THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND SOCIETY: SOME FUNCTIONS, DYSFUNCTIONS, CONFLICT, AND INTERACTIONS

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Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide, from a sociological perspective, a broad overview of the historical and current interaction between the Christian Church and Society; with an inclusion of the specific contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is not meant to be a comprehensive listing and critique of all possible areas of contributions, conflicts and interactions, but rather represents the macro views of two distinct generations of scholars. The senior author is a sociologist who has held his PhD in Sociology for 30 years and has been a part of the faculty at Andrews University for 20 years. His views are based on not only many decades of observation and involvement with the Adventist Church but also a wide variety of other social roles in the public square from chairing a local Public Health board, chairing NIH grant review committees, and thirty years of publicly funded research on health risk behaviors. His views on the impact of Christianity on society often represent as much dinner and after dinner conversations as the scholarly literature. The second author is a female undergraduate researcher who is for the first time viewing the interaction between Christianity, Adventism and society, and reacting and reflecting on the perceptions of her generation. As the philosopher Karl Mannheim (Edmunds & Turner, 2002) argues, one generation, which he defined as a group experiencing major socio-cultural events at the same stage of biological, cognitive and social development, constructs reality in very different conceptual ways than another generation. We hope that this interaction between generations almost four decades apart may provide some creative elements to our examination of the purpose of this paper. In addition to this inter-generational perspective, as noted, we would like to examine the impact of Christianity on society from a specifically sociological perspective. Truth has many different facets, and therefore different methods of research and conceptual frameworks may provide useful insight into the interaction between Christianity, Adventism and Society. The tools which we will be using are the theoretical frameworks of Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. We would like to note that we are not attempting to provide a

comprehensive list of the relationship between Christianity and society, but rather to highlight what seems to us to be some of the major contributions and issues.

Conceptual Framework:

Functionalism is one of the oldest conceptual frameworks in sociology and primarily focuses on the social arrangements that facilitate the aspects of a society that make it work, function, survive and prosper. These arrangements generally focus on cultural values and institutional operations/activities that seem to contribute to a society that pragmatically works and is supported by a great number of its participants. Functionalism does recognize that there can be dysfunctional values or institutional operations (e.g. the response to the hurricanes of 2005 in the U.S.), but primarily focuses on modifying the values and institutional functions to reduce dysfunctions. Conflict Theory in many ways takes the opposite view. Theorists in this tradition often note that societies are not so much based on some sort of functional consensus but instead a dominant powerful group imposes its values and institutional arrangements upon the whole population. Dissidents are imprisoned, expelled or simply killed. Revolutions emerge in attempts to overthrow the dominant power structure by those being oppressed by it. Dealing with dysfunctions through slight modifications is not seen as possible; the focus is rather on radical social change. Finally, Symbolic Interactionism as a conceptual framework focuses on a kind of Hegelian dialectical process where the functional thesis and conflict anti-thesis can, through dialogue and interaction at all levels, change society to move toward some type of transcendent synthesis that helps society avoid conflict and bring the greatest good to the greatest number of its members (Henslin, 2004; Mill, 2002).

The Early Christian Church through the Middle Ages

Functional Contributions

Rodney Stark (1997) has done an excellent analysis of how early Christianity arose and triumphed in the Roman world. Among the contributions he first noted was the Christian redefinition of disease. Many non-Christian religions defined disease as a result of a curse of God. This view was exemplified by the words of Jesus' disciples when they asked him what sin a blind man (or his parents) had committed (John 9:1-3). Jesus made

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it clear that disease was not necessarily the result of individual behavior, but rather just a part of living in the world. His healing ministry had an enormous impact on how his followers behaved. Stark (1997) argues that Christians played a major role in changing how the Roman world not only defined illness but how the sick were treated. Matthew 25:35-40 presents a final judgment motif not in terms of doctrine but in terms of social justice. This judgment story provided a strong impetus for Christian social action in the Roman world. There is evidence that early Christians, rather than abandoning the sick during epidemic periods, stayed in the community and cared for the sick. They not only defined illness differently but saw carrying for the sick as sacerdotal (as making them holy) or at least following in the example of Christ. This resulted in what was to become a religious order of the hospitalars (which cared for sick pilgrims) to the modern faith based health care system. In fact, *hôtel-Dieu*, one of the old French terms for hospital, means "hostel of God" (Wikipedia, 2006). This attitude toward the sick and healing the sick dramatically changed Western culture in its fundamental attitude toward disease and how the sick were treated.

