

# Seventh-day Adventists - A Brief Introduction to their Beliefs

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## **Introductory Historical Sketch**

Seventh-day Adventists trace the formative stages of their movement to an enthusiastic revival of biblical prophetic studies which occurred in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely among Protestants but with limited Catholic participation. The collapse of the Old Regime and succeeding Napoleonic wars provoked a revival of prophetic studies, the then-current social disorder being widely interpreted as an evidence of the imminent return of Jesus.

Best known among its leaders in North America was a Baptist preacher, William Miller, and in Great Britain Henry Drummond and Edward Irving, under whose auspices a series of prophetic conferences was held on Irving's estate at Albury Park, Surrey (1826). Most influential among Catholic contributors was the Chilean Jesuit Manuel Lacunza 1731-1801) whose principal work, *La Venida del Mesías en Gloria y Magestad (1791)* attracted other students of the prophecies, especially after it appeared in English translation (1830). Older prophetic studies, such as Isaac Newton's treatise on the Apocalypse again attracted widespread interest.

The Advent Movement, as it was known, reached its culmination in disappointment when the coming of Jesus, expected by many in 1844, failed to materialize. In both Europe and the Americas, interest waned, although a small group in the northeastern quadrant of the United States, still expecting an early Advent, continued its studies. Alongside reinterpreting the events they had anticipated in 1844, and abandoning the setting of time for Christ's return, they expanded their beliefs by exploring other aspects of biblical teaching. In a relatively brief time they reached the conclusion that the seventh day of the week, Saturday, is the true day of

worship, based on the creation narrative, the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Protestant count), and the observance of the Sabbath as reported in the Gospels and Acts. In the setting of a surrounding Protestant community this group, at first not formally organized but sharing the conviction that Jesus was soon to return, began assembling a set of agreed beliefs, drawn directly from a quite literal reading of the biblical text.

During the two decades from 1844 to 1863, when they first formally organized as a church, Sabbatarian Adventists reached concurrence on most doctrinal points. This, coupled with a strong sense of mission in light of the expected Advent, led them to proclaim the gospel in a special setting they defined with the term, "present truth." In 1879 the first missionary was sent outside the United States, to Switzerland. Since that time Adventists have become known as an aggressively missionary people, having established churches in more than 200 countries, the exceptions being Islamic enclaves that as yet allow no Christian presence.

Organized churches now number 50,000, with an additional 50,000 locations in which groups not yet formally organized are worshiping. Current membership recently passed 12 million baptized members, composed of adolescents and adults, of which 92 percent live outside North America.

By way of organization, Adventists, differing from most Protestants, are linked together as a unified religious group. All the churches are joined in a single organization, the world offices located in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D C., but with subsidiary offices diffused throughout the world. Leaders are elected by delegates for specified terms of office and function along presbyterial lines, although many features, including admission to and dismissal from membership, are carried out at a congregational level.

In doctrine Adventists likewise are unified by a core understanding of Bible teachings. Not until the 1930s was a formal statement of faith adopted, which was last revised in 1980 at the quinquennial world conference of delegates. This remains the basic summary of Adventist

doctrines, officially endorsed by vote of the world delegation. All doctrines are held to be subject to revision should a clearer understanding be reached. The Adventist faith is properly described as non-creedal, despite the high level of doctrinal concurrence. The preamble to the *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists* (1980) reads,

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the of God's Holy Word.

## **I. AUTHORITY IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEF AND PRACTICE**

Although elements of this matter will be visited in the succeeding section, a basic sketch of what is seen as authoritative and how it functions among Adventists can be helpful.

Adventists believe in God who has been and continues to be involved in the affairs of our world. Although His nature differs from that of His creation, He makes Himself accessible to His creatures, manifesting Himself in a unique manner through His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Teacher and Redeemer. He invites us to approach Him in prayer and devotion and to learn of Him, principally through the study of the Scriptures.

While Christ is honored as head of the church, what we know of Him and His truth is found principally in the Scriptures, to which Adventists turn for guidance in pursuit of faith and practice. The Word is interpreted by means of a hermeneutic that, aside from obvious poetic and symbolic sections, treats the text quite literally, taking into account the historical, cultural and linguistic elements involved. Its method relates more closely to the historic Antiochian school of interpretation than the Alexandrian and reflects adjustments in method encouraged by the sixteenth-century reformers.

Although the principal basis of Adventist belief rests on the Scriptures and the church's outlook is more faith-based than liturgical, its understanding makes provision for elements of natural law, limited in scope but recognized as a part of the creation initiated by God. The locus of authority among Adventists, however, remains special revelation.

