

Bruinsma - Champion of Rome

GREAT CONTROVERSY, CHAPTER 35 VS. REINDER BRUINSMA

There is a new name for our *Senior Sabbath School Quarterly*. On the top of the front cover, it is called the *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* while on page 3 it is called *The Adult Bible Study Guide*. Because many books and other publications today are called “Guides,” in order to avoid confusion, we will continue calling it the *Senior Sabbath School Quarterly*.

The following statement is from the current *Senior Sabbath School Quarterly*. (All bold and italics is ours.)

“**This quarter’s Adult Bible Study Guide was written by Reinder Bruinsma**, a native Dutchman and longtime church worker (including six years, from 1995-2001, as **executive secretary of the Trans-European Division**). **He is also the author of 15 books** in both English and Dutch. In 2001, he returned to his native Netherlands, where he serves as the **president of the Netherlands Union**. His pastoral concern about practical Christianity, **about how we treat others**, comes through in every lesson this quarter.”—*Senior Sabbath School Quarterly, July-September, 2004, p. 3.*

This latest quarterly, titled *Religion in Relationships*, is about the need for us to be close friends with everyone around us. **Because Bruinsma has a special interest in this topic, he was selected as the one to author this Quarterly.**

Upon learning that it was Bruinsma whom the General Conference assigned to write this *Quarterly*, one individual (the wife of a husband-and-wife team who met Bruinsma prior to going overseas to fill a mission appointment) wrote the following statement:

“Dr. Oosterwal and Reinder Bruinsma were the ‘main men’ **in 1992** [when] we attended **Mission Institute** [a General Conference orientation session for those about to go overseas to mission stations]. Since we were going to Uganda to manage the Upper Nile Press, **Reinder made it a point to explain to us what our mission [reason for being there] would be.**

“He shared the story of the pope’s visit to the African country in which he had been a press manager. He [Bruinsma] said **the Catholics came to his press to have the ‘welcome’ posters and flyers [welcoming the pope] printed** because his press was known as the best in the country.

“Reinder told us that he believed it was his Christian duty to do this as an expression of goodwill, **and of the brotherhood of believers**. There were a number of other stories, but this one particularly made us

ponder prayerfully how to respond.

“**He repeatedly let us all know that we were not to see the Catholic Church in the light of the ‘outdated’ comments in the Spirit of Prophecy**, but that we should ‘realize’ that **it [the Adventist denomination] is now just another Christian church seeking to bring the gospel** to its people in the best way it knows how.

“Then, at the end of the Institute, after the Agape Feast [a non-Adventist term for the communion service] and all, Reinder set us up with a movie. Just before he had the lights turned down, he said, **‘If you remember nothing else that you have been taught here at Mission Institute, I want to be sure that you get the message of this movie.’**

“What followed was a very well-done depiction of a young Catholic priest who, for various reasons, was ‘destined to fail.’ One of his problems was TB [tuberculosis] or some such terminal illness. He would not settle for being sent home to die, so they finally gave him a parish in an Eskimo village where there was nothing but animosity for the Catholic Church.

“The movie showed touching portrayals of various efforts on the part of the young priest to get next to the natives. **Finally, at a funeral, the priest ‘realized’ that in order to reach the people, he needed to participate in their spirit-ceremonies** [demonic ritual services honoring and praying to their departed relatives], which he promptly began to do.

“Eventually the people were letting the priest do his Catholic rites at funerals **because he also performed their spirit rites**. Soon the church was filled. There was warmth and love all around. And, when the priest finally succumbed to the terminal illness he had, the people came to the church and gave him a good Catholic funeral, **then took his body out and committed it to the spirits**. The last part of the movie included shots of various ones who had become the friends of the priest, happily expressing their ‘knowledge’ that he was with them in relation to their traditional understandings of whatever happens to someone after they die.

“**As the lights came up, Reinder stood at the front and said, ‘Go and do thou likewise.’**

“Oh, for the record, when they gave us our evaluation sheets at the end of Mission Institute and asked for our thoughts on what was covered, we did write that we were most disappointed in the ecumenical emphasis to the training. I was a little less than tactful as I wrote:

“ ‘If the Catholics are doing such a fine job of evan-

gelizing—and if their methods are, indeed, the model, then why don't we just let them do it? They have lots of money and lots of willing members. Why should we struggle and sacrifice to go to their lands to take our little drop of the water of life—if they already have got it so well taken care of?"

