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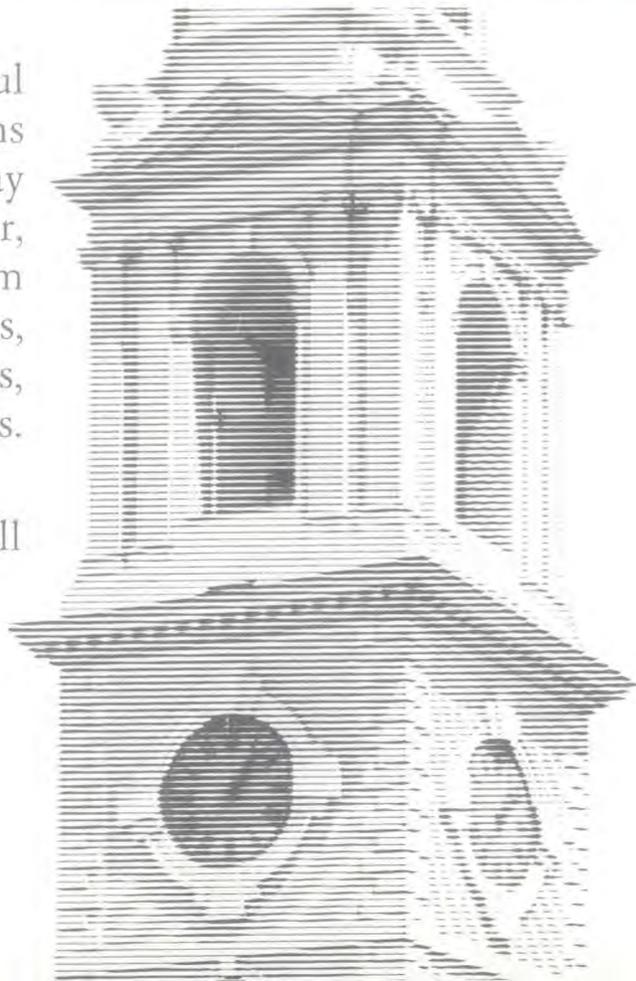
WHAT ADVENTISTS OWE TO OTHER CHRISTIANS



What Adventists owe to other Christians

Most of the beautiful Christ-centered truths which Seventh-day Adventists hold dear, they first learned from the Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics.

By C. Mervyn Maxwell



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS owe a debt of gratitude to their Christian friends of other denominations. Let me tell you the story of how it came about.

Once when Jesus was on earth, His enemies among the church hierarchy dispatched a contingent to arrest Him. Much to their annoyance, the soldiers returned empty-handed—but with a glow of joy on their faces. When the angry priests demanded an explanation, the officers replied, “Never man spake like this man.” They had heard Jesus say things so helpful, so filled with the promise of new life that, at the risk of their careers, they had refused to stop Him.

On another occasion, the Bible says, a crowd marveled at “the *gracious* words which proceeded out of his mouth.”

And gracious words they were. As Jesus touched one after another on the things that concern us most, He treated each one in such an inspiring and wonderful way that people knew He must indeed be the Son of God.

Filled with the Spirit of Christ, the apostles in a similar way passed on to us beautiful Christ-centered doctrines.

And then something went wrong. Paul had warned that after his death false teachers would rise (Acts 20:29, 30), and his words proved too tragically right. Many of the truths told in the New Testament became in the early Middle Ages sad caricatures of their former selves.

For instance, Jesus had taught that anyone who believed in Him could be saved—by faith. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. Paul, too, had taught that salvation was dependent on simple faith alone: “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9, R.S.V.

Never was this fundamental Christian truth totally forgotten. Christian theologians have always spoken of God’s forgiving grace. Yet in the confusion of the Middle Ages anxious souls eager to know how they might find peace with God were often taught that, in addition to believing, they must go on pilgrimages, visit shrines, per-

form penances of many kinds, and above all remain in good relationship with their pastors; for ministers, it was understood, held in their own hands the keys to heaven and hell and could punish anyone they thought did wrong.

When asked by His concerned disciples to tell when the world would end, Christ promised that He Himself would return in the clouds of heaven as all His angels gathered God’s children to begin together the wonderful new age the prophets had foretold. (Matthew 24.) On another occasion in relation to the same subject, He said quietly, “Set your troubled hearts at rest. . . . If I go, . . . I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” John 14:1-3, N.E.B.* Through the Apostle John, Jesus promised on still another occasion that after the second coming all who were overcomers would sit with Him on His throne. (See Revelation 3:21.)

