

# Soviet Views of Adventism: A Communist Analysis

edited by Chuck Scriven

The following four articles appeared in Russia in 1978 in a publication called *The Journal of Science and Religion*. Written from a Communist point of view, they describe and comment upon Seventh-day Adventism in Russia, for the reason, as the Preface states, that it is a “system of spiritual influence upon people” the knowledge of whose “peculiarities” is required for success in “atheistic work” among its adherents. The articles give, of course, a primarily negative account. The authors sometimes fire their salvos without benefit of supporting argument—Adventist belief just *is* delusory, for example; its primary appeal just *is* the promise of escape from earth’s misery. They do, however, suggest empirical backing for their central claim—that the Adventist Church in Russia is now in a process of crisis and decay. All four writers play upon this single theme.

The texts of the four pieces appear as they have been translated from the Russian, ex-

cept for minor stylistic changes and excisions, often quite long, for the sake of brevity. These latter, where longer than a phrase or so, have been indicated by means of ellipses. Where they run to more than a paragraph or so — and of the second and third articles we are actually publishing only excerpts—summaries of what has been left out, written by the editors and printed in italic type, appear as an aid to readers.

In reprinting the articles, the editors of SPECTRUM do not, of course, vouch for the accuracy of the descriptive content, let alone the adequacy of the commentary upon it. The idea is that from this sample of Soviet analysis, we may gain some insight into how Russian Communist writers perceive the religious movement of which we are part, and in so doing learn something about Communism and its relationship to Adventism in the U.S.S.R.

## Preface

They call themselves “Adventists” from the Latin “adventus,” which means “arrival” or “coming,” and by this very name they

Charles Scriven, former editor of *Insight* and SPECTRUM, is completing a doctorate at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. He is the author of *The Demons Have Had It*.

emphasize that the substance of their doctrine is based on their belief in the coming of Jesus Christ. But, in contrast to devotees of other Christian movements, they are convinced that the second coming of the Son of God to earth will take place, not in the far distant future, but very soon, and they are constantly preparing to meet Christ so that they will not be caught unawares.

This belief in a near second coming is only the starting point of a very delicate and flexible system of spiritual influence upon people. And precisely this is what helps Adventism to retain its position and, to a certain degree, even under conditions of a crisis in religion, to widen its ranks in some countries of the world.

In our country there are followers of the notable branch within Adventism—the Seventh-day Adventists. Moreover, there are still some local groups of the Adventist Reform Movement. Atheistic work among adherents of these movements requires specific qualifications, and, firstly, demands a knowledge of the peculiarities of their faith and of the sometimes contradictory processes which today are passing through Adventist groups. With precisely this purpose in mind, the following material is published.

### **Article 1: “This Quiet Sabbath World”**

by V. Franyuk

Snow had fallen the evening before in the city of Karaganda, and from the trampled path it was evident that more than a few people had come and gone recently along this little alley. On both sides, small houses nestled behind fences as though in hiding. The little street was the picture of repose and tranquility.

On this Saturday morning, people in groups or by themselves are wending their way toward a solidly constructed building with a new fence, iron gates, open shutters and wide windows. Behind the side gate, the well-kept young apple trees and small path paved with concrete display the order and neatness of a manorial seat.

The host is a 27-year-old carpenter, Vitaly

Eugenevich Snytko. His official family consists of a wife and two children. But Vitaly Eugenevich considers himself a member of the family of the local 150-member Seventh-day Adventist church, which rents the house from him. Every Sabbath — this day begins for the “brethren” and “sisters” with sunset on Friday evening, and ends with sunset the following day — three prayer meetings are held. I, too, have come to attend the morning meeting.

In the lobby are a long clothes rack and an antique organ. Church members are sitting in the hall on benches covered with bright cloth, conversing in low voices. One door opens into the parlor where there is a table and a sofa; another into the assembly room. A strip of carpet down the middle divides the rows of benches, and hanging on the wall in an age-darkened frame, “the commandments” contrast with the contemporary clocks. Alongside the pulpit is an electric musical instrument, and places for the choir. The assembly room has seven wide windows with blinds. On the ceiling there is a large ventilator.

The house has central heating. It is warm. The floor shines with its coat of light-brown paint. The entering “brethren” take their seats strictly in front at the right; the “sisters” arbitrarily. Before sitting down, they bow their heads and “talk with God.” There are children present.