"Needless to say, I am not studying this quarter's lessons. I find it impossible to do so with an open mind."—*A faithful Adventist, September 12, 2004.*

Another faithful believer (whose name you might know), upon reading the above statement, made this comment:

"Your story about Reinder Bruinsma is not surprising. **I well remember his *Spectrum* article in the Summer 1999 issue, in which he openly attacked the fundamental SDA position on the papacy being the Antichrist.** How the man can continue to hold any position in the denomination, without suffering proper church discipline, is a scandal of horrific proportions.

"If the right thing were done with Dr. Bruinsma, on the basis of inspired counsel as well as the Church Manual, he would lose his ministerial credentials and be disfellowshipped. The fact that such a man is permitted to write a *Sabbath School Quarterly*, and to have books sold at the ABC, is a tragic indicator of the institutional paralysis and lax conviction—concerning which the faithful must rise up and demand accountability."—*Statement, September 12, 2002.*

I decided to examine that *Spectrum* article; and this is what I discovered:

First, there was the editorial note about his article, which said this:

"Reinder Bruinsma is the secretary of the Trans-European Division. **He received his B.D. Hons. and Ph.D. in theology from the University of London.** An author in English and Dutch, **he has published numerous articles and ten books.** His most recent English book is *It's Time to Stop Rehearsing What We Believe and Start Looking at What Difference It Makes* (Idaho: Pacific Press, 1998)."—*Spectrum, Summer 1999.*

It is significant that Bruinsma obtained a doctorate in theology at an outside university. I know of no Adventist Bible teacher who has done that — without becoming radically unbalanced in his teaching. Two such examples are Desmond Ford, who obtained a theology doctorate at the University of Manchester, England, under F.F. Bruce, and Samuele Bacchiocchi, who got his (after a five-year course; most doctoral programs are two years after a one-year master's degree!) at the oldest Jesuit spy training school in the world: the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy.

Those who have read my book, *Broken Blueprint*, know that **our men who attend outside universities frequently come back and teach our youth and future ministers the assorted doctrines of Babylon.**

Notice the name of Bruinsma's lengthy book title, mentioned above. It hints at his basic theme: It is not what we teach that matters, but whether we are mixing well with others.

Bruinsma appears to have all the credentials of a card-carrying Jesuit spy, infiltrated into our ranks to dilute our teachings and bring us back to Rome. I would like to know where he got that Jesuit training film, which Rome prepared for its novitiate priests? There is no way that a faithful Advent believer would ever come across such a film. Only one who works closely with Catholic leaders could know about its existence. And only a faithful Catholic would show it to our people and encourage them to follow its directives.

Bruinsma's *Spectrum* article is titled *Adventists and Catholics: Prophetic Preview or Prejudice? I carefully read the article. Here is a brief summary of what it contains:*

It is only because of prejudice, inherited from earlier Americans, along with unfortunate statements printed in the book, *Great Controversy*, that our denomination is opposed to Catholicism. We need to put away those outdated nineteenth century prejudices and accept the fact that Catholicism has indeed changed—for the good—and is now a respected and honorable Christian church. Because of our rejection of Rome as a good friend, we are confronted with a serious problem: It is only because of our prejudice against Catholicism that we are rejected from fellowship by the other denominations. They have discovered that Rome is a good friend. When will we accept the fact and extend the hand of warm fellowship? Fortunately, our leaders are moving in that direction.

Here are several quotations from his article:

"Official Adventist prophetic interpretation has not undergone any dramatic change in recent history . . . **The traditional arguments for the anti-Christian nature of Roman Catholicism continue to be heard,** even though they are often more carefully worded at present than in the past. **More and more, however, it is recognized [by our leaders] that the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces a problem. What does it do with end-time prophecies [Great Controversy] that are rooted in a nineteenth-century interpretation of the world?** To understand the problem, it is helpful to review some history."—*Reinder Bruinsma, "Adventists and Catholics: Prophetic Preview or Prejudice?" Spectrum, Summer 1999.*

Bruinsma then discusses how our denominational thinking was molded by nineteenth century American prejudice against Catholicism. **He sorrows over the fact that publication of Ellen White's book, *Great Controversy*, cemented that unfortunate prejudice.** While the other churches, and Americans in general, have abandoned such narrow-mindedness, oddly enough, Adventists still cling to the myth that the Catholics are eventually going to try to injure the Adventist Church and gain control of the world.

