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# JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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## ARTICLES

- The Totality of Scripture *versus* Modernistic Limitations . . . 30  
*Gerhard F. Hasel*
- The Role of the Centrist Theologian in the Church . . . . . 53  
*E. Edward Zinke*
- Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics . . . . . 69  
*George W. Reid*
- Adventist Doctrines and Progressive Revelation . . . . . 77  
*P. Gerard Damsteegt*
- In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message . . . . . 93  
*Richard M. Davidson*
- When Did the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24 Begin? . . . . . 115  
*William H. Shea*
- In Confirmation of Prophetic Interpretation . . . . . 139  
*C. Mervyn Maxwell*

## SERMONS

- A Trojan Horse Within the Church . . . . . 6  
*Enoch de Oliveira*
- Toward an Understanding of the Prophetic Office . . . . . 18  
*Kenneth H. Wood*
- How to Survive the Coming Sunday-law Crisis . . . . . 152  
*Norman R. Gulley*
- The Role of the Law in Salvation . . . . . 167  
*Lewis R. Walton*
- Christ-centered Pulpits for Christ-centered People . . . . . 181  
*Mervyn A. Warren*

## FEATURES

- The President's Page . . . . . 1  
*Gerhard F. Hasel*
- Greetings . . . . . 5  
*Robert S. Folkenberg*
- Like the Leaves of Autumn . . . . . 188  
*Leo R. Van Dolson*

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ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1991

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Senior Dedication  
April 12, 1991  
Jack Blanco

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

A Message from the ATS President  
Gerhard F. Hasel

This third issue of the JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY is being sent not only to members of the SOCIETY but also to thousands of pastors and other leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist church as well.

If this is the first time you have seen a copy of the JOURNAL, we are happy to present you this complimentary copy. We trust you will find in it affirmation of sound Bible teachings, stimulation for your Adventist religious convictions, and deep spiritual blessings that will enhance your mission outreach to a world about to pass away in these dramatic last days.

Nearly every item in this issue was presented first to the International Convention of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) held in Indianapolis, June 28-30, 1990, just prior to the General Conference session. This ATS convention was attended by more than 1,000 persons, including many church leaders, hundreds of ordained ministers and Bible teachers, and division, union, and local conference administrators, as well as physicians and dentists, scientists and researchers, lawyers and business persons, and still others.

You will probably find some of the articles easier to digest than others. Let me beg you to dig your teeth into the most challenging ones!

Because our JOURNAL is designed primarily to serve the members of our Society, you may expect it to reflect the convictions and goals of the Society and of its constituencies.

The Adventist Theological Society affirms the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ, reaffirms the surety of the Word



of God in its entirety, confirms the Spirit of Prophecy as God's gift to the remnant, attempts to research revealed truth to its full depth, investigates unsettled questions, evaluates new approaches to truth from the perspective of confidence in divine revelation, provides dialogue and fellowship among persons with theological interest, upholds principles of sound interpretation of Scripture, prays for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our time, and upholds church leadership in prayer and with personal effort. ATS members support the Seventh-day Adventist church with their tithes and gifts, and by their influence.

The next annual International Convention of ATS is scheduled to meet at Southwestern Adventist College in Keene, Texas, March 7-10, 1991, addressing the area of "Salvation and End-time Prophecies." By invitation from the Southwestern Union Conference, this convention will be merged with the union's quinquennial Union Ministerial Meeting, expected to host 350 pastors from around the union. All ATS members and everyone else who is interested are invited to attend.

Our Society is pleased to serve our church in this capacity. And there are other projects as well that ATS is engaged in. Very recently, the Society had the honor of presenting a CD-ROM computer kit containing all the published writings of Ellen G. White (and costing over \$1000.00) to the new Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary in Russia. Thus our ministers in the Soviet Union will now have access to all the Spirit of Prophecy publications during their training period. We hope that under God's blessing people will be impressed to provide funds for additional Ellen G. White CD-ROM computer kits for needy seminaries around the world.

We are also very happy to announce that through God's special blessing over the past six months, donors have been impressed to contribute \$38,000 to our Society to assist in the purchase or construction of a Seventh-day Adventist seminary

building in or near Prague, Czechoslovakia. The seminary began to function by faith in October, 1990, as an institution without a building. Impressed by this display of courage and by the unique opportunities available just now in Eastern Europe, the ATS Executive Committee pledged to attempt to raise the basic, Western (hard) currency required to get a building program off the ground.

Another major ATS project is a scholarship fund, recently established, to help qualified students from around the world engage in doctoral studies in religion. The needs are immense. Our official church budgets are simply unable to keep up with the expense of educating dedicated persons to serve the seminaries and college religion departments among our rapidly growing world membership. We earnestly encourage donations large and small to this important fund.

We are also looking for funding to provide publications on significant topics of relevance to Seventh-day Adventists.

We invite you to participate in our projects. Because ATS is duly registered as a non-profit corporation, all gifts to it qualify as tax-deductible under IRS regulations.

Regional chapters of ATS have been established in the United States, Europe, and Africa, and requests are coming in for the establishment of others. At the invitation of the Indiana Conference and several local congregations, the Midwest chapter conducted a weekend series on Jan 25-27, 1991, at the Indiana Conference campsite. Topics of great relevance to our faith were presented in an atmosphere of study and prayer.

As President of the Society, I wish to thank every one who has provided and will provide financial support for ATS projects. A big "thank you" goes also to those who have assumed leadership roles in the Society and in its chapters, helping it indispensably to fulfill its mission.