What happened to these promises is almost incredible. Christ’s loving words were so reinterpreted by theologians of the Middle Ages that they made them apply not to the personal coming of Jesus to gather His followers into an eternal kingdom of love and peace, but to the organization of the medieval Christian church, with its hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, and priests ruling as a power structure stronger than the state. Christians were told to look at the bishops seated on their thrones (cathedra) in their churches (cathedrals) as already sharing Christ’s throne. His new kingdom was not one of universal love and peace for every humble believer but of the never-ending struggle between priests and kings, church and state. The literal return of Christ was not denied, of course, but it was thrust so far off into a dim and misty future that it was virtually forgotten.

Just before He died, Christ gathered His disciples about Him to institute a spiritual meal. So that His followers might think of Him every time they ate, Jesus took the bread and wine His disciples were using and passed it around with the words, “This is my body,” “This is my blood,” “Eat and drink in remembrance of me.”

Diaries and devotional works of monks and saints reveal that for many Christians the Lord’s Supper continued throughout the Middle Ages to be an

occasion for intimate spiritual intercourse with a personal Saviour. At the same time, the simple words of Jesus, “This is my body,” translated into the Latin, “*Hoc est corpus meum*,” were believed to turn the Communion bread into the bleeding flesh of Christ, and to make the wine so sacred that laymen were forbidden to drink it lest they accidentally spill the “blood of God.”

Superstitious folk entered churches at midnight to steal away fragments of the flesh of Christ and sprinkle it for good luck among their cabbages. There was little need for sermons or indeed for any worship save at the moment when the bell began to ring and the pastor pronounced, “*Hoc est corpus meum*.” Services were accelerated that this moment of divine encounter might come the quicker, and in the process, illiterate listeners caught his words as, “Hocus-pocus”! Christ’s words of spiritual fellowship became for millions nothing more than magic!

Do these alterations of truth surprise you? Then you should thank God that during the course of history men and women arose who recovered New Testament truth in its original beauty.

One of the first great Christians to begin the arduous task of removing the superstitions that encrusted Christ’s truths was the well-known Morning Star of the Reformation, John Wycliffe. Wycliffe was a busy statesman as well as a theologian. As a loyal Catholic he knew that he loved the Lord Jesus and that Christ was the source of all truth. He begged his fellow Catholics to lay aside various man-made “traditions” and return to the simple words of Scripture. Enemies threatened to kill him. Attacked by a serious illness, he lay apparently dying, and his enemies came to mock him. But he rose up in his bed and declared, “I shall not die, but shall live to make manifest the errors of your ways.” God blessed him. Wycliffe became the father of the first translation of the Bible into English. Hundreds of handmade copies were circulated. Special Catholic preachers called Lollards were sent about England in a distinctive garb, reading this Bible to the people and teaching them to put Scripture above tradition.

Contemporaneous with Wycliffe and well acquainted with his position were John Huss and Jerome of Prague, pro-

fessors in a Catholic university in Bohemia. The special concern of these men centered in Christ's desire that His followers partake of the wine at Communion as well as the bread. As Catholic priests they yearned to bring the blessing of the cup to their parishioners. Thousands of the faithful in central Europe heard their teachings with deepest gratitude. Many of them, along with Huss and Jerome themselves, gave their lives in exchange for their newfound faith in the Lord. They did it gladly. It was because they loved Jesus that they wanted to participate with Him in the Lord's Supper in the way that He intended us to.

A century passed, and Martin Luther appeared. As a faithful Catholic he, too, held in high regard the mystic fellowship with Christ in the Lord's Supper. As a professor in a Catholic university he was required to teach the Bible as the Word of God. But his feelings were disturbed with doubt. So many ritual penances were required of him that heaven seemed impossible and God nothing but an angry judge. "Love Christ?" he asked in a moment of particular anguish; "I hate Him."

Luther's first step to genuine hope came as, in his Augustinian monastery, he studied the writings of Saint Augustine. With intense excitement he one day rediscovered in the Bible itself the magnificent truth that sinners are not saved by works but by simple faith in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seemed as though the gates of Paradise opened wide and he walked right in.

God is indeed a God of love, Luther found, who has chosen us "in the beloved." There is no need for priests to intercede between us and God—save for our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, in our right to approach the Deity for ourselves, every man is his own priest. We are (as the Bible says) a kingdom of priests, a royal nation—and "as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another the divine things. These are the functions of priests, and they cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in Him, to be not only His brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also His fellow-priests. Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith . . . and cry 'Abba, Father!'" ("The Freedom of the Christian Man," *Three Treatises*, p. 290. Revised edition.)

