once in the truth are now keeping Sunday, drinking coffee, wearing jewelry, etc. I realize that people have the right to choose how to live their lives (that is what our loving God allows us to choose to do), but when we choose not to follow what He has asked of us, then we will pay the price for our sins. It is not legalism to follow what God asks of us. It is simply submitting our wills to Him. God in his love for us gave us laws to follow for our best interest, and we have liberty when we follow them.

Psalm 119:45 says, "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek they precepts." So when we seek or keep God's precepts or laws, we have liberty. We are not bogged down by sins. I hope that you will come to see the light of truth as it is in Jesus.

## Look forward to magazine

You can't imagine how much we look forward to your magazine. We devour it so fast! We enjoyed "The Exclusiveness of Remnantism" by Moses Luswata. Also, "Walking by Faith" by Colleen Tinker is really helping me start to understand "by the Spirit" instead of "by the flesh." I've been a "true gospel believer" saved out of Adventism since 1975, but I can always learn more, especially in God's purpose for my life everyday now that I am saved!

My family hassles us all the time, so we keep praying!! We have presented the gospel from every angle. We don't know what else to do... but pray.

Please keep up your magazine. We give what we can. We really appreciate all the effort that goes into this gospel magazine. We will keep praying for its continued success and hope to make it to the February celebration [FAF weekend] next year.

## "Johnny-one-note" theme

I'm still trying to decide if your magazine is on the level or if you're trying to give Seventh-Day (sic) Adventists some comic relief. Your "Johnny-one-note" theme of saving them from the evils of the church is hard to take seriously. You act like the church has never taught that our salvation is in Jesus Christ. Then where is it?

Sure, fanatics are among all groups—even ones that think its' (sic) mission is to save poor misguided Adventists. And what in the world is the Former Adventist Fellowship? Is it kind of like AA where you get together so you can make sure some weak soul doesn't backslide into the church?

Give me the biggest break!

## Warm, validating fellowship

I enjoyed meeting you at the FAF weekend. It was a wonderful weekend—inspiration, educational talks, and warm, validating fellowship. I felt truly blessed to be there.

Thank you for all the work you do for LAM. You are fighting the good fight! Don't be discouraged by the critics. God is with you and will continue to bless you for sharing His Word with all those of us seeking the truth of the gospel. I am praying for you.

## Doctrines of devils

Please remove this name from you mailing list. I don't want your magazine. You are not even keeping the commandments of God which we will be judged on. Even the dictionaries say Saturday is the Sabbath. You have to know the Catholics changed the Sabbath to Sunday. You people must be Catholics trying to lead Adventists astray.

"In the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

That's you people. I don't want anything to do with you, and I don't want to hear from you ever again. You could not have known much about Adventist doctrines or know your Bible very well, or you could've never went (sic) so far out. I feel sorry for you people. You are the ones that are lost.

## Valuable insights

I was very touched by [Dale Ratzlaff's] article, "Lord, Increase Our Faith" and his conclusion that



we must embrace “a high view of inspiration and Scripture [to] engender a strong, dynamic and growing faith” as opposed to “a low view” which “undermines faith.” Thank you for sharing your always-valuable insights in your wonderful magazine.

Also, I want to thank Dale again for writing *Sabbath in Christ*, a book I consider to be a high point in my understanding of God’s grace. I have become convinced of Dale’s integrity and the worthiness of your ministry and would like to show my appreciation and encouragement with the attached gift.

Thank you again so much, and may God bless you and strengthen you in all your endeavors to His glory.

## Jesuit infiltrators

I cannot help but feel sorry for the people whom you leaders have deceived with your anti-Adventist rhetoric! For them I have started to pray that the Lord bring them back to His fold. However, you leaders know exactly what you do, for you do the works of your Father the Devil. You call yourselves a Protestant group. However, by observing Sunday as your day of worship, you show your allegiance to Rome, which changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and not to the Lord Most High and His Commandments. Are you by chance (or by choice) Jesuit infiltrators doing the work of the Roman Church?

By the way, what is this so-called “Sabbath in Jesus” thing? Is that a way of saying you don’t feel like keeping His whole day holy, so you invent a catchy phrase in order to exonerate your selfish wants and cheat God of His Holy Day? Remember, if Jesus abolished His Law, then we no longer have a sin problem. After all, sin is transgression of the law! And if there’s no more sin, there’s no longer a need for a Savior. Oh, how foolish your rhetoric sounds! You speak a lot about faith. However, James 2:20 states that faith without works is dead!