Everyone who is interested in becoming a subscriber—or, better yet, who is desiring to become a member of ATS—will find a tear-out sheet at the end of this copy of the JOURNAL.

Please fill it out, indicate your interest, and mail it to us as soon as possible. As is the case with most professional societies, the process of membership in ATS is designed to protect the Society's goals and purposes. Members of ATS include religion teachers, pastors, administrators, business people, medical and legal professionals, local elders, lay persons of many kinds, students, and retirees. The annual membership fee is \$25 (\$35 for husband and wife, \$10 for students or retirees). You will receive each year two issues of the JOURNAL and two Newsletters. Membership entitles a person to full participation in all international and local Society events, including participation in the business sessions. Let us receive your tear-out sheet soon.

Our mission statement affirms that the Adventist Theological Society is "centrist" in outlook. The challenge facing the Seventh-day Adventist movement today to remain a united movement, on track for the Lord, is intense. May God help His remnant church carry its true message to all the world and thus hasten the coming of Christ on the clouds..

We greatly appreciate the kind words of greeting, encouragement, and support extended to the Society and its members, for publication in this issue of the JOURNAL, by Elder Robert S. Folkenberg, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. May the Lord Jesus Christ abundantly bless Elder Folkenberg and his fellow leaders in their heavy responsibilities.

Let us continue to be united with our leaders in earnest prayer and common interests, so the Lord can be glorified and His work can be strengthened.

All praise be to God for the achievements of our Society thus far.

Yours cordially in Christ,

Gerhard F. Hasel



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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January 22, 1991

GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

From our beginnings Seventh-day Adventists have maintained loyalty to the Scriptures as a hallmark of our movement. They are taken not only as good counsel but messages from God spoken with authority.

I am pleased to extend greetings to the Adventist Theological Society—a group dedicated to searching the Scriptures in pursuit of a deeper grasp of God's message. In a time when theological confusion is rampant in the Christian world and secular values compete for the loyalties of people everywhere, it is important that Adventists maintain and extend their loyalty to Christ, who as the Word of God is most fully revealed in the Written Word.

My commendation is due as well for the journal you are publishing. Although this project is relatively new, already it has provided for us a number of well-written articles on important subjects.

May the Holy Spirit encourage you in seeking His message as we prepare for the return of Jesus.

Your brother in Christ,

Robert S. Folkenberg

/dw



## A TROJAN HORSE WITHIN THE CHURCH

A Keynote Sermon by Enoch de Oliveira  
Former Vice President of the General Conference

In one of his famous epics, Homer describes the clever device the Greeks employed to conquer the city of Troy during the Trojan war.

To enable the Greeks to enter the legendary city by stealth, the master carpenter, Epeius, built a huge hollow wooden horse. According to Homer, 100,000 soldiers besieged Troy. The ten-year siege ended when the Greeks concealed some soldiers in the horse and then left it behind as they pretended to withdraw.

Despite the warning of Laocoön, Sinon persuaded the Trojans to move the horse inside the city walls. At night the Greek army returned and the soldiers who had hidden inside the horse opened the city gates to their comrades. In this way Troy was invaded successfully and destroyed.

Although the war between the Greeks and the city of Troy is generally considered a historical fact, the episode dealing with the Trojan horse has been considered a mythological tale. Nonetheless, from this epic we can derive some timely illustrations that are applicable to the situation our church finds itself in today.

For many years the Seventh-day Adventist church succeeded in bravely and tenaciously resisting the fearful assaults of the enemy. The walls of the "holy city" remained impregnable. But in his determination to conquer and destroy God's

church, the prince of this world has undertaken to employ clever and deadly secret weapons.

"There is nothing that the great deceiver fears so much," wrote Ellen G. White, "as that we shall become acquainted with his devices" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 516).

After many attempts to conquer the "city of God" by applying the same kind of deceitful action employed by the Greeks, the great adversary has been able to obtain his ends by surreptitiously introducing the Trojan horse of liberalism within the walls of Zion.

Now that liberalism has become operative within our church, we perceive how vulnerable we can be to the assaults of Satan. As a church we have been inclined to believe that our greatest danger of being defeated by the powers of evil would come from without. While we may be able to perceive clearly from the walls of Zion what Satan is doing to conquer and destroy the church, we do not seem able to do much about standing firmly against the evils that are developing insidiously within our midst. Ellen White warns: "We have more to fear from within than from without" (*Selected Messages*, 1:122).

### Liberals Are Not Bad People

Those who are promoting liberalism in our ranks are not "bad" people. They are committed believers. Many of them exhibit the beauty of Christian virtues in their lives. Most of them love the church. They would like to share the faith and certainties of our forefathers, but in the honesty of their hearts, they do not have them. They are unable to see the uniqueness of our message, the distinctiveness of our identity, the eschatological dimension of our hope, or the urgency of our mission. Representing a wide spectrum of religious thought, they attempt to reinterpret traditional theological Seventh-day Adventist thinking by dressing some of our old doctrines in what appear to them to be new and attractive semantic garments.

Why are these people advocating liberal views among us?



Why are they so enthusiastically playing the role of apostles of change in our theological system?

First of all, it seems to me, they are eager to discard the "cult" label that has been used so widely to characterize Seventh-day Adventism. They long to see our religious movement become a part of what they consider mainstream Christianity. In their endeavor to attain religious "respectability," they suggest the reinterpretation of some historical views of our theology that they believe are Biblically indefensible.

