

AN EVANGELICAL HISTORY OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SPLIT

The enclosed historical review, by a leading evangelical writer (pages 5-12), disproves the oft-repeated claim that no doctrinal sellout occurred in the mid-1950s during the Martin-Barnhouse meetings (generally known as the Evangelical Conferences) with our leaders.

Back in the spring of 1983, the present writer prepared the most complete historical documentary ever done on exactly what occurred in those conferences, along with the aftermath over the next couple decades. An abundance of quotations were included in that 72-page documentary (*The Beginning of the End—Part 1-18*, now in Part Two of our *Doctrinal History Tractbook*).

Yet there continues to be those who will declare that such a doctrinal compromise, by certain of our leaders, never occurred.

With this in mind, it is significant that the summer 1988 issue of the *Christian Research Journal* (the quarterly publication of Christian Research Institute) carried an article, entitled “*From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism*,” by Kenneth R. Samples.

The *Christian Research Institute* was founded and, until his death in June 1989, headed by Walter Martin. He was the man who, almost single-handedly, was able to alternately threaten and bribe certain General Conference leaders into acceding to his demands for a variety of doctrinal alterations.

The concluding portion of this present report consists of a complete reprint of that 15-page historical overview, published from the perspective of evangelicals themselves.

As did our lengthy documentary, Samples’ historical overview dealt not only with the Evangelical Conferences, but all the years since. —Advent believers ought to find it to be very interesting reading.

Frankly, if we only commented on the article, without reprinting it, you would hardly believe the admissions made in it about the source of the changes which have taken place in our denomi-

nation between 1954 and the early 1980s.

This 15-page article, which begins on page 5 of the present 4-tract report, contains several symbols: Asterisks = boldface type. _ = italics. Square = meaning uncertain.

SURVEY OF THE ARTICLE

Page numbers, below, refer to the 15-page article, which we have reprinted on pages 5-16 of this present report.

Pages 1:1 to 7:2 of Samples’ article primarily deals with the Evangelical Conferences.

Page 1:1—It should be mentioned here that, at a meeting on February 22, 1983, in Napa, California (*Beginning of the End, Parts 17-18*), Walter Martin defended his position that he ranks Roman Catholicism as having “orthodox theology,” and is therefore not a “cult.” In contrast, Protestants consider Adventists to be a cult while Martin classified us as heterodox.

1:2-3—**As a result of the Evangelical Conferences, two distinct factions began to split apart within Adventism.**

2:0—Samples, the author of this 15-page article, portrays “evangelical Adventists” (his name for those of us accepting the new theology) as being persecuted and chased out of the Adventist denomination. We, who have lived through the 1980s and into the 1990s, know the opposite to be true.

2:1—Kenneth Samples’ article was prepared in the spring of 1988, and published that summer. Shortly afterward, our new doctrinal book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (SDAB) came off the press; and talk of relabeling us immediately ceased. This is because SDAB had the same doctrinal errors that its predecessor, *Questions on Doctrine* (QD), had (*Sequel to Questions on Doctrine—Parts 1-4 [DH-311-314]*, now in our *Doctrine Tractbook*).

At that 1983 Napa meeting, Martin had disclosed that he was sending letters to our leaders at the General Conference, threatening to relabel us as a “cult,” if they did not squelch the conservative dissidents and reissue *Questions on Doctrine* or prepare a new

doctrinal book which would also contain its evangelical positions. Martin's anxiety ceased when the General Conference published the new doctrinal book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

2:2 to 4:1—This section discusses, from their vantage point, how the doctrinal sellout by certain of our leaders occurred. You will want to read it thoughtfully. It is very possible that Leroy Edwin Froom and Roy Allen Anderson really believed they were doing right in making those compromises. Yet it led to the present split in the denomination. Unfortunately, the General Conference president, Reuben Figuhr, gave them his full backing. This entire history is covered in much detail in our historical documentary, *The Beginning of the End—Parts 1-18*.

The present writer was in attendance at our Seminary in Washington, D.C. during most of that time (1955 to 1958; the Evangelical Conferences ran from 1954 to 1956, with publication of QD in 1957). Close at hand, he learned some of what was taking place, and personally heard Martin speak (in two of the only three sermons he gave in our church). Martin spoke like a battering ram. That, plus his powerful memory, produced devastating effects when he took on our leaders in committee meetings.

Walter Martin demanded that our leaders agree with modern Protestant thinking, make printed admissions of that agreement, and remove certain books from our ABCs (then called Book and Bible Houses) which disagreed with those positions. All this is detailed elsewhere by the present writer.

