



The History  
of the  
Sabbath Rest  
Advent Church

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# The History of the Sabbath Rest Advent Church

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## The Spiritual Roots

The Sabbath Rest Advent Church has its spiritual roots in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The tremendous upheaval which the Reformation brought about was but the climax of the faith and resolution of pious individuals and some underground religious groups, such as the Waldenses<sup>1</sup>, the Lollards<sup>2</sup>, and the Bohemian Brethren<sup>3</sup>, who looked to the Bible as the foundation for their faith and way of life.

These faithful people suffered all kinds of persecution and were branded as heretics<sup>4</sup> because they lived out their faith contrary to the dictates of the official church. They were dispossessed, cast into prison, tortured, and executed. Sometimes, even wars were proscribed against them. They were denied the right of freedom of conscience, and of living out their faith, because there was only one recognized church at that time, which was closely connected with the state. In fact, it was this very union of church and state that laid the foundation for the persecution.

Among other things, the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century may also be considered as justifying the stand taken by these persecuted Christians. However, the principle of state and church being separate remained unknown to the early Protestants. Naturally, the reformers and their followers strove to maintain a right relationship to the state, but they also made some mistakes because of their lack of knowledge. Time and again they discussed the issue of who should play the leading role in the marriage of church and state. The churches that were most influenced by Luther tended, on the whole, to submit to the authority of the state. The same can also be said of the English Anglican Church, which even went so far as to appoint the ruling regent as their spiritual head.

In Geneva, Calvin developed a model in which the church played the leading role. However, in contrast to the medieval predominance of the church, Geneva recognized the Bible as the source of its constitution. In America the Calvinists established a form of government that bore the impress of the church, but this led to all kinds of abuses. For example, only those who belonged to the state church were permitted to occupy government offices. Also, attendance of the

church services was compulsory, and whoever failed to do so faced fines or prison. This soon led to a hypocritical Christianity, which was of course contrary to the original goals of the Reformation. In principle, they repeated the same mistake as the church from which they had fled.

Roger Williams<sup>5</sup> and other reformers of the seventeenth century recognized this danger and pleaded for the separation of church and state. Unfortunately, this stand exposed them to the charge of rebellion. It was thought that a separation of church and state would undermine the authority of the state and lead to the dissolution of society.

The present American state of Rhode Island, which was founded by Roger Williams, was the first colony in America where the principle of separation between church and state was realized. Believers of different religious faiths, such as Anabaptists and Quakers as well as others, came here to exercise their faith, which was proscribed in other states.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, North America was the missionary goal as well as the refuge of many who held different views from the state church and were therefore subjected to intolerance and persecution. These people came from the established Protestant churches as well as some smaller Protestant groups. In addition to these, Rationalists<sup>6</sup> and Deists<sup>7</sup> also sought a safe haven here.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, revival movements<sup>8</sup> among the various Protestant churches of America, as well as the reaction that emanated from the French revolution, led to more emphasis on religious freedom in the new world. The result was the separation of church and state. The equality of all the religious groups in regard to civil law was a Protestant as well as a rationalistic concern.

Religious freedom proved to be favorable for the growth of the Protestant faith, which was based on the Bible as the revealed will of God, and which emphasized righteousness by faith in Christ, as well as the need of a personal religious experience. Consequently, in the early part of the nineteenth century a religious revival movement spread among the various Protestant churches in both the old and the new worlds. Bible and missionary societies sprang up. The

word of God, and especially the prophecies, was studied in many countries. This led to a general expectation of the soon coming of Christ, or Second Advent.<sup>9</sup> The changes in society, coupled with various natural occurrences (such as the Leonid meteorite shower in 1833), strengthened the faith of many in their conviction that some special event was impending. This movement found its greatest expression in North America where William Miller and hundreds of other ministers preached that Christ would soon be coming again.

Before his conversion at the age of 34, Miller was a Deist. After finding Jesus as his personal Redeemer, he tried to convince his friends of the reality of a God who takes an active part in our personal lives. With this aim in view he began a thorough study of the Bible. As he did so, he realized that the prophecies found in God's word were perfectly suited to overcome prejudice. While he was studying the prophecies in more detail, he became convinced that Christ would be returning to this earth in the near future. But although he felt a definite call from God to preach his faith publicly, he held back from doing so. As a farmer and layman he would have preferred to leave this task in the hands of the clergy. However, he could not refrain from speaking to his neighbors and friends about his faith, and in 1831 he was finally invited to preach his convictions publicly. Now he could hold back no longer, and he began to spread the message of Christ's Second Advent. From this time on invitations for him to preach the message in the various Protestant churches multiplied.