While much has been made about the tensions between feminist views and Christian Theology, one of the most interesting aspects of Christianity is that demographically, although not administratively, it is a religion practiced primarily by females. Surveys show females are significantly more likely to attend church than males and that the majority of those attending services in any given week are female (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2006). A part of this may be inherent in how Jesus treated women. The story of Martha and Mary suggests that Jesus was very comfortable with women being a part of theological teaching and discourse (Luke 11:38-42). Women also played a significant role in funding Jesus and his ministry (Luke 8:1-3). The story of the women who was hemorrhaging and touched Jesus to be healed reminds us that, unlike in the Mosaic code, Jesus felt no sense of uncleanness in being touched by this woman (Luke 8:48). Finally, that fact that women prepared Jesus' body for burial and that Jesus first appeared to women may be a significant part of why women appear to be a stronger support base for Christianity than males (Mark 16:1, 9; John 20:10-18).

Early Christianity also taught the Roman World the value of female life. Roman culture, like some societies today, placed a much higher value on the birth of sons than on

the birth of daughters. Female infanticide was very common. This is well illustrated in a story quoted in Lewis (1985). A Roman business man on a trip to Alexandria in Egypt writes his pregnant wife back in Rome a tender note about how much he misses her and would never forget her. In passing, he notes that if he she gives birth while he is gone "if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it" (Lewis, 1985:54). The early Christian Church's strong opposition to this common practice of forced abortions and female infanticide may also have been a significant part of the attraction of women to the early church.

Early aspects of the Celtic Christian Church on the edge of the Roman world may also help us understand the bond between women and the Church. St. Patrick in his Confessions voiced strong opposition to the sexual slavery that Christian women were being sold into (St. Patrick, 2004). A crucial part of his ministry focused on attempts to change this social tradition. Further the Celtic Church appears to have been gender inclusive. There is some evidence that the Celtic Church had female abysses (including St. Bridget) that governed Christian districts and ruled over male priests (Harrington, 2002).

War is certainly one of the almost universal human conditions. In its earliest years, the Christian Church appears to have taken a fairly strong stand against war and violence. The words of Jesus in many places in Scripture suggest that the peace makers are blessed (Matthew 5:9) and that we should turn the other check rather than strike back (Matthew 5:38-40). There is strong evidence that early Roman Christians were pacifists prior to the rule of the Emperor Constantine (Hoekema, 1986). This pacifist tradition in future centuries stimulated a strong Christian peace movement exemplified by the Quakers and Anabaptists, and to a lesser extent by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and today it continues to be a part of our foreign policy war debate. Unfortunately, when the Roman world became Christian and in need of defending itself, strict pacifism began to crumble. But the Church Fathers did attempt to define appropriate or just war. St. Augustine of Hippo wrote a treatise on just war in the City of God (1994) that informs Christian thought to this day. It essentially justifies war as only a last resort and only for defensive reasons with the protection of non-combatants. To a significant extent the Geneva Convention on war is a testament to the continued impact of St. Augustine.

Many historians have noted the strong Christian contribution to learning. As the literate Roman world collapsed it was in the monasteries that the written word of God was kept as well as where the classics of the Greco-Roman world survived. It has been noted that much of this repository of written knowledge was hidden in Irish monasteries at the fringe of the conflict between the barbarians and the Romans. It was often the Celtic monks who reintroduced literacy into the new post Roman, Germanic world (Cahill 1996).

Some Dysfunctions and Conflicts

While the contributions of positive elements to society of the early Christian Church were extensive and pervasive, it is also crucial to note that the early Christian Church may have provided some dysfunctional elements to society. Perhaps the most obvious one is the intolerance of heterodoxy. Genocide was committed on whole tribes over the dispute about the nature of Christ. Religious wars characterized the role of the Christian Church in Society from these early wars about the nature of Christ to Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons to the suppression of such dissidents as the Waldensians and the Albegensians. The Crusader attempts to conquer the Holy Land could also be seen as another example of the willingness of the church to enforce its view through the strength of state arms (Nirenberg, 1998).

