The Beatitudes of Matthew 5 are familiar verses to anyone who has read the Bible. These words from Christ’s 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 valued 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 hopeless 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.”

---

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!
LETTERS to the Editor

In fact, that same verse calls your erroneous ideol-
ogy "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 (Hebrews 3:16-17).

Editor’s COMMENTS

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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 Carolynal Ratzlaff, “Get Saved, Stay Saved, Always Be Ready” • Questions answered and free book to everyone

Planning for 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.
Dear Editor:

I have been sent the Easter special to your friend. You may also read all the past issues at our website: www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org.

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.

I don’t want to have anything to do with your magazine. You are not even Adventist doctrines or know your Bible very well, and you could’ve never went (sic) so far out. I feel misguided Adventists. And what in the world is the “Investigative Judgment”—and when my folks detected some errors in your writing, they were 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 adopt-ed a worldview that elevated reason and dismissed the supernatural. I studied philosophy and psychology and learned to doubt 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 mother were bigger than I could see.

Somehow, God provoked 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 interested in 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 the church. I kept reading about faith and reason, seeking reasons for my positions. Meanwhile, my folks were a “God of the gaps,” at any cost. I both doubted and appreciated the 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. I have 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 agiot” 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.

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 agiot” 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 doubt 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 mother were bigger than I could see.

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 parents were very active in the church, both financially and physically. 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 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 stu-dent 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 dining what I pleased while continuing to worship on the “right” day.

When a pastor boasted, “We know better how to live!” I shud-dered. 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 “uniformed” 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
in a sacred place.

was born a fourth-generation Adventist, grew up

†

Awesome realizations dawned: our Creator’s love is so incredible, so

gift. I've now become something I used to dread: an emotional,

would stay up really late reading.

longer an abstraction, Jesus was someone I now loved.

dug up treasure. I was taken back to the gospel we had been

situation. When I got home, I Googled Dale's name and found Life

Investigative Judgment with Sharon's brother who was attending

really know Him or have the deep desire to let Him take control.

read and understand the Bible, and though I loved Jesus, I didn't

cameras and timed sermons). I worried about my lack of desire to

held in common with the atheists. We are more than just animated

happiness; I found plenty of testimonies and articles that addressed this issue

for me. I read well-written studies supported by Bible texts. I discov-

ered documented problems with the Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White. Until that point, my problems with her seemed to be just

"problems." I finally felt a tiny bit of understanding and began really to

FOLLOW ME.

“‘You’re asking me?’

“Yes. That moment, I could feel His presence in the room, gently

touching me. I knew I wanted to talk to 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 knew.

I started reading the Bible intensely as a book with power, every-

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

wanted me to know that life only that 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 too soon to come back around. By our third

sermon at Trinity church I was so moved by Pastor Gary’s sermon on

the Sabbath that I decided to quit. The day before my Sabbath the

day and not my God. Sabbath Sabbath had been such an issue

(as it seemed subtle at times) that I had no rest at all. In fact,

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 #1 #2, 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 His 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 old-

est 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 house-

hold. Thank you, Life Assurance Ministries, for helping our family.

And most of all, thank you, Jesus, for true rest.

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 chil-

dren. 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 dif-

ferent 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 — interpreting, taking the “good” and leav-

ing the “bad”. It can try to grow “Southern California-styled” pro-
gressive communities throughout the Adventist world.

The problem, however, is that the fruits of historical

Adventism — misunderstood or distortion of the gospel, fear of

the end times, cultic separation from other Christians, insec-

tainty 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-hospitable 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 butu-

san in a sacred place.