Now Martin Luther accepted the discoveries of John Wycliffe and of Huss and Jerome that the "Bible and



the Bible only" is the rule of the Christian's faith. Everyone knows that at the Diet of Worms in 1521 Luther declared with consummate courage, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. . . . Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."

Luther also accepted what Wycliffe and Huss had discovered, namely that the bread does not turn into the actual body and blood of Christ; that Christ had never intended this. The Lord's Supper for Luther came to be a supreme symbol of Christ's sacrifice for the free forgiveness of all our sins. Thus Luther accepted insights of previous Christians in their rediscovery of truth, added others of his own, and passed them on to millions after him.

All over northern Europe hundreds of thousands of Catholics rejoiced with Martin Luther. Large numbers gave their lives for their faith—Lutheran ministers were hanged from trees in batches—but it seemed to them cheap enough to give all in exchange for the wonderful new light that had come to them about their wonderful Saviour.

In France and Switzerland other devoted Catholics continued their study of the Scriptures and discovered additional truths that had been obscured in the Middle Ages. The most notable of these was of course John Calvin. Cal-

vin is the father of the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and the Baptists today. He was blessed with a mind that was as logical as Luther's was enthusiastic, and in the providence of God it fell to him to systematize the exciting Biblical truths that were newly coming to light.

It is unfortunate that his name has become so strongly associated with the doctrine of predestination. True, he did teach it, but to the people of his time it did not sound as it does to us today. Then people had been taught that their destiny depended on the whims of priests and bishops who held the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Calvin quoted New Testament passages to show that the Christian was indeed predestinated—not by any man, however, but by God *before the foundation of the world*. (Ephesians 1:4.) It is impossible for us today to grasp the immense relief that came over Calvin's congregations when they learned from the Bible that their destiny was so far removed from the fickle whims of pastors that it was settled by God thousands of years before these men were born.

Calvin was not completely correct in his doctrine of predestination. He taught that once a man had been chosen by God for salvation, even the man himself could not choose to be lost. Calvin did not get this from the New Testament but from the theologian Saint Augustine of the early Middle Ages. Nonetheless, when he put man's destiny in the hands of God rather than in the hands of men, Calvin was moving his people significantly closer to the glorious truths of Scripture.

Calvin did something else which in contrast to Luther is more a matter of emphasis than specific teaching: that is, whereas Luther tended to emphasize the truth of forgiveness (justification by faith), Calvin tended to emphasize the promise of victory and of overcoming grace (sanctification by faith). Calvin laid earnestly before his followers the grace of victory over sin and challenged them to live better each day than they had the day before. Whereas Luther recovered chiefly the doctrine about our transformed status before God, Calvin emphasized the transformation of character that God's grace makes possible.

Because a man got drunk yesterday is no proof that he needs to get drunk again today. The fact that you got angry with your wife yesterday is no reason under God that you need to be angry with her again tomorrow. In Christ there is victory over every sin—even over every tendency to sin. And you

can experience this victory.

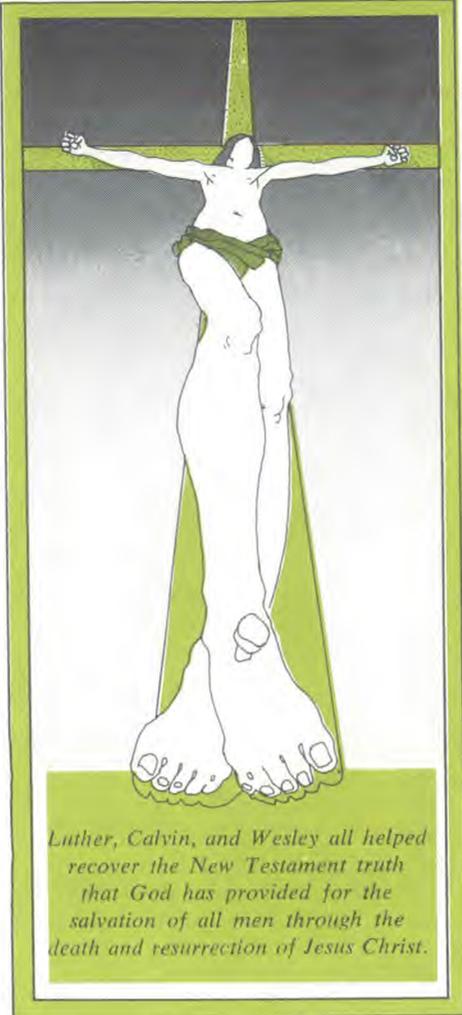
Just as thousands of devoted Catholics accepted Luther's teachings in the northern part of Europe, many at the expense of their lives, innumerable others in other parts of Europe accepted with gratitude the recovered truths Calvin taught them, and many of these, too, gave their lives.