A young man enters. He wears glasses with yellow frames, a black suit and tie and a white shirt. He carries a folder in his hand. This is Snytko. Being the host, he goes up to the clock and moves the hands forward (they were behind). He becomes absorbed in talking with his God; then takes his place beside the pulpit. After praying in the same manner, a young lady takes her place behind the musical instrument. She is the choir leader.

The clock strikes ten. Three men walk along the carpeted strip to the pulpit, kneel behind it. Everyone in the room stands up after a short pause for silent prayer. When the pastors arise, the members sit down again. The leader of the congregation announces: “Let us glorify our God with a Sabbath song.”

Observing this worship service, I discover an interesting peculiarity. Seminary-style, the participants pursue a theme by means of questions:

“What was the motive for Jesus’ doing all He did?” asks the leader of the congregation.

Two ladies stand up. “Love to his neighbor,” they answer simultaneously.

“Who wishes to express his thoughts?” asks the preacher.

An elderly man on one of the front benches stands up and asks a quirkish question: “There are many different faiths, each guaranteeing salvation while considering the others delusions. Which one is right?”

The preacher calls out asking if there is

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anyone who wishes to answer the question. Some do, but neither their explanations nor those of the preacher himself satisfy the elderly man, who reproachfully shakes his head. Whispers are heard among the “brethren.”

The choir leader stands up on the small platform, and the choir enters and sings. Although two of the men are unable to carry their bass part, and women’s voices predominate, the singing is impressive. After prayer, two ladies accompanied by a guitar present a religious duet. The preacher speaks on the subject of God’s commandments, that they are life’s compass. He uses an illustration from secular literature: The French author, Jules Verne, in his novel, *The Children of Captain Grant*, relates an incident of when the compass once began to mark a wrong course, because someone had intentionally put a piece of iron beside it, and so the ship went off course. Likewise, every encroachment on Christ’s teaching, causes our life compass to deviate, and we get off course. This, of course, is a reference to the man in the con-

gregation who had asked the quirky question.

At the close of the service, the man who had led out introduced himself to me as Vasily Vasilievich Novosad, chairman of the church board. I don’t remember how it happened, but in speaking with the preacher, it came out that he and I were colleagues in the past, having traveled into the North Atlantic some time ago. We took pleasure in recalling how cozy, in stormy weather, we found the channels of the Faroe Islands, the white slopes of Iceland and the fogs along the shores of Britain. The reminiscences about the sea aired thoughts of prayer out of Vasily Vasilievich’s mind, and he enthusiastically began to recall the names of different ships, and especially that of our own ship, *Michael Kalyinin*.

Novosad is 33 years old, works as a mechanic with escalators, is married and has two children. He grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist family, but in his younger years, he did not follow the teachings of the church. According to his own words, during the years he spent at sea his life was filled with sin. After several months at sea, he had a good amount of money in his pocket, felt solid ground under his feet, and, as the saying goes, his soul soared to heaven when he was on land again and he began to live a life of pleasure.

“After staying on shore for some time, there was again no other choice if I wanted to earn some money but to go to sea again for some months, and my former life repeated itself. Then I asked myself what purpose there was in living such a life.”

“And did you find the answer to that eternal question?”

“Oh, yes, with the help of faith I found a purpose for my life in establishing a right relationship with God.”

The “brethren” and “sisters” had by now gone to their homes until time for the evening worship service. The house was empty, and the host, Snytko, joined us in talk. He, in contrast to the former sailor, Novosad, preferred to talk only about the Bible. He was pouring out quotations.

His way to God, Vitaly Eugenevich Snytko said, began in his childhood under

the guidance of his parents. When he was 12 years old, he began to think for himself, and a grasp of understanding came upon him. Once he asked his biology teacher after the lesson, "Is nature alive?"

Of course, the teacher answered that nature is not an organism with functions inherent in all that is alive. "This will be gone over later," he said. The thoughtful student made the logical conclusion: if nature is not alive, it cannot create a living cell; and furthermore, if this is so, someone must have created it; and still further, if it is unknown who, there remains only God.

The biblical explanation about the creation of the world was acceptable to the boy's understanding. When he decided to believe in this myth, he accepted the importance and great devotional meaning of the whole Bible. After finishing school, Vitaly Snytko graduated from a photography course, and took a job in photography with the government. However, he was compelled to work on Sabbaths, days which every Adventist is obligated to devote to God, so he had to change his work and become a builder. He kept his devotion to religion during his army service, also.