Just as some Japanese families attempt to hold onto both a

butusdan and Christianity, trying to keep both identities, so

many progressive may be trying to hold onto both the

Adventist foundation and Christianity (perhaps calling this syn-

cretism “diversity”). Their attempts to reform Adventism con-

tinually fall short because the family “altar” is left in place. Deep

insidiously, Adventists can attempt to reform their modern churches

while holding on to their family “altar” — but this family “altar” is not the family of

Christ, but a family of God. It is no wonder that 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 butusdan 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 resist this reform will tell a story of

transformation,” I once said, 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-hospitable spirit that shaped the beliefs of the denomina-

tion 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 pro-
gressives are able to say that Adventism “was once blind.” Only

by recognizing their blindness and letting go of the family butu-

san 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 car-

rying 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 butusdan 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 who-

ever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). And

what a life is waiting to be found in Him!

Endnotes


2. Ellen G. White, Early Writings, p. 139, 232-234; Spiritual Gifts, Vol. 1, p. 136, 140, 142. See also, and read the Nativi-

The Greek Doctrine of Seventeenth-Day Adventists, “Right or 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.

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Proclamation! May/June 2007

4

Proclamation! May/June 2007

21
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.

Adventism! When they go outside areas such as Southern California or travel to less industrialized countries and see Adventism “evangelism”, they see something that challenges their understanding of their church. It reminds me of the story where many children and adults are choked at night by 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 less extremist version 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 untouched. Foundational Adventism was clearly gospel-hostile.

Adventism compared to Buddhist altar

How dare I compare the early Adventist beliefs to a Buddhist 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 is more than that, these 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: The gospel was missing from the first 40 years of Adventism. Anti-gospel beliefs were confirmed by a “prophet” who had visions and received instruction from “angel guides.” The “angel; the prophet,” and the early Adventist teachings condemned those who clung to the gospel instead of the early Adventist teachings.

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 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 compromise among our teachings of how to live as Christians, how to 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 God, I also know the freedom experienced when my outward projections match my inner convictions. May God help us each to walk in the transparent light of Christ without compromise among our teachings of how to live as Christians, how to give serious consideration to the reasons behind the conflicting “truths” and realize the danger of starting down the road of ethical darkness.
The Tree: Are you connected?

RICK LANGER

O

ne of the challenges of modern Christianity is sorting out the incredible diversity of denominations, sects, cults, and here-
sies. Particularly in the Protestant world, there is no single authoritative body which determines what teaching is orthodox and what teaching is heterodox. So that our only rule of faith and prac-
tice 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.

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 corner-
stone (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 founda-
tion, 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 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 theo-
logically 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 keep-
ning a butsudan and perhaps can cite theological rationaliza-
tions 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 mem-
bers in Japanese Seventh-day Adventism, even among “con-
servative” Adventists.)

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

As I talked about these things with my wife, she comment-
ed 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 replac-
ing it is okay, but not getting rid of it.” As she spoke, my wife suddenly remembered when she took Adventist bap-
tismal 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 spe-
cial occasions they are brought out.

Interestingly, she said that it is acceptable to replace the butsudan. This practice parallels the way many reform-min-
ded and progressive Adventists update the old beliefs. The old beliefs, they think, are outdated and irrelevant. It is com-
pletely 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 inheri-
tance 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.
R
cently I’ve been reading some discussions writ-
ten 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 progres-
sive Adventists’ 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 have
found that my heart wants to cut straight to the meat and ask,
“What about the Gospel?”
The difficulty for progressive Adventist faces is the
attempt to harmonize the gospel with historic Adventism—
the foundation of Adventist identity. Although many progres-
sive 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 occa-
sional but firm assent.

The Japanese family altar
Why would they hang onto old teachings even when they
no longer believe them? I have 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 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 heir-
looms; after the people are gone, it is the representation of
the family that 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
debt 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 heir-
looms; 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,
Jesus. It is also important to claim 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, 1 Cor 15:3-5). The resur-
rection of Christ is usually a bridge to belief in Christ’s return (1 Cor
15:24). Did the foundations of these beliefs work their way into formal creeds 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 various councils.