Although accepting some aspects of our distinctiveness, such as the Sabbath and our health principles, they believe that the time has come for a revision in our theological system. In fostering such a revision, some feel uncomfortable with the "remnant" concept as understood by the founders of our message. They believe that all "sectarian mentality" should be rejected as presumptuous and arrogant.

Other liberals, in their endeavor to make our theology more "relevant," question the integrity of the sanctuary doctrine and unite their voices with those of our opponents in this matter. They explain the two-phase ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as a face-saving device created by Edson, Crosier, and others to bail our pioneers out of the Millerite failure.

There are those who are alarmed about what seems to them to be excessive borrowing by Ellen White of material from a variety of sources. Misguided by distorted ideas about the way inspiration works, they are willing to challenge the validity of her claims, rejecting her prophetic authority.

Some liberals define our eschatology as a by-product of nineteenth-century North American culture and, as such, as deserving of substantial reformulation. They insist that after 145 years of proclamation we can no longer preserve the fervent expectation that permeated the church in its formative years.

Liberal scientists in the church insist that the creation

doctrine should be reevaluated in the context of current scientific information and hypotheses.

According to the February 5, 1990 issue of *Christianity Today*, the obsession for change in Seventh-day Adventist ranks had its beginnings in the 1950s and 1960s, when our students in much larger numbers than before began to attend non-Adventist seminaries and universities seeking advanced degrees. Some of these students, in spite of unfavorable circumstances, were able to preserve their religious experience and came forth strengthened in their convictions. Others, influenced by modern Biblical criticism and liberal theology, reshaped their beliefs.

#### What Is Being Gained by These Attempts at Change?

What are we gaining from the liberal attempts to make our message more "palatable" to the world? When so many seeds of doubt, uncertainty, and strife are sown, what else can be expected? Liberalism is reaping what it has sown. It sowed unbelief and it is harvesting apostasies.

During the early 1980s, an unprecedented number of ministers and lay people left the church in Australia and New Zealand. During the 1970s our church in those two countries lost one believer for every three who came in. In 1981, after a particularly notable attempt to effect a liberal change, the percentage of loss rose to 46 per cent. It peaked at 63 per cent in 1982 and then settled down at approximately 50 percent—a loss of one member for every two believers. (See *Australasian Record*, Oct. 28, 1989.)

We must not remain indifferent to such staggering losses. We must not minimize the tragic consequences of our internal confrontations caused by new theologies. The casualties are thousands of perplexed souls who, spiritually confused, are departing from us, throwing away their confidence in the validity of our message. They have lost the landmarks of our faith and no longer have a clear understanding of what we stand for.

The following set of North American Division statistics reflect the consequences of ongoing theological and other attempts to change our beliefs in the United States and Canada:

Years	Annual Growth Rates
1931-1940	4.4%
1941-1950	3.1%
1951-1960	2.9%
1961-1970	2.8%
1971-1980	3.2%
1981-1988	2.3%

What is the message in these numbers? Oscar Wilde, famous dramatist of the past century, with inimitable irony affirmed that "there are three kinds of lies in the world: common lies, small lies, and statistics." Thus Wilde underlined the fact that statistics may deceive and lead us to wrong conclusions. But even though statistics are susceptible of incorrect interpretation, we dare not minimize their importance in an analysis of the crisis that we face. They can help us understand the gravity of our problems.

It is true that we can be deceived by numbers and conclude that in spite of what seems apparent the North American Division is still growing. But it is not growing. According to reliable sources, 30 to 35 percent of our believers no longer attend church. With this decrease in attendance has come a decrease in offerings. Sharp cutbacks in church budgets have been approved. Enrollment in our schools is declining. Institutions have been closed. We are in the process of trimming down our church's operations and reducing our task forces. The market for our books is shrinking. Denominational periodicals have been merged and yet their circulation has still dropped. We have come to a time of financial restraints, with most conferences cutting back on their ministerial forces. These are inevitable consequences of what has happened in theological areas.

After so many seeds of doubt and uncertainty have been sown within the church by those who are obsessed with the desire to reinterpret our theology, after so many years of theological disputation, what else should we expect? We are witnessing the inevitable harvest of liberalism. When unbelief is sown, the harvest is bound to be apostasy.

After its insidious penetration within the walls of God's city, liberalism in its various shapes and forms has succeeded in opening the gates of the church to the invasion of such other evils as pluralism, secularism, humanism, materialism, futurism, and preterism.

#### Pluralism

To diffuse the polarization we are facing, some articulate scholars suggest the official adoption of theological pluralism, the acceptance of peaceful coexistence of conflicting, even opposing, views among us.

"On fundamental beliefs, unity; on non-essentials, liberty; in everything, love," is the popular dictum that inspires pluralistic scholars in their appeal for flexibility and openness. But who is going to determine what is essential and what is negotiable? Individuals, independent ministries, theological societies, the annual council, or the church as a whole under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Would we be able to retain our self-understanding as God's last prophetic movement, if we were to fragment our beliefs by including in them divergent schools of thought?

We need theological unity in our preaching and in our publications, but above all, we need unity in the theological departments of our colleges and universities. I submit that no school of theology, under pluralistic influences, shaken by the confrontation of ideas, is able to produce preachers with strong convictions. Without preachers having certainty, there is no power in their preaching.

The successful spread of the gospel over the Mediterranean world in the days of the apostles threatened Christian



unity. People of widely divergent backgrounds were baptized, bringing into the church some of the popular religious concepts of the age. Thus, there was a real danger that the teachings of the church would be affected by syncretism. Aware of this danger, Paul exhorted the Ephesians to maintain unity. See Eph 4:4-6.