It has been noted by Stark (1997) that the Christian Church played a major role in the liberation and inclusion of women as it triumphed in the Roman world. However, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Church became the only organized force in Western Culture and it rapidly disengaged women from leadership. The Celtic Church in general was replaced by the Roman Church which ended the Celtic practice of including women in leadership. Within the context of St. Augustine, males dominated the Church and the Middle Ages Church became very ambivalent about human sexuality and the role of women. Sexual intercourse was reserved for procreation. That was the only justification for it! The exchange of letters between Julian of Eclanum and St. Augustine clearly shows the horror of St. Augustine in any suggestion of marital sexual pleasure (Cahill, 1996:65 & 66). St. Augustine sincerely wondered if women could have souls because they diverted men from their spiritual nature; but eventually decided that they

must because women gave birth to men, who obviously had souls, and the soulless could not give birth to the soulful. However, St. Augustine did not appear to define females as being completely in the image of God; only males appear to be in the image of God (Matter, 2002). St. Augustine's writings continue to affect our thinking today on birth control and the meaning of human sexuality as well as the role of women in the Church and in the public square; from ordination to ministry in the Christian Church to equal wages for equal work. The cultural implication of Augustine may well be that if women are created in less than the full image of God, then they are less like God than men, their sexual being is incomplete, and they do not deserve ordination, equal wages, or equal status in general.

While the early Church often supported major social change, as the Church became institutionalized it came to be strongly associated with power. The adoption of Christianity by Constantine, the Christianization of the King of the Franks and the strong Christian views of Charlemagne all resulted in a very close relationship between the Church and secular power. The Christian Church provided strong theological and philosophical rationales for the justification of civil power. The unity of Church and State resulted in strong and, for centuries, effective polices that often prevented significant social change (Reardon, 2006). The peasants were expected to accept their position in society because it was ordained of God and they were to look for their reward in a non-corporal paradise. Any opposition to the ruling class was rebellion against God. This alliance between the Pope (and other religious leaders) and Emperors and Kings was a key part of the cause of revolutionary movements that began in the eighteenth century and continue to some extent to this day (Marx et al., 1998).

Some Interactions

Sociologists who have focused on popular culture have noted that the early Christian Church attempted to transform Carnivals into Holy days; albeit with limited success. Festivals of the flesh were transformed into days commemorating special days in the life of Christ or the birthdays of saints. These days also provided work relief days for an often oppressed working class. Sociologists and Anthropologists at times use the term cultural leveling to describe the process whereby adjacent cultural groups and values

come to blend core beliefs, values, and behaviors. The Medieval Church to a very significant extent came to look like an organization that combined the governmental structure, customs, titles and dress of both the Roman and Byzantine Empire (Vatican, 2006). In addition, there are those who argue that the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, incorporated the traditional worship of a mother earth goddess and that the veneration of saints incorporated the polytheism of traditional societies (Van Der Post, Cashford, & Baring, 1993).

The Protestant Reformation

Some Functional Contributions

Certainly since the work of Max Weber, entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), sociologists have seen the Protestant reformation as a crucial event that contributed to redefining society. Weber argued that the capital formation which permitted industrial development characterized Protestant culture, emerging within the context of a work ethic that defined salvation itself dependent upon hard productive work, non-conspicuous consumption, and the production of goods and services that exceeded consumption. Weber further argued that the focus on an individual judgment before God provided a sense of accountability that resulted in a strong civic attitude of contributing to the community and the needs of others (Shah & Woodberry, 2004).

A variety of scholars have concluded that the Protestant reformation played a role in the development of democracy in Northern Europe as well as in other parts of the World. The argument is that the idea of Universal Priesthood often (though not inevitably) results in universal suffrage in political democracies. In addition, if there is no Pope or Bishop how can there be a King (Hunt et al., 2000; Shah & Woodberry, 2004)? Shah and Woodberry further argue that the Protestant belief that every Christian must be able to read scripture provided a powerful impetus to universal education. Literacy, while not wide spread historically, is a fairly old cultural phenomenon. What is unique about the concept of universal literacy is inherent in the term universal. The belief that not just an elite or specialized class needs to be literate, but that all need to be literate is a unique historical phenomenon that changed how human being thought and lived. While early Protestant movements were often as intolerant as the Medieval Church, after periods of

war between Protestants and Catholics and between various Protestant groups, a more tolerant pluralistic religion emerged. Some scholars believe (e.g. Hunt et al., 2000) that religious tolerance and pluralism related to wider acceptance of ethnic and cultural pluralism in general.