Canon of Scripture: It is also clear that authentic faith was associa-
ted 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 under-
stood 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 com-
plete and fulfill it (Matt 5:17). In the course of events, the apostolic
proclamations were themselves written down both in systematic fash-
on 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 sacrame-
tical 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
Christ tree has been planted. As you walk through the forest you
notice that there are some branches. Some trees grow much closer to
one another, and others look distinctly different. Some trees are near-
by, 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 so 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 “discerning practices of 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 peo-
ple have done is looked at the branches and found them to be near-
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 “true” 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 in a God that is not the 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, man can become.” This is an under-
standing of god that has its roots in Joseph Smith, not historic Christian
monotheism. They believe in apostles, but it doesn’t appear that
the foundation of the prophets and apostles was “laid” for all. Rather,
the apostolic work of Joseph Smith, most importantly, and the ongoing
were the essential foundation on which the Latter Day Saints are
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 prophet, a doctrine, or a charismatic
teacher, they have been restored.

The most obvious and disconcerting problem about this approach is
the unverifying sense of spiritual pride. There is something problematic
about the claim that there is one true branch and that all others seem to
have just sprung up. Christendom, has the truth; that 2000 years of Christians have misun-
derstood 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, histori-
cal, 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 is also clear that authentic faith was associated with these progres-

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.
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.

Rick Langer is an associate professor in the Biblical Studies and Theology Department at Biola University. Prior to coming to Biola, he served for over twenty years as a pastor at Trinity Evangelical Church Free in Redlands, California. Rick holds an undergraduate degree in chemistry from Colorado State University, an MDIV from Talbot Seminary, a master’s degree in philosophy from UC Riverside. He and his wife Shane live in Redlands; they have two children, Catori and Matheus.

16. EGW, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald 07-04-1895, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” Par. 14
19. Wayne Goddard and Ed Jolliff, “WLC 042 Was Yahweh Divine or Manikean?,” page 114, 1999
20. ATJSH
23. Lionel Matthews, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology at Andrews University, “A Christian view of sex. (Retrieved from: http://te.fae.adventist.org/inquis/348/Matthews.pdf)
29. About 14 years ago I was a guest at a gathering of “WomenChurch”, a group of Adventists who met in the Loma Linda area to discuss theological topics. The evening I attended, the facilitator was Cheryl McIlvain, 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 to anything but abhorrence to the symbol of the cross.
30. Leviticus 16:10-12: the description of the scapegoat. Two goats (or lambs could be used) were brought as a sin offering (note the singular form of the word, and the priest casts lots to determine which one would be the scapegoat and which would be the sin offering). 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 scripture locus of Satan serving two masters is clearly understood in the context.
31. Colleen Tinker is the editor of Proclamation! and she has written two books: Roy and Nathanali, both in college; The Ticats attend Trinity Church in Redlands, California, and lead a PhD in former Adventist Fellowship study teams. They also help two websites: www.famildevolve.com and www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org.
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 2000 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 us and then the money has come. From a humble beginning, the mailing list is now nearly 40,000 and growing.

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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.
I didn'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 believed Jesus was God.

This Jesus was not the meek, mild, abused human-stripped-of-divine-power who had no advantage I did not have—If I learned to access the Holy Spirit properly and resist sin I could do—if I learned to access the Holy Spirit properly and resist sin as Jesus did. 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.

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 trinitists with a weak Jesus whom God exalted (to Satan's chariot)—a Jesus who could have failed in His mission to earth and who may not have existed eternally as the Mighty God.

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.

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Dale Ratzlaff, associate professor in the biblical studies and theology department at Biola University, says in his article "The Family Tree" in this issue of Proclaimtion 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, follo...
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 particu- lar 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 Him, 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, in- ner, 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 develop- ing view of God away from credal trinitarianism.20

While the church affirmed that Ellen White had embraced Trinitarianism during the later part of her career, this affirma- tion was only in name. The Adventists’ use of the word “Trinity” to describe Ellen White’s understandings has kept millions of people from seeing that she “often saw the lovely Jesus, that He is a per- son.” In her final years White wrote that she had experienced Christ as both a Person and a power.

