a personal testimony…

The gospel, the nature of man, the Sabbath, a holistic life style, the prophecies —there are good reasons to believe.

why be a Seventh-day Adventist? some reasons

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There are many troubled hearts in Adventism today. In Australia and New Zealand we wish our Church was progressing as in the island fields and in other parts of the world. Instead divisions over procedure, belief and worship style may be discouraging. It may be time to re-examine the question "Why be a Seventh-day Adventist?"

Society is changing as never before. While the church would not want in anyway to compromise its message to the world, yet there is increasing pressure on the church to be culturally relevant.

A rapidly changing culture causes a quick succession of generational differences. We are conscious of the Survivor, Baby Boomer, Baby Buster and Generation X differences. All have different expectations from the church.

The SDA church has made education a priority. Ellen White told us to teach the youth to be "thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's opinions." As a consequence youth think different ideas. Christian education produces people who think creatively, critically and with discernment. We should expect some new thoughts to be part of the fruitage of a successful educational system.

Our church originally refused to write up a creed. The pioneers decided to leave room for advancement in our understanding of Bible truth.[1] The great challenge is "how can we grow together and not apart"? It is a challenge for any church to maintain unity while searching for more light from God's Word. It would seem that we have inherited many unresolved theological differences now threatening our unity,[2] and some get discouraged because of these tensions. It is therefore important once again to look at the questions "why be a Seventh-day Adventist?" "has God given us a special task?" "is He still with us in spite of the differences and tensions?"

Let me share a few personal reasons for being a Seventh-day Adventist.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist . . .

1 Because of the gospel. The essence of all true Seventh-day Adventist preaching is found in the everlasting gospel as expressed in Revelation 14:6. This is what Adventism is all about. All our major teachings are related to this one great truth.

Even discerning Christians will always be zealous to contend for the purity of the gospel. We should not become discouraged as we see conflicts in our church regarding this issue. Even the apostolic church experienced such (see Gal 1:8-9).

2 Because of our view of the nature of mankind in death. Almost the whole world, both Christian and non-Christian, deny that death is really death. Because we trust in Christ, we believe that we have life only in Him.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is paving the way for the spiritualistic teachings of "New Age" and Eastern religions. Our teaching on this subject effectively warn men and women of these deceptions. Likewise, we follow the Bible in rejecting the cruel view of God expressed in the belief in an eternally burning Hell.

It is interesting to note that in recent years some prominent Biblical scholars who are not Seventh-day Adventists have come to realise the truth of what we preach on this subject.[3]

3 Because the Bible clearly teaches that the seventh day is the Sabbath of God. It amazes me that so many other Christian denominations go on record as upholding the Ten Commandments, but do not honour God's Sabbath.

In a world that is searching for meaning, the Sabbath reminds us that we have lost our Eden home, but that God one day will give it back to us again. Our rush and tear society needs the rest that God so graciously gave us. The observance of the Sabbath is linked with our rest in Christ. Only a Christian who understands and experiences the gospel will want to honour God on this day.

4 Because of the holistic lifestyle the church advocates which is linked to our view of the nature of mankind. Time and surveys have vindicated the benefits of Adventist lifestyle.[4] I do not believe there is another Christian body today that has so much to offer in this area, although some have come to take note of the subject of health in recent years. It is important to see the health principles advocated by our church, not as rules or regulations, but as benefits to our health given by our Creator because of His care for us. If we really understand the gospel, we will want to honour God in our lifestyle (1 Cor 6:19-20).

5 Because I believe that God has given this church a prophetic message to proclaim to all the world, to both Christian and non Christian, to prepare a people to meet Jesus.

According to Revelation 13, there is to be a conflict at the end of time over the issue of worship. Who is to be worshipped? How is worship to take place? When is worship to take place? The first four commandments of the decalogue are all related to this issue. [5]

But obedience to God in this time of crisis must and can only be as a result of knowing Christ and desiring to be faith-

ful to Him. However we interpret the end time events, the gospel is at the centre. The end time brings to light who are really trusting in Christ in contrast to being mere outward professors.

Prophecy is best understood "when" it has come to pass (John 14:29). We may be surprised at the time of fulfilment as to how some of the finer details work out. Never the less, Seventh-day Adventists have a sense of mission to prepare people to face this last great crisis.

Some teachings have especially helped us understand the prophecies.

