

DISSENTING SECT OR
EVANGELICAL DENOMINATION:
THE TENSION WITHIN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

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ABSTRACT

A well-known dynamic among religious collectivities is the tendency of religious groups that begin as sects to move toward denominational status as they reduce tension with the surrounding society and diminish their claims to exclusive legitimacy. This chapter reviews this movement within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and then focuses on one evidence for the change. Over 2,000 delegates to the World Session of the Adventist church completed surveys indicating their priorities for the church at the end of the millennium. In assessing factors essential for unity in a world church delegates placed emphasis on basic Christian teachings like faith in Jesus Christ, being filled with

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the love of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit ahead of group-specific doctrines and organizational structure. Asked which of their 27 fundamental beliefs needed the most emphasis, delegates selected the experience of salvation and tended to put sectarian views toward the end of the list. It is concluded that Adventists have moved a long way from their sectarian roots toward denominationalism.

One of the key themes in the literature of the sociology of religion is the tendency of religious groups to change in character over time. While various types of movement are theoretically possible, the most usual pattern has been that religious groups that begin as sects in significant tension with their surrounding society tend to move toward denominational status, gradually accommodating to make peace with the general culture.

It is the purpose of this chapter to use this framework to examine a fast-growing Protestant group throughout the world, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Other historians and religious scholars, at various times, have examined this group on a sect-denominational continuum (Hoge 1979; Smith 1990). However, recent growth and the increasing complexity and sophistication of the church organization as well as current data suggest the importance of re-examining the sect-denominational status of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our examination will proceed in two ways. First of all the meaning of sect and denomination will be examined and applied to current Adventist structures and practices. Secondly, fresh data from a survey of a representative group of church leaders will be examined to determine if these attitudes are more consistent with a sect or denominational orientation.

Weber (1963) defined a sect as an association that accepts only religiously qualified persons—that is, those who meet certain standards. He further saw it as marked by charismatic leadership and noted that over time such leadership, through the process of “routinization,” tends to be replaced by the more stable bureaucratic organization.

Troeltsch (1960) contrasted “church” and “sect.” The church is accommodated to the social order, and its membership is not exclusive but incorporates the masses. One is born into it. By contrast, the sect is a voluntary community with selective membership of those committed to a higher level of holiness.

This use of “church,” however, does not fit well into a religiously pluralistic society like the United States where there is no established church of the kind Weber and Troeltsch knew. Therefore, Niebuhr (1929) suggested adding a type, the “denomination,” which, like the church, accommodated to its society but, unlike the church, lacked the ability to dominate society.

Other contemporary sociologists have refined and expanded the definitions. Johnson (1963) felt that the key difference was the relationship between the religious group and the dominant society. Sects find themselves in a state of high tension with the world around them and withdraw from society to varying degrees. Robertson (1970) saw the distinguishing mark as the extent to which the religious group considers itself to be uniquely legitimate. Sects tend to regard themselves as the “true church” which alone possesses the truth necessary for salvation.

“The sect is a religious organization that considers itself uniquely legitimate and is in a relatively negative relationship with the dominant society.” In contrast, “the denomination is in a positive relationship with society and accepts the legitimacy claims of other religious collectivities” (McGuire 1987, p. 120). To this basic formulation Yinger (1970) has suggested adding “established sect” to describe organizations that are highly differentiated and complexly organized and yet have retained their negative tension with society. A reasonable corollary to these definitions would seem to be that a Christian sect emphasizes its own special doctrines over the basic teachings common to Christianity in general.

Few organizations, however, can resist the powerful pressures to accommodate to the larger society. In order to accomplish its goals an organization finds it necessary to institutionalize—to create an objective structure—to at least some extent. While such structure aids the movement to spread its particular message, it also contains built-in tendencies toward stagnation and loss of cohesion (O’Dea 1961). Johnstone (1988, pp. 63-64) pointed out that if a group is successful, it grows in size, and that very growth changes the nature of the group in several ways: (1) the degree of consensus concerning goals and norms declines, (2) deviance from group norms increases, (3) the ratio of formal norms to informal norms increases, (4) roles tend to become more specialized and change from volunteer to full-time paid roles, and (5) there is a greater need for coordinators and thus a widening gap between members and leaders.