At first, William Miller was a welcome guest in all of the Protestant churches because his message produced a spiritual revival. Within a few years at least 50,000 people (some estimates go as high as 100,000) in East USA testified to their belief in the soon coming of Christ. Approximately 500 ministers and 1,500 laymen preached this message. The revival came to be known as the "Advent movement," and its followers were referred to as "Adventists."

Neither William Miller nor any of the other Adventists had intended to establish a new church. In fact, they recommended the new converts to remain in their churches and there prepare for the coming of Jesus. But in 1844 there was a break with the established churches. At that time the Adventists were either put out of the churches or they left voluntarily.

In the autumn of 1844 the Adventists suffered a bitter disappointment when the expected event—the visible appearance of Christ—did not take place. Of the many who had eagerly awaited the event, only a few faithful ones held on to the hope that Christ would still return to this earth in the near future. These believers soon realized that they had made a mistake in regard to the *event* that was prophesied to take place at that time. As a matter of fact, the exact timing of Christ’s second coming cannot be calculated (see *Matthew* 25:13). The time prophecies they had studied actually pointed to a different event—the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and not the earthly one (see *Daniel* 8:14), as the Adventists had wrongly assumed.

And yet the experience and hope of the Adventists had not been in vain. Jesus had warned His disciples to maintain a constant watchfulness in regard to His second coming—an event which is of the utmost importance for the Christian world. “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” *Matthew* 24:44. The Second Advent of Christ had become as much a living hope for them as it had been for the early Christians.

Through their study of the prophetic times, the faithful remnant of Adventists had their eyes drawn to the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, which is described in Paul’s letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament. As they studied both the heavenly sanctuary and its earthly counterpart in Old Testament times, they saw the special position of the law of God, and the particular importance of the fourth commandment. It was the law of the ten commandments that formed the center of the original sanctuary in Moses’ day, and also of Solomon’s temple which was built later. The fourth commandment describes the Sabbath (Saturday) as the day of rest that God has chosen for humanity. The Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—is not a Jewish institution, but was given to humanity at the creation of this earth (see *Genesis* 2). The Adventists were convicted that the Sabbath, as a divine institution, will be valid until the end of time.

Another important conviction that the Adventists came to was that the spiritual gifts Paul speaks of in *1 Corinthians* 12–14 are not limited to the times of the early church, but that God also gives them in the present day. The gift of the spirit of prophecy was especially manifest in the experience of Ellen G. Harmon (later Ellen G.

White). The Bible remained, in harmony with Protestant tradition, the only rule of the Adventists' faith, but the gift of the spirit of prophecy proved to be an invaluable aid in putting its principles into present-day practice.

In 1848 the Adventists held several small conferences in which various doctrines were discussed and the points of faith mentioned above were accepted. By 1850 the main doctrines had been formulated, and between 1860–1863 the church took some important steps in its own organization and adopted the official name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA Church). That is how the Seventh-day Adventist Church came into being. This small movement developed rapidly. By 1863 there were 3,500 members, and as they entered the twentieth century some 75,000 people confessed this faith.

The early SDA Church emphasized the prophetic statements of the Bible and the moral law (the ten commandments) in their preaching of the message. However, while outwardly holding on to these doctrines, many Adventists soon lost sight of the Protestant principle of justification by faith in Christ. As has happened so often with other movements of the past, after a time there was only an external observation of forms coupled with an inward emptiness. And so the movement lost its spiritual power and became complacent, necessitating another revival.

In the year 1888 the Seventh-day Adventist Church held a significant General Conference in Minneapolis, in the state of Minnesota. Two young preachers were present who put their fingers on the sore spot. They had themselves experienced justification by faith in Christ in a significant manner, which led them, like Luther and many others, to preach their message with an inner conviction that was in harmony with their lives. Ellen White supported these young ministers, and for several years the three of them worked together. Even so, they were not successful in effecting a lasting, spiritual revival of the entire SDA Church.