Both the Protestant Reformers and Catholic theologians in the Counter Reformation can be argued to have played a major role in the ending of slavery. Stark (2005) contends that such a perspective arises from a basic Christian view which is reflected in the U.S. Declaration of Impendence: that human beings are endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights, which include liberty. As Stark noted (2005), by the 16th century Pope Paul III issued a Bull excommunicating those who traded or kept slaves. The Protestant Countries of Northern Europe took similar civil action. In the United States, the first strong abolitionists were the Quakers, whose understanding of the New Testament and Pauline theology required equality. The influence of the Quakers moved many other religious groups, including the Puritan and Congregational traditions of New England, to provide a strong religious and moral base for the abolition of slavery (Ferrell, 2005).

Some sociologists, such as Stark in his recent work (2005), have argued that the dialectic between the Medieval Church, the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Reform Movements in the Catholic Church have provided the very basis for rationalism, logic and general scientific advances in Western culture. The view that there was one God (a prime cause) and that both He and the nature He created could be understood by rational processes and deductive logic as well as by observation, exploration, and experiment, resulted in the significant progress of Western Societies.

Some Dysfunctions

Probably the largest dysfunction about the Protestant reformation and Counter Reformation that has been noted focuses on the world wide imperialism fostered by the success of Western Capitalism and organizational ability. Such imperialism often occurred under the Christian banner and within the framework of a strong sense of Manifest Destiny that God had called Christians to civilize others through domination. Slaves may have been freed in Europe under the influence of religion, but physical,

cultural and linguistic genocide was committed against people groups throughout the world and in some ways has continued to this day, under the heading of ethnic cleansing or by imposing some type of Christianized Athenian democracy on the world (Prior, 1999). Finally, there are those who have argued that Capitalism based on Western theology and technology has played a major role in the destruction not only of traditional cultures but also in the degradation of the environment in the recent era of rapid industrialization and economic development.

<u>Some Interactions</u>

In many ways the discussion of the functional contributions of Protestant Christianity has been a focus on the interaction between the Church and Society. Perhaps another major interactional impact of the Protestant Reformation has been in the application of the concept of universal priesthood and the oneness in Christ to world societies. This simple and yet fundamental concept has tended to do away with any theological or philosophical basis for cultural or national superiority and may have provided a basis for the beginnings of world cooperation and globalization. However, the pervasive social impact of the Christian Church on society in many ways may have contributed to the decline in the distinctiveness of Christianity compared to general society. Many Churches by the end of the 19th century began to believe that society could enter a kind of millennium era where the kingdom of God was being implemented on earth through persuasion or legislation. To a significant extent this evangelical movement was successful through the introduction of a variety of legislation including laws prohibiting Sunday work and alcohol prohibition (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996). By becoming a dominant cultural force, the Church may have begun loosing its ability to play a type of prophetic role in noting the problems and potential solutions facing societies.

The Current Christian Church in a Modern and Post Modern Time

Even 2000 years after it began, the Christian church continues to have a significant impact on society. Christianity has grown to be the world's largest religion, with an estimated 2.1 billion members worldwide (Adherents, 2005), while over 76% of Americans report themselves to be Christians (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001). This

number represents all people who call themselves Christians, regardless of which church they claim membership with or even actual church membership in and of itself. In other words, in this post modern world, from the perspective of many, one no longer needs to belong to a specific church or even any church in order to be called a Christian. The focus of many Christian churches has begun to center on a blending of ideas and doctrines as well as a push towards new non- or inter-denominational churches that meet a wide variety of social and spiritual if not doctrinal needs (Hybels & Hybels, 1995). This ecumenism has in turn led to a seemingly greater tolerance of other beliefs and cultures in general society.

One of the recent emphases in society has been a move toward globalization. Globalization recognizes the interdependence of people around the world through the links of economics, politics, culture, and technology. It can be argued that Christianity has to a large extent driven this trend. Many Christian churches, including Adventists, engage in missionary activities, stemming from Jesus' command in the book of Matthew to "Go ye therefore and teach all nations". The movement of missionaries and churches into countries and cultures previously unknown to the Western world has opened these countries up to movement in and out of ideas, customs, and material trade (Peterson et al., 2001). Given the universalism of the Christian Church, Peterson and associates argue that Christianity provided the basic underpinnings for globalization and the acceptance that all live in a global interconnected community.