**H**umanly speaking, let it be said without disparagement, Novosad and Snytko left me certain painful feelings. Not just because they devote so much time preparing for the coming judgment, and not even because they spend their life energy on interpretation of pseudo-profound thoughts about ancient legends and myths. It is also distressing to see them trying to enhance themselves before their fellow believers by means of oppressive persistency, almost consecration, in abstaining from logical reasoning, arguments or comparisons.

"Logic is nonessential for the true faith," asserts Novosad.

"Christ's teaching doesn't need to be re-evaluated," reiterates Snytko. "It is eternal and unshakable."

And yet they do agree that in the realities surrounding us, the human mind, intellect and reason yearn to discern new things and to put under the screw that which has outlived

itself. There arises a certain spiritual dead end. The human belief in a better future changes into the doomed expectation of a terrible judgment.

*The author continues by describing how Novosad and Snytko are "tormented by contradictions," and how most Adventists avoid television and the cinema. He then describes other Adventists whom he met, including one man who asked that his name not be published.*

P., a locksmith in an institution, is 34 years old and has a secondary school education. At the prayer meeting, he attracted my attention by his difficult, penetrating analysis of a Bible chapter from the pulpit. Then, he took a place in the choir. When he offered prayer from the pulpit, he wiped away his tears. I talked with him later in his shop. I already knew that he was a most conscientious worker.

The story of P. is a dramatic one. In his childhood, he lived near the railway station among Adventists. At the age of nine, he fell under a wheel and lost his foot. At 18, he was lost during a snowstorm on the steppe. In his despair, he promised God he would accept the faith if his life were spared. He went at random through the snowstorm and finally stumbled on a house. He has kind eyes and hands that are rough from work. He is a typical, skillful master-dreamer. Such are always mastering something unselfishly in a

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skillful manner, or creating or inventing something. Maybe, if he hadn't been caught in a snowstorm, his fate would have turned out quite differently.

Many of those whom I met here were drawn into this queer world by a religious upbringing from childhood, producing in them a moral passiveness. As a rule, every one of them had met some difficulties in life, and likewise, every one was unable to with-

stand them, but readily hid in the fragile shelter of religious faith.

After the worship service, we went with Novosad, in an old “Volga.” The snow had begun to melt, and from the railroad tracks, the noise of passing trains was heard. In the back seat was seated his wife with a child in her arms. She was the one who had led the church choir, and beside her was eight-year-old laughing Vovka. Vasily Vasilevich’s wife had studied music, but at the insistence of her parents, became a nurse. In Adventist families, the will of the older people is law. Yet, music remained her favorite occupation. Involuntarily, I began to think of restless Vovka, whom the parents brought to the morning worship service. What will her fate be?

## Article 2: “In Expectation of the Latter Rain”

by D. Koretsky

The words of the sermon echoed sadly through the Seventh-day Adventist church in the city of Chernovtsy:

We live in perilous times. Within the church there is a struggle for authority and supremacy. Believers do not trust each other any more, and it seems that the words of the prophet Jeremiah are written especially for our time: “Take ye heed every one of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother” (Jer. 9:4). Satan has succeeded in focusing the attention of God’s people on minor questions. And even worse, many of us are doubting the perilous nature of sin. There are persons who are heading toward temptation like insane people toward a beating.

We could quote more, but there is no need, because it is all more or less the same and nearly in the same words. In short, the content of the sermon is as follows: The Seventh-day Adventist Church is going through a crisis and decay. Pastors are struggling for authority, and believers are less devoted to the teachings of Christ and more and more taken in by the temptations of secular life. In the world also, the “abomi-

nation of desolation” is evident as scientific and technological progress gives rise to perplexity, fear, uneasiness among nations (struggle between classes in capitalistic countries, and national liberation movements).

We will return to this sermon later, but now let’s take a look at the church in the city of Gorlovka, in Donets province. Here the talk is of other things — of earthquakes and other calamities, and the voice of the preacher sounds different, quite assured and almost prophetic: “Men’s hearts failing them for fear and fainting.”

