

# From Sect Towards Denomination Tracing the Trajectory of Seventh-day Adventism in the USA over Time

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## ABSTRACT

Seventh-day Adventism emerged from the Millerite Movement, which had preached throughout the American Northeast that Christ would return in 1844, after the parent movement fragmented following the "Great Disappointment." The new group was marked by considerable tension with its surrounding culture during its early decades, and was therefore, in terms of the definition promulgated by Stark and Bainbridge, highly sectarian. However, the Adventist Church in the US has been following a well-defined trajectory from sect towards denomination for the past century it has reduced tensions with its surrounding environment by removing antagonisms between itself and the state and other religious organizations and as its members have become less peculiar in their lifestyles and beliefs and more integrated into society. The process continues, but it is now so advanced that the Adventist profile imitates that of mainline Protestant denominations in some important ways. This paper provides an overview of the trajectory taken by Adventism in the US. It applies and tests Church-Sect Theory as it now stands.

## Introduction

Church-sect theory, which was originally put forward by Ernst Troeltsch in 1911 and amplified by H. Richard Niebuhr in 1929, has been used extensively by sociologists to explore the evolution of religious groups. This has occurred especially in the US, with its multitude of sects and denominations. Since the US had no established church, but a number of "mainline denominations," "denomination" became the preferred term among researchers here, especially those exploring the dynamics of change from "sect" towards "denomination."<sup>i</sup>

There was confusion in the early decades because the theory's polar opposites, "sect" and "denomination" were typically defined in terms of multiple characteristics, without agreement on which characteristics to use. Consequently, competing typologies multiplied, and the theory's usefulness was limited.

In 1985, Stark and Bainbridge proposed a reformulation, defining the polar opposites in terms of a single encompassing characteristic, "the degree to which a religious group is in a state of tension with its surrounding sociocultural environment" (23). This proposal built explicitly on the insights of Johnson (1963) and stood on the shoulders of Yinger (1946) and Wilson (1973). Yinger had noted that a "church" (or, to use current parlance, a "denomination"),<sup>ii</sup> unlike a "sect," "accepts...the legitimacy of the prevailing societal structure" (1946: 21). Johnson had suggested that "A church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists. A sect is a religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists" (1963: 542). Wilson's typology of sects was based on their "response to the world," because a "sectarian movement always manifests some degree of tension with the world" [1973: 17,19].

In reformulating these insights in terms of a single characteristic, a group's degree of tension with its social and political environment, which could vary in degree from high to low, Stark and Bainbridge proposed a continuum from sect to denomination. For them, tension is characterized by difference, separation, and

antagonism, for a sect and its surrounding society "disagree over proper beliefs, norms, and behavior" (1985: 49). Tension can be a product of the beliefs and lifestyle of members when these are viewed as peculiar or offensive within the society, thus creating a strong separation from it, or of institutional actions and relations with the state or other organizations, such as influential religious groups, when these are perceived as uncooperative, threatening, or confrontational, and elicit antagonistic responses.

The work of other researchers had already suggested that the pace of movement from sect to denomination could vary from one group to another. Yinger, for example, in critiquing Niebuhr's contention that a sect became a denomination as its first generation was replaced by the second, had defined an "established sect," a term that aptly describes the slow change among Jehovah's Witnesses from the 1930s through the 1970s (Yinger 1957: 151-2; Penton 1997: 56-98). In contrast, Wilson, who had set out to account for varying rates of denominationalization, had concluded that what he dubbed "conversionist sects"—those who, like the Assemblies of God, focused on evangelism and admitted new members after a "born again" experience, with little training or time for socialization—moved most rapidly (Wilson 1959; Blumhofer 1993: 142-160). Lawson has since drawn a similar contrast between the trajectories over time of Witnesses and Adventists (1995b). Similarly, there was nothing in Stark and Bainbridge to indicate that movement from sect towards denomination should proceed at a uniform speed, or that there could not be times when the movement seemed to change direction. The pace of movement is influenced by context, policies, events, and the personalities involved—however, the process also develops a life of its own.

Church-sect theory assumes that as sects denominationalize they become increasingly diverse doctrinally, behaviorally, and in terms of SES and ethnicity. It postulates, to use the terminology of Stark and Bainbridge, that the lowering of tension between a group and its environment will cause discomfort among its more conservative members, creating the likelihood that it will spawn a new dissident sect (1985: 24-26; Niebuhr 1929). This pattern has been especially common among Protestants. Alternatively, a sectarian group may remain within its church or denomination but become self-encapsulated, like the monastic or mendicant orders within the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, as protestors setting a different example and working for reform; or they may, because of their fervor, play important roles in charitable or missionary work (Troeltsch 1931)

Wilson concluded, later in his career, that sects had become much less likely to form schismatically, at least in Britain, where he was located (1973; 1982). He argued that as the secularization of denominations had advanced, members had focused more on the significance of being part of their church community, and were less likely to have the intensity of belief to create schisms.

During the past century American Seventh-day Adventism has moved a considerable distance from sect towards denomination. The process continues, but it is now so advanced that the Adventist profile imitates that of mainline Protestant denominations in some important ways. I have explored various topics that - illustrate this process in several papers. This paper pulls these data together and adds other strands, providing an overview of the trajectory taken by Adventism in the US.

## **Research Methods**

The research reported here is part of a large study of global Seventh-day Adventism, which has included well over 3,000 in-depth interviews with church administrators, teachers, hospital administrators and medical personnel, pastors, students, and leading laypersons in 59 countries in all thirteen divisions of the world church. The US has received special attention because Adventism originated here, its headquarters

are located here, its leaders, most of its missionaries, and the bulk of its funds have come from here, and its membership here is extraordinarily pluralistic both racially and ethnically and in terms of social class and variations in belief and behavior. I have interviewed extensively at the headquarters of the General - Conference and North American Division, each of the eight union headquarters, 27 of the 50 local conference headquarters, all 13 Adventist universities and colleges, more than a dozen academies (high schools), 16 hospitals, the former national healthcare corporate headquarters and five regional - headquarters, both publishing houses, the media center, and at scores of urban, suburban, institutional and rural congregations. I have kept up with changes over time in a period of turmoil through hundreds of follow-up interviews.

For the initial wave of interviews in the latter 1980s, I prepared separate interview templates for different categories of interviewees church administrators, pastors, college teachers, etc. The in-depth interview format allowed me to interpolate follow-up questions that emerged from my interaction with an interviewee and to take advantage of his/her specialized knowledge as appropriate. Some interviews were more specialized, as I sought out respondents relevant to particular research topics. I prepared special interview templates for these, often tailoring them individually to fit the focus of the interview.

