

## A View from Outside the Veil: The Evangelical Reaction to *Questions on Doctrine*

Despite the fact that for much of the last fifty years most within Adventism have focused on the internal struggles *Questions on Doctrine* caused in Adventist theology, no discussion of the topic would be complete without acknowledging that QOD was essentially a book for those in the Evangelical world. QOD was created to clarify Adventist theology to a skeptical Evangelical world shocked by the Donald Gray Barnhouse and Walter Martin's offer of the hand of Christian fellowship to Adventism. Almost since the redefinition of the word "Cult" as a designation of those outside the bounds of accepted orthodoxy, Adventism was excluded from Fundamentalist/Evangelical circles. The audacity of men such as Barnhouse and Martin to breach the fortification of Evangelicalism and allow a group that some viewed as the most dangerous of the cults certainly elicited a reaction from the Evangelical press.

In the weeks that followed the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*, personalities on all sides of the issue made their voices heard. Barnhouse was quick to note the publication in the November 1957 issue of his *Eternity* magazine, and said "it is a vindication of the position we have taken in recent months and will soon be recognized as such by all fair-minded Christians."<sup>[i]</sup> He reiterated the position taken by Martin and himself a year earlier but attempted to make it clear that some of his earlier words needed clarification. On the issue of whether or not the Adventist church changed its positions, Barnhouse said, "they say that it is *not* a new statement of faith, but rather 'an answer to specific questions concerning their faith.'" However, "it is a definitive statement that lops off the writings of Adventists who have been independent of and contradictory to their sound leadership and effectively refutes many of the charges of doctrinal error that have been leveled against them." He then leveled a shot at two of the most vocal critics of both himself and Adventism Louis Talbot and E. B. Jones by saying, "The writings of those who have in the past attacked Seventh-day Adventism in those areas are now out of date. From now on anyone who echoes these criticisms must be considered as willfully ignorant of these facts or victims of such prejudice that they are no longer to be trusted as teachers in this field."<sup>[ii]</sup> Almost

as though he could not restrain himself in “setting the record straight” to those who questioned *Eternity’s* embrace of Adventism the year before, Barnhouse inferred that the only people who would continue to question the Christianity of Adventism would be those who “will not want to believe that they have been misinformed and that their favorite allegations have been drawn from fringe teachers who do not represent the real thought of the Adventist movement.”<sup>[iii]</sup> As a means of validating the courageous nature of his stance, he pointed out that, despite the great loss of subscriptions in months immediately following his embrace of Adventism, “many who canceled have renewed their subscriptions because they have come to understand the matter and realized that they were motivated by Christian love.”<sup>[iv]</sup>

For Barnhouse, *Questions on Doctrine* set aside one of the major drawbacks in Adventist theology, its stance on the sinful nature of Christ. In *Questions on Doctrine* “Freda” implied that Adventism as a whole never held to the sinful nature of Christ, and that if you read Ellen White carefully, it was clear that any who believed that she supported such a view was simply misinformed. Barnhouse then took another tack in explaining the issue. He said the major problem in understanding Ellen White’s view on this, and many other issues, stemmed from the fact that “Mrs. White was not a trained theologian.” Because she lacked an understanding of historical theology, she might use a term that may have one theological usage to explain a totally different concept. He said of Ellen White, “in my opinion she lacked profundity, accuracy, and scholarship, but she owned, honored and taught Jesus Christ as the eternal sinless Son of God.”<sup>[v]</sup> In conclusion, Barnhouse argued that if others would take the time he and Martin had to cross the boundaries of misunderstanding often created by a unique Adventist terminology, they would come to the same position. He quoted an Adventist leader who said, “the editors of *Eternity* have communicated more with us in two years than the whole Protestant church did in over one hundred years because they came to us in the spirit of Christian love.” This Barnhouse believed justified all he had done. He accepted Adventism in Christian fellowship because, he argued, he had taken the time to understand Adventism and, for Barnhouse that was the essence of Christian Fellowship.<sup>[vi]</sup>

