

THE
ESSENTIAL
HANDBOOK OF

DENOMINATIONS AND MINISTRIES

GEORGE THOMAS KURIAN AND
SARAH CLAUDINE DAY, EDITORS



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Preface

The Essential Handbook of Denominations and Ministries is a guide and road map of the religious landscape of the United States. It profiles 200 denominations, with a combined membership of over 150 million people, and 140 ministries that serve not merely in the United States but also in over 190 other countries. The entries in *The Essential Handbook of Denominations and Ministries* provide a narrative profile as well as statistical information. But by themselves they do not provide an overview of Christian America or its strengths and weaknesses. Christianity is more than a set of numbers or raw information. The real strength of the church is from the Lord who watches over it.

“Denomination” is the term most commonly used to denote families of churches that share the same doctrines or dogmas and thus share fellowship. There are over 22,000 denominations in the world today, not counting sects and cults, and there are nearly 5,000 in the United States alone. We have profiled 200 of the largest and most active. The denominations’ traditions and confessions vary, as do their organizations, authority structures, practices, and worship modes, and we have sought to illumine these differences, even as we also note the broad agreement on the essentials of the Christian faith.

A ministry can be an outreach of a church, denomination, or fellowship, or it can originate with the passion and call of an individual or small group. These ministries are a means by which the faithful engage with the world around them and participate in the mission of God by serving the community (locally or globally). The ministries section profiles prominent ministries in the United States.

The Essential Handbook of Denominations and Ministries tries as faithfully as possible to inventory and profile the major denominations and ministries in the United States so that Christians have a better understanding of the nature of the church as it operates in America. The entries draw as much as possible on information directly from the denominations or ministries themselves, and often particularly from the organization’s website, listed at the end of each entry.

Special thanks are due to Phil Stoner for his commitment to this project. I would also like to acknowledge the prayers and support of my wife, Annie Kurian, during the gestation of this book.

George Thomas Kurian
Yorktown Heights, New York

Part 1

Denominations

Adventist/Sabbatarian

Advent Christian General Conference

History

Following the failed prediction of Christ's visible return in 1844 by William Miller, evangelical Adventist-minded followers formed the American Evangelical Advent Conference. Out of this group the Advent Christian General Conference (ACGC) officially organized in 1860. Two primary doctrinal positions formed the core of this new denomination: belief in the imminent, personal, and visible return of Christ to earth to raise the dead, punish the wicked, and usher in a new heaven and a new earth; and belief in "conditional immortality"—that eternal life is a gift of God given only to those who trust in Christ alone for salvation. Conditional immortality led Advent Christians to deny natural immortality of the soul and that unbelievers will be justly punished for their sin in the lake of fire. Similar to other groups of the Second Great Awakening era, Advent Christians made use of prophecy charts, conferences, and evangelistic camp meetings.

Headquarters

146011 Albemarle Road
Charlotte, NC 28227

Core Beliefs

The watchword of early Advent Christians was "no creed but the Bible." Advent Christians share with other Christians the beliefs set forth in the Apostles' Creed and "make Christian character the only test of fellowship and communion" (2010 *Advent Christian Manual*, 11).

Their beliefs span Reformed and Arminian doctrines as well as a variety of eschatological views. The ACGC website publishes a doctrinal statement.

Website

<http://www.adventchristian.org/>

Bibliography

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William J. Monroe and Philip G. Monroe

Church of God, Seventh Day

History

The Church of God (Adventist) grew out of William Miller's Great Disappointment (1844), when the church remained independent of the leading Adventist churches. Their independence was characterized by the rejection of Ellen G. White's visions, which in 1863 led to the formation of independent sabbatarian congregations comprised of devout advent believers located in Michigan and Iowa. These believers conducted conferences and camp meetings and were inspired by the periodicals (*The Hope of Israel*) and leadership of Enos Easton, Samuel Davison, and Gilbert Cranmer.

By 1866, the name Church of God was common and in use, and, as the assemblies coalesced, the Church of God, Seventh Day was formally organized in 1884. It was incorporated in Missouri in 1899. Headquartered in Stanberry, Missouri, the church adopted the name Church of God (Adventist) Unattached Congregations in 1906. In 1933, the affiliated congregations of the Church of God met at a general conference to discuss the reorganization of church polity and structure, namely, whether to leave the congregational system for what was perceived as an "apostolic" structure of "apostles" and "prophets."