Addressing "the churches of Galatia," the apostle expressed his regret for the way the Galatians, under pluralistic influences, changed their minds and turned away from the grace of Christ to a "different" gospel (Gal 1:6). Was Paul being narrow-minded in his appeal for unity? After all, those Jewish-Christians certainly preached salvation through Christ. They never denied, as far as we know, that it was necessary to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. Why then was Paul so vehement in his opposition to this Jewish-Christian preaching? Because the Judaizers insidiously distorted the gospel of Christ, throwing the believers into a state of mental and spiritual confusion. At the real risk of being labeled intransigent, Paul exhorted the Galatians to pay no attention to those messengers who, claiming ecclesiastical authority, were disrupting the peace and unity that had existed among the saints.

#### Let's Learn from Methodist Experience

Methodism in our day is known for its wide latitude of beliefs. Its clergy have freedom to subscribe to different schools of Bible interpretation. Attempts to define basic Methodist doctrine have met much opposition, and Methodist theology has become surprisingly divorced from its own tradition. Persons who want to be accepted as church members are no longer required to endorse any specific creed. To the question, "What do Methodists believe," ministers and laity respond by saying that they believe in Jesus.

Today the Methodist Church is in a steep numerical decline. "In the 1965-1975 period the United Methodist Church lost over one million members," says C. Peter Wagner,

*Leading Your Church to Growth*, p. 32. And who is responsible for this sharp defection? The exodus that the Methodists are facing is not to be blamed on outside forces. The real blame lies within their church. If the Methodist Church were attacked by enemies from outside, if it were suffering persecution as a result of its endeavors to evangelize the world, there would be hope. But the world does not persecute a church that seems to stand for nothing. The Methodist Church is declining as a result of its failure to preserve its own religious heritage.

Can we learn some profitable lessons from its perplexing experience?

#### Preterism, Historical Criticism, and Futurism

A segment of the Seventh-day Adventist scholarly community no longer accepts the principles of prophetic interpretation that made our church what it is.

In the books of Daniel and Revelation, our pioneers found our time and our mission. Applying the historicist method of prophetic interpretation, which had been used by the majority of Christians over the centuries and which earned the subsequent endorsement of Ellen G. White, our forefathers were able to unfold the history of the long conflict between Christ and Satan. They were able to look upon themselves as an integral part of the cosmic program.

Today, however, we sense a gradual rejection of the historicist approach and a growing acceptance of the Counter Reformation schools of prophetic interpretation. Furthermore, historical-criticism does not allow for true long-range prediction. As a result, in some quarters our message has been changed and has lost its distinctiveness and its power.

Moving the fulfillment of the long-term prophecies to the end of the age (the futurist view), or relegating their significance to the distant past (the preterist view), or denying true long-term prophecy (the historical-critical view), makes the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation irrelevant and trans-



forms the Adventist movement into just another denomination without power and special prophetic message.

#### Secularism

Another intruder that is expanding its presence within the walls of God's city is the trend known as "secularism," often defined as the organization of life as if God did not exist. Its growing influence is producing a decline in attendance, reduced commitment to Christian ideals, and an increasing tendency to view the church—any church—as obsolete and irrelevant. Professional growth and prestige, business and profits, economic status and academic attainments are overestimated, while Christian virtues are neglected, or relegated to second place.

According to Norman Blaike, American Christians today can be divided into two groups, the "supernaturalists" and the "secularists." The "supernaturalists," Blaike observes, are generally to the right theologically, while the "secularists" are to the left. The "supernaturalists," he states, prize Christian virtues, such as devotion, piety, and church commitments, while "secularists" admire tolerance, success, efficiency, and academic achievements. (See N. W. H. Blaike, "Altruism in the Professions: The Case of the Clergy," *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 10 [1974]: 87.)

The process of secularization is affecting not only believers but also institutions. According to George Marsden, Duke University historian, the religious character of many erstwhile Christian institutions has been eclipsed with "nobody noticing and nobody seeming to mind" (*Time*, May 22, 1989).

In the past two decades we have seen Seventh-day Adventist institutions affected by substantial changes that have not all been on the plus side. Surreptitiously, secularism makes inroads that tend to eclipse the religious character of these institutions. Religious services are still held in their chapels, but they are more a form than a spiritual force.

Theological liberalism makes an immense contribution to this insidious secularism of believers and institutions by its rejection of an authoritative church, an authoritative Bible, and an authoritative body of truth. It is more than willing to accommodate religion to the spirit of the times.

#### Other Evils

Other evils, such as exaggerated academic freedom, the historical-critical approach to Scripture, and theistic evolution (with its very long chronology) are making their contribution to the undermining of confidence in basic beliefs and leading congregations to spiritual disaster.

It is impossible to prevent the teaching of aberrant views within the church, when the concept of academic freedom without sound confessional responsibility is accepted. Defenders of academic freedom in our midst state that we are not a creedal denomination and so every believer should be free to endorse different theological views. But we understand that if an individual is to be a Seventh-day Adventist, he or she should subscribe to our Fundamental Beliefs in their entirety. Otherwise, he or she ceases to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

I still remember the strong opposition manifested by some Adventist scholars when the historical-critical methodology was condemned officially by the General Conference on the basis that this method, by definition, excludes our belief in the transcendence of the Scriptures.

I believe, however, that the church has the unquestionable right to decide which approach should be used by our scholars and preachers. This is our only safeguard to protect our religious heritage, which subscribes to the Reformation principle that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and its own interpreter.