Niebuhr (1929) noted that successful sects tend to accommodate to society eventually becoming indistinguishable from denominations. This is partly due to the laws of group size noted above (Johnstone 1988). It also reflects generational change Niebuhr (1929). Enthusiasm and commitment are high among the first generation who found the sect. But the second and third generations lack some of the personal experience of their parents and grandparents and thus tend to find themselves less in tension with the surrounding society.

One of the important considerations whereby sects maintain their tension with the larger culture and with other religious bodies is through their religious ideology. The more distinct a religious ideology is from that of other religious bodies, the more likely is the group to maintain a sense of separateness and to secure adherence through exclusive claims to having a "truth" that others do not share.

The transformation of religious bodies from being in a high tension state to becoming more comfortable with the general culture is dependent on several factors: their polity, clergy, religious doctrines, and evangelization techniques, among others. When denominations downplay their distinctive doctrines or reduce their transcendent dimension, movement toward greater accommodation with the larger culture often results in loss of zeal and decline of growth (Finke and Stark 1992, pp. 17-18). There is a strong interaction effect between polity, doctrine, leadership, and proselytism methods that can predictably affect a religious group's movement from sect to denomination (Finke and Stark 1992). However, in this chapter we focus primarily on leadership and religious doctrines.

One of the dimensions which starkly distinguishes the religious leadership of a sectarian movement from that of a denomination is the level of education. Sectarian movements are often led by charismatic individuals with very little education and no formal theological training who are personally known by the sect members and whose dedication and oratorical fervor generate commitment among followers. The leader who comes from the same social setting as his/her parishioners is able to identify with their needs, understand their life circumstances, and create a heightened sense of community. Sects make it easy for "called" individuals to enter the ministry. What makes these leaders attractive and successful is their incredible devotion and sacrifice—at times serving without salaries—and deep commitment to a transcendent dimension of faith. Mystery, miracles, heaven, and hell are realities to be reckoned with, that function as

compensators—creating solace, hope, and security in contexts of dramatic change or of material disadvantages. The degree of conviction for some "peculiar" religious ideas and the fervency with which they are communicated tend to vary inversely with the level of formal education.

Societies that are religiously pluralistic make it easier for sects to move toward denominationalism because they are more likely to be tolerant of the sect and thus not intensify its sense of opposition (McGuire 1987). Sects maintain their opposition to society and preserve high internal cohesion when they are persecuted, because the outside opposition forces the members to unify and take a stand for their beliefs. Tolerance, on the other hand, makes it easier to accept other groups as also authentic. "Sects become denominations by giving up their claim to exclusive legitimacy and by reducing their dissent, accommodating to society" (McGuire 1987, p. 137).

Another factor moving sects toward denominations is the upward mobility of the members. An important component in the formation of sects is deprivation of some kind (Glock 1973). Sects are disproportionately composed of representatives of the lower economic classes (Niebuhr 1929; Pope 1942; Johnstone 1988). However, many sects value behaviors such as hard work and not wasting money on "sinful" pleasures. These behaviors tend in time to bring prosperity, and as sect members rise in the world, it becomes easier to accommodate to the surrounding culture. Sect members educate their children. These children enter professions and become "respectable." Gradually, the members no longer want to be seen as "odd," and the sect evolves into a denomination (McGuire 1987, pp. 135-138; Johnstone 1988, pp. 81-84).

The purpose of this paper is to look at one aspect of this process of transformation in a single religious community. While a number of evidences will be cited, this research will explore one set of data for the change from sect to denomination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

THE ADVENTIST JOURNEY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church certainly began as a sect. In the 1830s and 1840s a movement led by William Miller and others attracted perhaps 100,000 followers with the message of the imminent

return of Christ. Through their study of Bible prophecy the group finally settled on the date October 22, 1844 as the climax of this world's history. When the predicted event failed to occur, the movement splintered. Many gave up their faith altogether while others formed small groups that explored alternative dates (Schwarz 1979, pp. 24-52).

One small fellowship, however, held to the date but reinterpreted the event. Rather than returning to earth on October 22, they decided that Christ had entered the heavenly sanctuary to begin the final phase of His ministry for this world which included the investigative judgment (a work of determining who are saved and who are lost that takes place in heaven prior to Christ's Second Advent). In small groups they hammered out a further doctrinal pattern and finally organized in 1860 taking the name Seventh-day Adventists. Three years later they formed the General Conference. At that time they were composed of only about 3,500 members, all located in northern United States from Maine to Minnesota and Missouri (Schwarz 1979, pp. 53-70, 86-98).

