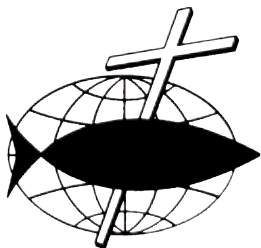


**THIS  
WE  
BELIEVE**



*Declaration of  
Principles of the  
Advent Christian  
Church*

What happened in the northeastern United States between 1831 and 1844 is more unbelievable than fiction! During this brief period, the message of the eminent personal Advent of Christ shook America and Canada and permanently changed the doctrinal teaching of evangelical churches.

The movement began with the urgent voice of William Miller, a Baptist farmer from the frontier of eastern New York State, and rose into a tidal wave of traveling preachers and lecturers who flooded North America's countryside and greatest cities (Montreal, Boston, New York, Newark, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore) until over a million people looked to the heavens for Christ's coming. This Advent Awakening gave birth to several denominations in the years that followed, and the Advent Christian denomination was one.

### **How the Declaration of Principles developed**

Advent Christians have every reason to be proud of the dedication, commitment, sincerity and fervor of these early American Adventists.

This remains true even though at several points we may disagree with what they taught. Those faithful servants of Christ changed the way Christians think about Christ's return so that Bible-believing Americans and Canadians look for the Lord's coming in the near future.

And yet, when the Advent Christians organized in 1860, their doctrines included more than the message of Christ's return, for their study of Scripture had led them to other truths. They shared many of these with Christian denominations in general, but they had developed some out of their own examination of the Bible and contemplation of the Lord's return.

The distinctive teachings of the denomination tended to cluster around the doctrine of the second advent, and to fall into the area of theology, which theologians call "eschatology" (Greek for "study of the last things"). Yet, when we Advent Christians today are asked to set forth what we believe, we desire to make clear both where we hold doctrines in common with other Christian bodies and where our views may differ.

Advent Christians do this by means of our Declaration of Principles. The earlier Adventists had prepared a statement of their views at Albany, New York, in 1845, to “declare to the world that the Scriptures teach among others, the following (10) Important Truths.” Yet, it was not until 1881 that Advent Christians formed their own distinctive Declaration of Principles, developed at Worcester, Massachusetts, and ratified at conventions held that year in Worcester and in Foreston, Illinois.

In January, 1900, at Boston, the denomination unanimously adopted a more concise Declaration of Principles consisting of 10 articles, which summarized the views commonly held among Advent Christians. This declaration has remained the same except for occasional amendments, the most recent being a strengthening of the statement on Scripture (1964) and an expansion of our position on war (1972).

### **What is a Declaration of Principles?**

One of the privileges possessed by Advent Christians is freedom of conscience to study and

follow the teachings of Scripture. We are not a denomination in a narrow sectarian sense, and it is important to recognize this as we study and develop the doctrines expressed in the Advent Christian Declaration of Principles.

There is the temptation to view the Declaration of Principles as a creed, a doctrinal statement to which total conformity is required at every point. E. P. Woodward, who served as chairman of the committee that prepared the 1900 Declaration, warned against yielding to this temptation when he wrote:

*Do not forget that this is not a creed. It is simply a statement of what the denomination, as a whole, believes. It is never used as a "Shibboleth," which must be repeated before one can enter an Advent Christian church. "Christian character" is our only test of church fellowship, and members are frequently received who do not assent to all the points in this "Declaration." The truth is trusted to commend itself to those who are not perfectly familiar with it, thus securing a more essential unity than by requiring assent to a "creed."*

While strict doctrinal standards have been set for those in the ministry and teaching positions, Advent Christians have granted to one another the freedom and responsibility of believing, studying and following the Scriptures. Clearly the editor of the “World’s Crisis” was correct in reporting that our principles are “not rigidly binding rules to which every Advent Christian must give consent in order to remain a member. They are merely descriptive of what most Advent Christians believed at the time when they were formulated.”

If the Advent Christian Declaration of Principles is not a creed to which all must subscribe in every detail, neither is it exhaustive and comprehensive of all points commonly believed by Advent Christians. Some theological creeds (the Westminster Confession of Faith is an excellent example) provide comprehensive and exhaustively detailed presentations of the total teaching of denominations. Our Declaration of Principles speaks, rather, in broad and general terms about Scripture, God and salvation. Its more precise and explicit statements and details relate to the more

distinctive and unique denominational positions. Still, even on these positions that characterize the denomination, the document addresses the central and broadly held views without going into all details one might expect.