In a manner uncommon among Protestant groups, the laws of nature have a place in Adventist thinking. Although imperfectly understood by mankind and impacted by the

presence of sin, their study is valued as a means of knowledge about the intent and methods of God. Such attention encourages scientific investigation and has led to an understanding of health and healing that is virtually unique among churches. As a consequence, the Adventist church is noted not only for its study of the Scriptures and what are specifically theological and moral issues, but for an effort to teach principles of healthy living as well, which they see as an element of moral service to God.

In harmony with the teachings of the Scriptures and guided by the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists accord to the church, conceived of as a voluntary community of believers, an authority that is real. As noted previously, local congregations exercise considerable authority within their communities while at the same time the presence of the overall believing body, the world church, is acknowledged and supported. Final decisions in faith and practice are reached only in the assemblies of delegates from the entire world. The clergy functions in a servant role designated by the community of believers, an arrangement that prevails from the local regional body (comparable to a diocese) through the president of the denomination, all of whom are subject to re-election for stated terms. In general the church as a whole has been reluctant to create a detailed format to govern specific elements of faith, leaving much freedom for the individual believer, however with its closely knit system of structure throughout the world, a substantial series of policies has been developed.

Truth is to be discovered principally in the Scriptures and can be stated generally in propositional terms. This does not mean no existential element is admitted, but that subjectivity is to be monitored by the objective. Adventist doctrine is described in essentially propositional language, as evidenced by the *Fundamental Beliefs*. Reason is to be accepted as a gift from God, a means of exploring His truth, but is not of itself a reliable guide outside special revelation.

The civil authorities are to be respected as a God-given element of society, as expressed in Paul's epistle to the Romans. For this reason Adventists urge their members to live in

conformity with civil laws, its effect being to encourage among the believers an often passive spirit with respect to governments. Social reforms should be advocated and brought about within lawful means.

## **II. THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS**

As the principal purpose of this paper is to provide a succinct introduction to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, and in so doing provide a basis for discussion, this, its principal section, proposes to survey in brief the core doctrinal teachings as expressed in the 27 statements of faith accepted by all church members.

This approach should not obscure the fact that the Scriptures provide guidance for the Christian in virtually every aspect of activity, for the mind as well as practical living. Those who study the church quickly observe that while the central statement of faith can be expressed in 27 statements, the overall Adventist Christian perspective encompasses a very broad value system and way of life, of which a considerable portion lies beyond them in implications that penetrate every element of existence as Christians. Such a sweeping application of biblical principles ties believers together not only in doctrine, but in a unified set of values capable of spanning huge variations in culture and language.

Rather than visit the 27 statements in their usual sequence, which only in a general manner follow a logical pattern, this paper subsumes the full list under five categories of what is known to systematic theology as a synthetic arrangement of doctrine, proceeding from cause toward effect. Such grouping helps promote overall understanding. For convenience, the number, title, and full text of each entry is included in this paper, although for reference an accompanying copy of the *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists* is provided in its officially stated form.

## A. GOD

### Nature of God

#### 2. The Trinity

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:7.)

#### 3. The Father

God the Eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father. (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:28; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:17; Ex. 34:6, 7; John 14:9.)

#### 4. The Son

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and

died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things. (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:15-19; John 10:30; 14:9; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; John 5:22; Luke 1:35; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:9-18; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Heb. 8:1, 2; John 14:1-3.)

## 5. The Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)

## Works of God

### The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

## 6. Creation

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made; the heaven and the earth and all living things

upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was 'very good,' declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)

### God's Law

#### 18. The Law of God

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Ex. 20:1-17; Ps. 40:7,8; Matt. 22:36-40; Deut 28:1-14; Matt. 5:17-20; Heb. 8:8-10; John 15:7-10; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 8:3, 4; Ps. 19:7-14.)

#### 19. The Sabbath

The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the

Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts.(Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Luke 4:16; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Matt. 12:1-12; Ex. 31:13-17; Eze. 20:12, 20; Deut. 5:12-15; Heb. 4:1-11; Lev. 23:32; Mark 1:32.)

*Nature of God.* A reading of the above statements will show that with respect to their doctrine of God Seventh-day Adventists are in harmony with the great creedal statements of Christendom, including the Apostles' Creed, Nicea 325), and the additional definition of faith concerning the Holy Spirit as reached in Constantinople (381). However, such was not always the case. Many early Adventists came from churches holding to what is described as a semi-Arian position on the nature of Christ, making it the predominant view for almost a half-century. Shortly before the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, as theological development took place, and with the encouragement of Ellen White, the church moved to a full trinitarian position. Other classical teachings that came to be designated as heresies, such as forms of monarchianism and modalism, have not troubled Adventists.