Early Adventism was definitely sectarian in nature. The group was small and not formally organized from 1844 to 1863. Its ministry was not professionally trained. While they considered themselves to be Bible Christians, Adventists tended to bypass the common teachings of Christianity and to emphasize their special message to the world. This message included doctrines not usually held by mainline Christians, such as the Saturday Sabbath and a conditional immortality (sometimes known as soul sleep). Other beliefs unique to Adventism were the sanctuary and investigative judgment message, the millennium located in heaven, and the application of the three angels of Revelation 14 to their movement. Occasionally they differed from orthodox Christianity as, for example, in that many of the early leaders held Arian views of the trinity, and salvation through Christ alone was not listed in early doctrinal statements (Schwarz 1979, pp. 166-181; Froom 1971, pp. 77-90, 281-296).

Furthermore, the charismatic nature of the leadership was evident in that they were guided by a prophet. Ellen White received her first vision shortly after the disappointment of 1844 and continued to be a molding force in the growing religious community until her death in 1915. Her vast literary production on a wide variety of religious and practical subjects was accepted as inspired by God. Even though Adventists claimed to formulate their message from the Bible and

the Bible alone, her counsel provided an extra-Biblical source for Biblical interpretation and Christian living. The church continues to regard her writings as authoritative (The complete biography is the six-volume set by her grandson, Arthur L. White (1981-1986)).

While Adventists do not believe that they alone have salvation, they do believe that they have a unique message of truth for the end times and that they constitute the true remnant (Ministerial Association 1988, pp. 152-169). This somewhat exclusive claim to legitimacy naturally has placed them in tension not only with society but with much of the Christian world, especially with regard to proselytizing. In addition their emphasis on behavioral standards such as the prohibition of alcohol, tobacco, theater, jewelry, gambling, dancing, and pre-marital sex results in high tension with the culture around them (Ministerial Association 1988, pp. 278-292).

Thus the sect-like character of the movement, especially in its formative years, seems undeniable. Even today the label persists. In his classification system based on multiple sources and criteria Smith (1990) grouped Seventh-day Adventists with sects like Four Square Gospel and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In their survey of religion in contemporary America Kosmin and Lachman (1993, p. 45) affirmed the sectarian origins of Adventists as an outgrowth of the Millerite movement. They have, furthermore, continued this classification in their present-day schemata. They employed four measures of social ranking: percent college graduates, percent working full-time, percent owning their homes, and median annual household income. In a composite index based on these four components, they ranked Seventh-day Adventists 28th out of the 30 largest religious groups in America (1993, pp. 257-262). They comment: "A sect frequently exercises close control over its members and their personal lives. A prime example of such a closed community is the Seventh-Day [sic] Adventist. Its members can be born in an Adventist hospital, educated in Adventist schools from kindergarten to university, work in Adventist institutions, buy Adventist food, live in Adventist communities, and end their days in Adventist retirement centers (1993, p. 264).

There is, however, another side to the picture. True, an Adventist could do all the things Kosmin and Lachman suggest. But all of these represent personal decisions; none are mandated. Therefore, it is difficult to see that they represent close control over personal lives. We will look at several pieces of evidence suggesting a shift from

sectarian to denominational characteristics before we examine the main thrust of this paper.

First, there is the matter of size and complexity. According to the latest edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Office of Archives and Statistics 1995, p. 4), by the middle of 1994 the church had 8,173,662 members worldwide (now near nine million) and employed 136,539 workers. Adventists were organized in 209 of the 236 countries in the world. They operated 5,530 schools, including 85 colleges and universities, with 828,833 students. They also owned 148 hospitals, 354 clinics, 79 nursing homes or retirement centers, 13 orphanages, and 35 food industries. Literature was produced in 206 languages by 56 publishing houses. Contributions by members in 1993 amounted to over 1.1 billion dollars. Adventists have come a long way from their sectarian beginnings.

Another perspective from which to view these changes is to note how the church has historically related to government over time. In considering the relationship of Adventism to the United States, church historian, Jonathan Butler (1974), has identified three phases. In their Millerite beginnings and very early days Adventists espoused an *apolitical apocalyptic* in which they avoided any relation to government. From mid-century until the 1870s, they moved to a *political apocalyptic* in which they denounced the Republic as doomed, using the language of contemporary politics. By the 1880s to the present, they adopted a *political prophetic* which “engaged them as prophets to sustain the Republic, at least for a time, rather than merely to forecast its ruin as apocalyptists” (1974, p. 174).