Another impact of the Christian church on modern and post modern society has occurred as a result of the church's strong focus on world relief, aid, and human as well as economic development. As mentioned earlier, this focus on humanitarian aid began with the early Christian Church in the care for the sick, and continues today. Christian organizations, such as World Vision, Maranatha, and ADRA, have a significant impact on relief and aid around the world in areas such as medical services, AIDS care, community development, water purification, orphan services, economic aid, shelter, food provision, educational opportunities, as well as a host of other contributions (ADRA, 2005; World Vision, 2006; Evans, 1979). These organizations are often some of the first major responders to disasters, as seen by the response to such catastrophes as the tsunami in East Asia and hurricanes in the United States. In addition to disaster response,

organizations such as these operate full-time in many third world countries, and are continually changing societies around the world. Christian relief organizations have created a broader sense of responsibility throughout world governments, and have spawned other relief organizations, such as the Red Cross, in the public domain.

One can readily notice that many of the changes to society which Christianity has caused have been related to Christianity's commitment to caring for others. As Jesus said, one of the greatest commandments for Christians to follow is to "Love your neighbor as yourself". This statement, as well as the story of the Good Samaritan that it precedes, invokes a responsibility that has not only led to the creation of world aid and relief organizations, but also to several very large hospital systems. The role of health care provision during the rise of the Christian church has been noted, but that role continues to this day. A large proportion of hospitals today in the United States are non-profit organizations with religious affiliations (FTC & DOJ, 2004). Although today there are also many for-profit as well as government-run hospitals, the system of health care that we have today was started and maintained by Christians in an effort to better serve God and humanity

Christianity also had a major effect in the civil rights movement in the mid to late 20th century. In the 1950s and 60s, protests against the denial of civil rights and liberties to African Americans became a large controversy in the United States. Many Christian churches took a strong stand on the side of granting civil rights, backed by Paul's statement in Galatians that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NIV). Many of the leaders in the civil rights movement came from among Christian pastors, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. One of the largest civil rights organizations at the time, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was created, governed, and operated by Christian leaders. This organization was often at the forefront of the movement, organizing events such as the 1965 Selma to Montgomery Freedom March, and was involved in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Dr. King delivered his famous speech. Religious influence can be seen in his claim on rights from the standpoint of demanding justice for "all of God's children" (King, 1963) and the quotation of multiple Bible verses.

In addition to providing leaders and support for the civil rights movement, Christianity was influential in the nature of the movement and its conductance. The U.S. civil right movement mostly upheld the early Christian ideals of peace, non-combatantcy, and pacifism (see first section of paper). Many parts of the civil rights movement were centered on these ideas, creating a nonviolent movement focusing on civil disobedience and peaceful demonstrations, leading to a major change in civil rights and liberties, including affirmative action, civil rights acts, voting rights acts, and desegregation.

Some Dysfunctions and Conflicts:

One of the largest criticisms of Christianity ironically centers around one of the areas in which it has impacted the most good. Although Christian organizations deliver millions of dollars in services and goods each year to starving children and sick families, there is concern over what the real impacts of these programs are. It has been suggested that these efforts of world relief and development are becoming nothing more than a cover for spreading Western political influence in a post colonial era. Another suggestion is that the influence of aid organizations may lead to the disregard of the culture and beliefs of the individuals and their society, and the imposition of Christian and Western beliefs, language, culture and general way of life. Not only would this imposition lead to a tragic loss of some of the unique beauty in the differences of humankind, but it can also lead to a domineering attitude of ethnocentrism which then automatically assumes that the "primitive" culture is not as good as the "advanced" Christian culture leading to cultural wars and violence, as it did in the Middle Ages between the Muslims and Christians (Smith, 2002).

Another possible dysfunction caused by the Christian church in this era can be seen in United States foreign policy. Dispensationalist ideals within Christianity have influenced foreign policy, mainly through attitudes towards the nation of Israel. Dispensationalism became a branch of Christianity with its birth in the 1820s, and was brought to America in the 1860s, impacting a change in reaction towards Jews. Prior to this, the United States had been influenced by Covenantalism, which placed Jews as a nation rejected by God when they did not accept the Messiah. Dispensationalists, however, believed that the second coming would not occur until the Jewish nation was

reestablished within its original borders. These views became so prominent within the United States that it caused the government to strongly favor establishing the 'Promised Land' of the Israelites as a homeland for the Jews following World War II. This branch of Christianity still affects foreign policy today, as can be seen in the significant amount in aid and support that the United States gives to Israel (Mark, 2005). In fact, Israel is now the largest annual as well as the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid. This unbalanced distribution has led to poor relations with Arab and Muslim states.