*Jesus as the Christ.* Adventist Christology, introduced in the statement on the Son, follows widely accepted Christian norms with regard to the nature of Christ, affirming His dual nature as both human and divine, His conception by the Spirit and birth to a virgin, His messianic ministry in fulfillment of prophecy, His temptation and sinlessness, His assumption of sin and substitutionary death for the sins of humans on the cross, His bodily resurrection, ascension, and the reality of His promised return. Christ was indeed a historical figure in whom was manifest God among us in human flesh. This statement in itself should be sufficient to distinguish Adventists from other groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, with

whom Adventists are sometimes confused.

*The Scriptures.* The position on the Holy Scriptures is foundational to doctrine and theology, for the Bible is the ultimate source of final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. For this reason this statement appears first in the listing of basic doctrines. The understanding of revelation as of God through the Holy Spirit, and its reception by human writers, generally described as inspiration, points to an intrusion of divine activity into human experience through miraculous events.

In a community so heavily dependent on the Scriptures, how revelation/inspiration is understood assumes great importance. Because elements of this process lie beyond human analysis, a certain degree of discussion continues on the subject among the church's theologians. The reading of the statement is strong, describing the Scriptures in terms such as infallible, authoritative, and trustworthy, which underlines the priority involved. Being well aware of canonical history, the church accepts as viable the outcome of that process, based on the native evidence that influenced Christians of the early centuries on this matter.

The rise of the critical school of religious studies poses a challenge to the credibility of an intensely biblical and literal position, with its reliance on historical reliability and the validity of the biblical text. One response could be a turn to simple fideism or obscurantism. The direction Adventist scholars have taken is to examine and in many cases challenge not the raw data of contemporary studies, but the presuppositional bases of the system, whose philosophical principles are drawn largely from the Enlightenment. Elements such as denial of the supernatural, evaluation of evidences by solely rationalistic norms, and developmental theories applied on a conjectural rather than a documented basis are found unacceptable. On the other hand, efforts to understand more clearly the environment in which the biblical writers worked have stimulated among Adventists an intense interest in Near Eastern archaeology, whose work in the field has become well known.

In view of their high view of Scripture, superficial observers are tempted to classify

Adventists as fundamentalists, or at least within the dynamic religious community in the Americas known as Evangelicals (in the American sense of the term). In general, they share a common high respect for the Scriptures, but on different premises. Most Evangelicals hold to the infallibility of the Scriptures, which for some is understood as some form of dictation of the biblical text, the writer being limited essentially to a copyist. Other Evangelicals have adopted a different view nearer the Adventist understanding. Despite the use of the word "infallible" in the Adventist statement, by which is meant the high authority vested in the cumulative impact of the Scriptures on the whole, Adventists do not assign to the biblical text the kind of textual infallibility (generally of the original autograph) characteristic of fundamentalists and some Evangelicals. For Adventists it was the writer who was inspired, i.e. received the message from divine sources. It was the writer's task, however, to describe the truth given him in the language of his time, the result being that on occasion problems in language can appear without diminishing the authenticity of the message itself, for its source is God.

*Creation.* The prevalence of critical studies in religion and adoption of the Darwinian rationale respecting origins have exerted strong pressures on Christians to adapt the traditional understanding of the biblical doctrine of creation. A typical response has been synthesis in the form of theistic evolutionary theories, thereby re-casting God in the role of supervisor using a long developmental process. Because of its internal claims and interwoven character, the Bible functions as an integrated unit. Dismissal of the historicity of the creation events affects our understanding of even Jesus Himself, who quite clearly accepted the creation and Noachic flood as authentic reports of fact. Equally difficult is the biblical teaching that death is the result of sin, yet throughout the geologic column may be found abundant evidence of death, preserved in fossil remains, beginning in large numbers at the Cambrian. At stake also is the origin of the Sabbath, which is important for Adventists, for the biblical teaching, assigns this institution of God to specific creation events which could not be successfully defended on the

basis of theistic evolution.

Given the Adventist commitment to the historicity of the creation events as reported in Genesis 1 and 2, the church continues resolutely to endorse a literal reading of these passages as historical fact, leaving Adventists as distinctly counterculture in such matters. Given the special interest within the church in scientific discovery, the clash of interpretations assumes importance and receives considerable attention, especially among Adventist academics and professionals.