Both sermons, the first about decay within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and “abomination of desolation” in the world, and the second about terrible natural events and calamities, are directed toward the same end — that is, to convince the believers of Christ’s soon coming. “Soon the Lord will pour out the latter rain upon His people,” proclaims the preacher in Chernovtsy. “Today the signs of the times tell us that we are now on the threshold of great events. There is anxiety everywhere. The prophecies are being fulfilled before our very eyes. . . . Take care, or you will be found at the king’s dinner without a wedding garment,” so echoes his colleague in Gorlovka.

Is this just a coincidence? Of course not. For about one and a half centuries, Adventist preachers have managed to find in everyday events some signs predicted in the Bible which show that Christ could come any day to our earth. During this period, the lives of the people have changed, their world has changed, even the face of our planet has changed, but the untiring preachers still look for and find their signs, just as though there were not thousands of forerunners, who all turned out to be false prophets — every one.

And most remarkable in all this is the fact that Adventist preachers, not knowing how, and not wanting, to look at the world without prejudice, contrive to find confirmation of their persuasion! A tract, “The Shaking,” plainly states that “perplexity” among the adherents of Adventism is “programmed beforehand in God’s plan of future events!”

The existence of a crisis is so evident, the

process of deterioration of religious belief so intense, that denying it is just impossible. The ministry has only one way out: to appeal to the conscience of the believers and pretend that all this was foreseen in God's plan and that this decline itself is one of the most convincing signs of Christ's soon coming. Indeed, the crisis in religion cannot be settled with such measures, it can only be lessened in some degree.

*The author next cites what he sees as evidence – such as stories of disagreements among members, of decline in membership – of a “process of disintegration” within Soviet Adventism. This leads to his short article’s final paragraph.*

Adventist ministers are unable to hide these facts and processes from the believers, and, therefore, they declare that the crisis in the Adventist Church is “measured and programmed by God,” and over and over again they convince the believers that “very soon the Lord will pour out the Latter Rain upon His people.”

### **Article 3: “In Search of an Exit”**

by S. Orlov

*The author claims that certain social changes (which he does not describe) have brought “crisis” to Seventh-day Adventism, one manifestation of which is a “split” in the church dating to the mid-1960s. One group, said to be “the more reactionary,” is led, according to the author, by P. Matsanov, and has established “parallel communities of Seventh-day Adventists.” The other group, called “moderate,” is said to have the backing of the General Conference, which has tried without success, the author says, to reunite the groups. The Matsanov group is now linked with the “Reform Movement, an extremely reactionary branch of Adventism which started during the First World War in Germany.” It stands for rigorous separation from the world. The following excerpts further describe and comment upon the two groups.*

The credo of this more moderate branch of Adventism is shown in this statement by one of its leading ideologists: “What should our course be? Should we accept the complete liquidation of Adventism and leave God’s true church, or hold on to what we do have,

amidst all our difficulties, and look for new approaches to the task which has been given to us — to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth?”

Following this principle, a number of realistic Adventist preachers admonish the believers to pay attention to what is going on in the world around them, to overcome their tendency to live within their own narrow circle, and to seek to fulfill their duties toward society and the state. They think the future of the church depends on finding the right solution to this problem.

This sane approach to the problem is presented in the paper prepared by one of the prominent modern Adventist leaders under the title, “The Christian in Society and State.” The author says:

We Adventists who live in the U.S.S.R. have every reason to treat our socialist state with warmth and gratitude. We cannot equate socialism and the Gospel, but the principles upon which the Soviet state is built are considerably nearer to the Gospel’s spirit of care for man than are the principles of capitalist society. We consider it a great privilege to be citizens of this country.

The paper goes on to refer to the great changes which took place in our country after the October revolution. Special attention is given to the fact that in our country the church is separate from the state, and reference is made to the religious persecution which was in force under the Czarist state. This is a worthy answer on the part of believers who live in our country to agitators abroad who day and night proclaim to the world that in the U.S.S.R. there is no freedom of conscience and that the rights of Christians and the church are not respected.

The author of the article expresses satisfaction that believers can take part in work for the welfare of the country in common with all citizens: “For us Seventh-day Adventists, it is a great joy that our humble creative efforts can be united to those of the millions of people in our country toward achieving progress. In this way, we directly participate in the common success and deplore the mistakes and problems, and feel ourselves part of a society which places before it not a few and

high ideals.” Without any doubt, one must not ignore these positive expressions which are based on a wise and unprejudiced view of the objective process. These men are educating the believers in a feeling of patriotism and an understanding of their duties to their earthly motherland. . . .