I have also drawn extensively on the many available histories of aspects of North American Adventism, many of which have been written by members of the history departments of Adventist colleges. However, historians typically stop short of the present. I took opportunities to complete oral history interviews in order to fill in relevant gaps. I also drew on other publications – official statistics, survey results, and relevant reports, books and articles – as sources of data. The fact that my own research on Adventism has extended from 1984 until the present has allowed me to map changes over this period myself.

In order to keep the confidentiality of interviewees, as was promised them, the convention adopted in this study is to refrain from citing the names of interviewees when they are quoted except when they are major figures in the church whose identity cannot be hidden.

### **High Tension during the Early Decades**

Seventh-day Adventists trace their roots to the Millerite Movement William Miller, a Baptist lay-preacher, had preached throughout the American Northeast that Christ would return in 1844 (Numbers and Butler, 1987; Gaustad, 1974). The new religious group, which appeared after the parent movement fragmented following the "Great Disappointment," was marked by considerable tension with its surrounding culture. It rejected the American Dream, for it continued to predict the imminent return of Christ and the end of the world as we know it; indeed, its urgent apocalypticism prevented it from forming a formal organization until 1863 or from sending out foreign missionaries until 1874 (Schwarz, 1979: 97,145). It embraced the visionary Ellen White, one of its founders, as a prophet, and accepted her views and writings as having authority. It developed a markedly different lifestyle. This included the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath in a society where a six-day work week was almost universal, and the rejection of non-biblical observances such as Christmas Day; diet prohibitions (meat, coffee, tea, alcohol, and spices); the rejection of much of popular culture (the theater, dancing, gambling, card playing, fiction, and smoking); the commitment of its women members to a plain dress code which included "dress reform" and abstinence from jewelry and makeup; and the rejection of medicine as it was currently practised, especially the use of drugs, and their replacement in its "sanitariums," which were seen as a spiritual "entering wedge," by water treatments, fresh air and exercise, and a "natural" diet based on fruit, vegetables, grains, and nuts. Their lifestyle set Adventists apart and made it difficult for them to associate with others.

These barriers were reinforced by the close ties that developed among members, whose lives typically centered around their church, the subculture it created, and its mission. Commitment to its mission led many to become missionaries, preachers, or to work in its institutions, and resulted in widespread participation in personal evangelism. This commitment, together with their comfort in being with others like themselves, led Adventists to "prepare for service" by attending church schools and to settle and often find employment in the "Adventist Ghettos" surrounding such church institutions as schools and sanitariums (Hodgen, 1978; Lawson and Carden, 1983).<sup>iii</sup>

Not only were Adventists different and separated from the surrounding society, but their beliefs also fostered antagonism between them and others. Adventists viewed themselves as "God's Remnant People," who, as the bearers of "present truth," were charged with delivering God's final warning message in the last days. Other Protestant groups were "apostate" and had become "the whore of Babylon"; the Roman Catholic Church was identified with the persecuting "beast" of the book of Revelation. Adventist evangelists developed an aggressive style, denouncing Sunday-keepers as "commandment breakers" who risked receiving the "Mark of the Beast" and, ultimately, damnation, and issuing brazen challenges to clergy of other denominations to produce a biblical passage endorsing the sacredness of Sunday.<sup>iv</sup>

Adventist eschatology and preaching focused closely on the apocalyptic visions of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, where governments were portrayed as wild beasts that hurt God's people. A unique interpretation identified the American Republic with the second beast of Revelation 13, which, although it had "two horns like a lamb," would now speak "like a dragon." In this dragon phase it would breach the constitutional separation of church and state, joining together with the apostate Roman Catholic and - Protestant churches to persecute the Remnant just before Christ's return. It would do this by decreeing that since its members were without "the Mark of the Beast," they were not allowed to "buy or sell." Adventists seized on the fact that some of their members, usually farmers, were facing arrest under the "blue laws" of several states for working on Sunday as proof that the expected persecution was already waxing.<sup>v</sup> That is, the Adventist apocalyptic enshrined tension with the state (Morgan, 1992; Lawson, - 1998a).

This tension increased during the Civil War, when Adventists, facing conscription, took a position as conscientious objectors to military service. This was not a surprise decision. Morgan found that the roots of their opposition to participation in war can be traced to the Millerites, and that Adventists had published articles supporting such a stance from time to time since the late 1840s. The coming of the Civil War forced them to act on these sentiments (Morgan 2007a, 2007b). He noted that in deciding what action to take and when to take it Adventists had to sort through three factors that pulled in different directions their fervent dedication to keeping "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," which bade them not to kill and to love their enemies; a pragmatic concern for the survival of their fledgling movement, and therefore a fear of becoming a casualty of wartime intolerance; and their passionate opposition to slavery. In this, he discovered, their commitment to obedience to God was prime, but their other concerns led them to express their position cautiously in order to try to avoid problems. He interpreted the initial debate in the Adventist press during 1862—before conscription was instituted and during the period when Adventism was creating its organizational structure as a chorus of support for pacifism with a few outlying opinions at both extremes, and concluded that the main difference expressed concerned pragmatics (how strong their first actions or statements should be) rather than the principle of whether or not to participate in the war (Morgan 2007a).

Ellen White eventually intervened, rejecting both participation in the conflict and the adoption of a brash stand for pacifism, but taking a strong position against serving in the military "I was shown that God's people...cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith" (1885 [1863]: 361). Her argument was that soldiers would be forced to break two of the Ten Commandments (those forbidding killing and the desecration of the Sabbath), and that they would also be exposed to bad company and faced with an unacceptable diet (White 1885 [1863]: 361; Graybill 1978). This statement ended debate, and the position she had enunciated was then enforced through church discipline members who participated in the war were disfellowshipped (Graybill, 1978: 7; Brock, 1974: 26).

