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## Genuine Adventists

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# GENUINE ADVENTISTS

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## Ten ways you can pick them out of a 12-million-member crowd

**A**dventists come in all shapes and sizes, all colors, and from every quadrant of the globe. They read God's Word in virtually every language of Earth. They worship in churches seating thousands, in mud huts crowded with 20, and in private homes. They worship to Bach's *Requiem*, played on 4,500-stop pipe organs, and to such hymns as "O for That Flame," "Baptize Us Anew," "Nothing but the Blood," and "How Shall We Stand in the Judgment?"—all sung enthusiastically by our Adventist pioneers. Others sing to guitars and drums, or a *capella*. They sit in pews, on wooden benches, on clean-swept ground. Whether under governments benevolent or persecutive, they worship God each week on his holy Sabbath. With

membership over 12 million, their theology is sifted through many cultures and customs.

So how can you pick a genuine Adventist out of this conglomeration of worship procedures and contemporary ethics? Of musical taste and sermonic preference?

I believe 10 characteristics distinguish real Adventists from the counterfeit. (And with 12 million members, there must be a few!)

**1. Real Adventists have been born twice.**

They share this essential with gen-

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*Many Christians (perhaps all) tend to emphasize one table of the law at the expense of the other. . . . The evil one doesn't mind which table we emphasize, so long as we neglect the other. There's a warning here for people like us who emphasize the importance of theology and the Bible. The word is balance.*

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uine Christians of all centuries and all churches. Adventists, as all real Christians, don't describe themselves as first- or second-generation Adventists or even as third- or fourth-generation Adventists. They assert no special status based on genealogy.

Billy Graham once said that being born in the church doesn't make a person a Christian any more than being born in a garage makes a person a car. To be truly Christian, people have to be born of the Spirit, individually "born again," or more correctly, "born from above" (*an-then*, in John 3:1-5).

Nicodemus was a 42nd-generation Jew (basing calculations on Matthew 1), yet Jesus said even to him, "You must be born again"—"from above" and "of. . . the Spirit." When the Jewish leaders prided themselves that they were "sons of Abraham," John the Baptist told them that God could make sons of Abraham out of stones (see Matthew 3:9). Being a blood relative of an Adventist missionary or administrator or the president of ATS doesn't make one a child of

God. *God has no grandchildren!*

## 2. Real Adventists are "Two Table" Christians.

Let me explain. Adventists know that Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments under two heading representing the two tables of the law—supreme love to God and heartfelt practical love to humankind (see Matthew 22:36-40). Many Christians (perhaps all) tend to emphasize one table of the law at the expense of the other. Some of us Adventists take our obligations to God so seriously that we neglect the needs of our fellow human beings. Others of us treat people kindly enough but take our obligations to God rather lightly. The evil one doesn't mind which table we emphasize, so long as we neglect the other. There's a warning here for people like us who emphasize the importance of theology and the Bible. The word is *balance*.

## 3. They live in consciousness of the Second Coming,

Have you Adventist friends who conclude a discussion of their long-

range plans by saying “If time lasts,” or “If the Lord doesn’t come first”? A real Adventist lives in expectancy of the Lord’s return. Of course, so do others. Dispensationalists, for example, believe Christ could come any minute. If believing Christ is coming soon makes one an Adventist, Dispensationalists are better Adventists than we are!

Real Adventists, however, will explain that their expectation is based on fulfillment of the 1260-day and 2300-day prophecies, the last of which ended in 1844. Most Christians say that the final judgment will mark the very end of time. Adventists are commissioned to tell the world that the judgment marking the end of time *has already begun!* A real Adventist knows that the new ministry Christ commenced in 1844 in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of a special kind of Christian faith.

#### 4. They love to keep the Sabbath spiritually.

Real Adventists love to talk about what they’ll be doing next Sabbath. Of course, so do many devout Christians who keep Sabbath on Sunday. And they may be doing it in the right way. And some Adventists, to be sure, while observing the right day, do so in the wrong way. You would want to learn whether they keep the seventh-day sundown to sundown Sabbath in a spiritual manner. Are

they finding spiritual fellowship with Jesus?

God revealed that he sanctified the Sabbath for a holy purpose (see Ezekiel 20). Further, he reveals that he set *us* apart for a holy purpose! When Israel was commanded to keep the Sabbath holy, God also said, “Ye shall be holy men unto me” (Ex. 22:31, KJV). Truth is, we cannot keep the Sabbath unless we *are* holy.

Through faith, real Adventists partake of the righteousness of Christ. (See *Desire of Ages*, page 283.) You will hear them emphasizing the holiness as well as the joy, the joy as well as the holiness, of the Sabbath. It is no coincidence that the Sabbath truth dawned on our pioneers in 1844, the same year that Jesus entered the most holy place. They perceived that both the Sabbath and Christ’s new sanctuary ministry involved a “special work of purification, of putting away of sin among God’s people” that was to prepare them for the Second Coming.

#### 5. They know what they believe.

It was said in the 16th century that the ordinary citizens of Geneva knew the Bible as well as the doctors (theologians) at the Sorbonne. End-time Seventh-day Adventists will be prepared to make a defense to any one for the hope that is in them (1 Peter 3:15). Settled “into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually,” they “cannot be moved”. (See the

*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 4, page 1161).

Real Adventists will know the Christ of the cross and his forgiveness. They will cherish the promises of his second coming. And they will be well informed about his current ministry. "All need knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time" (*Great Controversy*, p. 488).