After the disappointment of 1844, those Millerites who clung to their faith in the time prophecy and adopted the seventh-day Sabbath spent the next few years trying to agree on a core of doctrines and establish a sense of identity as a religious group. While Christ had not returned at the predicted time, they still expected His coming to be very soon and put all their efforts into attaining a state of readiness. They would not recognize government, even to the point of organizing as a legal entity, for they felt that any such bow to societal arrangements would constitute them as Babylon. They were “*apolitical apocalypics* in that they spurned even minimal political participation as they awaited an imminent end” (Butler 1974, p. 177, italics in original).

The foundation for the shift to a *political apocalyptic* was laid even before the official organization of the church in the early 1860s. In

1851, just about the time that sabbatarian Adventists had defined their basic doctrines, established a sense of identity, and begun to institutionalize with the establishment of publications, John N. Andrews (1851) published what was to become a unique Adventist view of the American government.

While many Protestant interpreters had held that the first beast of Revelation 13 represented the papacy, Andrews went on to apply the second beast in the chapter—the one with two horns like a lamb but who spoke as a dragon—to the United States of America. He held the horns to be symbolic of its Republican civil power and its Protestant ecclesiastical power. To “speak like a dragon” would be to repudiate its principles and to enforce the worship of the first beast upon its citizens.

Thus very early the foundation was laid to view the American Republic as the ultimate persecuting enemy. While Adventists would follow the New Testament counsel to be good citizens and obey government as long as its dictates did not conflict with their duty to God, they would view government suspiciously, realizing that at any time the dragon might cast off its “lamb-like” disguise. For the next few decades, pronouncements about government tended to follow this *political apocalyptic*. This is most evident in the matter of slavery and the Civil War. During this period church papers contained many articles opposing slavery and advancing abolitionist sentiments. However, the condemnation of slavery was not so much an effort to abolish the institution as it was to illustrate the dragon-like characteristics of the United States.

By the 1880s, a gradual shift in the position of the church vis-à-vis government was taking place. In certain limited areas Adventists were beginning to engage in the political arena with the goal of influencing public policy. The two major areas of such activity were religious liberty and temperance. The struggle for religious liberty could be justified in that it would make possible the preaching of the pure gospel and thus allow more people to hear the message and prepare for the coming of Christ. Prohibition was a moral cause because liquor so dulled the minds of its slaves that they could not comprehend God’s last message. Thus, the church moved gradually into the *political prophetic phase* where Adventists, as a prophetic people, were to use their voice to sustain the Republic as long as possible (Butler 1974).

Since then the reaction to public concerns has been mixed. Adventists largely sat out the Civil Rights movement because to take sides might result in internal division and would make it more difficult to earn a hearing with some of the populace for their spiritual message. More recently, after consultation with the sixteen world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, president Neal C. Wilson (GC President 1985) issued a series of public statements expressing the church's position on peace, racism, home and family, and drugs. The documents urged "every nation to beat its 'swords into plowshares'" and proclaimed that the "Adventist hope must manifest and translate itself into deep concern for the well-being of every member of the human family." In a world of conflict Adventists "desire to be known as peacemakers and work for worldwide justice and peace under Christ as the head of a new humanity." The church "deplores all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination." (The above material on Butler's three phases of Adventism's relationship with the American government has been adapted from Dudley, Hernandez, and Terian [1992, pp. 79-81].)

It is of interest to examine the extent to which the church wishes to be well-regarded by the general public. Stark and Bainbridge (1985, p. 23) distinguished a sect from a denomination by "the degree to which a religious group is in a *state of tension* with its surrounding sociocultural environment." They went on to explain that over time as upward mobility takes place and influential members begin to participate in the wider society, they find that the tension between their religious group and the world in which they live is inconsistent with their interests. Thus they begin to compromise some of their distinctiveness and move toward denominational status.

Lawson (1995b) has examined the tension within Adventism by exploring three responses to the Branch Davidian crisis in the spring of 1993. The Branch Davidians had their roots in the Seventh-day Adventist Church through a series of splits going back to 1930. Though there was no organizational connection, leader David Koresh was a former Adventist, and most of the Branch Davidians had been recruited from Adventist congregations.