Adventists at first avoided the draft by paying a hefty \$300 commutation fee. However, in 1864, when a new law limited those who could escape the draft to members of registered pacifist churches, the leaders moved at once to register (Morgan 2007a, 2007b; Graybill, 1978: 6; Lawson 1996a). Their petition, presented to the Provost Marshal General, described Seventh-day Adventists as "a people unanimously loyal and antislavery, who because of their views of the ten commandments and of the New Testament cannot engage in bloodshed" (Morgan 2007a). They then published two pamphlets, one reprinting pacifist articles published in their papers during the period since 1847, the other containing letters of endorsement from prominent citizens and the sworn affidavits by church leaders declaring that participation in war and bloodshed was a violation of their core beliefs, all of which had been presented to state governors and other officials. For example, in his affidavit James White stated that he had been a minister of the "denomination" since 1847 and that "during all that time, the teachings of that church have been that war is sinful and wrong and not in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures" (Morgan 2007a). The sessions of the General Conference in 1865, 1867, and 1868 also voted strongly pacifist resolutions. The 1865 resolution stated "...While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind." That of 1867 added that "the bearing of arms, or engaging in war, is a direct violation of the teachings of our Saviour and the spirit and letter of the law of God" (Morgan 2007a; Wilcox, 1936: 234). Noting that the Adventist church "made definitive and repeated declarations of pacifism during its first decade of organizational existence," Morgan concludes that "Seventh-day Adventism began as a peace church" (2007a). He finds that "the documentation that the Adventists compiled to prove the legitimacy of their claim to be principled noncombatants is so abundant, and their insistence that these documents indeed represent the movement's united stance so vigorous and solemn" that he gives great weight to them (2007a).

### **Reducing Tension over Time Growth, Institution Building, and Conformity**

Adventism's total membership stood at only 5,440 members in 1870, all of whom were in the US. However, it achieved the remarkable average growth rate of 133.6% per decade between then and 1900, by which time it had 66,547 members, who were now found on every continent (General Conference, 1996).

Adventists set about building institutions after the Civil War, initially in the US and then, as Adventism became international, also abroad. By 1901 they had built 16 colleges and high schools, a medical school, 75 sanitariums, 13 publishing houses, and 31 miscellaneous institutions. Adventism was putting down a stake in the societies where it operated (General Conference, 1901; General Conference, 1902: 596, 597).

These institutions later became a vehicle for the upward mobility of Adventists and a Trojan horse bringing widespread changes to Adventism. When their medical school, which was the cornerstone of their medical

work and therefore also central to their missions, was threatened after World War I by rulings that it could no longer admit graduates from unaccredited Adventist colleges without jeopardizing its accreditation, Adventists sought and eventually obtained accreditation for the latter (Hodgen 1978: 227). Accreditation meant accepting a degree of conformity imposed by the regulators it forced the colleges to send faculty members to secular universities for doctoral studies, thus exposing them to a world from which they had previously been protected; it raised the quality of the education offered and increased its secular content. It also prepared the way for increased upward mobility among their graduates. Many of the latter were employed initially in the expanding institutions of the church as medical practitioners, nurses, professors, teachers, and managers. Later, as educated Adventists became increasingly comfortable with the broader society and the number graduating expanded many-fold, the vast majority followed careers in the secular world. As the number of Adventists entering the professions increased dramatically, their wish to appear "regular" rather than "peculiar" had the effect of encouraging decisions that would further reduce Adventism's tension with society (interviews).

Meanwhile, the accreditation of its medical school and changes in the ways in which medicine was practised and organized in society resulted in the gradual transformation of Adventist sanitariums into regular hospitals practising medicine that was indistinguishable from that practised elsewhere. The Adventist Church, after considerable debate, chose to accept, with certain restrictions, the government aid that became available to private educational and medical institutions after World War II – a decision that encouraged further conformity (Morgan, 1992: 271-284; Syme, 1973: 120-143). These changes brought the hospitals into broader contact with their communities, from whom they sought support, and led eventually to the placing of prominent non-Adventist citizens on their boards; meanwhile, the proportion of Adventists on hospital medical and support staffs declined steeply (interviews). The Adventist dietary and smoking prohibitions also gradually won credibility through medical research, so that they were no longer seen as peculiar.

Today, as American healthcare undergoes radical reorganization, the pressures to conform are coming from the market rather than the government. In a situation where the segment of healthcare being provided in institutional settings is declining, Adventist hospitals are joining together with erstwhile competitors in order to survive. Adventists are struggling to find a mission within networks and integrated health delivery systems where, in some instances, they exercise little legal control and typically have only fleeting contact with patients (interviews; Waller 1994).

Meanwhile, the diversity of choices by Adventists seeking education has broadened. Only 20% of Adventist college students in the U.S. now choose Adventist colleges (interview). Some find the latter too limited, others too expensive, and yet others too "worldly." In a church where its colleges have resulted in widespread upward mobility, more members are now encouraging their children to seek admission to the best private and public universities, which will hopefully allow them to spring even higher; others, who simply cannot afford Adventist schools, choose less costly options, such as inexpensive community colleges close to home; yet others opt for unaccredited self-supporting schools run by conservative Adventists without the denomination's imprimatur (interviews).

### **The Transformation of Adventist-State Relations**

As Adventists began to put down roots into society during the period after the Civil War, their eschatology was reshaped. While America continued to be identified with the two-horned beast, it was no longer portrayed as already in the dragon phase, but as still lamb-like, and its demise was thus seen as less imminent. That is, the tension between Adventism and the state was beginning to relax (Butler 1974: 193-

94). Ellen White counseled rapprochement with civil authorities in order to facilitate missionary work; indeed, she urged Adventists to help prolong the future of America "so the Adventist message could go forth and flourish" (Butler 1974: 193). Adventists found themselves in the anomalous situation where they wished to delay the end of the world in order to have greater opportunity to preach that it was at hand they were postponing the apocalypse.

In the midst of these changes, the National Reform Association launched a campaign to extend the Sunday sacredness "blue laws" in effect in some states to the national level. This confronted Adventists with a crisis that seemed to be a direct fulfillment of what they had predicted in their preaching. Despite the fact that their eschatology saw the passage of a "national Sunday law" as the culmination of the prophecy concerning the two-horned beast, and thus a sure signal that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand, Adventists chose not to welcome the apparent fulfillment of their prophetic interpretation but, instead, because they felt obliged by Ellen White's counsel to "extend the time," to set out boldly to defeat this threat. They established a magazine, The American Sentinel, devoted to religious liberty, in 1883; in 1888 and 1889 they participated in the lobbying that helped defeat Senator H.W. Blair's Sunday-Rest bills; and in 1889 the General Conference founded the National Religious Liberty Association. By 1892, when Adventists opposed the closing of the Chicago World Exposition on Sundays, their involvement included petitions to both Houses, the reading of papers before congressional committees, and the presentation of legal briefs in court (Butler, 1974: 196-98; Morgan, 1994: 241-42).