In Britain the followers of Calvin came in time to be known as Puritans because of their deep concern to cleanse the rather immature Christianity characterized by the Anglican domination of the day. To the Puritans we owe the King James Version. In 1603 they petitioned King James I for a new translation for use in worship services, and the king complied, appointing forty-seven scholars of the realm to undertake the task. Eight years later, in 1611, the famous King James Version came off the press. Who can estimate what this translation has done for the glory of God through the centuries!

Meanwhile, on the continent of Europe devoted Catholic laymen and priests continued the study of the Bible, further uncovering forgotten truths. Some discovered that Jesus had told His disciples to teach men the truth and then baptize them; that Jesus had said, "Go . . . and teach . . . and baptize" (see Matthew 28:18-20), and "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

It dawned on them that by sprinkling babies and naming the procedure "baptism," they were cheating their children out of one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives. Millions of people were being called Christians who had never been challenged to think through the claims of their Saviour and make up their own minds about serving Him. Immediately these good folk called on one another to accept "believer's baptism." They invited their fellow Christians who had come of age and had a chance to study the Bible for themselves to make a mature decision in favor of their Lord and then to kneel and have water poured three times over their head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This experience was so significant to those who participated in it that it made them, too, willing to give up their lives when necessary. The first Anabaptist to die was a lovely Swiss girl whose head was held under water in a horse trough in mock imitation of believer's baptism. Others died this way or by being drowned in rivers. Others were burned at the stake, or, more fearfully, barbecued at a stake set up close to a



fire. Still others were laid on open coffins built too small for them as soldiers pounded them in with their hob-nailed boots.

Sometime later other Christians discovered that not only does the Bible invite us to be baptized when we are mature and able to understand, but that it also prescribes a particular mode of baptism. This led to baptism by immersion, explained by Paul to be a symbol of the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? . . . that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:3, 4. Thus came into being the Baptists we know today.

The Baptist movement in America began among Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches in New England after the preaching of the eloquent evangelist George Whitefield. In the early eighteenth century Whitefield labored impassionately to revive the churches both in England and in the British colonies, pleading with them to recover the vitality of New Testament Christianity and warning them to escape the danger of being unconverted themselves and of following unconverted ministers. When some local pas-

tors in New England took offense, their people formed separate congregations of their own. Quickly Baptist revivals swept south to Virginia and the Carolinas, then on to Kentucky and other Southern states. This is why the American South today is so blessed with Baptist churches.

The same century that saw the rise of the American Baptists saw also the birth of the Methodists. Calvin's preaching on predestination had begun to age. No longer was it a glorious contrast to a medieval error. Millions of Protestants did not know the earlier fear of priests that had made God's predestination seem a wonderful relief, and for them the fear arose that God Himself might actually have elected them to be lost! In the providence of God, John Wesley recovered the New Testament truth that salvation is free for all—for "whosoever believeth." (John 3:16.)

Wesley accepted the principles of "the Bible and the Bible only," the priesthood of every believer, the status of the Lord's Supper as a simple memorial bringing through faith the rich presence of Christ, and he accepted the doctrine taught by Calvin that the Christian's life should be a transformation of the old and not marred by continuous repetition of sin. Unfortunately Wesley always held to infant baptism, though nonetheless he allowed that baptism by immersion was a New Testament doctrine and permitted his followers to choose it if they wished. Thus Wesley, like other Reformers before him, accepted the recovered truths others had found, added to them, and passed on a glorious heritage to millions.

From time to time leaders arose among the Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, guiding the people to fasten their hope on the second coming of Christ. Luther certainly considered the second coming a vital doctrine. The Wesley brothers taught their followers to sing its glory. But it was not until the early nineteenth century that the second coming of Christ was restored to the luster it so richly deserves. In the United States there developed a great Second Advent Awakening in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is regrettable that most people associate this awakening with the name of only one man, the Baptist preacher William Miller. In actual fact, more than two thousand in many different denominations, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Quaker, and others, led out in this dramatic reemphasis on the coming of Christ.

And by no means was this move-

ment confined to the United States. Through the ministry of a Jesuit priest, Manuel de Lacunza, and his book, *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, it actually began in Europe and South America among Roman Catholics. In Great Britain as many as six hundred ministers of the Church of England, not to mention other denominations, fastened their hopes on the second coming and preached it with energy during the same period.