Despite Barnhouse's defense, it did not take long for Talbot to weigh in on the subject. In the March 1958 issue of *The King's Business*, Michigan pastor M. E. DeHaan published a review of *Questions on Doctrine*. DeHaan argued it would be difficult for Evangelicals to embrace Adventism as Barnhouse suggested. The fact remained that for DeHaan it was not simply the unique doctrines of Adventism that he rejected. Even if those changed, he rejected the very basis of Adventism's existence. Still, in his review of *Questions on Doctrine*, he baited Barnhouse by saying, "I had been repeatedly assured by certain friends of the S.D.A.'s," almost certainly referring to Martin and Barnhouse's articles in *Eternity*, "that they [Seventh-day Adventists] had done some drastic revision of their stand, and greatly changed their views to conform with Evangelical Christianity."<sup>[vii]</sup> It was easy to take from Barnhouse's articles that there would be drastic changes coming in Adventist theology,<sup>[viii]</sup> but DeHaan could find none. In fact, he said "some of their statements are slightly modified and re-phrased, but essentially it was the same old error in a slightly altered garment. The book, therefore, abounds in double talk and flagrant contradictions."<sup>[ix]</sup> For DeHaan, nothing short of Adventism's repudiation of anything he deemed to be non-evangelical would suffice. "There is no hint they ever had any intention to retract, modify, change or repudiate any of their previous doctrines, which had always been considered unscriptural, false and God-dishonoring by Evangelicals." He then touched on one of the major issues which served Adventists and Martin and Barnhouse very well, that of terminology. "It was the same error in new terminology."<sup>[x]</sup> DeHaan contended that Adventists were using "the tactics of the Trojan Horse." He continued, saying "if the S.D.A.'s wanted to be considered 'Evangelical' and not a Cult, they could have done it in a booklet of sixteen pages instead of a volume of 720 pages.... By eliminating the passages from Mrs. White's writings, and the many chapters of labored attempts to establish their erroneous doctrines, the book could be condensed into pamphlet size, and be clearer than the confusing maze of fantastic interpretations it now contains."<sup>[xi]</sup> He concluded by saying, "Seventh-day Adventism has not changed. It is still the same bigoted movement of error and clever deception. Surely this latest attempt at 'face-

lifting,' will deceive none who know the Word.'<sup>[xii]</sup>

E. B. Jones echoed DeHaan's words in a review of *Questions on Doctrine* in December 1957 in his publication *Guardians of the Faith* saying, "the artful compilers of the book (employing typical SDA double-talk) consistently submit, as being sound truth, a dozen or so of Adventism's chief, long-taught, and still completely unaltered Scripture-perverting doctrines!"<sup>[xiii]</sup> For Jones, *Questions on Doctrine* was simply another opportunity to lay out his arguments against his former faith. "Seventh-day Adventism is just as Bible-conflicting and soul-poisoning today as ever it was in the past." In closing, Jones took a shot at Martin and Barnhouse by saying, "No well informed, true-to-the-faith believer is being 'taken in' by the wily, modern-day propagators of Seventh-day Adventist sophistries."<sup>[xiv]</sup>

DeHaan was not alone in his harsh critique of Martin and Barnhouse. Harold Lindsell, writing from Fuller Theological Seminary for the newly created evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*, gave an equally harsh assessment of *Questions on Doctrine*. In the first of a series of articles entitled "What of Seventh-day Adventism?," Lindsell refuted Adventism based on the very criteria laid out by Martin and Barnhouse. First, he questioned the legitimacy of *Questions on Doctrine* itself. Pointing out that it was published without attribution to author, he stated, "the authors cannot and do not speak with authority, since 'official' statements come only from the General Conference in quadrennial session."<sup>[xv]</sup> This statement alone showed that Lindsell would be a formidable opponent of Martin and Barnhouse. He knew not only the aspects of Adventist theology with which he disagreed, but he understood its polity far better than any of the other detractors. Contrary to DeHaan's blasts at *Questions on Doctrine* and what he seemed to believe to be its deliberate attempt to deceive, Lindsell openly stated that the book should be taken at its word as being "sincere and honest in the provision of answers to questions about their beliefs."<sup>[xvi]</sup> Less the polemic and more the scholar, Lindsell replied to a statement he received from an Adventist leader arguing that Adventist were far closer to conservative Christianity than modernists by saying, "the question now at hand is not whether modernists can be called Christian

(that is worthy of discussion in itself) but whether Seventh-day Adventists can be labeled Evangelical or orthodox.”<sup>[xvii]</sup> Lindsell systematically questioned the basis by which Martin and Barnhouse chose to open fellowship with Adventism. He began with Martin’s argument that Adventism was orthodox on the essential elements of evangelical Christianity while being heterodox on certain “non-fundamental” points of doctrine. Lindsell did not refute this and even went so far as to state, “a man can be a genuine believer who believes in soul sleep, providing at the same time he accepts the truths essential to salvation.”<sup>[xviii]</sup> What made a difference for Lindsell was not doctrines such as conditional immortality but the place and role of Ellen White. While Martin gave this issue to Adventism, as long as Adventists did not attempt to impose her authority on other Christians, Lindsell was less accommodating. An ardent advocate of inerrancy, Lindsell struggled with how *Questions on Doctrine* in particular and Adventism in general used Ellen White as an authority on scripture. “Seventh-day Adventism says that the test of Mrs. White’s writing is the Word of God itself, but then they conclude that her writings harmonize with the Scriptures and thus they appear to possess a native inerrancy.”<sup>[xix]</sup>