#### 6. They love and are nurtured by the Spirit of Prophecy.

An Adventist questions you, and you respond with a quotation from the Spirit of Prophecy. Is the response pleasure or irritation? Do you hear: "You can prove anything from Ellen White"? Or, "All we hear these days is Mrs. White, Mrs. White!?" If so, you haven't met a real Seventh-day Adventist.

Of course, it is possible to emphasize Ellen White at the expense of the Bible. And some have done this. If we have not had the proper balance between the great Light and the lesser light, a correction is all to the good.

Eugene Durand once asked, in an *Adventist Review* editorial: "How much is too much? Surely the Lord didn't grant us this precious gift of the Spirit of Prophecy only to have us ignore it. These inspired writings

for these last days are meant to be read and heeded. But I fear that new members and our youth have not been taught to appreciate them as our older members were" (Aug. 17, 1989, p. 5).

I am delighted at Affirmation 4 in the ATS Constitution and By-laws. It says: "We believe that the writings of Ellen G. White possess more than pastoral authority, and that in them God has spoken as He did through the prophets and apostles of old, to instruct His people concerning His will and the course He would have His people pursue."

Real Adventists believe that the writings of Ellen White are a true manifestation of the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10, KJV). They come from the one who "ever lives" for us (Heb. 7:25).

#### 7. They're grateful to be part of a special end-time people.

Seventh-day Adventists early taught that this movement constitutes, in God's inscrutable grace, the "remnant" of Revelation 12:17. We do believe that God has earnest, sincere believers in other churches. Otherwise, his invitation in Revelation 18:1-4 to "come out of her [Babylon], my *people*," would be meaningless. But the Bible does not identify these earnest believers as the endtime remnant, who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev.

*Keep this in mind: Calling the Seventh-day Adventist movement exclusively God's "remnant" is God's choice, not ours. We didn't invent this movement; God did. He thrust it into our hands and ordered us to run with it! And God hasn't limited membership in the remnant church as if it were an exclusive country club.*

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12:17).

Is this conviction, as some say, "boastful"? Keep this in mind: *Calling the Seventh-day Adventist movement exclusively God's "remnant" is God's choice, not ours.* We didn't invent this movement; God did. He thrust it into our hands and ordered us to run with it! And God hasn't limited membership in the remnant church as if it were an exclusive country club. Rather, the remnant is commissioned to persuade—even to urge—everyone in the entire world to become part of the remnant with us.

There is no place in true Adventism for a drift back into Babylon. "Come out," should be our cry, "that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4, KJV).

The ATS Affirmation 6 has it right: "We affirm. . . the identification of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant movement called by God to proclaim the three angels' messages. . . which prepare the world for the soon return of Christ."

This statement recognizes that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is "the" remnant movement, not "a" remnant movement.

8. They're deeply involved in soul winning.

A Seventh-day Adventist who isn't concerned for the salvation of others is not a real Seventh-day Adventist. Ellen White wrote: "If you once would get the understanding that you are the light of the world, you would feel that a great responsibility rested upon you" (*Review and Herald*, July 26, 1887).

End-time prophecies, as we've noted, our sanctuary message, as we've noted, as well as other evidence shows that we are living in end time, when people who are our contemporaries may be the very ones to receive the mark of the beast and suffer the plagues. If we have not spoken, if we have not warned, if we have not pleaded, they may one day say to us, "Why didn't you warn us!"

Articles in *JATS* [and *PD*] must not be confined to theological

abstractions. If Adventist theology doesn't lead to soul-winning, it isn't good enough for our time and place. Real Seventh-day Adventists, wherever they live, whatever they do, are occupied and preoccupied with soul winning.

### 9. Their lifestyle is based on the Bible.

Not, be it noted, on culture. Not on majority opinion. Not on what other Christians think and do. Rather, on what God has revealed through the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. On what they say about diet. About dress. About recreation. About Sabbath observance. Adhering to God's standards in these and other areas is not old-fashioned legalism.

I hope that ATS will help wean people from the fatal philosophy that lifestyle is to be determined by opinion polls and majority votes rather than by inspired revelation.

"God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith" (*The Great Contro-*

*versy*, p. 595).

Real Seventh-day Adventists, when arranging their lifestyles, will search to know, first, last and always, "What saith the Lord?"

### 10. They long for the beauty of a Christlike character.

"God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' This command is a promise. . . . He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. . . . There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 311).

God does not ask that we achieve his ideal so that we may shut ourselves away in a cloister and revel in what the Holy Spirit has done for us. Rather, it is because, as Edgar Guest put it, most people "would rather see a sermon than hear one any day."

Thus God has given us the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). We play a part in the atonement with him—persuading people to be reconciled to [that is, to be at one with] God through the witness of our lips and life. God wants the world to decide for or against him in part on the basis of what sinners learn about him by seeing his goodness lived out in us. Thank God that

his command is a promise!

Yes, it's in the Bible: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts [yours and mine] by faith, so that "ye [you and I] might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:17, 19). How can we know when this is a reality in us? "The completeness of Christian character is attained"—not when a person merely refuses to do wrong—but "when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384).

So what's a real Adventist?

He, she, is God's grace walking, talking, giving, loving, just as Jesus himself was. Yes, most of us are still works in process. How thankful we can be that when we have accepted the Son, the Father looks down at us and sees only the image of himself!—Born-again, commandment-keeping, Second-Coming anticipating, Sabbath-loving, Bible-believing, Spirit of Prophecy-nurtured, lifestyle-witnessing, Christlike end-time sons and daughters of the remnant. □

## PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

**L**ong ago I memorized an encouraging passage from *The Desire of Ages* on Christ's temptations: "There was in Him [Jesus] nothing that responded to Satan's sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ's humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character."—Mervyn Maxwell, quoting from *Desire of Ages*, p. 123.