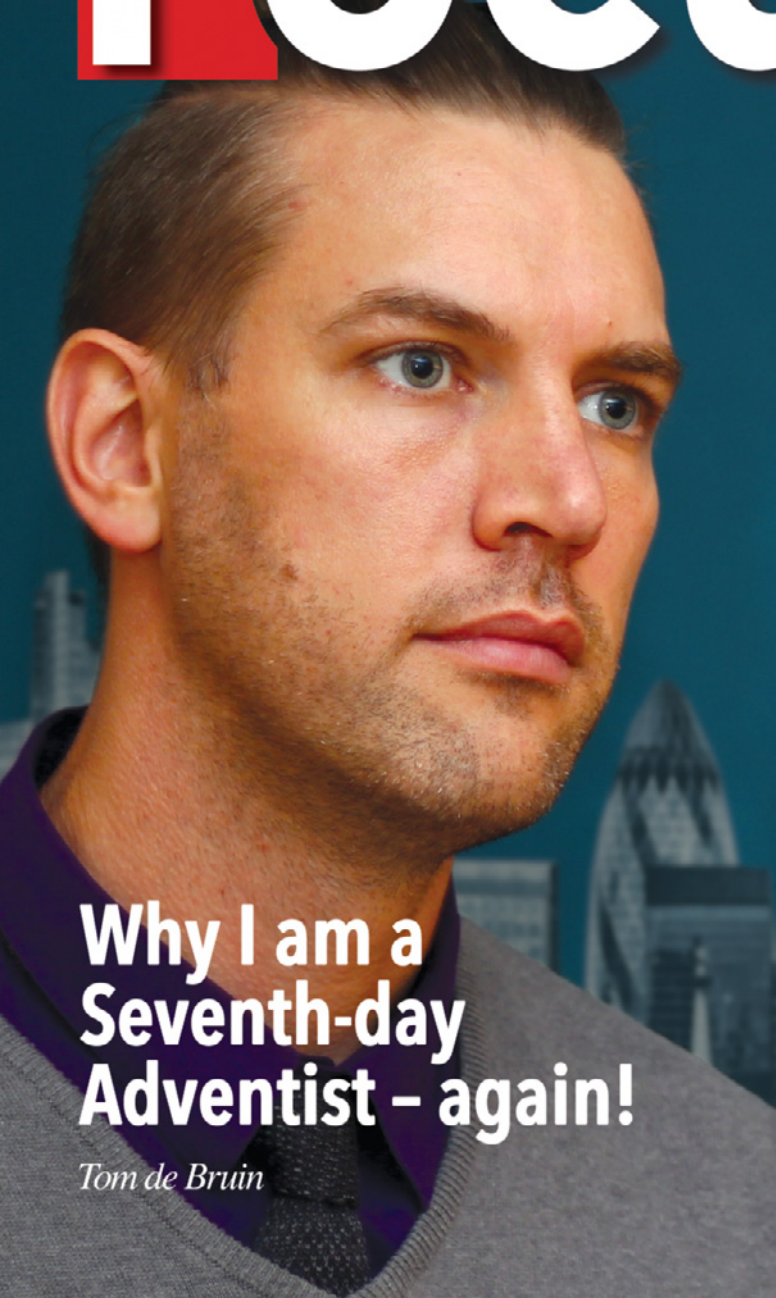


# **F**ocus

MAGAZINE



Award-winning London  
Adventist Chorale  
director Ken Burton  
on music, fame and faith

**Why I am a  
Seventh-day  
Adventist – again!**

*Tom de Bruin*





Tom de Bruin, like many of his age, rebelled against the conventional Christianity he grew up with. He found that the prejudiced, critical attitudes of some 'believers' clashed head-on with the way he saw Jesus portrayed in the gospels. Deeply disillusioned, Tom turned his back on the church of his youth and disengaged himself from religion. But what happened next may surprise you!

# Why I am a Seventh-day Adventist – again!

by Tom de Bruin

**J**'Jesus got the idea that while He believed in certain absolute truths, others didn't agree and they could still co-exist.'

I read this statement on Twitter recently and it really intrigued me. It's been haunting my dreams, and yes, I realise that that is weird. I'm the first to admit that I am slightly weird, too.

@metamodernfaith tweeted this peace of infinite wisdom from Dallas. He has four followers, one of which is another of his accounts. Compared to Stephen Fry, @metamodernfaith is Twitter small fry. But he's there, and while I'm quite uninterested in Fry's twenty-two thousand tweets, @metamodernfaith's seven to date fascinate me.

You see, I'm a young Christian. As such, I don't always fit in with other Christians. If you read about Christians in the news, it's often about horrible stuff, like the right to discriminate against certain groups. We find them arguing over whether to accept women leaders in their churches; or whether gay marriages should be allowed or not. And a little bit further afield some are campaigning to make abortion illegal. I don't really want to get sucked into these controversies.

It's not because I don't care. I *do*, but in a distant, detached kind of way. I care, but only because I'm so ashamed of my fellow Christians for behaving like this. Sometimes I think Christianity would be great if it wasn't for all those bickering Christians. Or as the fridge magnet that my ex-Christian sister gave me says, 'Dear Jesus, please protect me from your followers.'