Theistic evolution (or progressive creationism) is a concept accepted by a growing number of scientists in our ranks. It involves the subordination and accommodation of the Scrip-

tures to the Darwinian view of gradual evolution. Those who endorse this school of thought no longer regard key portions of the Bible as reliable sources of historical information. In taking this position they place scientific hypotheses above Scripture, making science a judge of the Word of God.

#### The Fifth Column

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) left a million dead. When the conflict seemed to be reaching its climax, General Emilio Mola commanded 'four columns moving toward the capital of the country. But in addition to his four columns he was counting on a fifth column, one that had entered Madrid behind its defenses, to deliver the city to him when the decisive moment arrived.

Among the lessons that history teaches us, we find the fall of empires and institutions that succumbed to internal forces. The historian Gibbon (1737-1796) ascribes the fall even of Rome to internal, not external, causes. He mentions the fourteenth-century Italian poet, Petrarch, who described the fall of Rome as follows: "Behold the remains of Rome, the shadow of its early greatness! Neither time nor the barbarians can glory in having brought about this stupendous destruction: it was accomplished by its own citizens, the most illustrious of her children."

Many civilizations have been defeated by the internal sabotage of fifth columnists. History warns us what can take place in the church. External opposition is not our worst enemy. Instead, the insidious deteriorating influences introduced by Satan, our great adversary, do the most harm.

What has been the greatest defeat suffered by the Christian church? Was it the loss of life as a result of violence, martyrdom, and torture? No. The church's greatest defeat took place when it accepted the favor of the Roman Empire and lost its purity and fervor. When the church left the catacombs, it adjusted to the splendor of the world. Satan's fifth columnists—his Trojan horse—weakened the church

internally, paving the way for dilution of faith and the establishment of pseudo-Christianity.

#### Conclusion

The picture I have presented of the Seventh-day Adventist church can be considered bleak and dark. But in my closing remarks, I would like to present a brighter side. In spite of the problems we face today, we have many reasons to believe in the triumph of our message as long as we stay faithful to the Bible. A revival will come and our eyes will see powerful miracles of evangelism.

Our message and movement deserve to be characterized by a triumphant spirit. They are not based on "cunningly devised fables" but on the unshakable foundation of "the sure word of prophecy."

"The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat" (*Selected Messages*, 2:380).

The conviction that God guides this movement allows us to declare, without a shadow of doubt, that the fire on Seventh-day Adventist altars will never go out. The determination to win the world to Christ will motivate us in our united evangelistic program. The world will be lighted with the glory of our proclamation of the Advent hope.



## TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

By Kenneth H. Wood

President and Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Ellen G. White Estate

Recently, while contemplating the subject of the prophetic office, I had a dream. Usually I am not much impressed by my dreams. In fact, when I awake I seldom can remember them. But this one left such a vivid impression on my mind that I want to share it with you. I dreamed I was trying to explain to some young people the process of publishing magazines a generation ago. I began with my experience in the print shop of Far Eastern Academy in Shanghai when I was a teenager.

In those days I held in my left hand a small metal tray we used to call a "stick." I set it to the correct column width, then composed by picking up letters of the alphabet from the California type case in front of me, and placing them one by one in the "stick" to form words and paragraphs. I justified the lines by pushing space pieces between the words until the line was tight. When I had perhaps a dozen lines in the stick, I would carefully remove them and place them in an oblong metal tray called a "galley." I continued the process until I had enough column inches to fill the paper. Then I would make up pages on a surface called the "stone."

The editor under whom I worked, incidentally, was C. C. Crisler, the secretary of the China Division, who had been one of Ellen G. White's chief helpers during her closing years at Elmshaven. One of the darkest moments of my young life as

a printer's devil (the usual term for an apprentice) was when I pried several galleys of type that I had spent most of a day setting.

Later, when I attended Pacific Union College, I became a Linotype operator and became proficient enough to keep the elevator hung, which meant I could have a new line ready for casting before the machine completed its cycle on the preceding line. I also learned to clean up what was called a "squirt," when a bent matrix or other flaw permitted the molten lead to escape during the casting process.

As for pictorial illustrations, we used zinc plates mounted on wooden blocks. We called these block-mounted illustrations "cuts," and having once produced them, we kept them on file for possible reuse. When I was editor of the *Review*, we routinely drew on this file. When we wanted to be creative by bleeding one of these pictures off a page, we had to know which pages we could use in this way without having the cuts smashed by the grippers on the sheet-fed press.

One other thing. A magazine such as the *Review* usually was made up of two signatures of 16 pages each, the signatures being run consecutively, then combined and trimmed. The first signature of the *Review*, one sheet of paper at a time, was run on a flat-bed press in about 12 hours near the end of the week; then the second signature, with late news on the Back Page, followed at the first of the next week, after the pressman had done the "make-ready."

All of this is a far cry from the publishing process today, in which the original key stroke is captured, the typeface of an entire article can be changed in an instant by pressing a button, pages are composed on a computer, pictures can be placed on any page of a magazine, and an entire magazine of 32 pages can be produced in a single run of a few hours on a rotary, four-color offset press.

Now, let us say that a young printer today decides to learn all he can about how printing was done in the past. How helpful will it be to examine all the modern publishing



machines and processes? Will this make him an authority on how things were done in the past? Will this give him answers to all the questions that might be raised concerning the problems faced by printers in previous generations, and the processes involved in producing first-class publications?