*Law.* Adventists understand God in terms of order, evidenced not only in His especially-revealed truths but also in an ordered creation. In moral matters, His character is revealed through His actions as well as laws He has given to define and to govern actions. First among these is the Decalogue, a key element in the covenant made with His people Israel, but by extension to every believer. As a reflection of His character, the principles pronounced in its laws, while adapted in language to human circumstances, are eternal principles. Harmony with His laws is the equivalent of harmony with Him. His law sets the standard against which are measured the terms of right and wrong. It is presented in the Scriptures as the standard in the final judgment.

Jesus and Paul took strong exception, not with the law itself, but with the manner of rabbinic interpretation and application which left the public with the impression that lawkeeping is a means of gaining favor with God. The apostle Paul, in particular, while insisting that salvation is not attainable through the works of law, saw its observance as the evidence of a saving relationship with Christ.

Long castigated in some quarters as legalists, Adventists do in fact promote the keeping of the Commandments, but not as the means of salvation.

*Sabbath.* In the heart of the Decalogue appears the Sabbath commandment. In quite specific terms it declares the seventh day of the week to be kept holy, on the basis of its initial sanctification by God at creation. It is a provision of the unchanging Ten Commandment law,

with its universal application to all persons, not simply Jews. As a memorial time set apart by a specific act of God on a specific day of the week, its sacredness is fixed in the nature of its origin in a historical event.

Not finding biblical reasons for transfer of its sanctity to another time or activity, Adventists continue to call for return to the observance of the seventh day of the week, not along lines of the rabbinical pattern criticized by Jesus, but in the original sense that brings honor to the Creator. For them the issue of the Sabbath is of importance, and it holds a significant place in their eschatological understanding.

## B. MAN

### 7. The Nature of Man

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7; Ps. 8:4-8; Acts 17:24-28; Gen. 3; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Ps. 51:10; 1 John 4:7, 8, 11, 20; Gen. 2:15.)

### 8. The Great Controversy

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated

in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Rev. 12:4-9; Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:12-18; Gen. 3; Rom. 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; Gen. 6-8; 2 Peter 3:6; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14.)

*Humanity.* In this doctrine is to be found a teaching that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventist from traditional Christian beliefs, although increasingly it is becoming accepted in Protestant circles. Man came from the hand of God as a unified person, which is a truth acknowledged in part in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Sections 363,365). This concept of unity defines the Hebrew understanding of the person and underlies discussions in the New Testament as well. The Hellenistic concept of the person as divided between mortal body and immortal soul owes its existence not to a specific teaching of the Scriptures but to other influences. Therefore it is not included in Adventist doctrine. Physical and spiritual qualities indeed are apparent in the person, but biblically in the context of a united person. While this distinctive understanding appears in the statement above, it is not emphasized, the larger attention being directed to man's fall and its consequences. The unified understanding of the nature of the human is of major importance in that it carries implications for other doctrines.

Adventist doctrine accepts the concept of fallen man as seriously flawed, severed from the Creator who sustains life, therefore subject to death. The fallen nature characterizes all the

descendants of Adam, who live under the shadow of its consequences, but are not, as in the federal doctrine, direct participants in Adam's decision. Nevertheless, they share in its effects. Only the intervention of God in Christ and the ministry of the Spirit can reconcile the repentant sinner to God, which reconciliation He offers as an act of grace.

*Cosmic Controversy.* Another doctrine that receives special attention here is the Great Controversy theme. Drawn initially from the prophets and the Book of Job, this teaching appears in an eschatological setting in the Apocalypse. This doctrine introduces a cosmic world view that locates man within a consummate struggle between Christ and Satan. Such a conflict appears repeatedly in the Gospels, most directly in Christ's conflict with demons, but also more generally. It would be difficult to understand certain of Christ's activities without reference to it.

In the Adventist understanding the Great Controversy theme explains the origin of sin in the mind of Lucifer prior to creation of the world as we know it. He appears as the adversary of God, first identified on earth in his deception in Eden, but cited repeatedly throughout the Scriptures as the opponent of God. Christ appears as man's advocate, acting in our behalf, and giving His life to make redemption possible. The Apocalypse devotes much attention to this conflict, concluding in the triumph of Christ over the devil and his ultimate destruction in fiery consummation, after which God creates a new world "wherein dwells righteousness." Considering that Adventists arose within an environment dedicated to studies of biblical prophecy, it is not surprising that this theme takes its place as an integrating world view, tracing the career of revolt against God from perfection past to a coming perfection restored. The Great Controversy doctrine receives considerable attention among Adventists. It is a major feature of the prophetic picture of the end times.