Early reports of the government raid on the Davidian compound detailed alleged bizarre behavior within the group and linked the group with Seventh-day Adventists. Lawson found in the church's responses evidence of uncomfortableness with a sectarian or cultist

label. The official response was to distance the Adventist church from the Davidians even to the extent of employing a public relations firm to put a positive "spin" on the events. Differing responses were also made by conservative fringe groups in Adventism and by those of a more liberal persuasion (Lawson 1995b).

Comparing these views goes beyond the scope of this chapter. The point is that the most influential Adventist leaders and members **did** not want to be identified as part of an odd sect. They wanted to be respected mainline. "Adventists have often been thought of as a sect or cult.... But Adventists have always looked upon themselves as being in solidarity with historic Christianity.... Seventh-day Adventists hold to the central core truths of Christian faith.... [they] meet all the criteria of an authentic church. The idea of cult or sect does not apply" (North American Division 1992, pp. 71-72).

Lawson (1995b) cited other evidence of change: the accreditation of Adventist educational institutions, the increasing orthodoxy of Adventist medicine, the seeking of better relations with government and other churches, the professional public relation services, the softening of the church's position on noncombatancy in the military, and the down-playing of apocalyptic proclamation.

In another recent article Lawson (1995a) compared the history of Seventh-day Adventists with that of Jehovah's Witnesses. Both began as apocalyptic sects with pre-millennial expectations, both rejected political participation, both held theological positions that put them out of step with the demands of the state, and both were in high tension with the surrounding society. Yet over time they followed very different trajectories, with Witnesses increasing their intransigence and remaining an "established sect" while Adventists have traveled a considerable distance toward denominationalism.

Lawson identified several factors to account for the difference. Adventists have had more upward mobility, their leadership has been more concerned with their public image, they have exhibited a growing tolerance for doctrinal diversity, and they have been more likely to be reconciled to a delay in the Second Advent and to avoid date-setting. Adventists retain more hereditary members than Witnesses do, and they have reduced the intensity with which they indoctrinate new converts, choosing to emphasize growth. While Witnesses have remained in tension with the state, Adventists have increasingly sought accommodation, particularly in respect to military service in times of war. An important factor appears to be

the Adventist emphasis on higher education with its 85 colleges and universities while “Witnesses have neither educational institutions nor a professional clergy, and they actively discourage their members from pursuing higher education” (Lawson 1995a, p. 369).

While a number of ways of seeking to determine where a religious group lies on the sect-denomination continuum have been noted, the present research concentrates on one factor. Is the group more likely to emphasize the basic doctrines of mainline Christianity or its own group-specific doctrines? Obviously, this question is related both to the area of exclusive legitimacy and to the amount of tension with other religious—especially Christian—communities.

Of some interest in this connection is a recent article by the president of one of the world divisions of the Adventist church entitled “The People of God” (Wiklander 1995, p. 14). “The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not imply that we are God’s people based on a different covenant [the new covenant in the cross of Jesus Christ]. The prophetic calling of our church does not replace the covenant in Christ, but has its only foundation there! . . . Where, then, does our uniqueness as a people of God come into the picture? Where is our specific identity? . . . Our only uniqueness would then be this: being closer to God. In other words, that of a growing spiritual quality based on God’s eternal character of love.”

While not denying a sense of prophetic mission, this statement seems to give priority to basic Christian experience centered in the cross. To pursue this line of thinking this study examines the responses of delegates attending the World Session of the Adventist church in 1995.

METHODOLOGY

The General Conference Session with delegates from the entire world field is the highest authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. First organized in 1863 when the membership was mostly confined to a few states in the northeastern and midwestern United States, the session was held yearly until 1891. As the membership increased in size and became more widely distributed, the session was held every two years from 1893 to 1905. The spread of the church overseas made the gathering of representatives more difficult and expensive so the sessions were moved to every four years (with some disruption during

the two World Wars) from 1909 to 1970. Increasing size and expense influenced the church to hold the general session every five years starting in 1975.

In contrast to the beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism, today more than 90 percent of the church membership resides outside of the United States and Canada, and that percentage continues to rise. The 1995 session was held in June and July in Utrecht, the Netherlands, with approximately 2,600 delegates certified to represent Adventism around the whole world. This far-reaching organization is divided into 14 geographical areas.