**U**p to the present time in our country, small groups of the Adventist Reform Movement continue to function. They are well known for their reactionary views and the antisocial character of their activities. Under the influence of their fanatical leader, Adventist Reformists refuse to register their churches, prohibit their children from joining the Young Communist organization, and instigate the youth not to serve in the army, and they produce and spread literature which contains slander against our socialist regime.

The ringleaders of the Reform Adventists aim at completely isolating their supporters from life. In a handwritten brochure, “Separation from the World,” they state: “We are living in a worldly age when our physical relationship with the world is much closer than in former times. Automobiles, radio and other modern devices have completely changed circumstances under which we live and have made it much more difficult than at any time before for us to be separate from the world and maintain our pure customs.” Asserting that radio and television transform

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the apartments of believers into theaters and other places shameful for saints to be in, the Reform Adventists try to ward off the effect of mass information on the conscience of believers. “We must do nothing, not read, look or speak, under any circumstances that have been forbidden by divine precepts,” they admonish.

To the dogmatic principle, common to all Adventists, of observing the Sabbath day, the Reformers ascribe special significance. On this day, it is absolutely forbidden to engage in any kind of work, except prayer. Even the purchase of a newspaper or food, conversation on ordinary topics and visits to public places are not allowed on this day. The believers are instructed: “Meet the Sabbath with prayer and singing and end it with hymns of praise; do not allow on this day any worldly lesson, music, occupation or conversation.” On Sabbaths, children are categorically forbidden to attend school. To back this up, they are reminded of Ellen White’s statement: “Adventists cannot count on God’s divine blessing if they send their children where they cannot fulfill the fourth commandment.”

But all these endeavors of extremists to separate their followers from the world, cannot withstand the influence of modern times. More and more reformists are deviating from their directives and involving themselves in different spheres of social life. . . .

#### **Article 4: “In the Captivity of Unattainable Expectations”**

by A. Bilov

*The introductory paragraphs note Adventist belief in the Second Coming and the fact that several attempts have been made to predict the exact date of Christ’s return.*

. . . On March 21, 1843, many thousands in North America in the United States met the day in fear and anguish. They had devoted years of preparation to becoming witnesses of the Second Coming and to rising with Jesus Christ to the 1,000 years of rule with God. Many took leave of their close relatives, put on white clothes and went to the tops of hills and mountains in order to be the first to meet the coming Christ. But the sound of the archangel’s trumpet was not heard. The Second Coming did not take place.

In history there have been many prophecies about the Second Coming. In different countries people appeared who set a time for the terrible judgment and the end of

the world. But then for the first time a “prophet” born on North American soil managed to captivate believers, not by eloquence or emotional appeal, but by a scheme of deductions pretending to be scientific, from “holy” texts which seemed convincing.

The founder of Adventism was William Miller, a small farmer and preacher in a Baptist group. After many years of careful Bible study, he became agitated by the idea that he had found indications in the book of Daniel as to the time of the Second Coming. He assumed verse 14 in the eighth chapter of Daniel, where it speaks of the evenings and mornings, meant that the Second Coming would take place after 2,300 years. Then Miller had only to find the starting point. Penetrating into the meaning of Daniel’s prophecy, he established the beginning date as 457 B.C., when the Persian king, Artaxerxes, gave permission to renew divine service in the temple at Jerusalem. As a result, it came out that Christ’s Second Coming was to take place in 1843.

We will not here go into the details of Miller’s reckoning, nor into his very arbitrary interpretation of Bible texts and his violation of the elementary rules of logic. This has already been done in our literature [A footnote to this paragraph appears in the Russian article, which reads as follows: “See E. Vartoshevich and E. Borisoglebsky: ‘They Are Awaiting the End of the World,’ M. 1963. A Below: ‘Adventism,’ M. 1973.”] But to many Americans at that time, Miller’s calculations seemed an authentic revelation. His call to carry the message of salvation everywhere was taken up by a great number of believers.

