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### Insight

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**Q. If LIBERTY, or the Seventh-day Adventist Church that sponsors it, believes in practicing tolerance for all religions, why is it its creed to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe whatsoever Christ commanded?**

**Why do you believe in "proselytizing," in forcing people of other faiths to accept your particular brand of religion? There are many paths to God's domain, and all are acceptable to Him. It may be through Allah, Vishnu, Buddha, Christ, or any other symbol representing a decent, humane way of life. Therefore, forcing "nonbelievers" to come to "Christ alone" is intolerance. Crusades, the Inquisition, witch hunts, et cetera, have all slaughtered in the name of Christ. Missionaries are a pain in the neck, whereas benevolence is practiced by agnostics and atheists. Knocking on people's doors and trying to explain one's religious beliefs to them, with a few phrases learned by rote, is so ludicrous to those who have far more knowledge that listeners get a laugh out of the attempt.**

**A truly wise religion teaches righteousness to its own congregation. Do you likewise. That would be liberty for Christ's sake. [New Jersey]**

**A. Do you know that this very letter you have written to me represents an attempt to "proselytize"?**

Dictionaries define "to proselytize" as changing a person not only from one religion to another but also from one party to another, or from one opinion to another.

No element of compulsion need be associated with the word. All major religions, including Christianity, have at various times in their history

attempted to win converts through force and intimidation. Seventh-day Adventists seek to persuade people by Bible study, by personally sharing faith with their neighbors, and through the operation of 300 hospitals and clinics around the world where, they hope, people will see love in action.

You refer to countries where "Allah" and "Vishnu" are the most widely accepted symbols. Now it happens that I have lived in some of these countries. I have seen that Islam practices polygamy, degrades women in certain characteristic ways, and inculcates a kind of fatalism that, for example, even keeps parents from providing fences in dangerous areas to save their children from injurious falls. Hinduism, which burned widows on their husbands' funeral pyres until Western colonialists forbade the practice, still turns millions of people into hopeless, illiterate "untouchables." Popular Hinduism, furthermore, still demands—in the 1970's!—that a kidnaped child be killed and then buried under the foundations of important buildings.

Along with other evangelicals, I as a Seventh-day Adventist cannot agree that every religion provides a way of life that is as "decent and humane" as Christianity at its best. Christianity, stripped of its extraneous trappings and represented in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus, offers to every non-Christian something more wonderful, more hopeful, more helpful, and more purposeful than he has ever known.

Incidentally, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were themselves proselytes. Joseph Bates, for example, first found Christ in a Congregationalist church, then later was converted (or "prosely-

tized") into a mid-eighteenth-century denomination known as the Christian Connection. James White, another early founder, was also proselytized by the Christian Connection. His wife, Ellen G. White, was at first a convert to Methodism. Rachel Oakes, who taught Adventists about the seventh-day Sabbath, was at first a Methodist, then later a proselyte of the Seventh Day Baptists.

In these various Christian religions of which they were members the Adventist pioneers found a living faith in Jesus. As they continued their Bible study, however, they discovered elements of "truth" that were not held by any of these denominations. In the process of time they grouped together into what came to be known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When Adventists invite persons of other denominations to leave their organizations and become Seventh-day Adventists, they do not tell them that there is nothing "decent" or "humane" in the religion they profess at the time. Adventists know by experience that there is much Christ-centered truth and beauty to be found in other churches. But Adventists also believe that they have many joyous, helpful, hopeful things to offer even to their fellow Christians—as well as to Hindus, Moslems, and Jews—that they have never thought of before and that can help to make their lives more nearly worth the living.

It is expensive and time consuming to operate missions in 200 countries, as Adventist Christians do today, but we believe it is eminently worth while.

I don't think you are going to be able to proselytize us into being nonproselyters!

TWENTY  
SEVEN