### C. CHRIST AND REDEMPTION

## 9. The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character; for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness. The death of Christ is and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow. (John 3:16; Isa. 53; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Col. 2:15; Phil. 2:6-11.)

## 10. The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (2 Cor. 5:17-21; John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-7; Titus 3:3-7; John 16:8; Gal. 3:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; Rom. 10:17; Luke 17:5; Mark 9:23, 24; Eph. 2:5-10; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:13, 14; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 8:7-12; Eze. 36:25-27; 2 Peter

1:3, 4; Rom. 8:1-4; 5:6-10.)

### 23. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)

*Christ's Salvific Work.* Statements 9 and 10 are parts of an expansion on the Christological discussion begun with Statement 4. Turning from His nature, Incarnation, and relationship to the Father and Spirit, these sections introduce a soteriological discussion focused on Christ's purposes, His achievements, and how His sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection

provide access to salvation. These statements provide the core discussion of how the church sees salvation. The statements stand for themselves, but can be summarized briefly in a few sentences. Through Christ's sacrificial death a way was provided for the salvation of all who believe in Him. The initiative was God's, and its entire basis rests on His grace.

To receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, the repentant sinner must reach out in a faith that reaches beyond mere intellectual assent, to a faith that leads to a transformed life. The elements stressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation are present, although in a balanced manner. The validity of *sola gratia and sola fide* is assumed and the principle of forensic justification accepted, however in ways closer to Zwingli and Calvin. The statement highlights the transforming power of the Spirit. This element is particularly apparent in Statement 10 where emphasis falls on how man responds to the invitation of God. The person in a faith relationship with Jesus acknowledges Him as both Saviour and Lord. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a surrendered heart, a new birth takes place, bringing its radical change of values and reorientation of one's manner of living. To be in Christ includes the initial surrender to Him and the justifying act of grace, followed by developing growth in the sanctified life.

*Christ and the Sanctuary.* It is possible this statement articulates the single doctrine most nearly unique to Adventists. It stems from an understanding of prophecy formulated following the failure of Christ to appear in 1844. William Miller had based his expectation of the Advent largely on the 2300 day (year) prophecy of Daniel 8 and 9, beginning with the decree issued BC 457 by the Persian monarch, Artaxerxes I. That decree gave permission for Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to return to Jerusalem. The time period was calculated to end sometime in 1843/44, at which point Miller expected Christ to return to "cleanse the sanctuary," assuming the sanctuary to be the earth.

Following the failure, a scattering of interpreters related the time prophecy not to the return of Jesus, but to a change in Christ's ministry as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary as

described in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The evidence lay in a typological relationship between Christ's ministry in heaven and the model found in the Hebrew sanctuary. This understanding was accepted by the forerunners of the Adventist Church, who immediately discontinued calculations of Christ's expected return, holding only that His coming would be relatively soon.

Inherent in this broader understanding is the concept of a pre-advent judgment in heaven prior to Christ's return, which appears in Daniel 7. The complexity of this teaching, which requires knowledge of both historical events and the prescribed ritual of the Hebrew sanctuary, makes it difficult to grasp without considerable study.

## D. THE CHURCH

### 11. The Church

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. (Gen. 12:3; Acts 7:38; Eph. 4:11-15; 3:8-11; Matt. 28:19, 20; 16:13-20; 18:18; Eph. 2:19-22; 1:22, 23; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18.)

## 12. The Remnant and Its Mission

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation<sup>14</sup>; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)

## 13. Unity in the Body of Christ

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23.)

## 14. Baptism

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of

the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12, 13; Acts 16:30-33; 22:16; 2:38; Matt. 28:19, 20.)

#### 15. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Matt. 26:17-30; Rev. 3:20; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17.)

#### 16. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's

varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love. (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:9-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

#### 17. The Gift of Prophecy

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 29:10.)

#### 20. Stewardship

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; Matt. 23:23; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Rom. 15:26, 27.)

#### 21. Christian Behavior

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste

and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:6; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; Lev. 11:1-47; 3 John 2.)

## 22. Marriage and the Family

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His

body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:3-9; John 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; Matt. 5:31, 32; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6.)