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

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.

One of the first changes I noticed after realizing that Jesus was all I needed for salvation was that I no longer felt embar- rassed saying His name. As I reflected on my experiences in Adventist schools and Bible conferences, I realized that people spoke of “God” far more frequently than they spoke of “Jesus”—espe- cially 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, the Jesus was part of God whom children could under- stand. As I grew older and more sophisticated, the more nu- lous “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 very powerful and He was always in control. His ability to accomplish His work was His 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 Non-Trinitarian movement which organized in 1820. This early group was composed largely of people from two sources: those who left Methodism because of their opposi- tion to bishops and autocratic church government, and those who left the Calvinist tradition because of opposition to closed communion and Calvinist theology.

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 infa- mous measures by which it was forced upon the church— which appear upon the pages of history—were put there to make every believer in that doctrine blush.

R.F. Cottrell published this statement in 1869:

To hold the doctrine of the trinity (sic) is not so much an evidence of evil intention as an indication from that view 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 pointed his adversary might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.

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.4

Ellen White: from Arian to trinitistic

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 view of the Godhead. This suggests she was more interested in the representation of her statements about Jesus and the Trinity than the recognition of her orthodoxy. While some of the angels joined Satan in his rebellion, others reasoned with him to dissuade him from his purpos- es, contending for the honor and wisdom of God in giving authority to His Son. Satan urged, for what reason was Christ

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 was the only Begotten God.” 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 schools and Bible conferences, I realized that people spoke of “God” far more frequently than they spoke of “Jesus”—espe- cially 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.”

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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 heav-

elvany family, his discontent, that Christ should be preferred before him, to be in such close conference with God, and he be uniformly as to the result of their frequent consulta-

tions. God informs Satan that this he can never know. That to his Son will he reveal his secret purposes, and that all of the family of Heaven, Satan not excepted, were required to yield implicit obedience. Satan baldly speaks out his rebellion, and points to the supreme 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 subject to Christ’s command, that God’s commands alone he will obey.”

The above quote details Ellen White’s belief that Jesus was not always God, but that the Father exalted Him to that posi-
tion—implying also that Jesus remained less than the Father. Further, she clarifies that Satan believed he had equal rights to not always God, but that the Father exalted Him to that posi-
tion next to God.”

Next, she expands on the notion that the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate beings, all of whom are God, as she states in a number of her writings:

“Further, she repeatedly expressed the idea that these three “Worthies” or “dignitaries of heaven” 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 there to help them develop a ‘character that is after the divine similitude’.

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

Ellen White’s view did change—she was not a ‘Trinitarian’ in her earlier years, and 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” view as early as 1844—her 1844 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.”

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 (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 overcoming but by faith in Jesus (Romans 5: 1-8; 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.”

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 10:12). The Bible 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). These 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 bap-

tized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient sub-

jects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life on earth. In the name of whom were you baptized? You went down into the water in the name of the three great

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

Worthies in heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost [. . .] Those who have been baptized in 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 can-not do this work in my own strength,’”

In her later years Ellen White consistently expressed the Trinity in trinitistic 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 there to help them develop a “character that is after the divine similitude.”

What is trinitism? 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. These three persons triune God are eternally one God. Trinitism, 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, trinitism affirms three separate beings who are God. 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.”

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 trinitism. 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 ortho-
dox understanding of the Trinity. She persisted in holding the belief in three separate beings, all of whom were God.
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 heav-


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.14

Moo: ‘The purpose of that 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.”

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 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 discov-


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.12

Adventists say, however, that Ellen White grew in her under-


Worths in heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. […] Those who have been baptized and live in 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 felt 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 can not do this work in my own strength.’”