Adventists continued their public defense of religious liberty in the twentieth century. Their magazine devoted to that topic was renamed Liberty in 1906 and targeted at "thought leaders." They became widely identified with protecting the First Amendment, for they saw the separation of church and state as the basic guarantee of religious liberty in the U.S. Their activities included lobbying against what was deemed to be threatening legislation, building coalitions to support or argue against legislation as needed, and involvement in court cases.

Another important indication that tension with the American state was diminishing was the gradual transformation of Adventism's stance on military service. During World War I it replaced conscientious objection to military service, embraced during the Civil War, with a noncombatant position, under which its conscripted members served as soldiers without arms, often in medical units. This shift allowed Adventists to express their patriotism while adhering to their refusal to kill. Service in medical units was preferred because Adventists regarded medical work as "doing good," and therefore as legitimate activity on the Sabbath, so that placement there would solve both the key problems posed by conscription. To facilitate such placements should there be conscription, the church had, in 1916, established Red Cross training schools at its colleges and hospitals, where young men liable to the draft could take training that would make them attractive to such units. The dangers from mixing with non-Adventists in the military were now downplayed (Wilcox, 1936).

During World War II, Adventist leaders created relationships with the American military, and ultimately with political authorities. In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, the American church again established a program to provide medical training to members who were potential draftees. This was much more sophisticated than in 1916. Called the Medical Cadet Training Program, it was directed and supervised, through cooperation with the armed forces, by regular army officers. Both students at Adventist colleges and others potentially eligible for the draft were trained (Dick, 1974: 20). The official church paper commented "Refusing to be called conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as conscientious cooperators" (Editorial, 1941: 4). Indeed, the cooperation of the Adventist church and the military in medical training became so close that some members criticized it for having become part of the

national war machine (Syme 1973: 73). Some 12,000 American Adventists served during World War II as noncombatants in medical branches of the services. Church leaders were especially proud of their military heroes, such as Desmond Doss, whose bravery earned him a Congressional Medal of Honor in 1945 (Sibley and Jacob 1952: 86; Schwarz 1979: 443).

The American Medical Cadet Corps was revived during the Korean War, and Adventist military chaplains, who were paid by the armed forces and had military careers, were appointed for the first time. By this time their noncombatant position no longer separated Adventists, but encouraged closer relations with government and military leaders.

In 1954 the U.S. Army established a special camp in Texas where all noncombatants could receive their basic training. This removed them from regular units, where their refusal to bear arms had proved a source of confusion. Over half the men trained at the new camp were Adventists (Davis 1970: 222) "It was a program engineered for the needs of conscientious cooperators" (Knight 1992: 17). That same year the U.S. Army Surgeon General contacted church headquarters, seeking approval for the Army to ask Adventist draftees to volunteer for a research program designed especially for them which would "contribute significantly to the nation's health and security" (Smith 1996: 36) The General Conference responded positively, honored by the special attention (Flaiz 1954). The upshot was the creation of "Project Whitecoat," under which volunteers from among drafted Adventist noncombatant servicemen spent their military service as guinea pigs in biological warfare research for the U.S. Army at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Thanks to the enthusiastic encouragement of church leaders, 2,200 Adventists participated in the program between 1955 and 1973 (Smith 1996: 49-50; interviews).<sup>vi</sup>

Many Adventists had become militant patriots, and these were dismayed when the antiwar movement in the late 1960s led to a surge in the number of Adventists choosing to register as conscientious objectors. A heated debate triggered another major shift in the Church's official position in 1972, when it declared that a member's decision on military service was a matter of individual conscience. After this decision, American Adventism retreated from the serious teaching of noncombatancy to its youth, many of whom began to enlist in the military after the draft was replaced by a volunteer force in 1973. (Most volunteers do not have the option of designating themselves noncombatants.<sup>vii</sup>) Since Adventist universities and colleges accepted Federal funds, they were not able to exclude military recruiters. Consequently, in the 1990s, "military recruiters [came] to Adventist school campuses, and school and university bulletin boards [displayed] posters advertising the benefits of service in the armed forces" (Thomas, 1991: 2). In 1991, the office of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries [ACM] estimated the total number of military personnel with an Adventist background as 6-8,000, and that 2,000 of these had participated in the Gulf War; when the National Guard and the Reserves were added, the Adventist total rose to 15,000 (interviews). Adventist participation in the military during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars may have declined from the earlier peak when I asked ACM for their data, it was explained that those they had were very unreliable. I was then given a formula that suggested that the total number of Adventists in the active forces was about 3,750, and that when the National Guard and Reserves were added this total climbed to 10,000. However, if the total number with an Adventist background were included, the figure was "undoubtedly higher" (Councill 2008)

A special track for would-be chaplains had been created by the Adventist Seminary in 1969. In 2008 there were over 50 Adventist chaplains on active duty, about 50 in the Reserves, and 40 enrolled in the chaplaincy program at the Seminary (Councill 2008). A total of four Adventist chaplains have risen to "Chief of Chaplains" in their service Colonel Alva Appel in the Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol; Rear Admiral Barry Black in the Navy; Rear Admiral Darold Bigger in the Navy Reserves; and Colonel James

Melancon in the Civil Air Patrol (Adventist Chaplain 2002). In 2003, Rear Admiral Black was elected as the 62<sup>nd</sup> Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. He was the first African-American, the first military chaplain, and the first Seventh-day Adventist to hold the position—and, indeed, the first from a religious group that was not one of the Mainline Denominations. His election, which was greeted with pride and joy by the Adventist media (Allen 2003), was a sign of acceptance by government and society, and also a symbol of the dramatic changes within Adventism in recent decades.

In spite of the profound religious, social, and political changes of the twentieth century, the Adventist church made no official change in its eschatology, with its expectation of persecution at the hands of the Federal Government. Some members remain alert, gathering and disseminating evidence suggesting, for example, that Congress is secretly preparing a national Sunday law. Nevertheless, to most American Adventists the republic seems "safe and benevolent, lamb-like enough" (Morgan 1992: 156). The Adventist situation has become much more comfortable the introduction of the five-day week in the 1930s removed most of the major problems surrounding their observance of the Sabbath; when, during World War II, the Supreme Court's decision in the Jehovah's Witness Barnette case (1943) strengthened religious liberty and subsequently President Roosevelt included religious freedom as one of his four basic freedoms, the editor of the church paper commented that what Adventists had prophesied clearly lay further in the future (Editorial, 1943: 4).

