



Sample of Brinsmead publications

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Brinsmeadism

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Brinsmeadism arose within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia during the 1960s and had run its course by the late 1980s. Its name derived from that of Robert D. Brinsmead, a Seventh-day Adventist church member, whose ideas became influential in small groups and meetings in Australia and along the West coast of

the U.S.A. during that time.

A number of church members in both countries accepted his views in part because of his prolific writing and speaking engagements.¹ The distinctive elements of Brinsmeadism focused on the 1844 investigative judgment, perfection of character, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the importance of the Sabbath and salvation. This article will summarize those Brinsmeadian views that opposed traditional Seventh-day Adventist teachings and led to the rise his followers, known as “Awakeners,” within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ideas Opposed to Orthodox Seventh-day Adventist Teaching

Viewpoints that were part of the Brinsmead body of teaching but which did not conform with traditional Seventh-day Adventist theology included:

That each believer is the sanctuary of the living God.²

That the final answer that will be given to Satan’s charges in the Great Controversy between God and Satan is embodied in those believers who have overcome all sin and live sinless lives.

That sins, both conscious and unconscious, are blotted out in the minds of believers through the sanctuary teaching.³

That there is a difference between a “first” and a “second” apartment experience for believers. Seventh-day Adventists have been looking for a first apartment experience rather than a second apartment one that involves a deeper experience of righteousness by faith.⁴

That the final atonement can change the believer’s character, even after death.⁵

That the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains outside the door of the Most Holy Place.⁶ This teaching had wider implications in that Brinsmead often attacked the church and its leaders. He accused the leaders of apostasy and of abandoning the faith by rejecting the Spirit of Prophecy.⁷ Brinsmead held that “ecclesiastically, ethically, intellectually and spiritually Adventism is a prison and a slave camp.”⁸

That entering the door of the Most Holy Place will result in miraculous, instantaneous, and absolute perfection. It will involve the cleansing of the remnant, the close of probation, and the sealing of the saints.⁹

That the teaching about the 1844 judgment is erroneous.¹⁰ Brinsmeadism held that the 1844 judgment message is contrary to the apostolic gospel.¹¹

That Babylon has been gradually entering the church since 1888 when the church rejected the message of righteousness by faith.

Christ had a sinful nature and He overcame sin in that condition. Believers can overcome sin just as Christ did.

Brinsmeadism taught that the preaching of the sanctuary message would divide the church into two classes. Its adherents believed that “the revival and re-emphasis of this great doctrine [the sanctuary message] will again make the line of demarcation plain and distinct.”¹²

The Rise of the Awakening Fellowship

As a result of Brinsmead’s activity, some church members joined him and established the Sanctuary Awakening Fellowship in the mid to late 1960s. The Awakening sought to be a voice within the formal Seventh-day Adventist Church that continually called it to the sanctuary message and the ministry of Christ taking place there. The Awakening heavily depended on a particular reading or interpretation of the writings of Mrs. White.

The Awakening message championed by Brinsmeadism taught that the sanctuary of the new covenant is God’s church and its members. The new covenant spiritualizes the heavenly sanctuary. Further, the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 refers to the cleansing of the heart. The holy place corresponds to the conscious mind of the believer while the most holy place refers to the subconscious. Both the conscious and subconscious mind need cleansing. As a result, the Awakening held the view that the living saints can become perfect through the final atonement of Jesus’ ministration in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary.

Brinsmeadism, and its followers in the Sanctuary Awakening Fellowship, were hostile toward the church. They held that the church leaders R. A. Andersen and L. E. Froom, among others, had “sold out” the denomination in their 1956 meeting with Dr. Donald Barnhouse and Dr. Walter Martin. The publication of *Questions on Doctrine* confirmed in the minds of Awakeners that certain church leaders had colluded with the Evangelicals because of compromise on matters related to a proper understanding of salvation, the nature of Christ, and the atonement. Thus, Brinsmeadism did little to advance either the unity of the church or its mission.

Through the efforts of Desmond Ford, head of the theology department at Avondale College, and others who taught the message of justification by faith through grace alone, Brinsmead changed his views and accepted the teaching in the late 1970s. In effect, he acknowledged that believers cannot attain sinless perfection.

Formal Church Response

The church initially responded to Brinsmeadism with a publication entitled *The History and Teaching of Robert Brinsmead*. Thereafter the church revised and enlarged the document and published it as *The Brinsmead Agitation*.¹³ After providing the history and background of Robert Brinsmead’s life, it surveyed the attitudes held by Awakeners and the hostile and combative nature they had toward the church. Importantly, the document then refuted the teachings of Brinsmeadism. Today, Brinsmeadism no longer exists as a significant theological

stream within the formal Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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NOTES

1. Gary Land, *Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists* (Maryland: Scarecrow, 2005), 47.
2. Robert Brinsmead, *The Open Door* (Denver, CO: International Health Institute, 1970) 3.
3. Robert Brinsmead, *A Doctrinal Analysis* (Denver: International Health Institute, 1970), 32; Robert Brinsmead, *Sanctuary Institute Syllabus* (Denver: International Health Institute, 1970), 459.
4. Robert Brinsmead, *God's Eternal Purpose* (Denver: International Health Institute, 1970), 191, 200.
5. Robert Brinsmead, *Australasian Division Committee's Report Reviewed* (Denver: International Health Institute, 1970), 13.
6. Brinsmead, *The Open Door*, 5.
7. Defence Literature Committee, *Some Current Errors in Brinsmead Teaching* (Washington D.C.: General Conference, 1963), 39-41.
8. Robert Brinsmead, *To My Adventist Friends* (Fallbrook: Verdict, 1982), 4.

9. Brinsmead, *Australasian Division Committee's Report Reviewed*, 12.
 10. Robert Brinsmead, *Are the Gospel and the 1844 Theology Compatible?* (Fallbrook: Verdict, 1980).
 11. *Ibid.*, 22.
 12. Robert Brinsmead, *Sanctuary Institute Syllabus*, 278.
 13. Biblical Research Committee, *The Brinsmead Agitation* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1967).
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