Miller’s prophecy resounded among those strata of the population which especially felt the uncertainty of the tempestuous development period of the capitalistic production method, which was accompanied by reinforced exploitation, crises of overproduction and disruption of the middle class. Small farmers, artisans, mechanics and tradesmen, not having the ability to make out what was going on or to understand the

reasons of the industrial upheaval which brought uncounted sufferings to millions of people, quickly took up the sermons on an imminent end to this world and the coming of a 1,000-year kingdom. They saw in it the opportunity of getting rid of earthly miseries.

During that period, the teaching on the imminent Second Coming had not yet attained its distinctive form; there was no talk of establishing an organization. The early Miller movement ran within existing religious groups. There was not even talk of a more or less logically concordant religious doctrine. The religious zeal rested completely on Miller’s prophecy and the signs of the Second Coming, which in the mouth of the “prophet” looked convincing to his followers.

Naturally, the expectations proved to be false. The Second Coming did not take place on March 31, 1843 as predicted by Miller, nor in subsequent years, though the ideologists in the movement several times brought in corrections on their computation. In no way would they admit the unsoundness of their predictions. According to one version, Christ had first to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary. After that, he would come to earth in order to cleanse the earthly sanctuary.

However, to take away the bitterness of the disappointed people who had believed Miller was impossible. Most of them broke away from the movement, from which several groups emerged, each construing differently the biblical predictions on the Second Coming. One of these groups is connected with the name Ellen White. Essentially, she is the founder and ideologist of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ellen White (nee Harmon) was the wife of one of the passionate adherents of Millerism. In preaching her ideas, she was above all else concerned that they should sound to the believers, not as her own fabrications, but as the testimony of God’s revelation. According to her words, everything she said was inspired by her constantly arising visions, and thus was God’s word passed on to the people through His chosen person.

It is interesting that Ellen White’s visions



were repeatedly the subject of dispute even among Adventists. To convince the believers that these visions were really given from above, followers of the prophetess several times published conclusions of doctors who had observed her during her ecstatic condition. The doctors concluded that “the source of these visions was divine.”

Curiously, some unprejudiced persons tried to evaluate these conclusions objec-

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tively. In a book published about 20 years ago in Stuttgart by a West German author, Kurt Hutten, *Foreseers, Dreamers, Enthusiasts*, the direct question, “Was Ellen White a prophetess?” is asked. After carefully analyzing a great number of testimonies of neutral observers and her own writings, the author points out that all conclusions on the “divine character” of Ellen White’s visions were made, as a rule, by commissions composed of favorably biased individuals. Besides, the visions described by the prophetess in her writings were constantly changing in reprints, and some were simply excluded from the text in harmony with the development of Mrs. White’s own views.

Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that Hutten succeeded in convicting the prophetess of plagiarism. A number of her visions are simply borrowed from the works of other authors. Yet, she wrote to the believers: “When I send you testimonies, warnings and instructions, many of you evaluate them as Sister White’s opinion. In this you offend the Spirit of God. You know that the Lord reveals Himself through the Spirit of Prophecy. I was able to see the past, present and future.” But how can this be harmonized with the fact that in her books, *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Life of Paul*, as well as in

other writings, in literally tens of places, other works are copied? One can assume that a psychically unbalanced, mystically inclined woman actually fell into ecstatic states accompanied by hallucinations of a religious character. Even to this day, Seventh-day Adventists accept these hallucinations—to them, “visions”—as “divine signs” and refer to them constantly as equal to the Bible. . . .

*The author briefly describes the beginnings of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church, calling Ellen White its “founder” and remarking on its worldwide missionary work.*

. . . Already by the end of the last century, Seventh-day Adventists were printing their literature in 91 languages. Simultaneously, Adventist missionaries appeared in Russia, to begin with in German colonies in the south of the country, and then in other places, also. Their preaching was successful among the peasantry, above all among the poorer classes who tied the teaching about the soon Second Coming in with their hope for deliverance from poverty, the heavy toil to which they were subjected, and their unbearable existence. Characteristically, it was mainly adherents of Russian Orthodox, who viewed their church as a true servant of autocracy, who turned to Adventism. In 1912, 64 percent of Seventh-day Adventists had come from the Orthodox Church. It is appropriate in this context to recall Lenin’s statement: “The struggle with the state church combined with the preaching of the new purified religion, that is, the new clarified, refined poison for the oppressed masses.”

