

CATHOLIC AND ADVENTIST: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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As I was still on my “journey home,” a priest friend—Fr. Tim—reminded me that embracing the Catholic Church was a fuller embrace of all the beauty of my Adventist past. As the II Vatican Council asserted:

Though we believe they suffer from defects, [non-Catholic communities] have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.

...

Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. . . . For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise.¹

Adventists enjoy “many elements of sanctification and of truth.”² In fact, I learned that “these elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.”³ All that I loved of my Adventist past, all that enchanted me about it, was, in fact, an impetus to move deeper into the Catholic faith.

Thus, I was not rejecting my Adventism; rather, I was enriching, refining, and perfecting it. Embracing the Catholic Church meant embracing the fullness of the Christian experience I *already* enjoyed. If I believe what was good in my Adventist experience was good because it is ultimately derived from the Catholic Church, then I have no grounds to reject it simply because it was associated with my past. Accordingly, my priest encouraged me to retain as much as I could of my former faith, recognizing its divine origin.

1. II Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3-4.

2. II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 8.

3. *Ibid.*

Perhaps, one could say I am called to be *both* Catholic and Adventist, in that order. In many ways, I continue to find myself in a process of distinguishing old “wrongs” from old “rights.” And as I progressively consolidate my Catholic faith, I am learning to appreciate and preserve the permanent (and very beautiful) footprint Adventism has left in my own life. I continue to celebrate the enormous and positive influence Adventism (and many portions of Mrs. White’s writings) had in my life; God was using those positive features to help me grow spiritually while I was yet estranged from His One Church. At the same time, I remain saddened by the misinformation and caricatures that Adventism spreads against the Catholic faith—a faith so preeminently scriptural and balanced. I commit myself to living a Christian life according to the teachings of Mother Church.

I would like to believe that my journey is a prelude to those of many of my Adventist brothers and sisters who will also come to realize the truth of the Catholic faith. This hope raises an interesting question: if millions of Adventists were to embrace the Catholic faith tomorrow, what would continue to make them uniquely Adventist? What defines an “Adventist Catholicism” (or “Catholic Adventism”)? The II Vatican Council provides some guidelines:

All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials [e.g., theology, morals]. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline. . . and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.⁴

I’ve devoted much thought to this question for the past two years, and suggest the following concept.

An “Adventist Catholicism” is rooted in a fully orthodox Catholic theology and practice, with the following unique emphases (listed in no particular order):

- Focus on scripture: encouraging of personal and group bible study on the lay level.
- Deeper interest in the second coming of Christ, and the necessary spiritual preparation preceding it.
- Emphasis on the spiritual basis for healthful living, including the practice of vegetarianism, and abstention from alcohol and tobacco—not as standards, but as gifts.

4. II Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4.

- Nature-centered spiritual experience (e.g., admiring “handiwork of God”).
- Emphasis on the beauty, spirit, and experience of sacred time (now experienced on sundays and days of obligation⁵), including rest, vesperal prayers, nature walks, etc.
- Love of the Adventist hymnodic tradition, and its revivalist spirit.
- Desire to increase church fellowship opportunities, especially organized around meals: potlucks, home meetings, etc.
- Modesty in dress and deportment.
- An international vision of Church.
- An enthusiastic missionary, evangelistic, and apologetical culture, moved by a profound, corporate desire to defend the Catholic faith, in reparation for decades of distrust, condemnation, and misinformation.
- A unique ministry to Christians struggling with similar distrust.
- A spirit of deep repentance, and exaltation of the sacrament of reconciliation.
- Enriching the existing Catholic commitment to Christian education: church, parochial school, and home-based.
- Enriching Catholic institutional healthcare.
- Continued institutional interest in “biblical archeology.”
- Augmenting Catholic media ministry in radio, television, internet, print.

5. Abandoning all observation of the Sabbath law (Pope Eugene IV, Bull of Union with the Copts, Council of Florence, Session 11), Adventists could still appreciate a certain sacred character proper to the Sabbath, recognized within some segments of the Catholic Church (such as among Maronite Catholics [Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, footnote 23]), and respected by all others.

- A vibrant, interest in Daniel and Revelation, open to alternative understandings.
- Theological emphasis on the eternal priestly ministry of Christ (e.g., the Mass as a corporate experience of the Priesthood of Christ in the midst of the Church; intercessory prayer as an intimate form of personal participation in the priestly ministry of Christ).
- An appreciation for the devotional writings of Ellen White, after a recognition of their limitations and weaknesses.
- Most importantly, an enthusiastic embrace of especially those elements of the Catholic faith that were stumbling blocks for so long: expressed in fervent prayers for the ministry of the pope, a love of Mary and the saints as newfound brothers and sisters in Christ, a sense of yearning for the Eucharist, etc.

I have tried to model many of these principles on a personal level, though many are appropriate for a corporate group of Adventist converts on the local level. I am certain one could add other emphases, or slightly modify these. Together, they form an exciting picture of what could be, in the spirit of Christ's prayer that "they all may be one" (Jn 17:22).

As they appreciate the uniqueness of their journey of faith, "Adventist Catholics"⁶ will also exercise a unique ministry to their Catholic brothers and sisters. The II Vatican Council reminds Catholics that "anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification."⁷ Thus, the riches of our unique spiritual background are not ours alone to enjoy, nor should they isolate us within our new Church. Rather, our final embrace of that Church necessarily becomes a mission to its members, encouraging them along their pilgrimage of faith. As the Church, has blessed us, we bless her; receiving from her gifts, we share them with the other members of the body of Christ.

This is our calling as Adventists, as Catholics—as brothers and sisters. As impossible as this desire for full ecumenical unity may seem, let us devote ourselves to prayer, remembering that Christ yearns for that unity.

6. I believe the term "Adventist Catholic" represents the continuity between these two phases of our spiritual experience more appropriately than "former Adventist."

7. II Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4.

“And should we ask if all this is possible, the answer will always be yes. It is the same answer which Mary of Nazareth heard: with God nothing is impossible.”⁸

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8. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unim Sint* 102.