“Acceptance of her statements in *The Great Controversy* and elsewhere as inspired pronouncements prevented later Adventism from taking another look at contemporary Catholicism while other Protestants were increasingly prepared to do so . . .

“Her major writings about Roman Catholicism date from the 1880s and 1890s, and thus originated in a climate of Adventist confidence about the reality of the Catholic threat and the imminence of events predicted for decades. **Once she codified those views, it became virtually impossible to reevaluate them critically** without questioning her prophetic authority.”—*Ibid.*

Bruinsma then summarizes our foolish belief:

“However, the [Adventist] message remained basically the same. [They were still teaching that] the Catholic threat had not diminished. The Roman Catholic Church would not rest until its teachings dominated religion in the United States, and, indeed, the world. Once that happened, the final events in Earth’s history would follow quickly. **The basic premise in Adventist reports of developments in Catholicism was that ‘Rome’ would never change.**”—*Ibid.*

“Even in the momentous days of Vatican II (1962-65), when Catholicism underwent enormous change, the Adventist view remained constant, even though B.B. Beach, the chief Adventist correspondent at all four sessions, had relatively positive appraisals of the proceedings.”—*Ibid.*

Research studies on my own part have revealed that, although John XXIII wanted to make some changes, few were actually made; and Paul VI and John Paul II later eliminated most of the innovations. All that remains are a few surface changes.

Once again, Bruinsma returns to the heart of the problem:

“One of the most central reasons for sustained anti-Catholicism, however, was that Ellen G. White had codified these views in her writings. Thus, it would be virtually impossible to reevaluate them critically without questioning her prophetic authority.”—*Ibid.*

Bruinsma, with consummate Jesuitic subtlety (it is very possible they helped him write the article), then presents his conclusion: **He suggests that our denomination can never be accepted by the other denominations until we get rid of our anti-Catholic prejudice** and warmly accept them as close friends. That is an argument calculated to win acceptance by many of our top leaders who are determined to gain acceptance by Protestant and Catholic leaders.

“Conclusion:

“What are the consequences of this unchangeable attitude toward Catholicism? I would suggest that it raises three major questions:

“1. *How does Adventism want to relate to other churches?*

“As the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown, it has become better known and has acquired increased respectability. That is certainly true for many church-affiliated institutions. Still, in spite of more than a century of intense public relations efforts, in many places Adventism has not succeeded in shedding its sectarian image.

“Some view Adventism as a *bona fide* evangelical movement, but others are not so certain. Consultations and dialogue with other religious bodies do occur from time to time, but can only be limited in scope . . .

“Ambiguity about the relationship with other churches is, of course, to a large extent rooted in Adventist eschatology [our teachings of last-day events]. Whatever the actual situation today, Adventist theology clearly teaches that some time soon all other churches will turn against the Adventist Remnant.”—*Ibid.*

Bruinsma then suggests that, fortunately, our leaders are gradually moving away from our historic views of the papacy.

“2. *Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church distancing itself from traditional end-time views?*

“Outside and within the church, many wonder whether Seventh-day Adventism is slowly but surely distancing itself somewhat from traditional views about the end-time and an Adventist Remnant persecuted by other religious bodies.

“The church’s attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church illustrates the dilemma most poignantly. When private individuals, or ‘independent ministries,’ mass-produced excerpts from *The Great Controversy* about the alleged [things written in that book are said to be only “alleged”] anti-Christian nature of Roman Catholicism and then distributed them far and wide . . . [Adventist] **church leaders hastened to distance themselves and the church. Yet the sponsors of these campaigns had, in fact, quoted from a book that the church officially publishes . . .** Adventist church leaders anxiously emphasize that, while the future end-time scenario must be kept in mind, we should not be deterred from having friendly relations with other Christian churches. Their critics, however, see this as a dangerous dilution of the Adventist task to call people out of ‘Babylon.’

“Clearly, this issue is potential dynamite. **Some time soon the church must decide unequivocally whether it is a Christian church**—with its own unique witness—amidst other Christian churches, **or whether it must stand alone and against all other Christian bodies.** That choice may be costly, but the attempt to find a middle road will continue to create serious confusion.”—*Ibid.*

—That sentence is astounding! **Bruinsma is a high-ranking Adventist church leader; yet he is publicly saying that, if we stand with the Spirit of Prophecy, we are not a Christian church!**

Bruinsma continues, alleging that Rome has changed while we recognize that, on every essential point, it has

not! “She is tolerant where she is helpless” (*Great Controversy*, 565).