In this section is grouped a series of statements that relate to the church and the practical life of the believers. The church is defined first as a voluntary gathering of believers, but also as an institution. While Adventist soteriology draws significantly from the major 16<sup>th</sup> century figures of the magisterial reform, its concept of the church parallels beliefs of the radical reformers. The people of God are thought of as a special, called people, a group apart from the normal corpus of the irreligious community. It is the body of Christ, living in the world but not of the world. They are a people who take religion seriously, a covenanted community unified in the service of God.

While separate from the surrounding community in values, practical Christian living, and ideals, they are by no means exclusivists, nor are they governed by a sense of monastic ideal. They understand themselves to be a people with a divine assignment, to share with as many as will listen the good news of salvation and the coming kingdom of God. It is this sense of special calling and divine mandate that inspires them in a worldwide outreach that is both a call to serve God and humanitarian concern for suffering.

*Remnant.* From its earliest days the Adventist community has used the term "remnant" in self-description. Drawn from a concept appearing frequently in both the Old and New Testaments, biblically it refers to those who remain faithful against great odds, who are survivors. The term appears in the Apocalypse to describe a group faithful to Christ through the final apocalyptic cataclysm that marks the end of the world and coming of Jesus. In that sense Adventists see the work they are doing portrayed in prophecy.

Adventists do not limit authentic Christians to themselves alone, but to all who bear

faithful witness to Christ. However, near the close of the end time they believe a final message is to be sent to the world, summed in Revelation 14:6-12. Adventists see themselves involved in carrying that message. The Apocalypse describes such a group as those who "keep the commandments of God and faith in Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, Jerusalem).

*Unity.* This statement stresses the egalitarian ideal of a people who respond to the call of God, literally from every "nation, kindred, tongue, and people". Drawn together in love to Christ, they seek to move beyond social, racial, and cultural barriers, recognizing that the call of Christ transcends these kinds of limitations. The statement is an ideal, but reflects the openness to God toward all people, which is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Although not always perfectly achieved, the fact that Adventists work as a single organization throughout the world testifies to a high level of success.

*Baptism.* Although Adventists are non-liturgical in theology, two ordinances are practiced among them, not as vehicles of grace, but in testimony to Christ. Following the example of Jesus, baptism is by immersion of believers only, the premise being that personal repentance and faith in Christ are essential if baptism is to be meaningful. Baptism is a personal confession, a death to the old way of life and the beginning of a new life committed seriously to Christ. Persons who take this step are added to the church as the body of Christ.

*The Supper.* The Lord's Supper is celebrated in Adventist churches not as a means of grace, but as a memorial recalling the sacrifice of Christ for our forgiveness and redemption. The understanding is similar to that taught by Zwingli. In symbol the supper commemorates His death for us, but looks forward to the kingdom when Christ is reunited with His people. Adventists practice open communion, available to all who accept Christ as Saviour, on the basis of self-examination. In harmony with the biblical pattern, prior to each communion the believers participate in washing one another's feet, a practice abandoned by most churches but preserved in this community on the basis of its biblical precedent.

*The Gifts.* The doctrine of spiritual gifts is developed particularly by the apostle Paul,

whose writings include four lists of gifts bestowed on the community of believers. Ministry is not the preserve of the clergy alone, but of every believer, these gifts being conferred by God for that purpose. This understanding does not exclude church leaders set apart for special service, which is marked by ordination as elders (bishops, overseers) and deacons, but Scripturally both those ordained and unordained are included in the *laos*. Adventists make minimal distinctions between clergy and laity. The gifts of the Spirit are described in the New Testament as remaining among the believers to the end of the age.

*Gift of Prophecy.* In Paul's catalogues of the gifts of the Spirit, prophecy appears among them. On the basis that the gifts are not limited solely to the apostolic age, but remain in the church, Adventists are open to the possibility that God may choose to communicate directly with His people following a pattern reported in both Testaments. As the canon is now closed, the ministry of the gift of prophecy would be non-canonical, given to meet circumstances within the community of believers, a prophetic role for which there are precedents in the apostolic church.

In harmony with this perspective, Adventists recognize Ellen White, one of the early leaders in the movement, as having been gifted with prophecy. In contrast to the Mormon understanding of Joseph Smith, Mrs. White's work and writings are not seen as canonical, superceding, or updating the Scriptures, but as subsidiary to the teachings found in the Bible. The Scriptures provide the sole basis of doctrine among Adventists, with the writings of Mrs. White seen as helpful, divinely-guided counsel adjunct to the Word of God.