Though the reorganization move was not adopted, many of its supporters resigned from the general conference and called a second meeting later in the same year in Salem, West Virginia, to

discuss the issue. At that meeting, the supporters quickly adopted the reorganization of church polity and distinguished themselves from the other churches as the true Church of God, Seventh Day, Salem, West Virginia. By the late 1940s, calls for the congregations affiliated with Salem to merge with the general conference of the Church of God were heard, and the merger was finalized before the end of the decade. Soon after, however, there arose opposition to the merger among those affiliated with Salem due to charges that the church in Salem did not correctly follow proper church guidelines, and the merger was rejected.

In the end, those in Salem who rejected the merger continued with the Church of God in Salem, West Virginia, and used the designation “7th day” to distinguish themselves from the general conference designation “Seventh Day.” The vast majority of the congregations affiliated with Salem accepted the merger and continued on with the general conference. In 1950, headquarters were moved to Denver, and today the official name of the Church of God (Adventist) is the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Headquarters

PO Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233
Telephone: 303-752-7973

Leadership

President: Whaid Rose

Core Beliefs

The Church of God is doctrinally sabbatarian and Adventist (though rejecting Ellen G. White’s visions), with a focus on the Old Testament.

The church believes in the authoritativeness of the Bible; the divinity of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit; the inevitable presence of sin in all people; and forgiveness of sin and salvation by repentance and faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, made possible by God’s grace. Through the Holy Spirit, the redeemed must obey God and bear the fruit of good works, although these good works do not earn salvation. The church has a responsibility to evangelize and to perform charitable works. The sacraments are baptism and the Lord’s Supper, symbolic in nature and followed by foot washing. Although Communion is practiced annually, allowances are made for those who practice it more frequently. Baptism is by immersion and

must be preceded by a confession of faith and repentance. Marriage is strictly heterosexual, and divorce is allowed only on the grounds of sexual immorality.

A distinguishing doctrine of the church is the teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath must still be observed as part of holy conduct, along with the observance of the other rules of the Ten Commandments. Church members are commanded to “avoid intermixing Christianity with extrabiblical practices, as in the common observances of Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Lent, and Halloween” (www.cog7.org, “Statement of Faith”). Other teachings condemn warfare, limit meat eating to foods called “clean” in the Bible, and require tithing. Prophetic teachings regarding the second advent occupy a central place in the church’s doctrine; the reestablishment of the nation of Israel is viewed as an indication of Christ’s imminent return. The kingdom of God will see two phases beyond the present time: the millennial kingdom of Christ, culminating with the resurrection of the unrighteous to suffer annihilation, and the eternal kingdom of God, in which Christ turns his kingdom over to the Father as a new heaven and a new earth begin.

Website

<http://www.cog7.org/>

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Joseph M. Holden

Primitive Advent Christian Church

History

The Primitive Advent Christian Church is a small denomination in West Virginia. It was formed when some Adventist Christians separated from the Adventist Christian Church because of the teachings of Rev. Whitman, a minister of the Advent Christian Church who rejected foot washing and rebaptism of backsliders and apostates. The use of the word “primitive” refers to a return to the pristine teachings of the church. Like the Adventist Christian Church, the Primitive Advent Christian Church adheres to the views of Charles F. Hudson and George Storrs, who put forth a doctrine of “conditional immortality,” meaning that the unredeemed are

not immortal but will be unconscious until judgment and extinct afterward. Primitive Adventists are pacifists.

Headquarters

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George Thomas Kurian

Seventh-Day Adventist Church

History

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church originated as a denomination in the United States as a consequence of the nineteenth-century Millerite movement. From his studies of the prophecies of Daniel, Baptist preacher William Miller (1782–1849) predicted that the second coming of Jesus Christ would occur within a year subsequent to March 21, 1843. Many thousands believed his teaching and made preparations for the second coming but were devastated as midnight passed on March 21, 1844, and Christ did not return to earth. A similar experience occurred on a revised date of October 22, 1844.

