

An aerial photograph of a city at sunset, with a white rectangular text box overlaid in the center. The city lights are visible in the background, and a river with a boat is seen in the lower-left corner.

Adventist Identity – A Never-Ending Quest

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What is the reason for our existence?

“You know, the world then was a much simpler world.”

We used to be clear – After 175 years not so...

“Where you stand depends on where you sit.” (Rufus Miles)

1874 – There is a world out there – J. N. Andrews sent to Switzerland

1888 – Time to adjust what is the Identity in Adventism

1901 – Time to reorganize for mission

1915 – The “founding mother” dies

**1919 – Bible Conference to deal with the new reality
– How do you deal with your own tales & myths?**

1938-45 – Confronting the “Fascist story” – did not do that well (D. Heinz; J. Hartlapp; J. Doukhan)

1964 – How long can you cry “wolf”...?

1966 – GC Session in Detroit – Revival & Reformation

**1989 – Confronting the “Communist story” – triumph
(90k+ USSR; 50k+ Romania, etc.; yet KERAK...)**

1990 – GC session in Indianapolis – Global Mission

**1994 – Genocide in Rwanda – orthodox FB are not enough
to hold together – different identities**

2015 – Dealing with complex realities of a polarized church

Adventism worked well with the shortness of time mentality – If not us, who else would do it for the Lord?

Adventism worked well with the 19th century mentality – If not our present truth, what else would finish the Lord's work?

Various solutions for the present-day crisis are proposed – that's why today we are more fragmented than any other time in history!

You are going to misunderstand the Adventist identity if you do not understand the world into which Adventism was born in 19th century.

To understand Adventism & Adventist identity, you have to understand the world into which Adventism was born.

Enlightenment

Started 1700-1750

Tradition or authority are no longer an acceptable source of answers

Beliefs must be based on reason

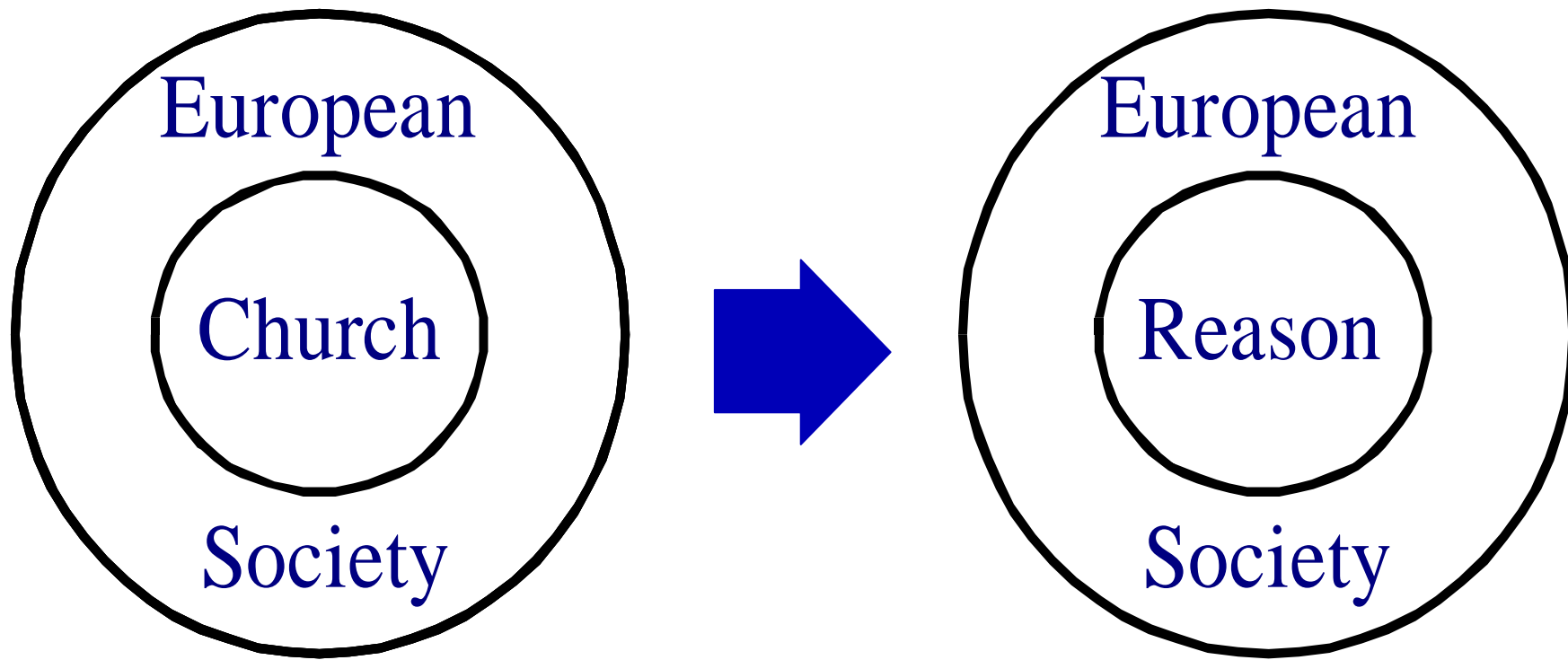
If everyone applies the correct principles of reason, all will come to the same conclusions

Before Enlightenment, the identity was clear:

God is up there; we are down here

If we are good, God rewards us, if we are bad, He punishes us

How Enlightenment changed the world



Lisbon Earthquake

Saturday, 1 November 1755 at 9:40am

Out of est. 275,000 population 60-90,000 died

All Saints' Day – people in the church, going out of the church, or going to the church

Most people who died, died in cathedrals

After Lisbon earthquake, people no longer believed that earthquakes are a punishment from an angry God

In Science – start of Seismology

In Theology – start of Deism

William Miller (1782-1849)

A Baptist farmer

Deist – God not involved with the world

Science, technology, new era of discoveries – Golden age of humankind

War of 1812 – Battle of Plattsburg (1814) =>

Change of thinking – post-millennialism to pre-millennialism

Carefully studied prophecies for many years

Between 1831-1844 no problem with identity

Wednesday, 23rd October 1844 – The Great Disappointment

What have we learnt?