*Stewards.* The biblical doctrines of creation and redemption make clear God's ownership and immense concern for humans and the world provided for them. In this light the character of sin can be expressed in a human declaration of autonomy, breaking the original unity by a willful decision that abridges this legitimate relationship with God. Adventists seek to retain a sense of God's ownership and our dependency. All the gifts entrusted to us belong to Him, whether of time, ability, financial assets, or the environment that supports us.

Acknowledgment of our role as stewards calls for the biblical practice of tithing, the return of ten percent of one's increase, and giving offerings according to one's ability. Tithes are used for the support of the pastors with their immediate ministries, following a biblical pattern most clearly described in the Old Testament, but met with favorable reference in the New Testament as well.

*Christian Behaviour.* As a people committed to a moral God whose character sets standards for guiding the life of His people, Christians seek to reflect Him in their lives. Ideals such as purity, trustworthiness, honesty, simplicity, diligence, thrift, kindness, compassion, and other similar qualities permeate the Bible in descriptions of those who serve God. While practical Christian life manifests itself first as a response to God's grace, its authenticity appears in behaviour.

Adventists take seriously the biblical counsels that endorse the life lived for God, in behaviour, in speech, in choices, in appearance, in care of our bodies, in witness to others, and in spirit. In seeking these ideals they value simplicity as appropriate to Christian witness. As a part of the dedicated life, they give priority to care for health, living temperately, avoiding damaging substances such as inappropriate drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, as well as the foods designated in the Scriptures as unclean. Honoring such standards sets Christians apart from the surrounding community, but it provides opportunity to bear witness as the people of Christ.

*Marriage and Family.* This statement endorses the family as established by God. Marriage is a bond between one man and one woman and is permanent in character. Sexual activity is honorable but legitimately so only within marriage. Despite the permissiveness of contemporary social standards, Christians are called to live according to the divine mandate, bearing witness to unbelievers and inviting them to a new way of life in Christ. Parents are commissioned to rear children in an environment that is safe, loving, and invites them to

accept Christ. Children should be provided with the necessities of life and an education that prepares them to understand the will of God and contribute rightly to the wider community.

## E. ESCHATOLOGY

As a people initially brought together in a concern for the return of Jesus, it is not surprising that eschatology remains important in Adventist doctrine. Evidence of this concern appears even in the church's name. Already in 1844 its organizers understood that while an exact time for Christ's return cannot be known, Christians are called to live in anticipation of it. Based on prophetic studies, Adventists continue to believe that this is the end time of earth's return is not far distant.

The remaining four statements describe how these insights contribute doctrinally. In most cases they are self-explanatory, needing little comment.

### 24. The Second Coming of Christ

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. (Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:43, 44; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; Rev. 14:14-20; 19:11-21; Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Thess. 5:1-6.)

### 25. Death and Resurrection

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our

life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; Eccl. 9:5, 6; Ps. 146:3, 4; John 11:11-14; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:1-10.)

## 26. The Millennium and the End of Sin

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Rev. 20; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Jer. 4:23-26; Rev. 21:1-5; Mal. 4:1; Eze. 28:18, 19.)

## 27. The New Earth

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:13; Isa. 35; 65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21:1-7; 22:1-5; 11:15.)

*Second Advent* Despite the delay in its fulfillment, this teaching remains in the center of Adventist doctrine. In it several other fundamental teachings come together. The Bible presents Christ's return as the ultimate divine intervention, a literal event within history, the culmination of human experience, and the triumph of Christ over the forces of evil. For the

believers it means joyful reunion with their Saviour. While no biblical evidence or prophetic line reaches to Christ's return, Adventists live in hope of His return as the fulfillment of Christ's promise and the ultimate solution to the problem of sin.

*Death & Resurrection* Already introduced in the statement on man, this statement carries the thought to its conclusion. If the human being is unitary rather than composed of mortal body and immortal soul, then death marks an arrest of consciousness, a teaching supported through the Old Testament and carried into the New. Unlimited life is not a characteristic of man, who remains ever dependent on continuing dispensation from God. Immortality is exclusively a divine trait.

In this understanding of life and death the resurrection takes on special importance, for eternal human existence depends on it. The apostles gave the resurrection major attention, not only because of their witness to Christ, but in the hope as well that the believer who dies will be restored to life at His coming.

*Millennium & the End of Sin* Adventist eschatology is millennial, but with significant exceptions to what is taught by most other churches. Typically the millennium is portrayed as a thousand-year golden age on earth, however Adventists believe the redeemed will spend the millennium not on earth, but in heaven following the second Advent. In succinct language the statement develops this understanding of the doctrine. More significant theologically is its annihilationism, which foresees an eternal conclusion to the entire experience of sin and those who perish.