The decision to accept aid for its educational and medical institutions after World War II compromised the Adventist stand on the separation of church and state (Morgan 1992: 271-284; Syme 1973: 120-143). In the early 1980s, when church leaders realized that vast sums in government aid, mostly from USAID, were available for distribution, they transformed the church's disaster relief agency into the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). They saw this as another "entering wedge," which could, like their clinics and hospitals in earlier decades, penetrate regions where conventional missionaries were often unwelcome. However, although other international sources of funds were developed over time, the facts that USAID remained its largest source and that the State Department restricted their use, transformed ADRA in many ways into an arm of American foreign policy for example, ADRA distributed a great deal of aid in Honduras but nothing in Nicaragua during President Reagan's Contra War in Nicaragua during the 1980s (interviews).

The decision by Adventist leaders to pursue positive relations with the American government has thus met with considerable success over time. This is not to say that the Adventist Church has gained significant political influence. However, it has received many symbols of acceptance.

### **Adventists and the US Courts**

Meanwhile, encounters with the US court system reflected similar phases in the Adventist journey from sect towards denomination. The first cases, when individual Adventists were arrested for working their farms on Sundays during the second-half of the nineteenth century, were much more than an economic imposition on members who had scrupulously observed their Sabbath on the previous day they confirmed the urgency of Adventist apocalyptic expectations. These distressing events reflected how separated Adventists were in their expectation of the imminent "end of the world," how different they were in their selection of a day of worship and the cosmic significance which they attached to its observance, and, in the ways in which neighbors reported them to the police and they were forced to endure arrest and imprisonment, how antagonistically they were viewed by their communities. That is, these arrests and trials revealed the extent of their sectarianism, of their tension with society at that time. This confirmation

of their apocalyptic expectations, together with the absence then of legal remedies for their plight, resulted in a fairly passive response to these problems posed them by the legal system.

It has been noted that the first four decades of the twentieth century were a time of transition for Adventism, when the tension with its social and political environment began to lessen as Adventists built institutions and sought accreditation for them, began to experience upward mobility, and changed their position on military service from conscientious objection to noncombatancy. During this period Adventists as such were completely absent from the courts they did not yet have the confidence to take their -grievances there for adjudication.

However, Adventist involvement in court cases began again intermittently just before and during World War II, which marked the beginning of a long period during which tension between Adventism and society was reduced sharply. Changes such as the establishment of the Medical Cadet Training Program were accompanied by the creation of what was to become the legal department within the General Conference, which was to help plan legal defenses for Adventists and later to participate directly in cases. The first cases focused on whether Adventists who would not promise to take up arms could become citizens. One of these cases, (Girouard, 1946), took Adventism to the Supreme Court for the first time. During the years from the beginning of the Korean War through the close of the Vietnam War, continued relaxation in -tension between Adventism and the state and society was symbolized by a landmark free exercise case (Sherbert, 1963), in which the Supreme Court granted Sabbatarians fired for reasons of conscience the right to unemployment benefits.

The period since the Vietnam War has been marked in the courts by a multiplication of the number of cases brought by Adventists, which have thus celebrated and consolidated Adventism's new, much more comfortable relationship with society. The General Conference has concurrently restructured and expanded its legal department and sharply increased the proportion of cases litigated in-house. The major cases of this period have extended the protection of unemployment benefits for those dismissed because -of Sabbath conflicts to new converts (Hobbie, 1987), protected members with a conscientious objection to union membership (Nottelson, 1981; Tooley, 1981), and recognized the right of Adventists to engage in door-to-door activity (Tate, 1977; Espinoza, 1980). However, Adventists have been relatively ineffective in the area most significant to them and where they have fought the greatest number of cases—their attempts to preserve the jobs of Sabbatarians who refuse demands that they work at that time (Lawson 1998a). That is, although the coming of the five-day week removed many of the problems faced by Sabbatarians, the increasing use of shift work in recent decades presents some Adventists with serious problems, so that this remains a source of tension between Adventists and society.

Throughout most of the history of Adventism, members who felt aggrieved by their church had little recourse there was no effective internal mechanism for achieving justice available, except perhaps, during her lifetime, an attempt to persuade Ellen White to intervene on their behalf, and the Adventist community was so isolated that it was almost unthinkable to seek secular solutions. The institutional church represented such authority that aggrieved members were usually cowed into submission before it. However, as members became more comfortable with the broader society and its courts, and increasingly independent of church control, they became more willing to initiate suits against their church and its institutions when they felt wronged by them. The best known of these cases were those brought against the Pacific Press in the 1970s by women employees, who were joined by government agencies in their efforts to enforce statutes outlawing discrimination based on gender (Pacific Press, 1976).

Adventist institutions have played a key role in accommodating Adventism to society, for most of them were obliged to come under government regulation. The survival of the hospitals, in particular, depended on their attracting patients from their communities. The staffing needs of all institutions encouraged members to seek higher levels of education. The participation of the institutions in the broader society, and especially in selling their products and services there, led many of these institutions into disputes which were increasingly settled in the courts.

That is, the denominationalizing of Adventism was reflected in, and in turn influenced by, its involvement in the courts. As it moved from sect towards denomination, it became more compatible with formal methods of dispute resolution. As part of this process it developed an institutional legal capacity and familiarity, and then a growing ease with the legal system, which it then used with rapidly increasing frequency.

Perhaps the most striking symbol of the Adventist Church's accommodation to its environment was its decision in 1981 to trademark its name. The specter of this Church, whose apocalyptic had led it to expect persecution at the hands of the U.S., making use of the legal system to attack both schismatic Adventist groups and disapproved organizations of church members such as Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc., a support group for gay and lesbian Adventists, represented a dramatic shift in its position. The cases charging such groups with breach of trademark, deceptive trade practices, unfair competition, and false advertising demonstrate that the church leadership sees itself as entrenched within the capitalist economy; indeed, it has adopted a corporate model for the church itself. This shift was further confirmed by the General Conference's move to a corporate park in Silver Spring, Maryland, in the 1980s and by a recommendation brought to its Annual Council in 1994 that the General Conference President be recognized as the "chief executive officer" of the Church (Medley 1994: 6).

### **Changes in Relations with Other Churches**

Adventism remained very isolated from other American religious bodies until well into the twentieth - century. Indeed, while its initial isolation had been pragmatic, flowing from its poor relations with other religious groups, it increasingly became a matter of policy that cooperation with such groups was wrong and should be avoided (Beach, 1998). Its fear that ecumenism might foster the persecution that it was expecting led it to hold aloof both when the Federal Council of Churches [FCC] was formed in 1908 and again from the World Council of Churches [WCC] in 1948 and when the FCC was transformed into the National Council of Churches [NCC] in 1950. However, the explanation given for not joining the NCC – that Adventist beliefs were too different – suggested that attitudes were changing it was explicitly stated that it was not "because we think that the Protestant leaders who created it are evil men with a sinister, long-range plan to dominate the religious world and drive out all who differ with them" (Nichol 1951: 3).