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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 trinitism. 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.
Further, her understanding of Christ’s nature and identity was never clear. While some of her publications did affirm Jesus as eternal beings related to Him as 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 part.’” Thus, these early visions steered her developing view of God away from creedal trinitarianism.

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 address their understanding of the Godhead springs from a simple misunderstanding about the true nature of God, and about the identity of God as one Being, not “three great Powers.” In spite of a fundamental belief about the Trinity, there was no concordance to the understanding of the three-part (“Father, Son, Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-equal Persons…”). 

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 co-equal Beings.” Leonard Courtier, an orthodoxy of Sociology at Andrews University says this in his paper “Sociology: A Biblical Perspective.” In spite of its denial of the Trinity, the biblical account seems uncompromised in its understanding 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 trune (group) God seems to indicate 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.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, retired professor of theology at Andover Newton Theological Seminary. 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 speaks through angels, 

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 automatic and often abusive exercise of power in the church, state, and the family.

Bacchiocchi also says this:

> Thus the human maleness and feminality 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.

Speaker/evangelist for Adventism’s Amazing Facts and Presenter/evangelist for Adventism’s Amazing Facts and New Life Church, 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 redempson, plans, 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 unseen universe see as right? One side could have been the Godhead and the other side spinning into cosmic chaos, the proportions of this disaster are staggering yet the Godhead was still willing to take this risk for the salvation of man.

The above quotation contains multiple problems. First, the implication that Jesus—eternal God—could have never taken the risk for the salvation of man.

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 somewhat “less than” the Father. He was merely the Son, the Jesus was part of God whom children could understand. As I grew older and more sophisticated, the more nebulously “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. I knew I was a sinner, and that there was “torn flesh and tender…” Jesus whose sacrifice was supposed to be a deterrant 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 Lord’s deputy. Yet His life-long understandings began to fade as I discovered God’s sovereign power and 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. 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 indeed the message of the Trinity in tritheistic terms—as if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three separate beings united in a group known as “God”—was completely new to him. 

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 Hebrew children out of Egypt.

As 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 somewhat “less than” the Father. He was merely the Son, the Jesus was part of God whom children could understand. As I grew older and more sophisticated, the more nebulously “God” was less embarrassing to mention than the human, suffering, bleeding, and dying Jesus.

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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 knew from the Jesus of my past. 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 Him as a born-again Christ-follower. In spite of my response, I also was disfranchised. I knew that my experience with Him as a born-again Christ-follower. I also was disenchanted with the Person I now knew was my Lord. This was, at a deep level, a mixture of emotions that I, for the first time, felt deep gratitude to Him, but always my reactions had been to feel 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 was, I think, a longing not to weep in public, overwhelmed by the Person I knew was my Lord. This was not an amorphous “God” that I was meeting for the first time. This 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 accept Him 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 accept Him as our Lord.

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. The pervasive influence of Ellen White’s and the founders’ Arminian 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 trinity”), 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 Arminian 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 Christ had a begotten Godhead, 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. [...] Most Adventist publications on orthodox-Trinitarian teaching permeate Adventist theology, and functionally Adventists are trinitists with a weak Jesus. While the Seventh-day Adventist Church today espouses the doctrine of the Trinity, there is a tendency to teach the pure gospel, cannot introduce people to the eternal, powerful, sovereign God the Son is the root of Adventism still nourishes it. No matter how Adventism
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 will be accomplished.

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 God’s will will be accomplished. 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.

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.

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.
Changes “before Abraham was, I AM” (eternalness) to “I existed†

changes “By Him

By another person, albeit an exceptional person. On the other hand, if

human sin is fundamental, deep and pervasive, we are hopelessly lost

example of a fallible Jesus. His death and resurrection do

example whose death was a down payment on salvation

their salvation.

and no observance or behavior on their part will figure into

from understanding that Jesus’ sacrifice was not able to fail,

level, but it really cannot be made any worse either. Therefore, one is actu-

to indulge in any sort of physical activity—sexual promiscuity

ally free to indulge in any sort of physical activity—sexual activity

merit specific mention:

Renewal is a work of the branches.