The answer is No. To truly understand, he would need to study the machinery of the past. And, beyond that, he would need to step into a time machine of some sort in order to actually participate in the publishing processes of the past and be affected emotionally by the experience.

I have spent considerable time reviewing this because in my dream I saw a blank, uncomprehending look on the faces of the modern young people when I finished my attempt to describe how printing was done in the past, and it occurred to me that even our best efforts to understand the prophetic office leave a great deal to be desired. Between us and reality "there is a great gulf fixed," even as it was between the rich man and Lazarus. The same may be said of studying the natural world to explain origins, and studying Scripture by the historical-critical method to understand inspiration and revelation.

We cannot here begin to deal with the prophetic office exhaustively, but I shall touch on the six aspects that follow.

#### 1. Our Personal Attitude As We Study the Prophetic Office.

In approaching the subject, we need to be humble lest God ask us as He asked Job: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:2-4).

I hope God is amused when we make uninformed pronouncements about the prophetic office. Since none of us, so far as I know, is a prophet, we hardly are authorities on the subject. But even prophets would be reticent to claim they understand the prophetic office perfectly, for they would say

that their experience as a prophet is different from that of others. Because the experience and mission of no two prophets are identical, even the prophets' understanding of the prophetic office are likely to be different. Moreover, producing a prophet is not an exact science. In mathematics, 2 plus 2 always equals 4. But God and inspiration plus a human being never equals two identical products. Making two cookies exactly alike is one thing; making two prophets just alike is quite another. In making a prophet, God must take the entire person—body, soul, spirit, intelligence, personality, weaknesses, strengths, education, idiosyncrasies—then endeavor through that person to proclaim His message and accomplish a special mission.

In our attempt to understand the prophetic office, we as Seventh-day Adventists are in a better position to make accurate assessments than are some others. Most Christians have only the inductive method with which to work. Seventh-day Adventists can also use the deductive method. Inasmuch as Ellen G. White filled the prophetic office in this church for approximately 70 years, we can examine her life, writings, and methods of divine communication to see how inspiration works. But even with this advantage, the most we can say about the prophetic office is that we are students of this subject, not authorities. We are learning constantly.

In a sense we are like a hiker who each evening writes down his observations about a distant mountain range. Each day as he draws closer to the mountain, he sees more clearly. Thus he revises his comments. What at a distance appeared to be a single peak turns out to be three peaks. What he thought was a glacier, actually is a huge outcropping of rock. What he thought was a fire break is a magnificent waterfall. Instead of being upset by these revelations and declaring the mountain range to be fraudulent and deceptive, he rejoices that past misconceptions have been corrected and that he has obtained a clearer view of reality.

Thus it has been with us in seeking to understand the

prophetic office. In recent years we have learned that the prophetic office is less mechanical than we had thought. We have learned that a prophet may use not only his own words to articulate divine messages but also the words of both inspired and uninspired people. We have learned that truth can be presented in various ways, depending on the background, perspective, and even the purpose of the inspired message-giver. (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 6, 8.) Far from destroying faith, these understandings have broadened our horizons and provided a firmer foundation for our faith.

No doubt we have more to learn. But as we seek to understand better the supernatural mysteries of the prophetic office, we do well to heed God's warning to Moses as he approached the burning bush: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex 3:5).

## 2. Why the Prophetic Office Was Created.

Why does the prophetic office exist? This question underlines the fact that offices and products arise out of need. Eyeglasses were created because people had defective eyesight. Printing was invented because people needed a better way to produce material for mass distribution. Automobiles were invented because people needed a faster mode of transportation.

In the case of the prophetic office, it was created because of two major factors: (1) The entrance of sin, which made face-to-face communication with God impossible (Isa 59:2; Ex 33:20); and (2) God is a God of infinite love (1 John 4:8; Jer 31:3; Ps 103:13), hence He was not willing to let the human family perish (John 3:16). But to rescue men and women from the pit into which they had fallen and to restore them to their first estate, God must help them understand the kind of God He is; He must make clear how they may be reconciled to Him; and they must know His laws, ideals, and purposes for them.

I want to emphasize that all aspects of the prophetic office

are an evidence of the infinite love of God. When we understand this and have a mind-set that is controlled by this view, we will welcome not only the encouraging counsels of the prophet but also the inspired person's rebukes and demands for reform. Instead of resisting God's will as revealed through the prophet, we will, like Saul on the road to Damascus, ask eagerly, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Instead of looking upon the prophet as an adversary or a kill-joy, we will look upon that individual as a dear friend who is trying to help us reach the worthwhile goals and objectives that we would most desire if we had true wisdom and our minds were not clouded by the results of six thousand years of sin.

In one sense, the attitude that we reveal toward the prophet shows what our attitude is toward God, for the message is not the prophet's own; it is God's message, given first to Jesus, then to the angel, and finally to the prophet (Rev 1:1-5). In His commission to the seventy, Jesus established this principle by saying: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16; cf. John 13:20).

God's infinite love for the human race has prompted Him throughout history to use almost every conceivable way to communicate with humanity. Among His various methods have been: angels (Heb 1:14; Ps 34:7; Gen 19:15; Num 22:31-35; Matt 1:18-25; Gen 22:11, 15); creation, or the natural world (Rom 1:20; Acts 14:17; Ps 19:1, 2); Urim and Thummim (Num 27:21); dreams (1 Sam 28:6; Gen 40, 41; Dan 2-4); a voice from heaven (Matt 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28; Ex 19:9, 19); the Holy Spirit (Prov 3:6; Isa 30:21; Matt 10:19, 20); Jesus in person (Heb 1:1, 2; John 14:9); and, of course, prophets (Amos 3:7; Num 12:6; 2 Chron 36:16).

