

destroyed; they and the wicked dead will rise when Christ returns at the end of the 1,000 years to cleanse the earth. At that time they will be destroyed forever by fire. The earth will then be restored to the state of the Garden of Eden and provide a paradise for the saints.

The Seventh-Day Adventists have two primary liturgical rites: Baptism by immersion is reserved for those of sufficient maturity to understand its meaning. Secondly, imitating the Last Supper, a communion service is held four times a year and is preceded by a foot-washing ceremony; however, the bread and unfermented wine used are considered only symbols of the body and blood of Christ.

Seventh-Day Adventists observe the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. All unnecessary work, including cooking, is avoided during these hours. They attend church and Sabbath school on Friday evening and Saturday morning.

They tithe one-tenth of their income. Most members follow a vegetarian diet; those who do not must abstain from foods forbidden by the Old Testament, such as pork, ham, and shrimp. For health reasons, they abstain from liquor and tobacco. The church also operates an extensive medical program with hospitals and clinics around the world.

The church government is democratic. Each local church is governed congregationally but belongs to a state conference which

appoints its minister. Four or more conferences comprise a union conference and several union conferences make up a division. There are 10 divisions in 189 countries with a headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1998, the Seventh-Day Adventists reported a membership of 5 million in the United States, and 9-10 million worldwide.

Since this article was inspired by an advertisement in the *Washington Times* attacking the Roman Catholic Church, please remember two points: First, the Roman Catholic Church is the first Christian Church founded directly by Christ. Second, someone must be pretty desperate and insecure to try to gain members through bigotry and half-truths.

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Pamphlet 295

## **Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Who Are These People?**

Fr. William Saunders, PhD

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church was founded by William Miller (1782-1849). Born in Pittsfield, Mass., on Feb. 15, 1782, he was a veteran of the War of 1812 and a farmer in upstate New York. At the age of 34, he abandoned Deism to join the Baptist Church. Self-ordained, he began preaching in 1831. Enthralled by the prophecies of the Bible, he believed that every prophecy that had not been fulfilled by Christ during His time on earth would be fulfilled in His Second Coming. Miller's scholarship, however, was superficial at best.

Nevertheless, his interpretation of Daniel and the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) led him to predict the Second Coming. Miller thought that the prophecies concerning the end of the world contained a numerical code that could be deciphered. He took the 2,300 evenings mentioned in Daniel (8:14) regarding the coming purification of the Temple, converted them to years, and then counted from the year 457 BC (which he maintained was "70 weeks" since the commencement of the first coming) to predict the Second Coming of Christ on March 21, 1843. He gained great following through his preaching and through the publication of *The Midnight Cry*. While his

prediction caused great excitement, it failed to come true.

Not to be thwarted, he revised his calculations and predicted March 21, 1844 as the time of the Second Coming. When that prediction also failed, he predicted Oct. 22, 1844 as the date. Again, Miller was wrong. This last failure became known as the "Great Disappointment," and caused most of his followers to abandon him.

His remaining followers met the following year in Albany, and formed a plan to keep the millennial movement alive. Factions developed, but one strong group survived. In 1860, they formally inaugurated the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. James White became the president of the Seventh-Day Adventists after the denomination was organized at Battle Creek, Mich., in 1863.

Mrs. Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915), a devout follower of Miller and wife of James, influenced the sect heavily. Probably due to her delicate health, she experienced visions, claiming to have had over 2,000 during her lifetime. Several factors influenced her religious perspective: (1) Methodist revivalism, which led to her conversion in 1841; (2) faith healing, upon which she depended for her many and frequent ailments; (3) supernatural visions; and (4) the teaching of Miller. Although she had only a third-grade education, she wrote 45 major books and more than 4,000 articles. *Steps to Christ* has been translated into 85 languages. Most of Mrs. White's

teachings which have been incorporated into official doctrine were derived from her various visions and are considered to be inspired.

Ellen White and her confrere Hiram Edson restudied the Biblical prophecies regarding the Second Coming and Miller's own teachings, and concluded that they indicated the beginning of the final judgment. They now taught that the Second Coming was still imminent, but the day and hour were unpredictable.

White also believed that Saturday, not Sunday, was the Sabbath day commanded by God in Genesis. According to her, the change of the Sabbath to Sunday was introduced by the anti-Christ or papacy. Of course, Christian tradition since the apostolic times has regarded Sunday as the Lord's Day, since our Lord rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. We find evidence of this in Acts of the apostles "On the first day of the week, when we gathered for the breaking of bread, Paul preached to them" (Acts 20:7), and St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians speaks of the faithful gathering and taking up charitable collections on the "first day of the week" (16:2). The great apologist, St. Justin Martyr (d. 165), wrote, "Sunday, indeed, is the day on which we hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and matter, created the world; and our Savior, Jesus Christ, arose from the dead on the same day" (*First Apology*). Interestingly, the Seventh-

Day Adventists changed a tradition originating in apostolic times and consistently recognized by Christians over the centuries. Clearly, such a change shows what force a personal revelation can have!

Just as a "fun" aside, Ellen White had a vision on June 5, 1863, in which she learned that meat, alcohol, and tobacco were forbidden, that doctors and drugs were to be avoided, and that the disciples should have a healthy regimen of fresh air, sunshine, rest, exercise, and diet. Any sexual impurity was also condemned. Interestingly, these teachings inspired Sylvester Graham to develop a nutritious cracker to promote well-being, hence, the "Graham Cracker."

Also, John Kellogg of Battle Creek, Mich., developed a wholesome diet of fruit, grain, and vegetables, and, yes, cereals, that not only insured health but prevented sexual impurity. (I don't think Count Chocula knew he had such an impact. However, in our Washington area, some people may have overdosed on Fruit Loops while others should eat more Lucky Charms.)

Concerning their tenets today, the Seventh-Day Adventists affirm the full deity of Christ. Seventh-Day Adventists believe that man is by nature mortal, not immortal. Death is considered a sleep. The resurrection of the righteous dead will occur at the Second Coming, when both they and living will be taken to Heaven, where together they will spend the millennium. Those living in this hour who have rejected salvation will be