This most ancient of heresies denies first

as a human work. In this particular case, salvation

and Arianism, it is important in its own way. It generally

shares with Arianism the denial of the deity of Christ, and not surpris-

The evening I attended, the facilitator was Cheryl McMillan, then the

which involve disregard of ordinary human activities such as work and

with Adventism is obvious, but I actually identify the

connection with Adventism is obvious, but I actually identify the

aspect of the world. The logic of this is relatively transparent—we tend to

worship a Savior who is only as large as our sin. So our sin is comparatively

tree trunk is mediated through some other prophet, teacher, or written reve-

is a new foundation rather than the one that was laid once for all.

Proclamation!

Rick Langer is an associate professor in the Biblical Studies and Theology Department at Biola University. Prior to coming to Biola, he served for over twenty years as a pastor at Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California. Rick holds an undergraduate degree in chemistry from Colorado State University; an MDiv from Talbot Seminary, and a PhD in Historical Philosophy from UC Riverside. He and his wife Shane live in Redlands; they have two children, Court and Mark, 18.

7. Adventism’s foundational Arianism still keeps its members from understanding that Jesus’ sacrifice was not able to fail, and

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 fol-

The logic is clear enough. The other branch of Gnosticism fol-

It describes their denial of a core doctrinal belief such as the deity of Christ as being a rejection of some of the apost-

and other writings by Paul) and had a special reverence for the

“Ebionite” shrub for a different reason. It was also characteristic of the

It describes their denial of a core doctrinal belief such as the deity of Christ as being a rejection of some of the apost-

Any resemblance of the church is a result of the work of God and not of the work of man;

to ask Him to teach us by His Spirit

example whose death was a down payment on salvation

their salvation.

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.

The identity of the Bohnites 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 varies in the trees that are grown in any particular area.

example of a fallible Jesus whose death and resurrection do

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Jesus Christ, also called Michael the Archangel…" Excerpted from

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at the sacrifice of Jesus. The evening I attended, the facilitator was Cheryl McMillan, then the

The evening I attended, the facilitator was Cheryl McMillan, then the

bible doctrine does not support such an idea. The

Scripture does not support such an idea. The

Deliberate

Endnotes


6. The word “trinity” was not capitalized in the original source.


8. The Seventh-day Adventist paraphrase of the Bible, The Clear Word (TCW) (available in their Adventist Book Centers), contains many altered verses which transform scriptural language into a contemporary idiom. For example: John 8:36, TCW changes “before Abraham was,” to “Abraham was before” (allowing his prior creation); Col. 1:16, TCW changes “by Him all things were created” (notot) to “through Him the Father created the Son” (only as notot). Other examples of this translation were included. What counts is the spirit, not the body. The weeds of

weakness reveals God’s strength. The perseverance of the church reformed is that we are always getting one thing or another wrong. Our

tine trunk with Paul, Peter and John as my near neighbors. But humility is appropriate. The reason the church is always getting one thing or another wrong is that the “trunk” of the New Testament church, this is unrealistic. We do not

Rick and Richard are both in college. Richard has a psychology degree and is working on a master’s degree in counseling.

Almost perfect description of the life of a tree—old leaves falling off but

earned his master’s degree in pastoral counseling from Union-FTC Seminary in Los Angeles. They have two children, Christine, 10, and Michael, 12.

Colleen Tinker is the editor of Proclamation! She and Richard have two sons: Roy and Nathanael, both in college. The Tinkers attend Trinity Church in Redlands, California, and lead a women’s former Adventist Fellowship study group there. They also host two websites: www.feministadventist.com and www.feministadventistministries.org.
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 progressive attempts to keeps 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. 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 that progressive Adventist faces is the attempt to harmonize the gospel with historic Adventism—the foundation of Adventist identity. Although many progressives do not believe and do not actively teach the foundational beliefs demand the same reverenced position in Adventism, in order to stay Adventist, one has to keep the early Adventist traditions 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 suggests throwing them out produces the same effect in the Adventist “family” that throwing out the family altar becomes within Adventism, 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. The difficulty every progressive Adventist faces is the reality of “Adventism”?

