

STATEMENT DS410

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

The main emphasis of ministry at the Christian Research Institute is to provide information which will help those who are evangelizing the millions of people presently entangled in cults, the occult, and various false religions. Because of this, and because Dr. Walter Martin did some pioneer research on Adventism in the late 1950's, we are frequently asked what our position is on the subject of Seventh-day Adventism (hereafter "SDA" for short).

Though several capable Christian scholars (e.g., Anthony Hoekema, J.K. Van Baalen, John Gerstner) have concluded that SDA is a non-Christian cult system, CRI has continued to assert that this is not the case. We take this position based on the content of the doctrine which was stated in an official SDA publication (1957) entitled *Questions on Doctrine*. It should be noted that in 1983 W. Richard Leshner, vice-president of the General Conference, affirmed that SDA stood behind the publication *Questions on Doctrine*. Since SDA does accept the foundational doctrines of historic Christianity (the Trinity, Christ's true deity, His bodily resurrection, etc.) we do not believe that it should be classified as a non-Christian cult. It is our conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, etc., and be a practicing Christian in the biblical sense of the word; but it is possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and a true follower of Jesus, despite certain distinctive Adventist doctrines which we consider to be unbiblical.

This does not mean that we endorse the entire theological structure of SDA, since a portion of it is definitely out of the mainstream of historic Christian theology (e.g., Sabbatarianism, conditional immortality or soul sleep, annihilation of the wicked). Though we would adamantly disagree with Adventists regarding these above mentioned doctrines, it should be added that one could hold these views and remain a believing Christian. In other words, these doctrines do not secure nor necessarily inhibit salvation.

Those who follow Adventism closely know that the last two decades have been characterized by a deep internal conflict which has divided the denomination and left many Adventist disillusioned. Today, there are various divisions or factions within SDA. Some wish that Adventism would fully enter into the evangelical mainstream, while maintaining certain Adventist distinctives. Others, the more traditional or fundamentalist Adventists, often reject portions of *Questions on Doctrine* and seek to hold on to several heresies which arose early in the Adventist movement, such as the investigative judgment, the sinful nature of Christ, and viewing Ellen G. White as the infallible interpreter of Scripture. It is the division of Adventism, who often refer to themselves as "the remnant church," or God's exclusive agent, that CRI would regard as being cultic. Some within this camp would anathematize all of Protestantism, arguing that as Sunday-keepers they will receive the mark of the beast just prior to Christ's second coming. Admittedly, this is the extreme part of SDA, but nevertheless well represented.

The crisis that exists within SDA today essentially centers around the investigative judgment, an unbiblical doctrine which severely compromises if not outright denies the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. Second only to the investigative judgment issue is the all-encompassing question of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen G. White. The controversy which has raged regarding the writings of Mrs. White has undoubtedly shaken the entire structure of SDA.

It is our sincere hope that this 5 million member church body, which has historically been a mixture of orthodox and heretical doctrine, will move toward a more soundly biblical position and away from the doctrinal errors it has held in the past. It is our hope that the leadership of SDA will lead its people out of all forms of legalism and into the liberty that results from being justified by God's grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9).

For a further analysis of SDA we recommend the following books:

Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1985), available from CRI.
Geoffrey Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977).

Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1963), for the viewpoint that SDA is a cult.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299