Maybe I should start at the beginning. I didn't grow up in this country; I was born in apartheid-era South Africa. I experienced

horrible discrimination first-hand. Even in the Christian community that I was brought up in. At a reasonably young age I moved to Europe – but have never settled. I currently spend a third of my time in Amsterdam, another third in Cardiff, and the rest at airports and on KLM flights. And (spoiler alert) I'm a minister.

I grew up Christian, but I left the church. Christianity and Christians didn't mesh in my mind. Reading the Bible, I found teachings of love, acceptance and care. Jesus seems to do nothing else but teach this message. But, looking at some of my fellow churchgoers, I saw gossip and judgement. These Christians were the least 'Christian' people I knew.

You can imagine my surprise when one day I woke up, and I felt that I just *had* to become a pastor. I hadn't been to church in years, but I could not think of anything else. It was stupid and crazy. I was reasonably successful at my work in the computer programming sector. I had a great future ahead of me – with a smart company car and a good salary. I'd say good parties too, but computer geeks actually throw terrible parties! I didn't go to church. I didn't like church. But I just *had* to become a pastor, a minister, a vicar.

I did my utmost best not to become one, but I failed. It's been fifteen years since that strange day, and I've been a minister for eight of them. And looking back, I'm glad I made the choices I did.

I've learnt a lot in those years. Yes, church generally is still not very interesting. And, yes, there are still thousands of Christians doing horrible things. But I've come to see that we often throw the baby out with the bathwater. The bad press of some ruins it for the rest.

Today I am a Christian, and I like it. I'm



different to most, but most are also changing. I don't go to church so that I will go to heaven. I don't have a list of things I must and mustn't do. I don't get into arguments with people about creation or evolution. I don't tell teenage girls that God won't forgive them for having an abortion. And I certainly don't force my views on anyone else.

Yes, I have views and opinions. I like to believe that there is a God. I like to believe that that God created me, and the rest of the world. I like to think that God holds all life sacred, and hates it when we are hurt or hurt others. I like to think that some choices are better than others. I like to think that what @metamodernfaith says about Jesus is true for me too:

'Tom got the idea that while he believed in certain absolute truths, others didn't agree and they could still co-exist.'

So why this article? And why this magazine? Well, I like to think that if you've got something good, you might want to tell others about it. I tell my friends of the best burgers in Cardiff. Succulent patties, crispy buns, excellent sauces. I even tell strangers on the street who may happen to be hungry.

Sadly, the best burger joint in Amsterdam closed down. I dream of those burgers. My wife and I reminisce about them, on nostalgic Sunday afternoons. I can't share those burgers with anyone anymore. It's too late.

Christianity is like my best burgers. If my life is awesome, much more so than before, surely it is just natural for me to tell others?

So what is Christianity and church for me? It's very simple. I think that we all have a hard time being our best. We have this tendency to be happy with mediocrity. Not only in school or at work, but in everything that we do. Too often we just go for 'good enough'. This is true for most people.

While we are going for 'good enough', we are also struggling with the things that pull the hardest and shout the loudest: money, bosses, careers, degrees. But, despite this, we know, deep down inside, that we are failing in the quiet places, where it counts the most.

Workaholism is so common that it's become a Hollywood cliché. We are all familiar with the typical workaholic father. Then there are the elderly, hidden



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away in care homes; the children sent off to daycare, so that their working parents can earn as much as possible. The people we love are pushed aside so we can do the jobs we hate. Deep down, we feel guilty about this and hide. We hide in alcohol; we hide in more work.

At the same time, people we don't know suffer even more than our loved ones. Homelessness and poverty are so prevalent that you barely notice people begging anymore. Immigration laws are becoming stricter; countries are arguing as to how few refugees they can take while far-away foreign workers are exploited so we can have cheap clothing. They suffer out of sight, out of mind, so we can look good for less!

This is the state of Western culture. Do you recognise it?

We need an antidote, and one of these antidotes is Christianity. It has become my antidote, and as far as I'm concerned, it's the best antidote out there. I wish everyone would give it a try.

Christianity gives me a weekly day off. A day when I won't work. I call it Sabbath. A day when I prioritise the ones I love. On this day I go to church, and yes, sometimes it's boring. But it's a 'good' habit, a day which pauses my life and helps me focus on what is really important.

My career is important: but my wife is more so! Money is necessary, but enough is enough. I'd rather take a day off to spend with my ageing parents than work an eighty-hour week. My boss often has ridiculous demands – which boss doesn't – but church helps me remember: for him good enough is enough, but for my family and friends good is not nearly enough.

Christianity helps me be a better person – someone who lives a better, kinder life. And that's a lot of what Christianity is all about. Often I hear Christians and non-Christians alike arguing about unimportant stuff, and I hear a Northern accent from *Game of Thrones* saying, 'You know nothing, Jon Snow.' Because they don't. They really don't.

I am happy to be a Christian. It makes my life better. It helps me reconfigure my life around important issues. My advice? Give it a go; it might make your life better too.

**Editor's note:** Tom de Bruin is a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who presently specialises in youth ministry.