Meanwhile, Evangelicals had regularly labeled Adventism a "cult" in their critiques. In the mid-1950s two well-known Evangelical scholars, Walter R. Martin, the director of cult apologetics for Zondervan Publishing Company, who had already classified Adventism as a cult in his book The Rise of the Cults (1955), and Donald Grey Barnhouse, the founder and editor of Eternity magazine, began a comprehensive evaluation of Adventist theology in preparation for writing a full expose, and contacted the General Conference - seeking representative published materials. The leaders there proved eager to avoid having Adventism classified as a cult--they were concerned for its public image and had no wish to be grouped yet again with, for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who had already received stern treatment from Martin. They therefore chose to cooperate closely with the researchers, appointing three men who had had, for Adventists, a great deal of ecumenical contact to work closely with them. These spent hundreds of hours

with Martin, answering questions that had arisen from his study of Adventist primary sources. When their answers to these questions were published, it became apparent that they had denied three doctrines relevant to the specialness of Adventism and its end-time message which had been widely held among Adventists but were offensive to Evangelicals (QOD 1957).<sup>viii</sup> Although some Adventists expressed a sense of betrayal over the new formulation of belief, there was widespread exhilaration when Barnhouse authored an article asking "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" (1956), a question he answered in the affirmative, and when Martin's subsequent book, The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism (1960), declared that Adventists were not a cult but were "bretheren" of the Christian Evangelicals.

Such acceptance encouraged Adventist leaders to lower barriers further. Adventist representatives began to attend meetings of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches as observers in 1968, participating in discussions but without the right to vote. The General Conference also affiliated with several subdivisions of the National Council of Churches, such as its Broadcasting and Film Commission and its Religious Liberty Commission. In 1975 it began to invite other denominations to send official observers to its quinquennial Sessions, and in 1980 it established the Council on Interchurch Relations to deal with ecumenical relations. Meanwhile, in 1977 the International Religious Liberty Association, which is sponsored by the General Conference Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL), organized the first of a series of World Congresses on religious liberty, in which major figures from other religious traditions have participated. During this same period Adventist pastors became increasingly active in local interdenominational clergy associations.

During these years the statement in the General Conference Working Policy written in 1926 to govern relations with other mission societies in developing countries (with whom relations have always been easier) was revised to apply to other Christian bodies in general:

1. We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.
2. When mission work brings us in contact with other missionary societies and religious bodies, the spirit of Christian courtesy, frankness, and fairness shall prevail at all times" (General Conference, 1990: 371-2).

Beginning in the early 1970s, B.B. Beach, a long-term key PARL administrator, proved increasingly successful in his pursuit of official dialogues with other religious bodies. Between 1970 and 1998, Adventists met with several international inter-denominational organizations (the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Fellowship), the international bodies representing multi-national denominations (the Salvation Army, the World Lutheran Federation), and other Sabbath-keeping groups (the Church of God Seventh Day, the Worldwide Church of God). Most significant of these was a series of meetings with leaders of the World Lutheran Federation between 1994 and 1998, at which formal papers were presented and discussed. At the end the participants agreed on a statement that Adventism should no longer be seen as a sect but as a "free church and Christian world communion" (Report, 1998: 15). Beach commented later that he hoped that the Adventist Church would benefit from such an assessment because of the Lutheran influence in certain countries. He added that a prime reason for PARL's existence and for its increasing ecumenical participation was to "project an image of a Christ-centered church rather than a queer sect" (interview). Since then, under John Graz, Beach's successor, there has been dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the international Presbyterian body, and the Presbyterian

Church USA. Graz has become the Secretary of Christian World Communions, where the world churches are represented.

Meanwhile, the International Religious Liberty Association, which is Adventist-sponsored, has held many more international and regional congresses, where Graz makes sure that different faiths and churches are represented. The Association has moved beyond the original focus of Adventist activity in the area of religious liberty—attempts to protect Adventism and Adventists from discrimination and attack—to concern for the religious freedom of all religious groups. The IRLA has sponsored one or two regional congresses a year, and an international congress every 5 years. There were 600 delegates at the Capetown international congress in 2007. There will be a regional congress in Chile in 2008. Congresses are open to all faiths, and all can speak “we demonstrate that religious freedom is a principle for us” (Graz, 2008).

Graz has also begun to fulfill his dream of sponsoring popular festivals focusing on religious freedom, with singers, music, celebration. The first of these was held in Sao Paulo in 2000. PARL is now seeking to replicate and develop this, using stadiums in Angola, St Petersburg (Russia), Hawaii, San Domingo, and Lima. The goal is to bring people together from different religious persuasions to celebrate and promote religious freedom. Graz reports that many from a variety of religious traditions are showing interest in participating (2008).

Meanwhile, there have been signs that the tension between Adventism and Catholicism is also easing. Adventists participated as observers in the Second Vatican Council during the 1960s. In the early 1970s, when the Pacific Press was sued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because of its discrimination against women in salaries and promotions, the defense brief distanced Adventism from its “earlier” anti-Catholicism as “nothing more” than a manifestation of an attitude then common among conservative Protestant denominations “which has now been consigned to the historical trash heap so far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned” (Pacific Press Case 1975: 4). In 1995, the previously unthinkable occurred, when PorterCare Adventist Health Services, the Adventist hospital system in Colorado, and the Catholic Sisters of Charity Health Services Colorado joined together to form a new corporation, Centura Health, in order that both could survive in an increasingly competitive market. Adventist officials involved in this decision argued that Adventist hospitals had more in common with Catholic hospitals than any others because their missions were so similar (interviews). In 1997, the General Conference released a statement on “How Seventh-day Adventists View Roman Catholicism.” While this was worded cautiously, it was markedly different from many of the diatribes of earlier years. It stated that Adventists could not ignore the “severe abuses of religious freedom” when the Catholic Church had allied with the state in earlier centuries, and believed that in the future a union of church and state would again result in “widespread religious oppression,” with “the seventh-day Sabbath as a focal point.” However, “we recognize some positive changes” in Catholicism since Vatican II and “stress the conviction that many Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ” (General Conference, 1997: 21-22). William Johnsson, then the editor of the official church paper, responded to the statement by urging “Let’s put aside all Catholic-bashing from the pulpit or classroom” [1997: 5].