Traditionally, the principal duties of the session are to elect officers and other leaders, to hear reports from the various entities that comprise the group, and to transact other business that may come before it, such as changes in the constitution and by-laws and changes in the *Church Manual*, the official policy book for operations. However, in planning for the 1995 session, it was decided to conduct a survey of the assembled delegates in which they would be asked to indicate priorities both for emphasis and for financial support during the coming quinquennium.

Developing the questionnaire and preparing for its administration took about a year and included a number of focus groups and extensive consultation with Adventist officials. The instrument was translated into six languages in addition to English and sent to each registered delegate in advance. Survey forms were then collected in Utrecht and mailed to the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University for processing. Out of a total of 2,341 delegates from all parts of the world who actually registered at the session, 2,011 questionnaires were received, constituting a response rate of 86 percent.

It is important to note that delegates to a General Conference world session—while they come from every area of the world in which Adventists have a presence—are not representative of the ordinary member in the pew. The largest contingent are officers in various regional headquarters of the denomination and representatives of Adventist institutions. Some pastors are sent along with a relatively small number of lay members. The latter, who are chosen by regional judicatories, tend to be influential professional or business people.

Thus 81 percent of the 1995 delegates were denominational employees, and 88 percent were male. The delegates were a well-educated group; 80 percent were college graduates, and 48 percent

held a graduate degree. Therefore, as the findings from this research are presented, it should be kept in mind that these are the opinions of the leaders—those involved in the decision making bodies. The views of ordinary members might well be more sectarian though that possibility cannot be determined from the present data.

The questionnaire was lengthy—197 questions divided into 11 areas plus demographics. For the purpose of this paper material from only two areas will be considered because they reflect the issue under examination: Unity in the World Church and Fundamental Beliefs.

RESULTS

Unity in the World Church

The instructions read: “The Adventist church is a world church with great diversity among its membership. How can we achieve the unity Christ prayed for? What is the ‘glue’ that holds us together? The list below contains some possible factors that promote this unity. Please indicate how important each is on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = not essential to unity in the world church, and 5 = absolutely essential to unity.” The instructions were followed by 30 items for rating. Table 1 displays the top ten choices with the percentages of those who chose number 5—“absolutely essential to unity.”

The delegates apparently believed that the most important factors for holding the world Adventist church together are not organization, structure, or common practices but *experience* and *beliefs*. The first

Table 1. Factors for Unity in the World Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Factor	Absolutely Essential
Faith in Jesus Christ	84.2%
Being filled with the love of Christ	83.2%
Ministry of the Holy Spirit	80.1%
A common hope in the Second Advent	79.4%
The Sabbath	76.7%
The 27 fundamental beliefs	65.5%
A common mission	53.6%
The writings of Ellen White	49.4%
Our understanding of end-time events	49.4%
The Sabbath school lessons	45.4%

organizational factors did not appear until number 12 in the rankings (the *Church Manual*) and number 13 (universal system of church organization). Last on the list were General Conference institutions of higher education, unified offering appeals, interlocking decision making processes and personnel, visits to the world field by denominational leaders, and inter-division workers. These each received less than 14 percent of “absolutely essential” ratings.

The top three rankings were: faith in Jesus Christ, being filled with the love of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Delegates put the core teachings of mainstream Christianity ahead of denominational specifics. This emphasis also received support when examined by the fourteen world areas. Faith in Jesus Christ ranked first in four areas and second in six others. Being filled with the love of Christ ranked first in six areas and second in three others. The ministry of the Holy Spirit placed second in four areas of the world and third in four others. In spite of their regional and cultural diversity, delegates believed the world church can find unity because the members are brothers and sisters in Christ. The leadership of the denomination in all geographical areas emphasized common Christian beliefs as the core to church unity.

Distinctive doctrines are still important. In fourth, fifth, and sixth place were a common hope in the Second Advent, the Sabbath, and the 27 fundamental beliefs. But even here, sectarian emphasis is muted. Many Christian faiths would affirm the Second Advent of Christ (though they might view time and manner somewhat differently), and a day of rest and worship has widespread appeal. Most of the 27 fundamental beliefs are in line with historic Christian thinking.

Those factors that would more likely set Adventists apart from mainline denominations such as the writings of Ellen White and their understanding of end-time events do not appear until eighth and ninth on the list and were rated as absolutely essential to unity by only about half of the delegates.