## 3. The Multi-faceted Character of the Prophetic Office.

The work assigned to prophets has been many-faceted. Unlike the picture of the Bible prophet held by many today,



the prophet was not primarily a predictor of future events, and certainly not a predictor of the kind of events that make good headline copy for sensationalist magazines. Not all prophets were given the same mission, nor did they do the same kind of work, but all spoke for God; all communicated Heaven-inspired messages. Some prophets set forth divine standards for human conduct, some revealed God's purposes for individuals and for nations, some protested against prevailing evils, some encouraged the people to faithfulness, some strengthened and guided national rulers, some directed building and other kinds of activities, some served as teachers. In the course of their work, some performed miracles, some wrote books. In every case, true prophets served a body of people as God's spokespersons; they were not merely instructed of God at the personal or family level.

#### 4. Some Elements God Must Consider When He Calls a Person to the Prophetic Office.

In choosing a prophet, it is necessary for God to take into account both the person He would select to fill the prophetic office and the audience to be reached. Not all minds can receive truth accurately and communicate it equally well. Nor can all the people in an audience understand equally well and appreciate the messages presented by a single spokesperson.

Let us note first the considerations that must be taken into account in selecting a person for the prophetic office. Doing so will help us better understand Ellen White's meaning when she wrote: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God" (MS 24, 1886; *Selected Messages*, 1: 21).

When God calls a person to the prophetic office, He inspires the entire person, for a human being is a totality whose parts cannot be abstracted. Thus, before choosing a person to bear a given message, God must take into account the person's background, education, personality, intellectual abilities, leadership qualities, ability to communicate (orally, and perhaps, in writing), and experience. Inasmuch as generations of sin have impaired the ability of the human mind to grasp truth clearly, God must look for a person whose mind can provide almost distortion reception.

We might illustrate this aspect by pointing out that some people seem to see life in "technicolor." Everything is the "brightest," the "biggest," the "most beautiful," the "most horrible." By contrast, other people see life in "black-and-white" and "shades of gray." For them, nothing is "super." They observe facts carefully and accurately, without exaggeration or distortion. So, which kind of mind will God choose as His prophet? Probably at times, both; or maybe neither, but a mind somewhere between the two.

The choice may be determined partly by the kind of truth God intends the prophet to communicate. If the message is one of encouragement and hope, a prophet with an upbeat personality may be able to convey it most effectively. If the message is one of rebuke and warning, a prophet with a somewhat pessimistic, somber outlook may present it most persuasively. If the message involves mathematics, a prophet with number skills and a penchant for accuracy may be needed. Let me repeat, God takes many factors into account when He calls a person to the prophetic office, for He must accept the person as a whole and imbue the whole person with the Holy Spirit.

Sacred history is replete with examples of the different kinds of persons whom God has called. As illustrations we might mention Abraham, a rich man, brought up in a heathen environment in a compromising family; Moses, guided by conscientious parents but educated in part by people who



worshiped false gods and espoused false values; Samuel, born to a conscientious mother but reared by a permissive, latitudinarian high priest in an environment that favored cynicism toward religious practices; David, a king who was also a career soldier; Amos, a poorly educated blue-collar shepherd; Daniel, a highly-educated expatriate who served with distinction as a statesman in the land of his exile; and the apostle Paul, a Jew by race but a Roman by birth, who, although highly educated and steeped in the traditions of Judaism, was proselyted to Christianity by the Lord Himself and became the church's most influential and articulate spokesman for his new-found faith.

But whatever the type of person God calls to the prophetic office, the message conveyed through the human instrument is God's message. Whether delivered orally or in writing, it is both human and divine. God inspires the prophet, hence the words through which that individual proclaims God's message become the Word of God. On this point Ellen White says: "The Bible, with its God given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' John 1:14 (*The Great Controversy*, p. 8).

God chooses certain people to the prophetic office not merely because of their ability to grasp truth with reasonable objectivity, but because of the wide variety of minds to which they must bear their message. That this consideration is important may be demonstrated even by the experience of God's messengers who do not have the gift of prophecy.

For example, evangelists find that not everyone responds to them equally well. In any audience, a number of people may be enamored of the evangelist and willing to accept readily almost anything he says. But in the same audience others sit impassively as they listen to his most logical presentations and strongest appeals. The reaction to prophets is similar.

Thus, because of God's great love for every member of the human family, when He calls men and women to the prophetic office He considers both the total person that He is calling and the variety of people who will hear the divine message.

#### 5. To What Extent Being an Inspired Person Changes the Prophet.

When people are called to the prophetic office, do they forsake their humanity? Do they become sinless? Do they never make mistakes? Do they become infallible? No to all these questions. It is true that the Holy Scriptures call the inspired writers "holy" (2 Pet 1:21), but in those same Scriptures the writers documented not only their own sins and mistakes, but also those of their inspired predecessors and contemporaries. As for infallibility, Mrs. White wrote: "I never claimed it; God alone is infallible" (*Selected Messages*, 1: 37). We must not set a higher standard for those who are called to the prophetic office than does the inspired Word.

Like the Bible itself, prophets have a human side—a side that is subject to inconsistent conduct, disorganization, forgetfulness, and other foibles. The apostle Paul wisely observed that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). But we dare not discount or dismiss the message of the prophet simply because the human instrument is an imperfect, earthen vessel. If we love and trust God, we will believe that He loves us with an everlasting love and that He is working with the best instrument available to provide us with the very help we need to be victorious in our battle with sin and deception.