<u>Some Interactions</u>

One of the most prominent and yet little recognized interactions of Christianity and society is suggested by the Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt in her book "The Human Condition" (1998). In this book, she points out that the United State's foreign policy often focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation rather than destruction of other countries. Throughout history, wars have resulted in the conquering nations either enslaving or destroying the losing nation, with little focus on any retention of the conquered culture or people. The most dramatic example of United States opposition to this policy is the reaction to Germany and Japan at the end of World War II. Rather than destroying these countries, the U.S. instead chose to rebuild and focus on recapitalization of these countries through actions such as the Marshall Plan. This policy has its roots in Christianity's ideals of helping others rather than beating them down into submission.

Christianity's ideas about justice have been largely influenced by the writings of Moses and the law the Israelites were given at Mt. Sinai. The Torah states that when property crimes are committed, the offender is required to pay restitution for the crime (example: if a neighbor kills another neighbor's cow, he is required to replace the cow with one of his own; if he gouges out his neighbor's eye, he will also lose his own eye). In the New Testament however, Jesus redefines the 'eye for an eye' practice more as restitution of the neighbor's eye by becoming their eyes and guiding them, rather than losing your own eye also as punishment. This can be readily seen in the story of Zacchaeus. Instead of commanding Zacchaeus' hand cut off for stealing, Jesus praised him for his decision to restore to his victims what he has stolen, with interest. This

system of justice was also endorsed by other societies, such as the Greeks, and can been seen in the writings of Aristotle and Socrates.

The focus on restorative justice was gradually replaced in the Middle Ages when the monarchy redefined crime as an act against the state instead of an act against an individual. This use of retributive justice took the focus off of the victim and focused it on the criminal. This meant that criminals would be punished for their crimes by the state, meaning imprisonment or torture, instead of forced restitution. However, through the interactions of governments, society, and the church in the 20th century, the idea of restitution and restoration has begun to be re-popularized. These interactions between restorative and retributive justice have resulted in our current response to crime: a focus on restorative justice for juveniles and non-violent criminals, leading to victim-offender mediation, community service requirements, education of criminals, and demand for monetary restitution, and a focus on retributive justice for more serious and violent crimes, leading to imprisonment, punishment, and sometimes death (McBride et al., 1999).

One of the concerns of many Christians today is that rather than Christianity having an impact on society, there is a danger of the opposite being true: society having a noticeable impact on Christianity. This concern especially applies to pop culture areas such as movies, books, and music. While it is quite true that most of pop culture has escaped the influence of Christianity, there are some notable exceptions. For example, recent movies released include *The Passion of the Christ*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, while books include *The Left Behind Series*. These examples are clear evidence that Christianity penetrates at least aspects of post modern pop culture. Other less direct interactions can been seen in both *The DaVinci Code* books and movie, which centers around speculations about Christ's life, and *The Lord of the Rings* series, which can be seen as allegorical to many of Christianity's beliefs. These series have become hugely popular with the general public and indicate that at least some Christian influence has leaked into pop culture.

Another interaction between Christianity and secular society has been what we know as the religionization of political discourse. Religion, a fundamental aspect for many individuals, has always been a large part of political discourse. The founding

fathers of the United States worked within the tenets of Christianity when drafting the Constitution and references to God and religion (although not one specific religion or god) can be found in many political documents of the time. It was not until the Bill of Rights was written two years later that this religious tone was reinterpreted as a separation of church and state. The religionization of politics has become reinvigorated with such efforts as President Bush's "Faith Based Community Initiatives" and the rapid exchange of sacred texts and Christian imagery in recent Presidential debates. The previously mentioned support for Israel by the United States can also be seen as religionization of politics. In addition, religious beliefs help to sustain core American ideals of justice, human rights, and democracy.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