It was out of this Second Advent Awakening of the first half of the nineteenth century that the Seventh-day Adventist Church arose. Seventh-day Adventists gratefully accepted the truths which had been recovered at such great sacrifice by so many of their fellow Christians of earlier times, and in the providence of God went on to discover other things which were yet to be restored.

It is well known of course that Adventists recovered the beauty of the New Testament Sabbath. Jesus came at a time when the Jews, the worshipers of the true God, had encrusted the Sabbath with many legalistic traditions, and He showed them by personal example that the Sabbath is a day for joy not only on which it is appropriate to worship together and to find power to diverge from the paths of sin, but on which it is mandatory to do good to others.

During the Middle Ages the beauty of the Sabbath, just like the beauty of so many other New Testament doctrines, was lost sight of. It is not merely that Sunday was employed to take the place of the seventh-day Sabbath, though this was bad enough. In addition stories were invented to compel the superstitious to obey. It was said, for example, that a man who ground grain on Sunday contrary to church law found when he had finished that his hand wouldn't open. It remained closed around the mill handle for two years! Another farmer, who harvested his grain on Sunday, went blind for a year. Such stories were well calculated to establish the Sabbath on fear rather than on love. In God's grace, Seventh-day Adventists have recovered the joy of true Sabbathkeeping based on deep loyalty to and love for a personal Saviour: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

In the Middle Ages people were taught that their eternal destiny depended on what the priest did for them in the sanctuary of the local church, a far cry from what the apostles had taught. In the New Testament they had pointed Christians to our "faithful high priest," Jesus Christ, who has entered



In the early 1800's more than 2,000 ministers of nearly every denomination began to reemphasize the second coming of Jesus Christ.

into the true sanctuary in heaven, "which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Hebrews 8:2.) This heavenly priest, Jesus Christ, is so superior to any earthly priest that He lives forever and is able to save "to the uttermost" those who "come unto God by him." (Hebrews 7:25.) He is a "merciful and faithful high priest," totally dedicated to the salvation of sinners. How pitiful that this wondrous truth was lost! But what joy that Seventh-day Adventists have recovered it! Although other churches have caught a glimpse of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, anyone who has given much attention to Seventh-day Adventism realizes how wonderfully rich and satisfying the New Testament doctrine of Christ's sanctuary ministry really is.

Confronted with the question of what happens to a man when he dies, Jesus said simply that he sleeps. Of Lazarus after his death Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." John 11:11. More than this, Jesus promised that at the second coming He would personally raise every deceased believer to triumphant life. In the Middle Ages, however, it was taught that the unbaptized were condemned to eternal torture in hell and that even *believers* were assigned to purgatory, an intermediate place where Christians were said to be

burned for their sins for an indefinite period prior to advancing to heaven.

Legends were invented to support these theories. A grave in England, for example, was said to rise and lower from time to time, proof positive to the pious that the soul buried therein was suffering the torments of purgatory. When people asked whether they might help their loved ones pass more quickly from purgatory to heaven, they were assigned additional penances. If they asked, "Have we done enough?" the reply was, "No one knows." It became an established doctrine of the church of the Middle Ages that it could not be known how long any particular Christian must suffer in purgatory before being taken to heaven. Thus the living who loved their dead were condemned to endless works.

All through the centuries, as L. E. Froom has shown in his two-volume *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, there have been men who have found in the Bible the truth that death is a sleep and that only the righteous have hope of eternal life; that the *punishment* of sin is eternal, not the *suffering*; that sinners will be eternally separated from the joy of God's presence, not by a life of anguish, but by death once and for all.

It is one of the most satisfying joys of the Seventh-day Adventist to explain this merciful truth to others and to help them to believe that the dead in Christ sleep peacefully until His return.

Seventh-day Adventists exist today and believe the things they do largely because of the sacrifices and the earnest study of many Christians in other denominations who have gone before them. They exist today also because they believe that they have been blessed with truths that go beyond those discovered by others.

When Seventh-day Adventists invite their Christian friends of other churches to become Adventists with them, they do not ask them to give up any beautiful truth about Jesus which they have learned in the Protestant or Catholic churches to which they now belong. Not by any means! They congratulate them for holding these truths dear and for sharing them with us. Seventh-day Adventists invite them to cherish these truths still, and now to accept still further truths from the New Testament that will make Christ seem an ever richer and more wonderful Redeemer.

END

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