Thus when delegates were asked about those things most essential to holding a world church together, they chose, in general; first, basic Christianity; second, teachings distinctive to Adventism; and finally, organizational structures. Since this question might be taken as a measure of their self-identity, it indicates that the leaders of Seventh-day Adventism wish to identify themselves first of all as a Christian church. These data indicate considerable movement from the group’s sectarian roots toward status as an approved denomination.

Furthermore, the perception appears to be universal among the leadership. The three top items (faith in Jesus Christ, being filled with the love of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit) were combined into a scale that measured evangelical outlook. No differences by gender, age, or level of education were found on the scores of the scale. Those who lived in North America were slightly higher than those who resided in the rest of the world on this scale, and those employed by the church were higher than the lay delegates. However, while these two differences were statistically significant—due to the large sample size—the actual magnitude was very small, explaining about 1 percent of the variance in the evangelical outlook scores, making the differences meaningless. Essentially, support for basic Christianity was found in all world divisions, by both genders, and by all age groups and educational levels.

Fundamental Beliefs

A separate section of the questionnaire concerned the emphasis needed on the various doctrinal teachings of the church. Instructions read: “Below is a list of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. [For a comprehensive discussion of each of these 27 doctrines see Ministerial Association (1988)] How would you rate the emphasis that the workers in your field give to each doctrine in their teaching and writing? Use a four-point scale where 1 = needs less emphasis; 2 = about the right emphasis; 3 = needs more emphasis; 4 = needs much more emphasis.” Table 2 displays the 10 doctrines out of the 27 for which the highest percentage of delegates chose number 4, “needs much more emphasis.”

Table 2. Ten Fundamental Beliefs Needing Much More Emphasis

<i>Fundamental Belief</i>	<i>Much More Emphasis</i>
The experience of salvation	44.2%
The Second Coming of Christ	42.8%
Stewardship and tithing	42.3%
Marriage and the family	37.2%
Unity in the body of Christ	37.1%
The remnant and its mission	36.8%
God the Holy Spirit	34.9%
Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary	34.5%
Christian behavior	33.6%
The Sabbath	33.5%

It is noteworthy that the delegates felt that the doctrine of salvation needed the most emphasis. This teaching ranked first in nine of the fourteen world areas and third in three others. This may indicate a concern that people may become Adventists without understanding basic Christianity. It emphasizes the conclusion of the previous section that mainstream, core Christian doctrine takes precedence over denominational specifics—important as the latter are—in the minds of the delegates.

The stewardship inclusion may indicate concern for weakening financial support of the church's mission and would probably find a sympathetic response from many financially hard-pressed denominations. Two of the top five concerns dealt with relationship issues (marriage and family and unity in the body of Christ) which parallel mainline interests. Incidentally, marriage and the family was ranked first by delegates from Inter-America (Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and a few countries in northern South America) and second by those from the Southern Africa Union, and by all female delegates.

Not until sixth place (the remnant and its mission) and eighth place (Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary) do more sectarian teachings appear, and, even here, they were given the highest priority by only slightly more than a third of the delegates.

At the lower end of the scale (23rd to 27th) are two that deal with conditional immortality (death/resurrection and human nature), the doctrine of the millennium and the end of sin, and two that concern the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's supper). All five are among those teachings that make Adventists distinct from many mainline denominations. Adventists are not alone in their belief in “soul sleep,” but they are certainly in the minority. Their eschatological vision of the millennium and the final disposition of evil is unique. While the rites of most Christian churches include baptism and the eucharist or communion, Adventists differ from the majority of them by holding to believers' baptism by full immersion and belong to a small minority that precede the Lord's supper with a foot-washing service.

Though Adventists hold firmly to all five of these sectarian doctrines, it is evident that they do not wish to place the stress on them that they accord to basic Christian teachings like salvation through Jesus Christ. Only 12 percent to 17 percent of the delegates rated these five as “needs much more” emphasis. As in the survey

section on unity, the delegates seemed to value the common core of Christian doctrine above sectarian teachings that accentuate their differences.

To assess how pervasive this emphasis is, ratings on the belief "the experience of salvation" were used as the dependent variable in a multiple regression analysis employing the same demographic variables described above as predictors. Because of the large number of cases, two independent variables were found significant. Those employed by the church and those with less education tended to call for more emphasis on salvation, but the multiple *R* was only .067, explaining less than 1 percent of the variance. In practical terms, the affirmation of the doctrine of salvation cannot be differentiated by social characteristics of these respondents.