This is not to say that all Adventists are marching in lockstep towards good relations with other denominations. Beach admitted that the problem had been solved more at the administrative level than at the grassroots. He explained that he was careful in his statements and actions lest he inflame the laity with traditional mind-sets. Thus, when he wrote about the dialogue with Lutherans in the church paper, he referred to it as “conversations” (Report, 1998: 1); he avoided participating in Communion in the churches of other denominations in order to escape critical letters from Adventists; and although he thought that dialogue with Roman Catholics could be fruitful, especially since its embrace of religious liberty during

Vatican II, he did not pursue this because he was acutely aware that some Adventists would be dismayed. He complained about Adventist evangelists who continue to spout vitriol against other denominations and about those Adventists who enjoy blowing up bridges rather than building them. He confessed that the Adventists who met with the Lutherans "could not declare that we no longer see them as part of 'Babylon' – we had to be vague there. In order to prevent a division among Adventists, we have to proceed slowly. I would like to see such a declaration in my lifetime..." (Beach 1998). Graz explained that in ecumenical activities Adventists "are very open to cooperate with other groups in activities that promote social work and religious freedom. However, we are still very prudent re formal ecumenism. We seek good relations between groups, so that all can work together on the same things, but are not ready to give up our own identity for ecumenical unity." He also explained that the cautious language employed in the statement on Catholicism was designed to avoid offending members who still cling to traditional Adventist fears and expectations "Because of the suspicion of our members, we must make sure that they understand our purpose and activities well" (2008).

In spite of the caution exercised, the changes have indeed caused deep disquiet among traditional Adventists "...our close fraternization with the World Council of Churches, with the churches of Babylon, and with the local ministerial associations has nearly shut our mouths to giving to the world the distinct message that has made us God's remnant church in this last generation" (Spear 1993 29).

### **Becoming "Regular" Americans**

The strong bonds linking Adventists to one another have weakened over time. The lives of members are less tied to the church counts show that fewer than 50% attend worship on Sabbaths, while attendance at the subsidiary services, such as Sabbath School and Wednesday night Prayer Meeting, has plunged in recent decades (interviews). Adventist Ghettos have become more mixed as cities have spread out to their once rural areas, and the staff employed by Adventist hospitals has become much more religiously diverse. The proportion of members pursuing their education at Adventist schools has declined, and that employed by the church has fallen sharply. While many of the names of Adventist colleges originally indicated that their prime purpose was to prepare missionaries, these names have all been changed with, for example, "Washington Missionary College" becoming Columbia Union College and the "College of Medical Evangelists" Loma Linda University. The number of Americans serving as foreign missionaries has declined precipitously in recent years, and it is now rare for a graduate in medicine from the medical school to make a career as a missionary (interviews).

Meanwhile, the "Adventist lifestyle" has moderated, becoming less distinct. Rather than rejecting the American Dream, many Adventists have become enmeshed in the pursuit of it. Sabbath observance is less separating, partly because of the introduction of the 5-day week, partly because it is kept less rigidly for example, even Adventist hospitals have relaxed their rules concerning what cannot be done then, as they collect payments from patients and often schedule non-emergency surgery (interviews). Most American Adventists now observe Christmas as most Americans do, with a Christmas tree, gifts, and a shared meal. Only a minority of Adventists are vegetarians, even as the practice becomes more common in society as a result of favorable medical research; meanwhile, many Adventists now drink coffee and a small but increasing minority admits to drinking wine and other alcoholic beverages, even though independent studies have shown that Adventists who follow their diet restrictions live on the average seven years longer than a control group (interviews). The dress rules for women have relaxed, with makeup, wedding - rings, and other jewelry becoming widespread dress is now seldom a badge, so that it is no longer possible to ascertain an Adventist's religious identity from her lack of adornment. Meanwhile, Adventists, and especially those of the younger generation, have embraced popular culture much more closely—from -

television and attendance at movies to the use of contemporary music in worship services; where fiction, theater and film were once rejected, they are now the subjects of courses at Adventist colleges (Case 1996; interviews).

There is now considerable variation among Adventists in what rules are observed. However, generally speaking, American Adventists are clearly less separate and peculiar than they were. The Church is forced to play catch-up with changing attitudes among its members for example, its boarding academies face frequent problems as they try to enforce behavioral rules that are no longer practised by the families of most of their students, but which others—often board members, donors, and older Adventists who have long lived close to the school—continue to champion (interviews).

Few American Adventists now engage in personal evangelism evangelistic outreach is left mostly to professional preachers on the Adventist media, in crusades transmitted simultaneously by satellite, and in local seminars and crusades. Although they are usually much less confrontational than in days of yore, evangelists continue to stress apocalyptic and triumphalist themes because these continue to draw audiences and propel them to a "decision" to join "God's true church in the last days." However, when these converts join local Adventist congregations, they are likely to hear few sermons on these themes, nor are these the focus of what is taught at the Adventist colleges or the Seminary. Church leaders orchestrated an incongruous celebration of the 150th anniversary of the "Great Disappointment" in 1994 – of 150 years of preaching that the world was about to end, rather than a day of soul-searching concerning the meaning of the unexpected "delay." Nevertheless, the delay is a huge problem to many members who grew up as Adventists, who are very aware that their grandparents expected Christ to return long ago and that they would never face death. There is a misalignment, then, between the continued apocalyptic preaching of the evangelists and the preference of most American members to focus on living in the present (Lawson 1996c).

### **Applying Additional Theoretical Insights to Adventism**

Adventism has moved at varying speeds from Sect towards Denomination. The engines behind this movement have been the development of its educational and health institutions; upward social mobility among its members, especially second and third generation members; policy decisions by its leaders and their administrations; and the changing context in America, such as the introduction of the 5-day week; a recognition that some of the elements of the Adventist lifestyle, such as the value of a weekly rest day and a vegetarian diet, were positive; a growing tolerance of differences; and the appearance of a variety of new religious groups, often labeled "cults" by the press, that did not form schismatically from Christian denominations but instead represented new religious traditions, such as Scientology, the Moonies (Unification Church), Hare Krishnas (Society for Krishna Consciousness), and the Children of God (later known as The Family), which, by contrast, made Adventism seem much less peculiar. One change of policy that had considerable impact in this respect was the decision, in the late-1970s, to launch successive programs pursuing faster growth by funneling more funds into public evangelism, setting baptismal goals for every pastor and rewarding those who achieved them, and, later, using technological innovations to invent new evangelistic approaches. As a result, the accession rate increased considerably world-wide, and indeed almost everywhere (Lawson 2007); evangelistic campaigns were shortened considerably, with baptisms occurring during each campaign instead of after some months of intensive study; and post-baptismal nurture largely disappeared, as pastors moved on from one public campaign or "Revelation Seminar" to another (interviews). Brian Wilson, who had researched Adventism, ceased to list it as an example of an "Adventist sect," a category where converts received lengthy instruction before being admitted as members, because, in his view, the new emphasis on growth had instead turned it into a

“Conversionist sect,” which, according to his categorization, encouraged more rapid movement along the sect-denomination continuum (1996).