Enlightenment started as a re-thinking of medieval European thinking. Deism started as a re-thinking of Enlightenment & Millerism started as a re-thinking movement in response to deism

As with every re-thinking, it brought some positive results and it also created some confusion

To sort out the confusion, another re-thinking was needed

Out of this re-thinking, Seventh-day Adventism was born and moved forward

History of Adventism

- 1) 1844-1888 – Eschatology**
- 2) 1888-1957 – Soteriology**
- 3) 1958- now – Fragmentation**
 - a) Historic**
 - b) Cultural**
 - c) Mainstream**
 - d) Progressive**
 - e) Evangelical**

Matthew 16:13-18 (NIV)

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" **14** They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. **18** And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Biblical Identity

The Question of Identity: Who is Jesus?

**The person of Jesus precedes the doctrines of Jesus.
The doctrines of Jesus are important because of
who Jesus is.**

Biblical Roles of Doctrines

The role of a doctrine is to deepen my relationship with Jesus, to make it more practical, liveable. To make me a more loving, gracious and tolerant person.

In that sense, doctrines are important! (False doctrines ultimately devalue your relationship with Jesus!)

Christianity = Jesus

If Adventism = Christianity =>

Adventism = Jesus

The Question of Biblical Identity:

Simon, bar Jonah + Christ's revelation = Peter the rock

Johnson + Christ = Rock

Anyone + Christ = Living Stone

All of us + Christ = Living Stones = the Church

Traditionally, religion has provided solutions to three types of problems:

1) Technical problems: How do you produce enough food for all to survive; how do you heal those who are sick? Enlightenment brought an end to this, because science produces better results in farming & healthcare (evidence based).

2) Policy problems: How do you run a society? Which economics are better, the left or right? How do you stop global warming? One just uses the principle of reinterpretation based on one's biases.

3) Identity problems: Defines who is "us" and who is "them" who should be helped, blessed, cured, or ignored, cursed, bombed, who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. Thus religion becomes in today's world not a solution, but a problem.



The Trinity in Adventism

The importance of the Trinity Doctrine

1) 1844-1888 – Eschatology

– Unimportant; (Suspicious-Catholic)

2) 1888-1956 – Soteriology

– A proper understanding of Trinity is needed for a proper Soteriology

3) 1956- now – Fragmentation

– The essence of Ultimate Reality is relationships [community]



In 19th century mindset the idea was that global domination will bring global liberation.

The problem of the contemporary world is that it brings global problems and those cannot be solved with local thinking, groupthink.

And thus **you cannot solve global problems without a global community.**

But to have that you have to espouse the values of **truth, compassion, equality, freedom, courage and responsibility.**

And not only consider them important, but radically pursue them – in other words – being willing to redefine your identity in light of your values.



In February 2017 Mark Zuckerberg published an audacious manifesto on the need to build a global community and Facebook's role in it. He explained that the socio-political upheavals of our time – from rampant drug addiction to murderous totalitarian regimes – result to a large extent from the disintegration of human communities. He lamented the fact that “for decades, membership in all kinds of groups has declined as much as one quarter. That’s a lot of people who now need to find a sense of purpose and support somewhere else.”

His ultimate goal is “to help 1 billion people join meaningful communities. If we can do this, it will not only turn around the whole decline in community membership we’ve seen for decades, it will start to strengthen our social fabric and bring the world closer together.”

This is such an important goal that Zuckerberg vowed “to change Facebook’s whole mission to take this on”.



A Solution for Identity Crisis

All new events and new patterns of thinking always cause a crisis of faith, an identity crisis

The only viable solution is re-thinking our faith and identity

Adventism started as a re-thinking movement: a response to Millerism, Deism and Enlightenment

Every re-thinking brings some positive results and also creates some mess

To progress further, another re-thinking is needed

Adventism needed to do a re-thinking a few times in its history and so far, managed to do it well

The future of Adventism depends on our ability to re-think/re-imagine our identity



Individual versus Community

A community of justice in a world of economic and ecological injustice

A community of generosity and simplicity (of 'enough') in a consumer world

A community of selfless giving in a world of selfishness

A community of truth (humility and boldness) in a world of relativism

A community of hope in a world of disillusionment and consumer satiation

A community of joy and thanksgiving in a world of entitlement

A community that experiences God's presence in a secular world

Imagine!

What if?

Questions for Discussion

Discuss in a small group:

- 1) To what extent the movement that had the attribute “re-thinking movement” written in its “birth certificate,” became just an institution that replicates itself and its traditions?**
- 2) What changes can you see in your current environment in the last 10 years? In what way these challenges require a new response? What are we offering/telling the people around us?**
- 3) If the SDA Church in your country wants to be the ‘salt and light’ for people in today’s society, what needs to change and what needs to be preserved?**
- 4) What are the implication of fragmentation of Adventism for you? Do you see it as a threat or an opportunity? Does it threatened/shake your religious identity? How can it be a positive factor in the world in which we live?**

