

# Theological Trends

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## Question asked

Please share with me what you feel are one or two of the most significant theological trends of the past 10-20 years. If you know of a good resource as an article or book which addresses this subject, please list it. The questionnaire was sent to an international group of theologians, pastors, administrators, etc. Most are Seventh-day Adventists, but a number are from other denominations. Approximately seventy-five responded.

## Organization of responses

The responses were grouped and summarized in the categories presented. The order is according to the number of responses received, with the highest number listed first.

### A. Doctrine of God

1. Nature of God—focus on process theology (power of persuasion instead of coercion) and openness of God theology (that God knows the probabilities)
2. Anti-Trinitarianism
  - That the Holy Spirit is the power of God and not a person or “an influence”
  - Jesus is the begotten Son of God, but not co-eternal with the Father
  - In response to these attacks, others have been emphasizing the Trinity
3. Nature of Christ
  - The nature of Christ in the context of the doctrine of perfection
  - Some notice the elevation of the doctrine of Christ
  - Some notice emphasis on the divinity of Christ
  - Rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus

### B. Ecclesiology

1. “The majority of our people do not have a clear view of why we exist as a church. Our mission and purpose seems to be a feel warm and fuzzy and entertain the saints! If we don’t turn this around we will, ere long, be totally marginalized by our culture.”
  - Congregationalism
  - Influence of mega-church philosophy; “watering down” of the message by the megachurches

- Tithe diversion to local needs is a non-issue for some members and pastors and is encouraged by calling it “local tithe”

2. The concept of remnant and ecclesiology
3. Diversification/polarization especially in North America—one example is ASRS & ATS

### **C. Role of Theology and Theological Studies**

1. Undervaluation or even resistance to theology—community is in and theology is out because “theology is perceived to be divisive to community”
  - Emphasis on “theology of success”
  - Liberation theology with emphasis on relationship with society
2. The relevance of the sanctuary/investigative judgment/1844 doctrine to our Christian experience today
3. Exegesis is the key word now in theology while among Seventh-day Adventists there seems to be a decreasing interest in exegesis
4. Too much dependence on Ellen White in the development of our theology
5. The theological resources of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (trained theologians, biblical studies, etc.) have increased dramatically
6. The emergence of, awareness of, and the acceptance of Islam into countries traditionally considered to have Christian majority

### **D. Secularism / Postmodernism**

1. The emerging influence of postmodern attitudes and perceptions of the church (increasing rejection of absolute truth and adoption of a moral relativism)
2. The challenge of postmodernism to theology
3. Less emphasis on doctrine and theology and more emphasis on “turning theology into biography”
4. Postmodernism & worship
5. Individual judgement in position of final authority

### **E. Prophecy**

1. A new emphasis on prophecy, not based on the rich Protestant theological heritage, but individual interpretation and skyrocketing book sales

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- 2. A new awareness among Seventh-day Adventists of their role in the great controversy and the understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation
- 3. Emphasis on more careful reading of the literary and contextual issues in the interpretation of prophecy
- 4. New interpretations of prophecy (that 2300 days begins at the end of the 70 weeks) with some focusing on Islam rather than papacy
- 5. A shift from the historicist approach to eschatology

**F. Worship**

- 1. “Libertine worship” or “feel good worship” is almost entirely devoid of strong biblical and theological girding; people seem to go to the “best” show in town rather than seeking God—little connection between church, community, and people
- 2. Worship and worship styles; ultraconservatives who are certain that we are allowing the devil’s influence if there is anything with a beat or drums are used and the extreme takes the opposite view
- 3. Music has become a point of contention and it seems to be based on personal preference rather than what is right and wrong

**G. Independent Groups**

- 1. Growth of independent groups; they seem to have an axe to grind with a focus on changing the church and not on presenting the church to the community
- 2. Pastors promoting their own independent ministries with emphasis on Trinity, feast days, country living, home schooling, veganism, etc.
- 3. Theology of church that allows harmful independent groups to use the congregations for their goals
- 4. Spirit of anti-higher education (suspicion of our system) with emphasis on minimal training for ministers
- 5. Congregationalism encouraged by administration by focusing on institutions rather than congregations

**H. Mission**

- 1. Global mission concept of interacting with other religions, secular and postmodern
- 2. Churches that are growing are evangelical or charismatic

1 3. Discovering the mission nature of the church in North America and recognizing North  
2 America as a fruitful mission field