3:2—Listed in this paragraph are some of the points on which Walter Martin was working to change us. The charge of “**Arianism**” was a straw man; for in our entire history only a relatively few men among us have taught that Christ was created. “**Galatianism**” means salvation solely by obedience to the law, which we do not believe either. We are saved by Jesus Christ, who enables us to keep His Father's law of Ten Commandments.

However, Martin's key objective was to remove obedience to God's law from Seventh-day Adventists. This is where the “**incomplete atonement**” point comes in. Evangelicals maintain that we were all saved 2,000 years ago at the cross, and we now have no responsibility other than to profess faith in Christ.

As for the **human nature of Christ**, we do not believe that Christ was sinful, as our enemies charge; but we do believe that, as our Example and Saviour, His human nature was able to yield to temptation—yet never did. (All sides are agreed that Christ was sinless.)

3:3—Here we find an example of Walter Martin's machine-gun approach to our leaders. He alternated between threats and cajoling, and persuaded them to remove some books from inventory and change

the wording of others.

4:1-2—There were three unique doctrines which our leaders refused to do away with: The sacredness of the Bible Sabbath, a post-Calvary judgment (the investigative judgment), and the authority of Ellen White. **However, the following paragraph reveals there was compromise even on those points.**

4:3—Unfortunately, even on these beliefs our leaders yielded as much ground as they could, in the hope of appeasing Martin. Keep in mind that he ever kept before them the hope of their gaining denominational acceptance as “orthodox” by the Baptists, Pentecostals, and all the rest. It was the glorious reward held out to them for compliance.

Our leaders said that **Sabbathkeeping** had nothing to do with salvation. This, of course, is a basic new theology theme: “Behavior matters not; obedience to the law of God is not necessary.” But this is the heart of the modern religious apostasy! Mankind is anxious to be saved in its sins. It does not want the help of Christ, who alone can enable mankind to keep the Ten Commandments.

5:2-6—Our leaders yielded on the **Spirit of Prophecy** also. They appeased Martin with the idea that the Spirit of Prophecy is only of limited application, only applies to certain people, and is fallible in its assertions.

6:4—The heart of our compromise on the **Sanctuary teaching** is found in the last half of Samples' paragraph. “The primary concern was whether these doctrines minimized Christ's atoning work [as finished, completed, totally done on Calvary 2,000 years ago] or reduced it to an incomplete atonement [which in some manner required something from Christ and/or us thereafter].” If the atonement was finished at the cross—then there is no act on Christ's part, the Holy Spirit's part, or behavior changes on our part needed thereafter. We were saved 2,000 years ago at Calvary.

Thus our doctrinal sellout on the **atonement** was based on our compromising position that the atonement was finished at the cross, and is only being merely applied in some spiritual way to us thereafter.

7:2—“Conditional immortality, annihilation of the wicked, health reform, and the remnant church concept”: The evangelicals were also upset that we did not believe Satan's lie that the wicked shall live forever (*Genesis 3:4*), and that we refused the error that God will burn people for billions of years for a brief lifetime of wrongdoing. They were also bothered by the fact that we liked to live healthfully, and that we believed Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 were really true (that the remnant would keep God's commandments through Christ's enabling strength). But they decided not to make an issue of those four

points.

7:3-14:3—The remainder of Kenneth Samples' article discusses the immense split which occurred in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, following the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.

Of course, this split was not entirely due to the Evangelical Conferences and our subsequent 1957 release of QD; yet the seeds of apostasy were sown in those meetings and in QD—which our leaders printed in order to appease Walter Martin so he would write a good report on us in his 1960 book, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, and his 1965 book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

(The books came about in this way: Over a period of many months, Walter Martin had presented our leaders with a series of pointed doctrinal questions. We (primarily Froom) had written and rewritten replies—until they were acceptable to him. Then it was agreed that our denomination would publish a doctrinal book—with Martin's questions and our replies. The full title of that 1957 book was *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*.)

With the publication of QD, two camps in our denomination slowly began to polarize. One preferred the be-saved-in-your-sins path to heaven; the other contended that Jesus died to save His people from their sins—not in them (Matthew 1:21).

8:1—“Martin . . . reported accurately what Adventists told him they believed.” “[Martin's book] accurately represented their theology in the late 1950s, though . . . acceptance of that theology in SDA was far from universal.”

8:3—“Would Adventism continue in the same direction established under the Figuhr administration in QD, or would the denomination return to a more traditional understanding of the faith?” In other words, would the faithful accept this new-modeling of the faith or remain with our historic beliefs? That was the question.

That which Anderson and Froom started in the 1950s, Desmond Ford carried on in the 1960s and 1970s, with the help of an increasing number of liberal Adventist college teachers (trained in outside universities), and came into full bloom in the 1980s. We live with the shattered results today. At the time of Walter Martin's death, I wrote that he was one of the most influential men in Adventist Church history (*Walter Martin and the Seventh-day Adventist Church [WM-249]* and *Walter Martin and the Scholars: Historic Adventism and Hebrews Nine—Parts 1-2 [WM-250-251]*).