The role of Ellen White was not Lindsell’s sole reason for opposing acceptance of Adventism. Adventist eschatology and the role of the sanctuary also lacked scriptural foundation in Lindsell’s mind. He charged, “destroy these and certain conclusions are self-evident. There would then be no adequate basis for the existence of Adventism.”<sup>[xx]</sup> A final issue which worried Lindsell about Adventism was what he regarded as its “Galatianism.” Referring to Paul’s letter to the Galatians and the questions concerning legalism as a means of salvation, Lindsell argued that Adventism was guilty of the “Galatian error” and was thus not evangelical. In conclusion, he gave one hint that possibly Adventism was on the road toward acceptability by saying if “the charge of legalism is more academic and formal than real, then perhaps Adventism will fall within the minimal orbit of Evangelicalism.”<sup>[xxi]</sup>

Despite offering that concluding glimmer of acceptance, Lindsell was convinced that Adventism as a religious system was irreparable, whereas Martin and Barnhouse believed

otherwise. Lindsell's second article asked a more specific question, could the individual Adventist be saved? He implied that it would be possible for an individual Adventist to be saved despite his belief system if he "truly accept Christ as the Son of God and Savior." He stepped away from the idea that simply because an individual is a member of a "cult" they cannot be saved. "One cannot assume that members of Adventism are unsaved simply because they are Adventists any more than one can assume that Baptists are saved simply because they are Baptists."<sup>[xxii]</sup>

Lindsell's critique showed a similarity to most of Adventism's critics in his struggle to transcend his own reformed theology when evaluating Arminian Adventism. While Martin and Barnhouse accepted that Arminianism was a legitimate belief system, Lindsell struggled with Adventism's unrepentant Arminianism. He states, "according to Adventist teaching, men can and do lose their salvation. The only way by which men can lose their salvation is by sin."<sup>[xxiii]</sup> He then makes a bold leap from Arminianism to Adventism's stance on the Sabbath. As to whether or not the Sabbath is an issue in salvation, he said, "to this we reply, that if men now or later must keep the Sabbath to demonstrate their salvation or to prevent their being lost, then grace is no more grace. Rather, we are saved by grace and kept by works."<sup>[xxiv]</sup> For Lindsell, it is this sin, that of Galatianism, more than any other that excluded Adventism from the ranks of evangelical Christians. In conclusion, he said, "Adventism, in my judgment, is not Evangelical and never will be until this serious error in its teaching is rectified."<sup>[xxv]</sup>

Lindsell exemplified the daunting challenge Adventism faced with evangelicals other than Martin and Barnhouse. The gulf between adherents of Arminianism and those with a Reformed theology remained a major barrier.

The immediate reaction to *Questions on Doctrine* by those outside of Adventism was not surprising considering whose voices rang out the loudest. Talbot, DeHaan, Jones and Lindsell were long-standing opponents of Adventism and their reaction was consistent with their earlier statement. The *Sunday School Times*, on March 22, 1958, headlined its review of *Questions on Doctrine* with the title "A New Book of Old Errors."<sup>[xxvi]</sup>



While *Questions on Doctrine* laid out the Adventist position, others awaited a full-length argument from Martin and Barnhouse. Immediately upon the release of *Questions on Doctrine*, Barnhouse penned an article in *Eternity* entitled “Postscript on Seventh-day Adventism.”<sup>[xxvii]</sup> In this article Barnhouse argued that *Questions on Doctrine* was the “vindication of the position we have taken in recent months and will soon be recognized as such by all fair-minded Christians.” He viewed the work of Martin and himself, as well as *Questions on Doctrine*, as setting a new mark from which to view Adventism.<sup>[xxviii]</sup>

Barnhouse was not naïve about those who opposed him, but he now was as hard on them as he had once been on Adventism. He argued that persistent allegations against Adventism might be hard for some of its opponents to give up. Though Barnhouse did not name him directly, he aimed his strongest words at E. B. Jones. He contended that Jones’ accusations against Adventism have been “disavowed again and again by the responsible leaders of the church.”<sup>[xxix]</sup> He concluded his defense with an argument that Walter Martin would use for many years to come. He and Martin came to their conclusions because they took the time to research what Adventism currently believed, and not what they believed in the past. This attitude exemplified everything Barnhouse believed on the matter of Christian fellowship. He concluded “the crowning desire of my life is that we are His disciples because we love one another.”<sup>[xxx]</sup>