In fact, that same verse calls your erroneous ideology “foolish”!

In the very last days, there will be no one denomination standing, whether Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist, Catholics, Muslims, or even Atheists. There will only be two groups of people, those who keep all of God’s commandments through God’s grace (see Revelation 14:12, 1 John 3:9, 10) and those who do not. Where will you stand?

Lastly, please remember Jesus will not save any man whom He cannot command. Seventh-day Adventists do not keep the Law of God in order to be saved. We keep the Law of God, which includes the Sabbath, as a result of His indwelling Spirit, salvation, and to show the world that we belong to God Almighty! (Exodus 31:16-17)

**Editor’s note:** First, we do not say Jesus “abolished” the law. He fulfilled it. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Because Jesus fulfilled the law, however, the Old Covenant (represented by the Ten Commandments, as identified in Deuteronomy 4:13) “he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” (Hebrews 8:13). Jesus Himself is the One whom we obey, and His Spirit puts His eternal moral principles—which are not defined by nor limited to the Ten Commandments (see Matthew 5 through 7)—on our hearts by His own presence.

As for the sin problem—Romans clarifies that sin precedes the Ten Commandments, and Ephesians explains that it goes much deeper than sinful acts. Romans 4:13-14 says, “for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.” Adam bequeathed sin to us all by transgressing the law

God gave him, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Further, Ephesians 2:3 states that we are all “by nature objects of wrath.”

In other words, we are born condemned to eternal death. Our sinfulness is not the result of our wrongdoing; it is the result of the spiritual death which is our inheritance from Adam. Even before there was a written law, people died because sin was in the world. In fact, as the text in Romans above points out, people died because of sin even when they were not aware of their sin. They were born doomed! The law was given to increase sin, to make people aware that they were, indeed, sinning! (Romans 6:20; 3:20; 7:7-8; Gal. 3:19)

Nowhere does the Bible state that those who are made alive in Jesus are to keep the Sabbath as a sign of their loyalty to Him. Instead, Jesus said that we are to come unto HIM, and He will give us rest (Matthew 11:28). While Israel was commanded to enter the Abrahamic covenant by means of circumcision, we as Christ-followers enter the New Covenant by means of the circumcision of our hearts when Jesus writes His laws on our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10), and we signify this entrance into the new covenant by the external sign of baptism.

While Israel was asked to perform a continuing sign of remembrance of God’s provision and deliverance from slavery by the keeping of Sabbath, we are asked to remember God’s finished work of deliverance from slavery to sin by taking communion as the symbols of His body and blood (Matthew 26:26-29).

“Sabbath in Jesus” is the acceptance of Jesus’ all-sufficient sacrifice for our sin and God’s declaration of us as completely righteous in His sight when we place our trust in Jesus. The shadow of Sabbath (Colossians 2:16-17) is finally fulfilled: the reality of Jesus replaces the weekly symbol of rest in Him.

Sabbath has not been changed, just as the law has not been abolished. Rather, in Jesus, both the Sabbath and the law have been deepened, enlarged, expanded—fulfilled. We are held to a much higher standard than the Ten Commandments. We are held to the standard of Christ’s perfect righteousness—and because we are found in Him, we have NOT “a righteousness of [our] own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9).

And no, we are not Jesuits!

**Note:** Letters will include the location (city and state) of the writer starting with the next issue of *Proclamation!* Mail letters and donations to:

**Life Assurance Ministries**  
P.O. Box 905  
Redlands, CA 92373



**Former Adventist Fellowship**

**Phoenix, Arizona**  
623-572-9549

## New fellowship in Phoenix hosting “kickoff” meeting in July

**Who:** Former and inquiring Seventh-day Adventists and their friends and relatives

**When:** Saturday, July 21; 11:00 am, fellowship and lunch; 2:00 pm, Bible study

**What:**

- Getting acquainted, potluck lunch
- Bible Study, Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff, “Get Saved, Stay Saved, Always Be Ready”
- Questions answered and free book to everyone
- Planning for future weekly and monthly FAF meetings

**Where:** Phone 623-572-9549 for location and directions, or for more information.

Locations of other Former Adventist Fellowships are available at: [www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com).

**T**he Beatitudes of Matthew 5 are familiar verses to anyone who has read the Bible.

These words from Christ' Sermon on the Mount are meant to be an inspiration to his followers. I have to admit to you, however, that these words always left me feeling somewhat discouraged.