8:4-9:7—Some representative teachings of our liberals are discussed in this paragraph. By the late 1980s, liberal Adventist writers were advocating far more extreme positions than are described here. It is NOT true that H.M.S. Richards, Sr., was a liberal!

That error was published in the final issue of *Evangelica*. Richards was faithful to his death.

9:8-10:7—These paragraphs purport to list the positions of historic Adventists. Here is a more accurate statement of four of those positions:

1 - We are saved by faith in Christ, who enables us to fully obey all that God asks of us in the Written Word. Those who refuse to cooperate will be lost. Every part of our salvation is accomplished by Christ in us and through us. To Christ be all the glory. He alone forgives our past and enables us to obey Him in the present.

2 - Jesus took not the nature of Adam, but the nature of his descendants (Hebrews 2:16). He took our nature and was tempted, but never yielded. He was sinless, never sinful. Because He never dallied with temptation, He had no evil in His mind.

4 - Living in Christ, as His loving, obedient children, we have full assurance. But, if we choose to forsake Him tomorrow, then we will have no assurance in our rebellion. Why should we?

5 - There are not two levels of inspiration. **As does the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy contains authoritative, divinely given information** which we need. However, in initially presenting our beliefs to those not of our faith, we should use the Bible. Our beliefs are clearly presented in the Bible.

11:2—Sample correctly identifies salvation and authority as the two key issues. (1) Do we have to cooperate with God in order to be saved, or is it done entirely apart from us? (2) Does the Spirit of Prophecy have any doctrinal and standards authority in our lives, or are they just nice books?

11:3—We have elsewhere written on Paxton (*Loma Linda Dialogue [FF-4]*) and Brinsmead (*Examining Brinsmead's "Re-examined" [FF-32]*).

11:4-12:1—Ellen White did not plagiarize! The present writer has dealt with this issue extensively in his book by the same name.

12:2-4—For a lengthy discussion of Desmond Ford, his history and teachings, see the *New Theology Tractbook*.

13:2-14:3—Kenneth Samples concludes his article by noting that evangelicals everywhere welcome with open arms those Adventists who believe as they do. Regarding historic Adventists, Samples implies that those who regard Ellen White's writings as an “infallible interpreter” are not very acceptable. According to him, those of us who believe that Jesus can take away our sins are “theologically bankrupt.” Laughably, he says we do not have assurance! **The new theology may imagine they have assurance in sin, but we have assurance in Christ our indwelling, enabling Righteousness.**

Thank God, that there is still a small remnant in this world who fit the description of Revelation 12:17 and 14:12!

The following letter was written by Walter Martin to an Adventist Bible teacher, in response to a letter he sent him in January 1980 (italics ours):

“December 9, 1980

“Dear Brother ___:

“I am sorry for a late reply to your letter of last January, but my schedule has been horrendous. As I stated in my *Eternity* [magazine] articles and Dr. Barnhouse stated in his editorial, and as I have further stated in [my books] *The Truth about Seventh-Day Adventism* and *The Kingdom of the Cults*, representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination with the full approval of Reuben Figuhr, then president, entered into lengthy dialogue with myself, Dr. Barnhouse, and Dr. George Cannon for the purpose of ascertaining Seventh-day Adventism’s agreement or disagreement with historic Christianity. Dr. Roy Allan Anderson, Dr. W.E. Read, Dr. LeRoy Froom, and Dr. Unruh referred our dialogues to selected members of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in Washington and to Reuben Figuhr. When the book, *Questions on Doctrine*, was published, it was stated that it represented historic Adventism as understood by the leaders of the church at that time. The book was in response to the questions I addressed to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The current editor of the *Ministry*, who is maintaining that what went on in those dialogues and the material that was printed was merely the interpretation *Eternity* magazine placed upon it, is not only woefully ignorant, but he apparently can’t read. “Barnhouse and Martin” didn’t say what your leaders said, Barnhouse and Martin reproduced exactly what they said; and after they had read it, as the book, *Questions on Doctrine*, and my book accurately represents it all.

“It is sorry to see after such a short period of time that some leaders of Adventism have not only short memories, but are now attempting to say things which are blatantly erroneous.

“If this dialogue must be public once more, I shall be happy to produce the documentation. Dr. Roy Anderson is still alive as is Dr. Unruh. This was not a matter of interpretation. This was a matter of very thorough documentation and the editor of the *Ministry* had better start doing his homework or his attitude will further what is now a growing schism within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

“One cannot simply have his cake and eat it too. Either the Seventh-day Adventist denomination stood behind the book, *Questions on Doctrine*, or they printed it under false pretenses. I do not accept the latter; and all the evidence is in favor of the former. You may consult Dr. Anderson if you wish. He is an honorable man with a good memory; and if we have to get down to the area of factual data, the editor of the *Ministry* will not be very successful in defending this double talk.