Orthodoxy 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, 1 Cor 15:3-5). The resurrection of Christ is usually a bridge to believe in Christ’s return (2 Cor 13:14). The final word of the early Christians worked their way into formal creedal confessions of the early church—and as parts of apostolic statements memorized by catechumens, and later they were expressed in more technical language in creeds associated with the early 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 progressive Adventist who is concerned with the legitimacy of the 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 Joel 2:31-32). The attempt may bring some peace to them, but what is the reality of “Adventism”?

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 received the faith and passed it on. Jesus 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, 1 Cor 15:3-5). The resurrection of Christ is usually a bridge to believe in Christ’s return (2 Cor 13:14). The final word of the early Christians worked their way into formal creedal confessions of the early church—and as parts of apostolic statements memorized by catechumens, and later they were expressed in more technical language in creeds associated with the early councils. 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 received the faith and passed it on.
The Tree: Are you connected?

RICK LANGER

The first mark of the authentic church is that it believes, for “no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 3:11). This is the bedrock of the Christian faith: the work of the New Testament writers, there is only one true foundation: the work 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 Jesus as Lord and that he was raised from the dead. 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 when she took Adventist baptism 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 spread. The further we move away from the family altar, the better. Why not let it be completely so? 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 Adventist!”

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.

Adventists take it theologically for granted that the Holy Spirit...
in a sacred place. I was born a fourth-generation Adventist, grew up with God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus. Wow! Awesome realizations dawned: our Creator’s love is so incredible, so selfless, 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, so trustworthy; Jesus is equal to God; we receive God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus, Wow!

I started reading the Bible intensely as a book with power; 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 #1 comfort and my 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 treated like royalty. He says he gives 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.

Endnotes
3. Martin and Sharon, Our Butsudan: A Progress Report
4. Ramone Romero, A Story of Change
5. Paul Kim, Korean Christian, Life Assurance Ministries
6. Timothy Tsuyoshi Romero
7. This 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 eldest 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.
8. Proclamation!”
9. Martin and Sharon, Our Butsudan: A Progress Report
10. 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.
Dear Editor,

I have been a subscriber to 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 have your magazine. We really appreciate all the effort that you all put in toMAIL. Finding our collective minds. We don't know what else to do…but pray.

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
"But it 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

Terrorific 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 were once in the truth and now keep Sunday, drinking coffee, wearing jewelry, etc. I realize that people have the right to choose how to live their lives (that's what our loving Lord allows us to choose to do), but when we choose not to follow what He has asked us to do, 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 is in love for us, we 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 them 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 Luiswala. 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 had 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 to receive 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 it's (sic) mission is to save poor misguided Adventists. And what in the world is the Former Adventist Fellowship? It is 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.

The best work you do for LM is...""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 your Word with all of those seeking the truth of the gospel. I am praying for you.

Doctrines of devils
Please remove this name from your mailing list. You 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 have never (sic) or so far out. Feel sorry for you. 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 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 faithful "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 mockery 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 "uniformed" 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...
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. When I was fired, I had no savings account to fall back on. That part of my life was over. My father had no insurance, sick pay, or retirement check, a retirement fund almost a year has passed—a year filled with excitement and challenges and advances. Through it all, our faithful Father 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. That part of my life was over. My father had no insurance, sick pay, or retirement check, a retirement fund 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. That part of my life was over. My father had no insurance, sick pay, or retirement check, a retirement fund...
The Beatitudes of Matthew 5 are familiar verses to anyone who has read the Bible. These words from Christ’s 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 valued 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.”