A small group still insisted that a significant event did occur on the prophesied day but not in the earthly manner Miller had prophesied. Through a radical reinterpretation of Miller's teachings, primarily through the explanation of Hiram Edson (1806–82), this small group (the "little flock") believed something significant did occur on October 22, 1844: the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven, when the ministry of Christ moved from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place and the investigative (pre-advent) judgment began. Despite several false prophecies, a core group of believers still affirmed the basic theology of Miller (without the predictions of the Lord's return). The core group met in Albany, New York, in April 1845 to clarify their doctrines of the second coming, the resurrection, and the beginning of the millennium. They agreed that the second coming of Christ would be personal and visible but that the date could not be predicted. Believers would be resurrected when Christ returned, but unbelievers would not be resurrected until after the millennium. The group also affirmed belief in the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) and "conditional immortality" (i.e., immortality is conditioned upon faith in Christ; thus, those who reject the Savior remain mortal and are subject to death).

Joseph Bates, one of the leaders of the second-generation Millerites, wrote a forty-six-page

pamphlet in 1846 that reaffirmed the importance of observing the Sabbath on the seventh day as a perpetual sign of God's eternal covenant between him and his people. In addition to those of Bates, the efforts of Ellen G. Harmon (1827–1915) and her future husband, James White (1821–81), helped to organize a small group in New England that coalesced regarding the doctrines of the Sabbath and the second coming.

The name Seventh-Day was chosen based on the doctrine of the Sabbath, and Adventist was chosen to reflect the urgency to obey the Sabbath in anticipation of the advent of the Lord. The group's name thereby incorporated the two distinguishing doctrines of the Adventist movement, the seventh-day Sabbath and emphasis on the second coming of Christ.

Ellen G. White eventually succeeded Miller as the leader of the movement, and, by the early 1850s, the group had affirmed the spirit of prophecy as manifested through her. The group initially developed slowly, as a consequence of the Great Disappointment (i.e., the failed expectation of the Lord's return in 1844), but prospered and stabilized enough numerically that in 1855 headquarters were established in Battle Creek, Michigan. By 1860, those in the Millerite-Adventist movement had experienced persecution within mainline Protestant denominations for their emphasis on the second coming (as opposed to any particular Protestant belief system), which compelled them to organize themselves into a denomination. On October 1, 1860, the name Seventh-Day Adventist was adopted officially. The headquarters were moved in 1903 to Washington, DC; however, to accommodate the growing needs of the church, its world headquarters were relocated to Maryland in 1989.

Headquarters

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Leadership

The Michigan Conference was organized in 1861 (only six months after the start of the American Civil War). The first general conference session was held on May 20, 1863. By that time, there were six state conferences and approximately thirty-five hundred members worldwide. Subsequent to 1900, the current administrative structure was established, which is expressed in a polity that is Presbyterian (i.e., modified

Presbyterian). The organization of the constituent bodies is based on a representative form of church government. The local churches are organized into local (state) conferences, which consist of local churches in a province, state, or territory. All pastors are delegates to their local conference, and all local churches are permitted to commission delegates to their local conference (based on church membership). The primary reason for the local conferences is for evangelistic work in the local church territories and to achieve support for missionary work. Local churches elect the officers of the church, but their local conference supervises all local pastoral and evangelistic work and supports all pastors and workers of the local churches within its territory from a central fund and therefore has the authority to assign or dismiss pastoral workers. The local churches pay tithes to the local conferences. All ministry support of the Adventist churches is based on the tithe.

Local (state) conferences are organized into union conferences, which are made up of local conferences within a larger territory (e.g., an alliance of states or an entire country). The presidents of the local conferences are delegates to their union conference, with additional delegates elected by the local congregations according to membership. A union conference is administered by an executive board, which primarily promotes and supervises work in the local conferences in a manner consistent with the recommendations and resolutions of the general conference.

Union conferences are organized into division conferences, which consist of an indefinite number of union conferences. As a worldwide community of churches, the Adventist church consists of thirteen divisions administratively. The presidents of the union conferences and workers of the division conferences are delegates to their division conference. The presidents of the division conferences are vice presidents of the general conference. A division conference is responsible for church work in its territory in a manner consistent with the policies of the general conference. A division conference is governed by the policies of the general conference.

As the international legislative body, the general conference is the worldwide expression of Seventh-Day Adventists. The constituent membership of the conference is defined in the constitution of the general conference. The general conference consists of divisional offices, which by action of the executive committee at annual

councils are assigned general administrative supervision for specific groups of unions and other church constituents within designated geographical areas.