“3. How should the Seventh-day Adventist Church address the changes that have taken place in Roman Catholicism?”

“. . . **Honesty demands an acknowledgment that in recent decades Roman Catholicism has changed in positive ways in most parts of the world . . . There is much spirituality in the Roman Catholic Church of which Protestants can be envious.** Furthermore, the Catholic Church has formally accepted the principle of religious freedom. It is not fair to suggest that these and other positive developments are just window dressing and must, in fact, be watched with suspicion, or that they should be seen as clever tactics to lull other Christians into sleep while Catholics await a fortuitous moment when they can wipe out other Christians, Adventists first and foremost.

“In criticizing Catholic history, **Adventists should try to be more balanced than in the past** and should avoid offering a simple extension of the often **biased and inaccurate picture that many past Protestants have offered of the medieval Church. Medieval Christianity also had positive and beautiful dimensions.**”—*Ibid.*

All that any thoughtful historian can find in the Dark Ages, in Europe, is ignorant laity bowing in worship to statues, as they finger beads and repeat the same couple of paragraphs over and over again. Priests know the Latin words for the mass, but nothing of the Word of God. Corrupt church leaders, like the monks, are sunken in every kind of vice. Hunted Christians fled for their lives while they left behind their loved ones who did not escape fast enough. Where are the

“beautiful dimensions” to all that?

It is of the highest significance that Bruinsma’s *Spectrum* article is summarized from his doctoral thesis,—which Andrews University printed two years later! So our central training school for future ministers shares in Bruinsma’s views about Rome.

“1. This article is based on the author’s Ph.D. dissertation: ‘*A Historical Analysis of Seventh-day Adventist Attitudes toward Roman Catholicism*’ (University of London, 1993), published by Andrews University Press in 1995 as *Adventist Attitudes toward Roman Catholicism, 1844-1865*.”—*Footnote 1, Ibid.*

What about the current edition of the *Senior Sabbath School Quarterly*? Brief examination indicates that, while Bruinsma wrote the original text, it must have been heavily edited by the principal editor, Clifford Goldstein. Although it leans toward ecumenism, perhaps little of it contains the blatant pro-Catholic sentiments that Bruinsma voices so openly elsewhere. —*vf*

AS WE GO PRESS: “[Regarding people who live together without getting married] In Holland . . . many pastors and members in our indigenous [native Hollander] congregations would tend to be pragmatic about it, to say if the couple is living together in a lasting kind of relationship that has been going on for some time and shows no sign of being temporary, then they could probably be welcomed into the church through baptism.

“But that issue looks altogether different to members of our immigrant [foreign] congregations. They would see merit in using the church discipline tools to try to correct the situation, and might encourage those young people not to seek baptism until their lives were more in harmony with Bible expectations.”—*Reinder Bruinsma, quoted in Adventist Review, September 23, 2004, pp. 12-13.*

“Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence, there is an increasing indifference concerning the doctrines that separate the reformed churches from the papal hierarchy; the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome. The time was when Protestants placed a high value upon the liberty of conscience which had been so dearly purchased. They taught their children to abhor popery and held that to seek harmony with Rome would be disloyalty to God. But how widely different are the sentiments now expressed!

“The defenders of the papacy declare that the church has been maligned, and the Protestant world are inclined to accept the statement. Many urge that it is unjust to judge the church of today by the abominations and absurdities that marked her reign during the centuries of ignorance and darkness. They excuse her hor-

rible cruelty as the result of the barbarism of the times and plead that the influence of modern civilization has changed her sentiments.

“Have these persons forgotten the claim of infallibility put forth for eight hundred years by this haughty power? So far from being relinquished, this claim was affirmed in the nineteenth century with greater positiveness than ever before. As Rome asserts that the ‘church never erred; nor will it, according to the Scriptures, ever err’ (John L. von Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, book 3, century II, part 2, chapter 2, section 9, note 17), how can she renounce the principles which governed her course in past ages?

“The papal church will never relinquish her claim to infallibility. All that she has done in her persecution of those who reject her dogmas she holds to be right; and would she not repeat the same acts, should the opportunity be presented? Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution.”

—*Great Controversy*, 563-564