Adventism in America has become extremely diverse over time. From a membership that was fairly homogeneous in beliefs, adherence to behavioral norms, socioeconomic status, educational level, and race during its early decades, it has become diverse across all of these dimensions. In addition, a flood of immigrant members from countries where Adventism has grown rapidly and reinforced the ambitions of its converts to better their lives has poured into America since the immigration laws were changed in 1968. These have created congregations that worship in their own languages and celebrate their cultures which have, in turn, become very successful agents in evangelizing their fellow immigrants. Independent publications speak to the highly varied theological concerns of the various groups, ranging from progressive/liberal Adventists to “historic Adventists,” and diverse causes harvest funds from them for different projects; organizations at both ends of the spectrum organize camp meetings and conferences; members who live in areas where there are a sufficient number of Adventists to give them a choice of congregations, frequently drive past several on their way to one that better fits their needs. The Adventist leadership reveals the extent to which it fears disunity and schism in the emphasis it places on maintaining unity in sermons, articles and councils.

In spite of these fears, there have been no major schisms in recent decades. The diverse groups tend to become self-contained, each speaking to its own. The ultra-conservatives express discontent and agitate for a return to the “blueprint” rather than breaking away they are constrained by the fact that their heroine, the prophet Ellen White, declared that Seventh-day Adventism was God’s final church, and also by the fact that, as Sabbath-keepers, they have few other options. However, their membership is aging and declining because members of the younger generation are less exercised about theological issues, preferring to enjoy the sense of community that worshipping on a different day and being used to a different diet has brought them. Some of the liberals and economically more successful Adventists do exit as individuals. However, they too are constrained by a sense of community that was often formed when they were young in Adventist schools and churches.

## **Conclusion**

In October, 1978, Robert H. Pierson, who had been President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists since 1969, announced to the Annual Council of the Church that he was retiring for medical reasons. In his final address to his Church, he invoked Church-Sect theory. As someone who had completed only two years of college he was probably not aware of the theory earlier. However, he had recently read a copy of a paper that Beatrice S. Neall, a graduate student at Andrews University, had submitted to *Ministry* magazine that applied and developed Niebuhr’s version of the theory in addressing difficulties that a religious sect was likely to have in passing on its faith from one generation to the next (Neall 1975). Although the paper was not published, the details of the theory, with its suggestion that the members of a group that begins as a sect later, over time, lose their zeal and abandon their peculiar behavioral norms while the sect itself, en route to developing into a denomination, bureaucratizes, establishes institutions, and accumulates wealth, and its schools, universities, and seminaries go to the world for accreditation and tend to become secularized, had grabbed his attention.<sup>ix</sup> He spoke with passion “Brethren and sisters, this must never happen to the Seventh-day Adventist Church! ... Fellow leaders, beloved brethren and sisters—don’t let it happen! I appeal to you as earnestly as I know how this morning—don’t let it happen! I appeal to Andrews University, to the Seminary, to Loma Linda University—don’t let it happen!...This is God’s last church with God’s last message!” (Pierson 1978: 10) But the process was already occurring Pierson mentioned that there were already some who would belittle the authority of the Bible and attack the

credibility of the writings of Ellen White; there were those who wished to forget the standards of the Adventist Church; who coveted the favor of Evangelicals; “those who would throw off the mantle of a peculiar people; and those who would go the way of the secular, materialistic world” (Pierson 1978: 10). The pace of denominationalization was increasing, in part because, under Pierson’s leadership, Adventism had adopted strategies designed to achieve rapid growth, becoming, in terms of Wilson’s classification, “conversionist”.

I have argued that Adventism's state of tension with both the U.S. government and the broader society has been greatly reduced over time American Adventism and Adventists are less peculiar and separate than they were, and the mutual antagonisms which previously characterized the relationships between Adventism and the state, other churches, and the broader society have diminished. As American Adventism has followed a trajectory from sect towards denomination, the Adventist profile has increasingly come to parallel that of the mainline Protestant denominations in key ways for example, the -growth-rate among its Caucasian and African-American members has fallen sharply, to the point where its American-born membership is now declining.<sup>x</sup> Moreover, as Church-Sect theory would predict, the increased pluralism among Adventists themselves as their church has undergone the transition from sect towards denomination has resulted in a sharp increase in the tensions within Adventism.

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## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Given the direction of change according to the theory, it would be clearer in the American context, especially for the general reader, if it were called “sect-denomination theory.”
- <sup>ii</sup> Yinger distinguished a "church" from a "universal church", and thus used it as the equivalent of what others would identify as a "denomination."
- <sup>iii</sup> The first sanitarium, the Western Health Reform Institute (soon to be renamed and to achieve renown as Battle Creek Sanitarium) was founded in 1866, and the first school in 1872. Both were in Battle Creek, Michigan, where Adventist headquarters were then located.
- <sup>iv</sup> Such a passage did not exist, since the beginning of Sunday observance post-dated the documents included in the New Testament.
- <sup>v</sup> By 1892 about 50 members had been convicted and 30 of these imprisoned.
- <sup>vi</sup> The draft was continued without a break from the beginning of the Korean War in 1951 through 1973.
- <sup>vii</sup> The Army allows enlisting non-combatants to get a prior waiver from bearing arms for one term. The director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists knows of no Adventist who has taken advantage of this option (Councell 2008).
- <sup>viii</sup> These doctrines were that Christ was born with a sinful nature (this change disowned the bulwark of - last-generation perfectionism), that the writings of Ellen White were free of error and equal to the Scriptures, and that Adventists alone comprised the biblical Remnant.
- <sup>ix</sup> Much later, when both Neall and her husband Ralph were senior members of the Theology department at Union College in Nebraska, he reduced the earlier paper to an appropriate size for Ministry, which then published it (Neall and Neall 1997).
- <sup>x</sup> Its total membership continues to increase because of an influx of immigrants (Lawson, 1998b).