Contemporary Adventist authors, in reviewing the history of their sect in Russia, focus on the persecutions the first missionaries were subjected to by the autocracy. Such cases actually took place. The main reason for this was that at that time the Russian Orthodox Church did not tolerate any rivalry in her influence on the minds of the people, and was especially hostile toward Adventism.

Adventist leaders tried to assure the autocracy of their loyalty, and, in 1905, when Czarism was compelled to allow persons leaving the Orthodox faith to join other religions, the Seventh-day Adventists are among those listed as loyal to the imperial

powers. It is interesting that in the circular to all governors of the Russian empire, the Minister of the Interior, Stolypin remarked: "Seventh-day Adventist teaching resembles that of the Baptists and can be regarded as a form of the latter, and, inasmuch as Baptists are freely permitted to profess their religious doctrine, there are not sufficient grounds to refuse the same privilege to Adventists."

Thus, statements about Seventh-day Adventist conflicts with autocracy are clearly exaggerated. The leaders of the Adventist groups repeatedly expressed sentiments like "loyal subjects of the sovereign," although, some of them were hostile and were even

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involved in the October revolution. These are facts which historians of Adventism prefer to pass over in silence.

Time has brought changes of attitude in the political orientation and social doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists, and compelled them to reexamine some of their dogmatic positions. Among Adventist ideologists, there are passionate disputes, heated arguments and strongly differing viewpoints on various problems.

At their fifth congress, in 1924, Seventh-day Adventists stated their position toward the Soviet government as one of loyalty as a basic principle of political orientation. It was at this congress that the split in the church originated. Some of the members did not accept the stated position toward the government, separated from the main body and tried to create their own organization with a bias toward extremism. They joined the so-called Reform Adventists, which emerged after the First World War in Germany. Such a split is not an unusual phenomenon for sects. It is the result of instability and differing attitudes of different social classes and religious

societies toward the Soviet power and comes about in their search for methods to retain and strengthen their positions. Similar processes took place also in the Baptist and the Evangelical churches. . . .

It is only natural that under socialist conditions, Adventism is experiencing a crisis. This results in a change of traditional religious ideas and in a considerable change in the psychology of the believers. In their minds, more and more place is given to "worldly things," while the "divine" gets weaker and weaker. . . . Under conditions of a general crisis in religion and a decline in piety everywhere, even Adventists, with their refined and flexible methods of spiritual influence on the people, have to search constantly for special ways to maintain in their adherents the little fire of faith. All this causes anxiety to the church leaders and compels them to action.

**I**n our country, there are comparatively few Seventh-day Adventists. Outwardly, contemporary Adventist religious teaching retains all its traditional doctrines, including belief in the 1,000-year reign of Christ and in the judgment of the living and dead, the conviction that Adventists are chosen of God to proclaim the message of salvation in all corners of the globe, and the necessity of an inner renovation involving observance of the Lord's commandments in order to earn the right to enter into the 1,000-year kingdom. . . . Adventists also hold to the doctrine of the mortality of the soul, which, somehow, does not tie in with general Christian teaching. But, the peculiar interpretation of the doctrine concerning the soul does not in the least affect the belief in life after the grave. . . .

A characteristic peculiarity of Seventh-day Adventists is the requirement of the absolute fulfillment of the fourth commandment. . . . In practice, the Sabbath day is used for strengthening the prayer exercise. Prayer meetings are held and "God's Word" is analyzed, often in the form of a Bible lesson. Believers are admonished to begin and end the Sabbath with prayer and reading from the Bible. Since there are 52 Sabbaths in a year, 52 days besides others each year are dedicated

to strengthening the spiritual life of the people.

Now, then, one cannot fail to call attention to the fact that the keeping of the fourth commandment at times leads the believer to violate his civil duties. Some of them refuse to go to work on this day, all because of religious obligations. . . .

*The next few paragraphs remark on tithing, baptism and worship rituals.*

The teaching of inner renewal deserves special attention. This is the Adventist interpretation of the Christian understanding of self-improvement, which includes emphasis on praying incessantly to grow in faith, repressing doubt, repentance and drawing nearer to Christ. Not so long ago, Adventist leaders demanded “self-sacrifice,” that is, denial of “worldly temptations.” In the *Week of Prayer Readings* for 1961, one could read: “Daily banish from your heart all that is worldly. Prepare yourself for the judgment so that when He comes and all believers bow before Him, you, too, may stand among those who are ready to meet Him.”