While *Questions on Doctrine* was designed to be a safe foundation from which Martin could base his *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, it also became a launching pad for several books critical of Adventism. The first of these came out in 1961, written by a Baptist minister from Grand Rapids, Michigan, Norman Douty. Douty originally wrote *Another Look at Seventh-day Adventism*<sup>[xxxi]</sup> as a refutation to *Questions on Doctrine*, but before he was finished, Martin’s *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* arrived, and he took aim at both. Despite the fact that Douty made a very open claim to objectivity, it takes little time to find the purpose of his book. Douty, who would later write the book *The Case of D. M. Canright*,<sup>[xxxii]</sup> based most of his perceptions of Adventism on Canright. Douty’s book very quickly

takes on the character of a pastor, which Douty was, defending his ecclesiastical turf from the encroachment of another denomination, Adventism. The logic by which he makes his arguments is not that of the scholar but that of a homilician, a pastor. Most of his arguments do not take into account that Adventism's foundation was Arminian rather than his own Reformed theology.

Douty openly criticized Martin's *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* and made it clear that he disagreed with Martin's assessment that critics of Adventism who refused to extend the hand of fellowship had not done their research. Douty used the example of Martin's review of Herbert S. Bird's *The Theology of Seventh-day Adventism*.<sup>[xxxiii]</sup> In it, Martin argued that it was not "abreast of the latest developments in Adventism." Douty's rejoinder was, "so whereas Martin esteems Bird's book to be antiquated, his own, in that it clears Adventism of heresy, must be deemed premature."<sup>[xxxiv]</sup>

Most of Douty's book looked at what Martin called the "special truths" of Adventism which he deemed to be outside the question of fellowship. To Douty, that was simply an excuse for condoning "heresy." It was simple, "Adventism is characterized by heresy . . . . Adventism denies a body of doctrine which the church as a whole has always declared, and declares another body of doctrine which the church as a whole denied,"<sup>[xxxv]</sup> and thus there is no room for Adventism within the fellowship of orthodox Christianity. To Douty, Adventism's Millerite past was inescapable. "Adventism is characterized by delusion. It was born of it, reared in it and has been nourished by it."<sup>[xxxvi]</sup> Douty concluded his book with something that leaves no doubt what he believed to be the real place of Adventism. "As long as Adventism remains Adventism it must be repudiated. When it abandons its destructive doctrines it will no longer be Adventism."<sup>[xxxvii]</sup>

During the early 1960s, particularly following the publication of *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, Martin consistently criticized any books which questioned his assessment of Adventism. In a review of Herbert Bird's *The Theology of Seventh-day Adventism*, Martin said that Bird's problem was that he drew "on such writers as Canright, Talbot and Van Baalen, apparently oblivious to the prejudices and inaccuracies all too apparent in



their writings.” Martin’s frustration with Bird’s analysis, and that of most other new looks on Adventism in the post-*Questions on Doctrine* world which “omit analysis of Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse’s writings on the SDA question and ignores completely any and all research work that tends to disprove his main thesis.”<sup>[xxxviii]</sup> Still, Martin embraced the aspects of Bird’s book that agreed with his analysis, but he made it clear that he alone remained the honest analyst of Adventism. He concluded his review by saying, “the value of this book is that it soundly criticizes certain areas of SDA teachings and practices for an orthodox position, but it cannot be said to be either thorough in its research or dependable in its charge that SDA is a revival of Galatianism.”<sup>[xxxix]</sup>

In a review of Doubty’s *Another Look at Seventh-day Adventism in Christianity Today*, Lindsell launched an unvarnished jab at Barnhouse and Martin. He drew attention to Doubty’s charge that Martin and Barnhouse were “taken in by the statements given them by the Adventists.” He then defended Doubty’s book while taking a jab at *Questions on Doctrine*. “His [Doubty’s] attitude toward *Questions on Doctrine* is that the book fails to represent the historical view of this group in its early days.”<sup>[xl]</sup> Lindsell was not persuaded that *Questions on Doctrine* accurately described the whole of Adventism in 1957.

Lindsell’s reaction exemplified the rash of articles and books which followed the release of *Questions on Doctrine* and it appeared that the issue was settled for many within the Evangelical community. Despite the fact that Martin and Barnhouse took another look at Adventism, for the majority of Evangelicals an additional look simply revealed more of the same, a group whose core views still differed from their own and, thus, remained outside of Evangelicalism.

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