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4 4. Fear of “social gospel” makes some Christians segregated from the world  
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6 **I. Atonement**  
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8 1. Atonement—shift from objective atonement to subjective—emphasis on persuasive  
9 power of God’s love and the human mind to choose to be renewed by the inner working  
10 of the Holy Spirit  
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12 2. Less emphasis on 1844 and more emphasis towards the meaning of Christ’s intercessory  
13 work  
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15 3. Portraying God as friend and adaptation of the moral influence theory of the atonement  
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17 4. Tendency to move away from substitutionary view of the atonement in favor of Christus  
18 Victor, representative or moral influence view  
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20 5. The nature of the atonement and how the subjective models are being touted as the  
21 primary reading of the atonement  
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23 **J. Salvation**  
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25 1. The emphasis on assurance makes religion more positive and attractive  
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27 2. The issue of end-time perfection tied to the post-fall human nature of Christ  
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29 3. Increasing tendency to universalism  
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31 4. The way that justification and sanctification relate to one another in the flow of God’s  
32 attempts to communicate the benefits of the atonement to a sinful world  
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34 **K. Emphasis on Spirituality outside the church**  
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36 1. Shift in the theology of the church (more people are “spiritual” but fewer are affiliating  
37 with a denomination or local church)  
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39 2. New Age—no such thing as a transcendent God and thus some place “spirituality” over  
40 Christianity (Singer who describes herself as spiritual, earns monthly \$750,000 and she  
41 budgets \$5,000 to charitable causes)  
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43 3. “Individualized religion,” or buffet line that enables each to choose their own religion;  
44 all religions are equally valid and therefore we choose which we will follow  
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46 **L. Revelation and Inspiration**  
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48 1. The nature of Scripture—is it revelation or merely a witness to revelation

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- 2. Articulation of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration, thus an enhanced understanding of the role of Biblical prophets and a better understanding of the role of Ellen White in relation to the Bible and Church
- 3. Inspiration with specific examples of Ellen G. White and understanding of Genesis 1 & 2
- 4. The emergence of liberation theology has provided lenses where we can read the Scripture through the eyes of the marginalized

**M. Creation**

- 1. Challenge to a short chronology of the earth; one individual told the respondent that “On Sabbath he believes in creation as the Bible says, but when he goes to work on Monday morning as a scientist, he lives in a different world.”
- 2. The role of creation

**N. Second Coming**

- 1. The emphasis on the Second Coming is more Christ-centered
- 2. Commitment to mission (including non-Christian religions) and preparation for the Second Coming of Christ
- 3. The Second Coming and the challenge of matching the prophecies and the signs

**O. Gender Issues**

- 1. The need to understand the role of gender in ministry and leadership with emphasis on female role in calling, work, and service
- 2. Greater participation by the world church in theological issues; one example is the rejection of ordination of women
- 3. In some parts of the world having a woman as a pastor is a theological issue

**P. Church Member Issues (Family, Youth, etc.)**

- 1. Youth taking the Word of God seriously
- 2. Family issues such as divorce, abortion, etc.
- 3. Matching the ideal of the Bible and the church position on marriage, divorce, and remarriage

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**Q. Southern Shift of Christianity**

- 1. The spectacular explosion of the Christian faith in the global south

**R. Uniqueness of Christianity**

- 1. The uniqueness of the Christian faith—hesitancy to press the uniqueness of Jesus
- 2. Power anti-Christian upsurge of well-known atheists

**S. Sabbath**

- 1. The concept of Sabbath rest without concern for a particular day
- 2. Sabbath is a “glue” that keeps the church together, but Ellen White who used to be such a “glue” is no longer largely due to the printing of compilations

**T. Medical Issues**

- 1. Medical ethics (reproductive technology, genetics)
- 2. Theological response to new scientific breakthroughs—abortion, euthanasia, end-of-life, bioengineering, etc.

**U. Liberty Issues**

- 1. Less emphasis on religious liberty issues
- 2. Church and state issue with emphasis on the evangelical push in this area

**V. Eschatology**

- 1. The trend in liberal theology in North America and England of rejecting scientific eschatology and endorsing a biblical new creation concept based on the physical resurrection of Jesus—they refer to the death of evolution

**W. View of Christianity**

- 1. Shift among 19-29 year-olds from having a positive view of Christianity to a negative perception—“You no longer look, act, or behave like Jesus!”

**X. Feast Days**

- 1. Interest in keeping Annual Jewish Feast Days

**Y. Ecology**

- 1. Awareness of the importance of ecology as a priority

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