Nonetheless, there was a significant growth in numbers in the SDA Church at the start of the twentieth century. Several charitable institutions such as hospitals and schools were established, and the worldwide missionary work spread out. But the church as a whole was lacking the inward, spiritual strength of the early years, which had led people to a personal experience in faith.<sup>10</sup>

## The Rise of the Sabbath Rest Advent Church

In the middle of the twentieth century a revival movement based on the message of justification by faith (as it had been presented in 1888 and shortly after) sprang up within the SDA Church. This movement began in the USA and Australia but soon spread out to encompass other countries.

In 1958 a man by the name of Frederic T. Wright, who was teaching at the Adventist College in Palmerston North, New Zealand, came into contact with this message. At a later date he recorded his personal experience in a publication entitled *From Bondage to Freedom* on pages 51–56. He was not aware of the full meaning of his experience at the time, and the consequences it would bring to his life. But in actual fact he had returned to the original, Christian faith—the same faith that had inspired the Adventists at the start of their movement. After noticing the adverse reaction of the school authorities whenever he spoke of his new faith, F.T. Wright decided to be quiet and not cause any offence. He was unwilling to speak about his faith publicly unless he had a direct call to do so. After several months of struggle he could no longer resist the call of God, which he recognized in the many invitations to speak to students and other members of the church. In personal talks and Bible studies he shared his faith and his experience with others, although he always respected the position of the school leaders. But conflict was inevitable, and eventually he left the college in 1960 and began work as a shepherd. Some time after this he was disfellowshipped from the SDA Church.

In the meantime, there was quite an interest in the “Revival Movement” within the SDA Church, and F.T. Wright was often requested to speak about his faith. As a result of this he began working fulltime as a preacher in 1961. Again, it was his firm conviction that this was a divine calling that finally led him to take this step—a conviction that had gradually matured and been carefully tested for some time.

From the beginning of his work, F.T. Wright was dependent on the voluntary gifts of those who wanted to hear the message, and who had an interest in him continuing his work as a minister. In fact, he

had made it a principle never to ask for contributions, and he saw the confirmation of his divine calling in the fact that he was able to continue his work without ever asking for money.

In 1962 he and his family moved to north New South Wales, Australia. And in 1963 the small group of believers that had gathered around F.T. Wright finally separated from the SDA Church. Although he never had the intention of forming a separate church, he eventually had to come to terms with the fact that it was not possible to restore the original faith within the SDA Church.

In the years that followed, the small group of believers in Australia and New Zealand was extended to include believers from North America, Europe, and Africa. The annual camp meetings, at which Bible studies were held for approximately one week in the various countries, helped to establish the faith of the believers.

Essentially, this group of believers were actually Seventh-day Adventists in the truest sense of the term. But this new movement was not limited to the truths understood by the 1844 and 1888 movements. The spiritual understanding continued to grow, year by year. The most important new truths of the SRA Church may be summarized as follows:

The gospel is not merely a doctrine but a power, enabling the believer to live a life which is similar to the life that Christ led, a life which is in harmony with God's laws.

A deeper understanding of the loving character of God. The concept of a punishing and destroying God (the Father) in the Old Testament, and a loving, saving God (Christ) in the New Testament is quite widespread. But in fact, Christ and His Father are One, and do not change (see *Malachi* 3:6 and *James* 1:17). Christ came to this earth to reveal the character of His Father. And Christ gave us the only reliable picture that we have of God. When the statements regarding God in the Old Testament are seen in this light they take on a new meaning.

The divine day of rest (Sabbath) which God has given to all humanity, has gained a new and deeper meaning in the light of resting in God. While the Sabbath Rest Advent Church recognizes the seventh day (Saturday) as the divine day of rest, the application of this principle is not restricted to this one day of the week. Sabbath Rest is a principle in the life of a converted Christian. A person who

has Sabbath Rest recognizes God as his Source, Plan Maker, Problem Solver, Burden Bearer, Doctor, and Redeemer. The believer has personal access to this Source through Christ alone.

In regard to the organizational structure of the church it was recognized that Christ is the only Head of the church. This means that any workers in His church are called directly by Him alone. It is the task of the members of the church to test this calling and, if convinced, to confirm it. This is not the same as a democratic vote to discover the will of the majority. The believers seek by earnest prayer to know the will of God and to act in harmony with it. Only after this has been done can God's choice be officially confirmed by the church.