Some Functions and Contributions

Sociologists and theologians have often debated the nature and classification of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Walter Martin defined Seventh-day Adventists as a Christian denomination and not a Cult (1960). An article by Dudley and his colleagues (Dudley et al., 1997) suggests that Adventists are a part of the Christian mainstream. However, many of the contributions Adventists have made center around their distinctiveness from the rest of society. Seventh-day Adventists, who describe themselves as "a faith community rooted in the beliefs described by the Holy Scriptures" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006a), include among their beliefs the idea of a wholeness of man integrating the health of the body and mind with spiritual health. This leads to strong beliefs in a healthful lifestyle, and a rejection of the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, other illicit drugs and unclean meats (as determined by Leviticus 11). The lifestyle that Adventists have shown to the world has become one of their most important contributions to society, specifically in the area of public health research and policy in the last few decades. These studies have ranged from examinations of cancer rates (Cook, 1984), fat and cholesterol levels in various foods (Raloff, 1985; Schardt, 2005), and cancer preventative vegetables (Raloff, 1985; Men's Health, 1995), to Alzheimer's prevention research (Harp, 2005), increasing life-expectancy (Buettner, 2005; Quinn & Harrar, 2002), lowering heart disease (Schardt,

2005), and preventing diabetes (Snowdon & Phillips, 1985). These studies have been conducted by Adventist medical researchers or were inspired by previous research on Adventists and their greater life expectancy and health than the average American. Adventists also have been featured in popular magazines such as *National Geographic* (November 2005 issue), *Men's Health Magazine* (January 1995 issue), and *The Saturday Evening Post* (March 1984 and Jan 1992 issues) as well as highly respected journals such as *Journal of Religion and Health* (Fall 1997 issue), *Journal of School Health* (April 1998 issue), *Prevention* (January 2002 issue), *Science News* (November 1985 issue), and *American Journal of Public Health* (May 1985 issue).

In addition to research findings documenting practical health, Adventists have been active in health education, particularly concerning tobacco use. The smoking cessation program offered by Seventh-day Adventists (Breath-Free Plan to Stop Smoking) is one of the oldest smoking cessation programs (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006b), and has been supported by public health practitioners on the same level as programs offered by the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association (McCarthy, 1992). Because the core health beliefs of Adventism call for abstinence from tobacco use, preventing tobacco use has always been an important part of the church's mission, not only in smoking cessation programs but also in encouraging abstinence through the church's anti-smoking policies.

Perhaps because Adventism calls for a wholeness of in mind, body and spirit, another contribution has been medical and health care services. Adventist health care services include more than 5 distinct health care organizations in the United States alone, each of which operates between 6 and 37 hospitals, in addition to many other health care services. Adventist health care has often been on the cutting edge of medicine and research, from the first ever cross-species infant heart transplant, performed at Loma Linda University Medical Center, an Adventist hospital in California (LLU, 2005), to leading the country in Alzheimer's and cancer treatment research (Harp, 2005) as well as assisting in NASA research on radiation (LLUAHSC, 2005). In addition to these large scale efforts, the Adventist health care systems contribute to the health care of society through many smaller hospices, home care services, nursing homes, clinics, and offices which exist separately under the umbrella of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Another significant contribution of the Seventh-day Adventist church to post-modern society is its involvement in advocacy for religious liberty rights. The Adventist church has been very active in this area since the founding of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) by the church in 1893 (IRLA, 2006). This organization advocates for individuals facing employment issues due to worship and religious convictions, campaigns for and against legislation affecting religious liberty, and participates in the United Nations commission on human rights. Although the IRLA was organized by the Adventist church, it is both a non-sectarian and non-political institution (IRLA, 2006), assisting in more than 1,000 cases a year on the issue of Sabbath work alone, and also for concerns not of direct interest to the Adventist Church (Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, 2002).

Surprisingly, the largest contribution of the IRLA is not the advancement of Sabbatarian issues or Biblical ideals, but rather a steady position of upholding all religious liberties and the separation of church and state, regardless of whether the case involves issues central to the Adventist faith or even opposes Adventism's core beliefs. To this extent, Adventists have been active in filing amicus curiae briefs in behalf of the First Church of Christ, Scientist and the Old Order Amish, as well as their own Adventist church members, in cases involving issues ranging from freedom to organize church government without interference and support for tax-exempt financing of religious schools in California, to opposing organized prayer in public schools and opposing the requirement for school children to say "under God" in the pledge of allegiance. (See New York City Transit Authority et al. v. State of New York & Mary Myers; Weaver & Varner v Wood et al; Elk Grove Unified School District et al v. Michael A. Newdow et al; California Statewide Communities Development Authority v. All persons interested). Clearly, the Seventh-day Adventist church has contributed to religious liberties through an active voice for the separation of church and state in all areas, regardless of their own specific interests.

