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What Adventists Owe to Other Christians

WHEN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM arose in the forties and fifties of the nineteenth century it built solidly on the work of devoted Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, who had for centuries treasured the Bible and the great truths it contains.

Adventists base their beliefs on Scripture. But who preserved the Bible during the Middle Ages, when it might have been lost or forgotten? Roman Catholic monks in Western Europe, of course, and their Orthodox counterparts in the East.

Predictably, passing centuries generated customs that, to some extent at least, obscured the meaning of Holy Writ. Thank God for Wycliffe! This Catholic scholar loved the Lord and believed in Christ as the source of all truth. As he struggled with the Word he realized that not all was well with doctrines that had filtered down to him, and he urged his fellow believers to lay aside various man-made interpretations and return more closely to Scripture. He became the father of the first translation of the whole Bible into Middle English. Under his inspiration Lollards went about England in distinctive garb reading this Bible to the people and teaching them to put Scripture above tradition. Their influence is still felt.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in righteousness by faith and in the supreme significance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Obviously, it was those within the Catholic Church who kept alive the knowledge of God and of Christ through

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the confusion of the Middle Ages. Diaries and devotional works reveal that a personal love for Jesus never died out among the faithful. As is well known, of course, concern for spirituality in the church led (understandably but unfortunately) to a multiplication of rituals and penances.

Then Martin Luther appeared, often on his knees before God seeking peace and truth.

As a professor in a Catholic university, Luther was required to teach the Bible as the word of God, but so many penances were required of him by his devout advisers that heaven seemed impossible and God was an angry judge. "Love Christ?" he asked in a moment of anguish. "I hate Him."

The writings of Saint Augustine helped. Then with intense excitement Luther discovered in the Bible that sinners are not saved by "works" but by simple faith in the life and death of Jesus (Romans 4:1-10; Ephesians 2:8, 9). He also discovered "the priesthood of believers," the truth that everyone may come to God directly through Christ (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5). "The gates of paradise opened wide," he said, "and I walked right in."

Like Wycliffe, Luther also regarded the Bible as the only rule of faith. "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I can do no other," he stated firmly at Worms.

Adventists believe that the Lord's Supper is a simple meal at which Jesus invokes His covenant of grace to forgive sin and to conquer iniquity. They see it

as a tangible reminder of the cross and a thrilling herald of the Second Coming.

Somehow, on the tides of church history, the simple words of Jesus, "This is my body," came to be understood as turning the communion bread into the actual flesh of Christ and as rendering the wine so sacred that laymen must be forbidden to drink it lest they accidentally spill the "blood of God." Superstitious folk entered churches at midnight to steal away fragments of the body of Christ and to sprinkle them for good luck among their cabbages. It was popularly felt that little need existed for sermons or, indeed, for any worship except at the moment when a bell rang and the pastor pronounced the words, *Hoc est corpus meum*. Services were accelerated to make this mystic moment come the quicker. Christ's sacrament of spiritual fellowship became for millions little more than magic.

But Luther and Wycliffe became convinced that the bread does not actually turn into the body of Christ. And Luther especially saw the meal as a supreme occasion at which the ever-present Christ assures repentant persons of the forgiveness of their sins.

All over Northern Europe thousands rejoiced with Martin Luther, and large numbers gave their lives for their faith.

In France and Switzerland other devoted Catholics continued their study and discovered additional truth that had been obscured. John Calvin, father of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, had a mind as logical as Luther's was enthusiastic. He systematized the exciting Biblical truth newly coming to light. It is unfortunate that Calvin's name today is associated with "predestination" so disparagingly. He did teach predestination, but to the people of his time it did not appear as it does to us. Ordinary people had come to believe that their destiny depended on the decision of ministers, who "held the keys" to the kingdom of heaven. Calvin said that people were predestined by *God* (not men) *before the foundation of the world!* It is difficult today to grasp the immense relief that came over his congregations.

Calvin also emphasized the marvelous change (sanctification) that can come to a person who sees himself as a predestined child of the sovereign God. Thousands of Catholics gratefully accepted the recovered truths that he taught them. Many of these, too, gave up their lives as a result.

In England the followers of Calvin

Anabaptists thought the Sabbath well worth dying for. Thanks to them we think the Sabbath worth living for.

came to be known as Puritans, because of their concern to purify what seemed to them to be the rather immature Christianity of the new Anglican Church.

To the Puritans we owe the King James Version. In 1603 Puritans petitioned King James I for a new translation for use in worship services. 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, to the glory of God?