Another practical consequence of Christ being the Head of the church is that He appoints the messenger of His choice. He uses the messenger as a channel to communicate whatever He wishes to impart to the church. Once again, the responsibility lies with the members to express their conviction, based on biblical principles, by confirming or rejecting the choice of the messenger, as well as the message itself. For the members of the Sabbath Rest Advent Church, F.T. Wright was the divinely-called messenger, and what he preached is the present truth.

In 1964 F.T. Wright began to publish a monthly newsletter, which was originally intended to be just an information sheet for the small group of believers. In 1965 the foundations were laid for a publishing house with its own printing facilities, and in 1966 the first edition of a monthly magazine, *The Messenger of Living Righteousness*, was published. (The title was changed when it later incorporated the newsletter, to its current name: *The Messenger and News Review*.) Apart from articles about the message from F.T. Wright, it also contained articles and reports from other members of the movement. Books began to be printed as well, and these were offered for sale at cost price. In 1973 a print shop in Germany also began to produce literature in the German language and later in other languages (apart from English).

F.T. Wright traveled to the United States for the first time in 1964 and remained there for several months. By 1966 there were representatives of the Sabbath Rest Advent Church in North America, in 1966 in Germany, in 1967 in Norway, in the 1970's in South and East Africa as well as in other East and West European countries, and in

the 1980's in India and other countries. Today the Sabbath Rest Advent Church is represented in more than 30 countries and in all the populated continents of the world. The worldwide membership is estimated at more than 2000 believers.

An important aspect of religious life within the Sabbath Rest Advent Church is the annual camp meetings or conferences. As far as possible, there is at least one conference per year, where the message is preached, in every country. Until 1988 the main preacher was F.T. Wright. But due to a progressive illness (Parkinson's disease) his ability to speak was greatly impaired, and since 1989 Andreas Dura, from Germany, has been the main speaker at the conferences.

Although the movement was independent of other churches it had no worldwide uniform name until 1989. The necessity for such a step was finally recognized and the name "Sabbath Rest Advent Church" was adopted. This is the name the church now has in every country, although it is of course translated into each country's language.

Until 1993 the main headquarters of the Sabbath Rest Advent Church was in Palmwoods, Queensland, Australia. At that time it had to be given up because of some personal family claims from members of the Wright family that could not otherwise be settled. Following this the center was moved to Dickendorf, Germany. F.T. Wright also moved to Dickendorf in 1993 and died there in 1997 at the age of 71.

The Sabbath Rest Advent Church (SRAC) does not canvass for members, nor does it force its beliefs on others. The guiding principle is that the message is preached only where there is an invitation to do so.

Yet the members of the SRAC do feel a responsibility for the welfare of humanity. This concern is not restricted to the spiritual area alone, but also includes physical health. For this reason the SRAC is active in the areas of healthcare, training children, youth, and adults, as well as looking after needy persons. In this work every effort is made to apply the philosophy of life as it is taught in the Adventist publications of E.G. White's writings. In this ministry of healing, emphasis is laid on each person's own responsibility for their health by living a healthy lifestyle. The training of young people involves a comprehensive schooling and includes physical activ-

ities as well as learning manual skills. One of the aims of caring for the needy is to teach them to help themselves as far as possible.

In the execution of its tasks, the SRAC has other institutions apart from the center in Dickendorf. In both New Zealand and Swaziland there is a country school, in Tanzania there is a home for orphans.

## The Sabbath Rest Advent Church in Germany

The beginnings of the SRAC in Germany go back to the years 1966 to 1968 when F.T. Wright visited that country. In 1968 Wolfgang Meyer began the work of translating the message into German and preaching it. From 1970 onwards he did this work full-time. In 1973 the SRAC set up a small print shop in Sonderbach, Hessen, where the monthly magazine *Botschaft aktuell* (the German equivalent of *The Messenger and News Review*) was printed and distributed to all the members in the German-speaking countries. The work of translating and printing the English books also began here. The first conference in Germany was held in Zwingenberg, Hessen, in 1969. After this, conferences were held every year. The annual meetings were held in Youth Hostels, or other public institutions that were hired especially for the event, until 1986.