We have already mentioned the impact which Christianity has had on education and universal literacy through the idea of a universal priesthood (see section on the contributions of the Protestant Reformation), so this section on the contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist church to education will be brief, although the Adventist church

has been one of the major players in the area of education. From the earliest days of its formation, the Adventist church has been a church very intent upon the ability to read and interpret the Bible (White, 2002). Because of this need for literacy and a scholarly understanding of the Bible, the Adventist church first began to develop its school system in the early 1870s. By continuing to grow today, the Adventist school system currently operates more than 6,700 schools, colleges, and universities and employs approximately 66,000 teachers in its educational system throughout 145 countries. Worldwide, the Adventist educational system currently educates more than 1.2 million students for "intellectual growth and service to humanity" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006c). As such, it contributes to society one of the largest unified Protestant education systems in the world.

Some Dysfunctions and Conflicts

Although religious tolerance can be seen as one of the contributions of the Adventist church (see previous section on IRLA), this area also is home to some of the largest controversy over dysfunctions in the Adventist church. Adventists have often been accused of being intolerant of other beliefs systems, especially due to the church's strong belief of the Roman Catholic Church as the 'anti-Christ' and Sunday worshippers as receiving the mark of the beast. Revelation seminars focusing on these ideas, as well as religious tracts featuring pictures of the pope and containing information on the mark of the beast have caused public outrage (see February 2001 issues of Kingsport Times News). Adventists have also been accused of being intolerant of members within their own churches. Although not the official policy of any Adventist church, numerous anecdotal accounts speak of individuals being turned away, asked to leave church, or refused baptism until they were better able to act within the church's belief system in areas such as not wearing jewelry or eating meat.

Other dysfunctions seen within the Adventist church stem from Adventism's belief in the soon future return of Christ and end of the world. While this was the impetus behind the Adventist movement and has led to great proselytizing efforts, it has also led to a deficit in planning for the future. The attitude seems to have been that if Jesus is returning so soon, why waste time, money, and effort on earthly things that will

not last? This has led to both a lack of financial and long range planning. In fact, this attitude can even be seen as contributing to Adventism's weak involvement in the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The official stance of the church at the time was "one of non-involvement, to stay out of political or revolutionary causes" (Smith, 2005), and most likely stemmed from the idea that, because of Christ's soon return, it was more important to spend time and resources on saving man spiritually, rather than physically and socially.

In addition to a lack of action regarding social justice, another dysfunction can be seen in the Adventist church concerning gender justice. Official Adventist theology at this time forbids the ordination of women as ministers, although the issue has been debated at some level during the last three General Conference sessions. Adventism seems to hold the view that women are to be subservient to men, an interesting conflict, as the most active participant in the founding of the Adventist church, as well as its accepted prophet, happens to be a prophet*ess*. Because of these views, however, Adventists have not been as active in equal rights for women.

Finally, one of the largest dysfunctions of the Adventist church, especially in North America, has been that of the Separationist ideas of the church. Although Jesus called his people to be "in the world, but not of the world" (See John 17:15; White, 1995; p. 422), Adventists have more often followed the admonishment of Revelation to "come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins" (Revelation 18:4, NIV). These two texts have often caused conflicts within the church on what the appropriate role of Adventists is in society, and have led Adventists to separate themselves from society into their own sheltered communities, thereby reducing many of the positive impacts and contributions to society.

Some Interactions

Although Adventism has tried to minimize interactions or synthesis with the general society, feeling they are called to be a 'peculiar people' in an end time, some cultural leveling, as evidenced by anecdotal reports, has recently been seen in the areas of dress, diet, and entertainment. Only a few decades ago, Adventists avoided theaters, bowling alleys, and other public entertainment areas, but in some Adventist communities

these places are no longer seen as forbidden. Cultural leveling can also be seen in more positive attitudes towards wearing jewelry, especially in the younger generations, as well as in changing attitudes toward diet, as many more Adventists are beginning to eat clean meats. Finally, research has suggested that about one-quarter or more of young Adventists drink alcohol (Mutch, 2003). Evidently, although there is some interaction between society and Adventism, leveling has only happened to a certain extreme, and core values are still held by a majority of Adventists.

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