CONCLUSION

Even if it be accepted that a single dimension distinguishes sects from denominations—the state of tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment (Stark and Bainbridge 1985)—a variety of tests of this tension are conceivable. Lower social and economic status, infrequency of higher education among the membership, absence of a professional ministry, simple organizational structure, exclusive claim to legitimacy, intolerance of doctrinal diversity, apocalyptic proclamation, and hostile or indifferent relations to government are prime candidates as tests. The review of literature has demonstrated that while all of these characteristics marked Seventh-day Adventism in its beginnings, most are no longer, or only minimally applicable.

The present research has focused on a slightly different test. We asked what kind of teachings and related factors a representative group of Adventist world church leaders would choose to emphasize. In assessing factors essential for unity in a world church delegates placed emphasis on basic Christian teachings like faith in Jesus Christ, being filled with the love of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit ahead of group-specific doctrines and organizational structure. Asked which of their 27 fundamental beliefs needed the most emphasis, delegates selected the experience of salvation and tended to put sectarian views toward the end of the list.

Actually, this shift in thinking first surfaced publicly at the 1888 World Session held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Two of the younger ministers made a series of presentations on "Righteousness by Faith in Jesus Christ." They urged that this reformation teaching should take central place in Adventist theology, and they were supported by the church's prophetess, Ellen White. The established leaders generally opposed this message, arguing that it would diminish the special and distinctive truths that Adventists had been commissioned to proclaim to the world. The tension ran high and has continued to some extent to the present time. Detailed accounts of the 1888 General Conference Session and its aftermath can be found in Olson (1966), Froom (1971), and Knight (1987).

As has been noted, leadership is generally ahead of the laity in the journey from sectarianism to denominationalism. The drive of the group which began as a sect towards acceptance and understanding with the larger culture is greatly catalyzed by the level of education of its leaders (Finke and Stark 1992). Greater education brings with it a process of questioning and critical thinking which sometimes forces distinct sectarian ideas to accommodate to more generally acceptable ways of understanding reality. Thus, peculiar religious beliefs become less important as religious scholarship questions the veracity of long-held positions. The constraining forces for acceptability often ultimately force distinctive religious ideas that are not shared by other Christian groups to the background while ideas that are shared in common with established denominations may receive greater prominence.

Religious leaders thus are more prone to have not only more education but also to be more concerned with questions of credibility and public acceptability in the larger culture. As sectarian leaders reduce the level of tension by diminishing the emphasis of unique beliefs, they help to accelerate the movement of the sect towards a denomination. This is particularly true in a centralized authoritarian form of church polity.

When religious leaders have the power to hire or fire individuals and to set the rules and role expectations for the ministry, they exert strong influence on local congregational leaders. In such circumstances individuals who may express ideas that move them from a position of acceptable doctrinal understanding to a more eccentric sectarian mode may find themselves in a deviant position. Sectarian religious leaders' desire and drive towards cultural

acceptability can influence employee constraints and expectations to ensure that a positive and acceptable image of the group is portrayed to the public.

Today a certain proportion of Adventism would like to retain its sectarian distinctiveness. This conservative wing would argue that rejecting the evils of society and the false teachings of other churches and proclaiming the special message of "present truth" is the way to be faithful to their historic calling. Others, however, prefer to emphasize their continuity with mainline Christianity and seek acceptance as Gospel Christians by their communities. This study suggests that the present leadership of the church tends to take a balanced position, not identifying with either extreme. The delegates apparently felt that the Adventist members have not fully understood the basic Christian Gospel and that this lack of understanding needs correction. But while they would put this as a top priority, they would still retain and proclaim the teachings that make Adventism distinct. This proclamation, however, could be done within a structure and in a manner that will identify the denomination with the wider family of Christian churches.

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SPIRITUALITY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CLERGY: SURVEY RESULTS

Keith M. Wulff and Deborah A. Bruce

ABSTRACT

This article presents a description of the spiritual lives of African-American clergy in two Presbyterian denominations—the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America—using data from questionnaires sent to all such clergy in the two denominations. The typology of prayer developed by Margaret Paloma is used to examine the prayer lives of these clergy. Survey responses of African-American clergy are compared to those of a random sample of all clergy in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). When possible, comparisons are also made with responses of a random sample of members of that denomination. Relationships between congregational involvement in social action and pastors' prayer styles were also examined.

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