“With appreciation for your correspondence and a continuing interest in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, I remain,

“In the Fellowship of our Lord,

“Walter Martin.”

The following are excerpts from Walter Martin’s February 22, 1983, lecture at Napa, California:

“It was agreed that my book, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism*, would be released in Seventh-day Adventist bookstores. [According to their agreement, TASDA was to be released simultaneously with QD, but, for some unknown reason, TASDA was not published until three years later.] It was agreed that we would push their volume in evangelical bookstores, so that more than four-thousand stores could get the information, and get it through the Adventists and through the evangelicals. It was not a tiny project. It was a great project. It had the support of the president of the General Conference and the committees he personally appointed. We had cooperation from everybody in attempting it. It was not considered to be a new statement of faith but an expansion of what they considered to be historic Seventh-day Adventism.

“Now we learned early on in our discussions that there was a division in Seventh-day Adventism that had to be recognized. There was a lunatic fringe that believed doctrines that appalled even the Adventists. And I came in one day with a suitcase, literally a suitcase, full of publications from Adventist publishing houses. Before I opened the suitcase, I said to my brothers on the committee, ‘Do you know that your denomination teaches these things?’ And I listed them, and they were appalled. I said, ‘I have the mark of the beast’—and they looked at each other and said, ‘Impossible!’ I said, ‘Well, I have.’ I said, ‘I have been told that by three Adventist publishing houses.’ ‘No! [they exclaimed]. I said, ‘Yes!’

“I said, ‘It gets even worse brothers. It says here in your publications that Jesus didn’t complete the atonement on the cross. It says here in your publications—and I went down the line on the subject. ‘Impossible!’ [they replied.] I said, ‘Alright, look in the suitcase.’

“So I put the suitcase up on the table and spread out about two hundred documents. And they spent a couple of days going through the documents. When they came back, they said, ‘We certainly have to do something about it immediately.’ I said, ‘Good! But this is what is confusing the whole evangelical world and this is what is confusing the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. You’ve got to speak with one voice on the great foundations of the gospel. You’ve got to speak with one voice so the sheep, the people, can hear it. And there are problems. You must face them.

“They were very responsive, and we entered into work in earnest. *Questions on Doctrine* was published. It was a great success. More than 150,000 copies went forth. . . .

“There are some important representatives of Seventh-day Adventism who are at this point beginning to move the denomination back from where they came in 1957.

“This group believes that Jesus Christ had a sinful human nature. This group believes that the atonement was

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not completed on the cross. This group believes that Ellen G. White is not only a prophetess of God, but that Ellen G. White was an infallible interpreter of the Bible. . . .

"It is therefore very important to understand that our Seventh-day Adventist brothers and sisters, who want to stay with *Questions on Doctrine*, are sticking with what I was told, and Dr. Barnhouse was told and the evangelical world was told in 1957 and through 1960. . . .

"The core of the entire problem is the role of Ellen G. White in Seventh-day Adventism and the Sanctuary doctrine, which has generated enormous controversy.

"The claim was made for Mrs. White in *Questions on Doctrine* and in Adventist publications, that she is not a canonical writer of scripture [that Ellen White is not fully inspired in her writings]. . . . that is the claim in *Questions on Doctrine*. . . .

"There is no remnant church, there is only the body of Christ. You can talk about a remnant in the book of Revelation under the tribulation conditions. But we're not in the tribulation. . . .

"The Adventist Church told us in 1956 that Jesus Christ had an absolutely sinless nature [Jesus had a human nature unlike ours; a nature unable to be tempted and sin], and they repudiated publications even by their

own magazines, that said that Christ had a sinful human nature, [that Jesus took a human nature like ours]. . . .

"Now the great threat is that it may go back again. This cannot be permitted to happen if at all possible in the body of Christ. We must fight for the integrity of our Seventh-day Adventist brothers to believe what their church says they believed. That's the real question, whether they stay with *Questions on Doctrine* and back it, will they republish it?

"*Questions on Doctrine* said the atonement was finished on the cross. *Questions on Doctrine* said salvation is solely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That's what it said, and that's good solid Christian theology.

"Today, we are hearing voices within the Adventist denomination that are not teaching good solid Christian theology. They are teaching heresies which the church originally repudiated. . . .

"I'm interested in only one thing: I'm interested in the official position of your denomination, and what it says. I'm willing to accept what they say is their position as I did in 1956, provided it is backed up with documentation. And I think that's fair."

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