Part of the breadth of statement derives from the brevity of the Declaration of Principles since it only contains some 750 words. Granted that brevity, not much space can be allotted to details. Again, it was intended only as a statement of our “principles” and, therefore, rightly concentrates on positions that are both central and distinctive of Advent Christians. Since members of our denomination recognize a fundamental loyalty to Scripture (“No creed but the Bible” was an early watchword), they have extended to one another freedom of interpretation so long as one is appealing to the written Word for doctrine. Most Advent Christians of the past and present agree on the principles declared in this brief document, while still allowing one another freedom of conscience on the details.

— Dr. David A. Dean

## **The Declaration of Principles**

**I.** We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, being in its entirety a revelation given to man under divine inspiration and providence; that its historic statements are correct, and that it is the only divine and infallible standard of faith and practice. (*Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15–16; John 17:17*)

**II.** We believe, as revealed in the Bible:

**a.** In one God, our Father, eternal, and infinite in his wisdom, love and power, the Creator of all things, “in whom we live, and move, and have our being.” (*Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 40:28*)

**b.** And in Jesus Christ, our Lord, the only begotten Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; who came into our world to seek and to save that which was lost; who died for our sins, who was raised bodily from the dead for our justification; who ascended into heaven as our High Priest and Mediator, and who will come



again in the end of this age, to judge the living and the dead, and to reign forever and ever. (*1 Timothy 3:16*)

c. And in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, sent from God to convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, whereby we are sanctified and sealed unto the day of redemption. (*John 14:16, 26; John 16:7–11; Ephesians 1:13–14*)

**III.** We believe that man was created for immortality, but that through sin he forfeited his divine birthright; that because of sin, death entered into the world, and passed upon all men; and that only through faith in Jesus Christ, the divinely ordained Life-giver, can men become “partakers of the divine nature,” and live forever. (*2 Timothy 1:10; Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 51–54*)

**IV.** We believe that death is a condition of unconsciousness to all persons, righteous and wicked; a condition that will remain unchanged until the resurrection at Christ’s second coming, at which

time the righteous will receive everlasting life while the wicked will be “punished with everlasting destruction;” suffering complete *extinction of being*. (*Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 14:14; John 5:28–29; Matthew 10:28*)

**V.** We believe that salvation is free to all those who, in this life and in this age, accept it on the conditions imposed, which conditions are simple and inflexible, namely, turning from sin, repentance toward God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of consecration to the service of God; thus excluding all hope of a future probation, or of universal salvation. (*John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:1–2; Luke 13:22–30*)

**VI.** We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his promise, will come again to this earth, even “in like manner” as he went into heaven — personally, visibly and gloriously — to reign here forever; and that this coming is the hope of the church, inasmuch as upon that coming depend the resurrection and reward of the righteous, the abolition

of sin and its consequences, and the renewal of the earth — now marred by sin — to become the eternal home of the redeemed, after which event the earth will be forever free from sin and death. (*Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Revelation 22:12–13*)

**VII.** We believe that Bible prophecy has indicated the approximate time of Christ's return; and comparing its testimony with the signs of our times, we are confident that he is near, "even at the doors," and we believe that the great duty of the hour is the proclamation of this soon-coming redemption, the defense of Bible authority, inspiration and truth, and the salvation of lost men. (*2 Peter 1:19–21; Matthew 24:42–45; Revelation 22:17*)

**VIII.** We believe the church of Christ is an institution of divine origin, which includes all true Christians, of whatever name; but that local church organizations should be independent of outside control, congregational in government,

and subject to no dictation of priest, bishop or pope — although true fellowship and unity of action should exist between all such organizations. (*Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:11–16*)

**IX.** We believe that the only ordinances of the church of Christ are Baptism and the Lord's Supper; immersion being the only true baptism. (*Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3–5; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26*)

**X.** We believe that the first day of the week, as the day set apart by the early church in commemoration of Christ's resurrection, should be observed as the Christian Sabbath, and used as a day of rest and religious worship. (*Psalms 118:22–24; Luke 24:1–12; 1 Corinthians 16:2*)

**XI.** We believe that war is contrary to the spirit and teachings of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ; that it is contrary to the spirit of true brotherhood, and that our influence should be used against it. We believe the Bible also teaches

that properly constituted government is ordained of God and is a divine instrument for man's welfare and protection. When an Advent Christian decides on the basis of Scripture and conscience, either to bear arms or to submit to penalties imposed for his refusal to do so, local Advent Christian congregations should extend continued fellowship and nurture. (*Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 15:15-22*)

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