

Walter Martin and the Seventh-day Adventists

Did the Seventh-day Adventists lie to cult researcher Walter Martin back in the 1950s? To get the complete answer click on the following link

- <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation/2010/3/waltermartin.html>. The story has often been told over

the last 50 years. Walter Martin, the well-known cult researcher and Christian apologist, went to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1955 to make sure he accurately understood Adventism's doctrinal positions. He had written a chapter about Adventism in *The Rise of the Cults* (Zondervan, 1955), and before he wrote more he wanted to question Adventist leaders directly. After several conferences with Martin and evangelical colleagues including Donald Grey Barnhouse in 1955 and 1956 (one count put the number of meetings at 18), the Adventists published *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (often called QOD) in 1957. This book was the Adventists' official answer to Walter Martin and his colleagues.

Numerous accounts of this story focus not primarily on the events of the discussions themselves but on their backlash from both within and without the Adventist Church. As many have stated and re-stated, the publication of QOD resulted in more and longer-lasting controversy within the Adventist Church than has any other issue the Church has faced.^{2, 3, 4}

Raymond Cottrell, associate editor of the *Adventist Review* and also of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible*

Commentary, practically prophesied about these 50 years of conflict as QOD was being prepared for publication:

Let us be certain that nothing gets into the proposed book that will take us the next 50 years to live down.⁵

In October of 2007 a QOD 50th anniversary conference was held at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. This event was not so much a celebration as it was a time for various individuals within Adventism (and two non-Adventists) to discuss issues from the QOD controversy which have persisted over the past five decades. Although many Adventists have opposed QOD, many have favored it, though their favor reflects a variety of viewpoints and agendas. Whether for or against the book, all of the conference participants agreed that QOD was a watershed event in Adventist history.

One particularly revealing event in the "QOD saga" occurred in 1984 when Walter Martin and William Johnsson, then editor of the *Adventist Review*, met for discussions on the *John Ankerberg Show*. The resulting five-program television series, "Who Is Telling the Truth About Seventh Day [sic] Adventism?," aired in 1985. The question now needs to be asked. Did someone lie about Seventh-day Adventism? To answer this question, we will first look at the Adventists and the evangelicals involved in the "Martin conversations"—and then examine various responses to QOD. Juhyeok (Julius) Nam's doctoral dissertation "Reactions to the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences and *Questions on Doctrine*, 1955–1971," is an excellent resource on this subject, but it only examines work written before 1972. Numerous issues, however, have arisen since 1971,

particularly from the *John Ankerberg Show*, which we will address as well.

Did Adventist leadership lie to Walter Martin?

The definition of "lie" is to tell an untruth with the intent to deceive. Included in the definition is the act of not telling the whole truth, or telling partial truths with the intent to mislead. Given this definition of "lie," the simple answer to the question must be a clear "Yes, Adventist leadership lied to Walter Martin." We can go to great lengths to discuss the specifics of the wordsmithing they did when explaining their doctrines, comparing the language of QOD to earlier written positions. Unfortunately very few remain who were a part of that experience. Those who were there, such as Herbert Douglass, are clear that *Questions on Doctrine* was not in harmony with historic Adventist positions, and it resulted in a deep and long-lasting controversy within the Adventist Church. George Knight, an accomplished historian and scholar, has documented well many of the issues that arose from QOD. His book *A Search for Identity* and his detailed annotations in the republished *Questions on Doctrine* provide many important details that indicate the Adventists involved in drafting QOD were not fully honest in the ways they articulated Adventism's doctrinal positions.

Finally, in his dissertation, Juhyeok Nam extensively documents the history of QOD from before its publication until 1971. He provides documentation on reactions from outside and inside the Adventist Church. These include private letters, not intended for publication, which have

direct and significant bearing on exactly how and why the Adventist participants in the 1950s meetings concealed the truth.

Walter Martin stated the facts himself on the John Ankerberg Show in 1985. It's now time to admit that the Adventists did not tell Martin, Barnhouse, and their evangelical colleagues the truth. It's time to set the record straight.

Will the Adventist leadership repent?

Regarding the direction the Adventist Church was taking in the 1970s and 1980s, Walter Martin said:

I fear that if they continue to progress at this rate, that the classification of a cult can't possibly miss being re-applied to Seventh Day [sic] Adventism." 51 (Walter Martin, transcript from the *John Ankerberg Show*, "Who's Telling the Truth About Seventh Day Adventism?," 1985, p. 26.)

Following the death of cult leader Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, his Worldwide Church of God labeled Armstrong's writings heretical, repented of its errors, and joined the greater Christian community.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church had a similar opportunity in the 1950s. When meeting with Martin they had the chance to come clean about their anti-trinitarianism, multi-phase atonement, identification of "Sunday worship" with the mark of the beast, Sabbath requirement, prophetess Ellen White, and many other unbiblical beliefs. They instead chose to rework the wording of their positions to appear acceptable to evangelical Christians.

Seventh-day Adventism has been able to infiltrate the evangelical community because key leaders deceived Walter Martin into believing they were evangelical Christians (albeit with a number of heterodox teachings and practices). Under this facade, however, the church has never renounced or stopped teaching its founding doctrines, and now, with the election of Ted Wilson as General Conference president, there is renewed emphasis on proclaiming and embracing true Adventism.

Regardless of the church's corporate stance, however, individual Seventh-day Adventists always have the opportunity to admit the truth. Jesus is calling, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul" (Mt. 11:28–29).

The voice from heaven in Revelation 18 calls all those caught in false religion:

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (Rev. 18:4–5, ESV). †