▶ The reality of the heavenly sanctuary. Each vision of Revelation begins with a scene of what is happening in the heavenly sanctuary before it pictures what is happening on earth. Rightly understood this teaching helps us to see the gospel more clearly (Heb 9:22).

▶ The Great Controversy theme. An understanding of this theme, often unique to Adventists, gives an overall view of why God allows sin and suffering to remain. It explains how and why God respects human freedom and finally punishes sin.

Our prophetic message calls for men and women to accept Jesus prior to His appearing at His Second Coming. We do this on the basis of the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-11) given just before the appearing of Jesus (vs. 14). These messages warn against worshipping the beast and its image and call for people to worship the God who "made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (vs. 7, cf. Exod 20:8-11).

Today many Christians believe that prior to the final contest, the church of true believers will be raptured to heaven and so escape the tribulation. Their elaborate system of interpretation claims a divine role for the state of Israel

This school of prophetic interpretation was first developed by the Spanish Jesuit Lucanza as a counter measure to the Protestant Reformation which had identified the Papacy as the Antichrist. In more recent times it has become the prevailing view of a number of Protestant churches. Besides the lack of biblical support, this teaching contains two serious problems in relation to the gospel:

First, this life is our opportunity to accept Jesus Christ. There will not as claimed in this system be another chance after His Second Coming. Next, we should not look to the Middle East or any state on earth for the centre of our worship. The Christian Church is the true Israel, and the heavenly temple with Jesus as its High Priest is the true sanctuary (Gal 4:26-29).

The prophetic commission of the Adventist movement is Christ centred and makes our ministry different from these theories. It is interesting to note that in more recent years many Dispensationalist teachers have moved towards our position.[6]

There are other reasons why I am a Seventh-day Adventist. I could add the sanctuary message and the writings of Ellen White whom I see as an inspired messenger given to us by God. I am also proud of the work our church does to help the underprivileged through ADRA.

We should never claim we possess all the light that God wishes to impart to His people. Nor should we claim that we are better than Christians in other churches. We believe that God has true followers and believers in every Christian congregation.[7] However we do believe that God has commissioned us to preach some great truths to both Christians and non-Christians alike to prepare men and women to meet Jesus when He returns.

Church history reveals that God works with ordinary humans, prone to misunderstandings. The apostolic church had to get away from its "shut door" mentality, thinking that the gospel was only for the Jews (see Acts 10). Calvin taught a predestination that closed the door of those who were not the elect. Luther's anti-Semitic remarks had long term impact. Spurgeon clinged to the idea of an ever burning Hell.

Today, most denominations fight divisions. Baptists are divided over issues like inerrancy of the Bible and prophetic interpretation. Roman Catholics argue over the authority of the Pope and the changes brought in by the Second Vatican Council. Anglicans are split over homosexuality and women in ministry. Charismatics frequently split over the personalities of the preachers.

The truth is that through some 2000 years of the history of the Christian church there have always been differences between and within denominations. Jesus has never promised us a perfect church free from problems. Look at the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30).

Also in the Adventist Church I, at times, meet disappointments. I get frustrated over the slowness of progress. I wish that I could streamline our organisation a little faster that it is done. Many times I come back to the point where I ask myself, "why am I a Seventh-day Adventist?" Despite the annoying issues I am convicted that according to the Bible, God has given this church vital truths to share with the world. Despite disappointments, many wonderful people within the SDA Church encourage me.

But most of all, I think of Jesus and what He has done fore me. Though He was let down badly by His church, He went ahead and gave Himself as a sacrifice on Calvary. It is a passionate love for Jesus and the commission He has entrusted us that keep me and others in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). ■

1 Adviced by Ellen White, see, for instance, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, page 35.

2 Such as the role of Ellen White and the nature of Christ.

3 As, for instance, Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead* (Epworth Press, 1962).

4 SDA Health Department directors can provide reports from scientific surveys from many parts of the world, showing that SDAs live longer, free of many common diseases.

5 The Antichrist powers are breaking the first commandment, Rev 13:4, 8, 12; the second commandment by making an image, Rev 13:14-15; the third by blaspheming the name of God, Rev 13:6. The fourth commandment is quoted in Rev 14:7 and linked to the enforcing of a false time for worship.

6 *The Blessed Hope* by George Eldon Ladd (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1975) has made a significant contribution.

7 See the 27 Fundamentals #12 - The Remnant and its Mission "The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ ..."