Adventists, along with all other English-speaking Christians, are greatly indebted to Calvin and his descendants.

Adventists Didn't Invent Immersion

Seventh-day Adventists believe in baptism by immersion, but, of course, they didn't invent it. When Luther stressed the Bible as above tradition and faith as vital to sacrament, some of his followers noticed that Jesus had said that people would be saved if they *believed* and were baptized (Mark 16:16). They wondered how infants could have faith. The first Anabaptist to die appears to have been a pretty Swiss girl whose head was held under water in a horse trough in mock imitation of "believer's baptism." Others died in this way or by being drowned in rivers or burned at the stake. Or barbecued *beside* a fire. Others were laid on open coffins too small for them. Soldiers pounded them in with their hobnailed boots.

Analogous to the Anabaptists on the continent of Europe were the Baptists of England and America—who, however, unlike most Anabaptists, adopted "baptism by immersion." They noticed that Paul called baptism a "burial" and that Jesus came up "out of" the water after He was baptized (Romans 6:3-12; Matthew 3:16).

Some Baptists and some Anabaptists, as they continued to study the Bible which Luther had opened up to them, discovered the seventh-day Sabbath. For keeping it, they were persecuted by Protestant and Catholic alike, and some laid down their lives. Andreas Fischer was thrown over a castle wall. Oswald Glait was hurled into the river Danube. John James was hanged, drawn, and quartered. They thought the Sabbath well worth dying for. It is thanks to such Christians that Seventh-day Adventists

think the Sabbath well worth *living* for.

In the eighteenth century, teaching on predestination began to grow stale. Millions who had never felt the fear of priests feared that God might have predestined them to be lost. John Wesley discovered that salvation is for "who-soever believeth" (John 3:16).

Today Adventists are at work in 195 countries, preaching that Christ's grace is free to all men everywhere. Thank God for John Wesley and the Methodists.

Through the centuries many individual Christians have taken literally the words of Jesus, "Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*" (John 11:11) and of Daniel 12:2, "Many of them that *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall awake." Wycliffe believed in the "unconscious sleep between death and resurrection." Martin Luther (at times, anyway) taught that death in Christ "is a fine, sweet and brief sleep." The Anglican Francis Blackburne, the Baptist Matthew Caffyn, the Puritan poet John Milton, and in America, the former Methodist minister George Storrs, and the former Congregationalist minister, Charles Fitch, are samples of numerous others who believed the same. Seventh-day Adventists are grateful to belong to their company.

In the early nineteenth century occurred a grand phenomenon known as the great second advent awakening. It was a vast interdenominational movement that stirred Europe and both North and South America. It caused the truth about the second coming of Jesus to shine with greater luster than it had since the second century. Out of this interdenominational revival rose the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Annie Smith, an early Adventist poet and editor, was originally a Baptist.

Rachel Oakes and R. F. Cottrell were originally Seventh Day Baptists.

Hiram Edson, Frederick Wheeler, and Ellen Harmon were Methodists.

Joseph Bates and James White were members of the Christian Connection.

Stockbridge Howland was a Congregationalist.

As these and increasing thousands of others became Adventists in the early days of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement, they did not give up the beautiful truths about Jesus that they had learned in their former denominations. Instead, they found new glory in them as they learned still richer concepts.

To those who preserved and passed on truth through the ages, Adventists owe a great debt of gratitude.

Justification through Jesus Christ, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, salvation by faith alone, the Bible as the only rule of faith, the seventh-day Sabbath, the sleep of the dead, all these truths and more, Seventh-day Adventists drew from their former churches. *In return*, they offered to their Christian brethren and to the world some exciting news that they discovered about a great new enterprise in which Jesus is currently engaged in heaven on the sinner's behalf.

So when Adventists say that they have "the truth" they mean that they have the truth that other Christians have taught them, and also a special understanding of the grace of God that applies particularly to the present time.

When an Adventist says that he has "the truth" he is not boasting. It isn't his truth. It's God's truth; truth that God has revealed through the Bible. And most of it is truth that God has revealed to a great many devout persons through the ages, who preserved it and passed it on, often at great sacrifice. To such Christians, Seventh-day Adventists owe a great debt of gratitude. ❧

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"The Minister and His Health"

R. H. Brown, Ph.D., Director, Geoscience Research
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Stuart E. Nevins, Asst. Professor of Geology,
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"Fossils, Sedimentary Rocks, and Noah's Flood"

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There is no charge for the seminar—complimentary meal provided. Runs from 9:30 A.M. until 4:30 P.M.