*New Earth* This statement concludes the brief review of Adventist eschatology with a theme addressed repeatedly by others through Christian history, the eternal kingdom. Being a prime component of Christian understanding, it is shared by most churches and incorporated into many creeds. Distinctions are found primarily in variations of how it is conceived. This teaching coincides particularly well with the Adventist restorationist ideal in foreseeing a time when all traces of sin will be removed and the universe in harmony with its Creator.

### III. RECURRING THEMES IN ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

This brief survey concludes by calling attention to several themes that lie in the background of doctrine among Adventists. The paper lists the formally accepted doctrines, not as a creedal statement but authoritative. Although the impact of these recurring themes is not to be exaggerated, including them enhances understanding.

1. Biblicism. It would be difficult to exaggerate the seriousness with which the Bible is treated among Seventh-day Adventists. Using a hermeneutic that encourages a literal reading of the text where possible, primacy is given to biblical studies rather than to philosophical theology. The method is exegetically based, accepting the overall text of the Scriptures as authentic, although acknowledging that minor discrepancies exist. The Adventist hermeneutic makes allowances for, and where possible seeks to reconcile such problems. The Scriptures are authoritative in doctrine and practice, being the place of final resort in resolving issues.

There is widespread recognition that a full understanding of all the Scriptures has not been achieved, hence the church's disavowal of creedal statements and a willingness to adjust teachings should persuasive evidence call for it. A notable example is the church's abandonment of a semi-Arian Christology in favor of the trinitarian position.

Given this approach, Bible study is taken seriously by laypersons as well as scholars. Many include daily Bible study in their routine. Pastors receive training that emphasizes skills in the biblical languages and are encouraged to continue their study. Their role is more that of teachers of the Scriptures than celebrants of religious liturgy or social workers.

2. The Bible as Normative. Given the high standing of the Scriptures, biblical teachings are taken as guides in both faith and practice. While modeling is based more on the New Testament, all the Scriptures are treated as equally valid, although the church recognizes that certain elements were related to the Hebrew theocracy or were fulfilled in the work of Christ.

As noted earlier, although Adventists participate in the Protestant heritage and their basic owes much of its configuration to the magisterial reformers, in other ways their ideals are closer to those of the radical reformers, whose teachings on believers' baptism, nonliturgical worship in the vernacular, the virtue of the simple life, separation of church and state, non-combatancy, and other matters became a part of Adventist faith and practice. Perhaps most important was the Anabaptist intent to restore the church to its original New Testament format, a formidable challenge indeed in an age when the church was the dominant force in European life.

Although it would be difficult to establish organic historical descent from the radical reformers, many of these ideals continue among Adventists. Their churches are structured along lines described in reports of the apostolic churches, with local congregations governed by elders and deacons. The central element of worship is the exposition of the Word. Their character is neither sacerdotal nor sacramental. Even large congregations have major lay leadership. Patterns reported in the New Testament are taken seriously as models, which explains the Adventist retention of footwashing in conjunction with communion. In a modern world some adaptation inevitably occurs, but the intent to model modern Christian life on New Testament principles remains.

3. The Church. As cited above, particularly in its concept of the church, the Adventist community exhibits its effort to model biblical patterns. The church consists of volunteers, persons who have made a serious commitment to live the Christian life. Should they become inactive, efforts would be made, both by pastors and laity, to restore them. Should they defect or discontinue a Christian life, they would be removed from membership. Membership is contingent on a serious interest in the Christian life. As noted earlier, Adventist church leadership is diffused, spread across laity and ministry. The church's role is expressed more in instruction and active outreach rather than intercession, for access to God is believed to be personal and direct. Christ is the sole intercessor, ministering in the heavenly sanctuary, to

whom petitions are made directly.

4. Cosmic Restoration. To a degree not fully developed in the 27 statements, the concept of cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan colors Adventist thought. Appearing in one of the 27 statements under the title, Great Controversy, this theme provides an integrating framework touching several other beliefs, including the origin of sin, the nature of sin, the creation, the concept of Messiah, covenant, the incarnation, the atonement, Christ's pledge of an ultimate kingdom, and the obliteration of sin. The theme focuses on three great divine interventions: creation, the atonement, and the second coming.
5. Eschatological Climate. Although the church's grasp of Christian beliefs has widened with continued study of the Scriptures, as noted earlier, eschatology remains a major component.