I suppose one reason that I didn't fully appreciate these words of Jesus was that I was coming from the mindset that I had to be perfect in order to be saved. I heard these words to say that if I were ever going to make it to heaven, I must be a meek, merciful peacemaker who was pure in heart and could expect to be persecuted! Reading the list of attributes that Christ mentions in these verses weighed me down with the regret that I could never measure up to all these saintly characteristics.

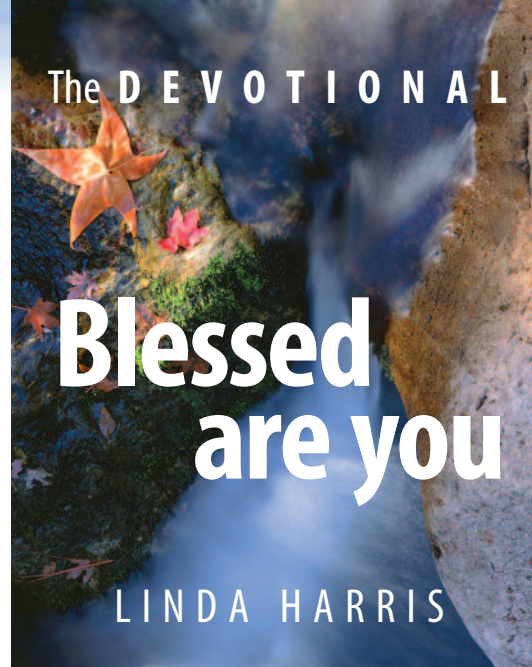
I thought I could lay claim to a few of these qualities. I knew I could be merciful, but I certainly wasn't meek! As for pure in heart, what did that even look like?

Having finally discovered the truth about God's amazing grace and understanding that there is nothing whatsoever that I can do to obtain salvation, I can look at the Beatitudes from a new perspective. I realize that all these qualities come only from God. However, even with this knowledge, I have come to see the words from Christ's sermon in a much different light.



I like to imagine that Jesus was not giving us a list of characteristics that we must display, but rather He was making a point of talking in a personal way to each personality found in mankind. He was making sure that every person felt addressed. He wanted all to know that He val-

**Linda Harris** lives in northeastern Oregon with her teen daughters, Megan and Jessica. Linda works at the local public elementary school as librarian and reading teacher. She is embracing each day with joy and gratitude for a new life in the SON!



ued them. His words showed that He could see deeply into everyone's soul and meet the needs of every heart. There was a blessing for all!

#### The Beatitudes

"Today, I say to you who are of a compliant, melancholy personality, Blessed are you, the poor in spirit. I recognize your struggle for self, your feelings of depression. You look at the world and feel hopelessness at its condition. But I tell you, take heart! The Kingdom of Heaven is yours—

now! I know how you mourn your failings and feel deeply the sorrows of the world. To you I give comfort."

Jesus turns and looks toward the back of the crowd to catch a woman's eyes. She shyly glances down as He says,

"Blessed are you who are meek. You are content to be in the background. Blessed are you, the peacemakers. You are a personality of steadiness and loyalty. You desire peace and stability. I want to offer you reassurance. You will be given the land. It is your rightful inheritance as the children of God."

The Master looks down to a young man in front of Him,

"And to you, the choleric, the one who displays a dominant personality, I know how you thirst and hunger after truth and righteousness. You have a deep hole in your soul. Your quest to quench your thirst sometimes hurts yourself and others, but I recognize the tender longings of your soul. Drink of Me—the Living Water. You shall be filled! That is my guarantee."

Jesus smiles and looks lovingly at a young woman at His feet. Then He says,

"To you who love people, the ones with influencing personalities—you have a gift of mercy. Blessed are you. You, too, desire peace and harmony. And yet you fear rejection and struggle with insecurity. Be of good cheer. You are sons and daughters of God! You will obtain mercy. I will not reject you!"

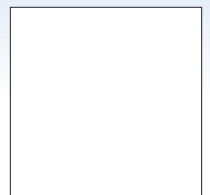
Then Jesus scans the crowd. As a loving Father to His children He continues,

"If for My sake any of you are persecuted or reviled, if men try to speak evil against you, remember who you are! You are my children! Rejoice in that knowledge. Be exceedingly glad! I love you just as you are right now."

†

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