The *Week of Prayer Readings* for later years include no such frank, open summons. Life is changing, and the believers are indifferent; they cannot isolate themselves from society completely, or lock themselves up in the narrow road of religious experience. This compels contemporary preachers of Adventism to search for new words, new approaches to believers. In the *Week of Prayer Readings* for 1976, we find the following: “Let us pray that we may conduct ourselves in the correct pattern of life and be true Christians, worthy members of society and faithful citizens of our country—our earthly fatherland.”

Always emphasizing that the coming of Christ is near, preachers call upon believers to prepare to meet the “Saviour of mankind.” They constantly insist on the necessity of surrendering completely to God, and of remembering always that we are living in “the last days,” for it is possible to miss out on the 1,000-year kingdom. But it is doubtful that merely admonitions and instructions could have given Adventist ideologists what they often succeeded in achieving. The Seventh-day Adventist system of spiritual in-

fluence over people plays an essential role here.

For instance, the so-called “health reform” is especially influential. In different countries of the world, Adventists have opened hospitals and sanitariums which have worked out a lot of rules. But, let us note that the health reform was used right from the beginning for missionary purposes. The Adventists turned their health institutions into centers for the spreading of their faith, and the medical personnel into preachers of “the saving message.” The *Week of Prayer Readings* contain advice on diet, work and relaxation. Some are excerpts from medical sources, others do not come up to the level of contemporary medicine. Such advice represents an integral part of their religious doctrine. It cannot be denied that believers are attracted, for instance, by advice not to use alcohol, narcotics, and not to smoke. But the main point is that, objectively, this concern for people’s health is one of the refined means of strengthening religious experience and adherence to the Adventist faith, for, according to the design of the church’s ideologists, it daily convinces its adherents of the special compensations of professing this faith. Strictly speaking, this is the substance of health reform.

The Seventh-day Adventist world church now has 141 hospitals, 221 dispensaries, and many other types of medical facilities with approximately 8,000 medical employees. These medical institutions have cared for about 5,000,000 sick people during the last few years. Such concern for the believers’ health, in the eyes of the ignorant, is a philanthropic activity. Adventist preachers emphasize that the most important integral part of the Adventist message is the message of a healthy way of life, of which people are in great need.

**I**n order to accentuate the humanism of Adventism, ministers today call the attention of the believers to problems they did not touch upon in past decades. They talk, for example, about peace between nations, the rights of all peoples to equality and freedom, etc. This reflects, of course, the influence of the times, and contrasts with the traditional

doctrine of Adventists, which has been cast in an eschatological and chiliastic framework. Ellen White taught in *Gospel Workers*: "The Lord wishes His people to keep silence concerning political questions. You who work as educators, preachers and workers in every branch of God's work must not fight in the political world. You must live as citizens of Christ's kingdom." But today spiritual shepherds cannot avoid questions which are agitating all people. Willy nilly, they are compelled to deal with problems which encompass far more than Adventist eschatology and religion in general.

As was mentioned, Adventism demands from its followers participation in missionary activity. According to the principle of the "common priesthood," every believer must bring the "message of salvation" on the Second Coming everywhere. In such books as *Gospel Workers* and *Testimonies to Ministers*, it is stated that "every Seventh-day Adventist is a missionary," and it is everyone's duty "to win souls for Christ." The believers are taught how to educate children so that they will grow up as "true Christians." They are told how to conduct their conversation with those who "are ignorant of this truth" and how to bring them to an understanding of it. It is suggested that special attention be paid to

those who are in difficult circumstances and in need of help and support. In this connection, the humanitarian role, which sometimes looms large in creating trust toward missionaries of Adventism, comes into play.

Coming across such cases, one can see that Adventists have had success where we atheists in the main are indifferent to man and do not stretch out a hand to him when he is in difficulties. And how important it is to contrast this illusory humaneness of religious preachers to the true humanism of our society.

To be honest, it must be admitted that the growth of the Adventist Church is largely due to family members and believers from other denominations. But such data do not give us a basis for self-complacency. Not a few people are still under the power of the unattainable expectation of the Second Coming of Christ. They are following all the commands of their spiritual instructors. They do missionary work, educate their children in their faith. But they are not able themselves to see their delusions and don't have the ability to look upon the world without prejudice in order to see how unrealistic and groundless all their expectations are. In this they must be helped.