

How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism
Apr 15, 1997

Seventh-day Adventists regard all men and women as equal in the sight of God. We reject bigotry against any person, regardless of race, nationality, or religious creed. Further, we gladly acknowledge that sincere Christians may be found in other denominations, including Roman Catholicism, and we work in concert with all agencies and bodies that seek to relieve human suffering and to uplift Christ before the world.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to take a positive approach to other faiths. Our primary task is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of Christ's soon return, not to point out flaws in other denominations.

The beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are rooted in the biblical apostolic teachings and thus share many essential tenets of Christianity in common with the followers of other Christian churches. However, we have a specific identity as a movement. Our compelling message for Christians and non-Christians alike is to communicate hope by focusing on the quality of life that is complete in Christ.

As Adventists relate to Roman Catholicism in particular, both the past and the future enter into our thinking. We cannot erase or ignore the historical record of serious intolerance and even persecution on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic system of church governance, based on extra-biblical teachings such as papal primacy, resulted in severe abuses of religious freedom as the church was allied with the state.

Seventh-day Adventists are convinced of the validity of our prophetic views, according to which humanity now lives close to the end of time. Adventists believe, on the basis of biblical predictions, that just prior to the second coming of Christ this earth will experience a period of unprecedented turmoil, with the seventh-day Sabbath as a focal point. In that context, we expect that world religions—including the major Christian bodies as key players—will align themselves with the forces in opposition to God and to the Sabbath. Once again the union of church and state will result in widespread religious oppression.

To blame past violations of Christian principles on one specific denomination is not an accurate representation of either history or the concerns of Bible prophecy. We recognize that at times Protestants, including Seventh-day Adventists, have manifested prejudice and even bigotry. If, in expounding on what the Bible teaches, Seventh-day Adventists fail to express love to those addressed, we do not exhibit authentic Christianity.

Adventists seek to be fair in dealing with others. Thus, while we remain aware of the historical record and continue to hold our views regarding end-time events, we recognize some positive changes in recent Catholicism, and stress the conviction that many Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.

This statement was recorded on April 15, 1997, by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and released by the Office of the President, Robert S. Folkenberg.

Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence, there is an increasing indifference concerning the doctrines that separate the reformed churches from the papal hierarchy; the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome. The time was when Protestants placed a high value upon the liberty of conscience which had been so dearly purchased. They taught their children to abhor popery and held that to seek harmony with Rome would be disloyalty to God. But how widely different are the sentiments now expressed! GC 563.1

The defenders of the papacy declare that the church has been maligned, and the Protestant world are inclined to accept the statement. Many urge that it is unjust to judge the church of today by the abominations and absurdities that marked her reign during the centuries of ignorance and darkness. They excuse her horrible cruelty as the result of the barbarism of the times and plead that the influence of modern civilization has changed her sentiments. GC 563.2

Have these persons forgotten the claim of infallibility put forth for eight hundred years by this haughty power? So far from being relinquished, this claim was affirmed in the nineteenth century with greater positiveness than ever before. As Rome asserts that the "church never erred; nor will it, according to the Scriptures, ever err" (John L. von Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, book 3, century II, part 2, chapter 2, section 9, note 17), how can she renounce the principles which governed her course in past ages? GC 564.1

The papal church will never relinquish her claim to infallibility. All that she has done in her persecution of those who reject her dogmas she holds to be right; and would she not repeat the same acts, should the opportunity be presented? Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution.

But Romanism as a system is no more in harmony with the gospel of Christ now than at any former period in her history. The Protestant churches are in great darkness, or they would discern the signs of the times. The Roman Church is far-reaching in her plans and modes of operation. She is employing every device to extend her influence and increase her power in preparation for a fierce and determined conflict to regain control of the world, to re-establish persecution, and to undo all that Protestantism has done. Catholicism is gaining ground upon every side.

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