Core Beliefs

Adventists affirm the infallibility of Scripture. They believe in the doctrine of the Trinity and the full deity (and humanity) of Jesus Christ. Although differences exist among Adventist denominations, the majority affirm Saturday as the Sabbath day of rest and worship. Adventists believe Sabbath observance is essential for awaiting the return of Jesus Christ.

The second coming of Christ is one of the core doctrines of the Adventist faith; consequently, it receives much prominence in the denomination's belief. Although Adventists deny that anyone currently possesses the mark of the beast (Rev. 13), there will come a "time of testing" wherein the counterfeit Sabbath will be enforced, and all those who continue in disobedience to the seventh-day Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast. The majority believe the wicked will not suffer eternally but will be annihilated and that the dead are not conscious between death and the resurrection (soul sleep).

Baptism is by immersion of adults. There is strict abstinence from alcohol, caffeinated beverages, and tobacco.

Worship

The typical service includes worship music, personal and public prayers, a sermon based on the Bible, and an opportunity to tithe and give thank offerings. Worship styles vary from formal (anthem and hymn singing with organ and piano accompaniment) to contemporary (praise songs with the accompaniment of a guitar or a small band).

Divisions and Splits

The Seventh-Day Adventist Reform Movement was founded in 1925 in reaction against the church's position regarding participation in war. As a consequence of World War I, the Reform Movement believed military service should not be forbidden, but attempts at reconciliation with the mainline Adventists failed. The Branch Davidian groups emerged from 1959 factions among the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists, who had separated from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the late 1920s. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has been criticized by

counter-cult ministries for affirming an extrabiblical authority of Ellen G. White's writings and for communicating an unbiblical gospel by means of the doctrine of the investigative judgment and seventh-day Sabbath obedience.

Statistics

Worldwide church membership is 16,307,880 in 68,225 churches, and by the end of 2009, there was a daily average of approximately 3,000 baptisms (with that average being surpassed for the first time in Adventist history with 3,032 daily baptisms in 2006). By the end of 2009, there was one Adventist for every 418 persons worldwide.

Largest Churches

Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-Day Adventists (Loma Linda, CA)
Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church (Takoma Park, MD)

Missionary and Evangelistic Work

Adventist missions began in 1874. The Secretariat Department of the General Conference oversees the worldwide missionary work of Seventh-Day Adventists. Adventist Mission provides coordination and funding for mission work, which currently impacts more than two hundred countries. The outreach of Adventist Mission workers includes community development, disaster relief, education, and medical care.

Academic Institutions

More than one hundred colleges and academic institutions are affiliated with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Ellen G. White founded Battle Creek College in Michigan (now Andrews University) in 1874 as the first higher education facility for Adventists. She also founded the College of Medical Evangelists in California (now Loma Linda University and Medical Center) in 1905. The church operates a worldwide system of nearly 6,000 schools with more than 1,065,000 students ranging from kindergarten to graduate level (approximately 4,800 primary schools, 1,000 secondary schools, 100 hundred colleges and universities, and 100 tertiary programs and worker training institutions).

Parachurch Organizations

The church worldwide operates 393 clinics (dispensaries), 174 hospitals, and 158 nursing homes, retirement centers, orphanages, and children's homes. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency works with victims of

human-made and natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, famine, floods, and wars). The Geoscience Research Institute was founded in 1958 to address the alleged conflict between religion and science. The Biblical Research Institute was established officially in 1975 to promote the study and practice of Adventist theology and lifestyle.

Electronic Media

Adventist World Radio is the international broadcast ministry of the church and the only ministry of the church that focuses on local international languages (particularly those in the 10/40 Window) by broadcasting in nearly seventy languages. Adventist Media Production (AMP) is the electronic media ministry of the church. AMP produces some of the programming for Adventist Communication Network, the satellite media distribution service for the church in North America, and Hope Channel, broadcaster of satellite Bible seminars. Adventist Television Network is the global satellite service of the general conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists. Three Angels Broadcasting Network is a private organization primarily consisting of Adventists.

Publications

The Adventist church operates a worldwide publishing ministry of more than fifty publishing houses in addition to printing countless magazines and other publications in 327 dialects and languages. The primary publishing agencies include Pacific Press (Idaho) and Review and Herald (Maryland), which publish a combined total of nearly fifty periodicals in addition to books for distribution in Adventist Book Centers.

Website

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