In 1978 Wolfgang Meyer died in a car accident while traveling in Austria. Shortly after this Andreas Dura took his place to continue the work of building up the church in Germany. As mentioned above, he was also called to the work of the worldwide church in 1989.

In 1982 the SRAC purchased a house and grounds in Dickendorf, Rheinland-Pfalz. This was the first property that the church had owned in Germany. The small print shop moved there the same year, although the building was still in need of renovation. In order to save costs, the renovation work was done by the church members. Naturally, this took quite some time so that the work was not finished until 1985. In 1986 the first conference was held on the church's own property.

In 1989 the SRAC purchased a neighboring property and in 1992 a multi-purpose hall was erected on the grounds to house the print

shop as well as to provide offices, a meeting room, guest rooms, sanitary facilities, and storage rooms. The hall was finished in 1995, and what had been a center for the German church now served as the center for the worldwide church.

As well as the annual German conference, regular international meetings have been held in Dickendorf since 1992. These meetings are attended by representatives from the churches throughout the world. The center also serves as a training school for young people from different countries. It offers them the opportunity of gaining a practical insight into church work, housekeeping, and health work, as well as providing social and educational activities. The care of several older believers in Dickendorf has also meant that the church qualifies for the employment of one alternative service worker.

On August 8, 1998, the members of the SRAC within the German-speaking countries formed a covenant together, in which the members gave expression to their unity in the faith, their mutual trust and pledged to faithfulness to God and to each other. It was the first time that the members had made such a covenant and written it down. Other SRA churches in different countries also followed their example. This covenant will now be renewed yearly.

Dickendorf, Germany, July 2002

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## Appendix

- 1 Waldenses: A religious movement that began with a merchant from Lyons by the name of Valdes in 1177. Valdes gave his property to the poor and traveled around as an itinerant preacher. His followers called themselves “the poor in Christ” but their opponents called them “Waldenses.” In 1184 the pope condemned them as heretics, and especially in the 14th and 15th centuries were they persecuted, tortured, and maligned as witches. See Dr. Albert de Lange, *Die Geschichte der Waldenser*.
- 2 Lollards: A religious movement which had its beginnings in England in the 14th century. The name Lollards is derived from the Middle Dutch *lollaert* (mumbler) and was used in a defamatory way by the opponents of this movement. The Lollards were followers of the English theologian and reformer John Wycliffe (circa 1330–1384). During the reign of Henry VIII (circa 1534) this movement united with the English reformation. It was also a causative factor in the reformation in Bohemia led by John Huss.
- 3 Bohemian Brethren: First known as Hussites, they were the followers of the Bohemian theologian John Huss who was burnt at the stake in Constance as a heretic in 1415. In the middle of the fifteenth century they formed themselves into the *Unitas Fratrum* (United Brethren). During the Leipzig debate, Luther recognized Huss as a fellow reformer.
- 4 Heretic: A dissenter from the official church dogma.
- 5 Roger Williams (circa 1603–1683): An English colonist of New England and founder of Rhode Island, which later became one of the states of America. He came into conflict with the colonial government of Massachusetts because he stood up for the separation of church and state as well as for the rights of the American Indians. In 1635 he was banned from the colony but in 1636 he avoided deportation and traveled to Narragansett Bay. In the same year he bought some land from the Narragansett

Indians and with some others of like mind he founded a settlement called Providence as well as Rhode Island colony. Soon, other settlements were established in Rhode Island and in 1644 Williams obtained the deeds for these from England. In 1651 the deeds were confirmed and in 1654 he was elected president of the colony. Until his death Roger Williams often served Rhode Island and the surrounding colonies by acting as a peacemaker between the settlers and the Narraganset Indians, who greatly trusted him.

- 6 Rationalism: reliance on reason as the only source of knowledge.
- 7 Deism: A view of God in which God created the world but does not interfere with its development. Consequently, the Bible is not considered to be the revealed word of God.
- 8 Revival (Christian): The conversion of indifferent and superficial church members back to the original faith of the church fathers.
- 9 Advent: from the Latin *adventus* = coming. Also known as Parousia, which comes from the Greek *parousia* = coming or coming again.
- 10 Reference is here made to a general trend and is not to be taken as a judgment of individuals.

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