#### 6. The Authority of the Prophetic Office.

Does the fact that the prophet is imperfect reduce the authority of the prophet's message? No. Scripture makes clear that Jesus is the One who speaks through the prophet. (See 1 Cor 1:4-6; 1 Pet 1:10-12; Rev 1:1, 10, 11; 19:10; 22:16, 20.) When a voice of authority declares that ballistic missiles are

approaching and orders everyone to hurry to air raid shelters, everyone must comply immediately, whether he or she hears the command on a high-fidelity stereo, a black-and-white TV set, or a pocket-size, battery-operated radio. The fidelity is of minimal importance; the instrument is of little consequence; only the authority of the one delivering the message is of importance.

Moreover, since Jesus is the supreme Message-giver, the prophet's message is of absolute authority, whether given in Old Testament times, New Testament times, or post-New Testament times. It defies logic to say that what Jesus said before the Biblical canon was closed is more true, more inspired, or more authoritative than what He may have said through a chosen spokesperson after the close of the canon.

In proclaiming God's message, the prophets made it clear that the message was not their own, it was God's. Scores of times in the Old Testament the prophets emphasized the divine origin of their message, saying, "The word of the Lord came." Among those who used this expression, we might cite Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Solomon, Jehu, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Ellen White, too, understood that the messages she bore were not her own, they were God's, and that therefore they carried supernatural authority. One night her heavenly guide said, "I have a work for you to do. You must speak the words given you by the Lord. . . . It is not you speaking, but the Lord speaking through you" (*The Upward Look*, p. 339).

At another time a messenger from heaven said, "Bear the testimony that the Lord Jesus has for you to bear in reproof, in rebuke, in the work of encouraging and lifting up the soul; 'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world'" (*The Upward Look*, p. 168).

When Israel was in Egyptian bondage, the Lord met Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to deliver His people and lead them to the Promised Land. "Come now

therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex 3:10). Moses pleaded inability to undertake the task, but God promised: "Go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Ex 4:10). "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I am the Lord: speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee" (Ex 6:29). Thus it is clear that a prophet speaks for God. The authority is not that of a human being, it is the authority of Almighty God. This concept should make it easy for us to relate to the message, no matter how frail or inadequate the bearer.

#### Conclusion

We have touched on six aspects of the prophetic office. If time permitted, we might discuss many other aspects, including the divine call of the prophet, the various categories of prophets, the gift as set forth in the New Testament, the task of the prophets, modalities of the messages as given to the prophets, hermeneutical principles in understanding the prophets' messages, and whether the work of the prophetic office ends with the death of a prophet. But even a discussion of all these topics would not exhaust our attempt to understand the prophetic office.

In the final analysis, it is not our intellectual knowledge of the prophetic office that is of major importance, it is our attitude toward the prophets and their God-given messages. I believe that the following two texts of Scripture make clear what our attitude should be: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron 20:20). "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa 66:2).



## THE TOTALITY OF SCRIPTURE VERSUS MODERNISTIC LIMITATIONS

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The topic of the totality of Scripture involves the authority of the complete Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God.

The authority of the Bible as Scripture is a topic of supreme relevance today, because the Bible's full authority is basically rejected and extensively reinterpreted by many modern Christians. Seventh-day Adventists, however, have correctly maintained that the Bible is the Word of God. It carries its own authority. The self-testimony of Scripture maintains that the Bible is entirely the Word of God. Yet there is disturbing evidence that even some Seventh-day Adventists are not immune to trends and approaches to Scripture that limit the Bible's authority for faith, life, and practice.

Two major views in modernistic thought<sup>1</sup> especially limit the use and authority of the Bible. One view (represented by most liberal and progressive<sup>2</sup> modern theologians) holds that the Bible is but a human word from the past which is as culturally conditioned as is any other document from the past or the present. This human conditioning means that the Bible is limited in the same way as any other human piece of writing. Harvard University theologian Gordon D. Kaufman makes a

typical statement of this position in words surprising to a person who accepts the Bible as the Word of God:

The Bible no longer has unique authority for Western man. It has become a great but archaic monument in our midst. It is a reminder of where we once were—but no longer are. It contains glorious literature, important historical documents, exalted ethical teachings, but it is no longer the word of God.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible, when understood this way, no longer functions with authority in the believer's life or in the church. Yet it allows for some principles of abiding value to be drawn out of the Bible as meaningful for modern man. These principles are taken from the Bible as from a piece of "classic" literature.<sup>4</sup> The Bible is used in a functional way so as to translate some of its values and adjust them to modern standards.<sup>5</sup>

A second, more subtle view is held by others (particularly neo-orthodox theologians and those influenced by them). It supports modernistic, evolutionary hypotheses of science, sociology, anthropology, and other areas of study. It supposes that parts of the Bible may become at times the Word of God, depending on how they speak to a person in the modern situation.<sup>6</sup> The Bible is narrative or belongs to the category of story, setting forth various patterns or models of action that can provide some guidance for today. This view, however, finds in the Bible no specific instruction or direct word that must be followed today. The Bible in this second view is again functional in purpose without giving binding directions. There are, of course, multiple variations within and among these major modernistic views.<sup>7</sup>

These positions, or related ones, are designated by their followers as either "liberal," "progressive," "modernistic," or the like. For our purpose the designation or label is not as important as the common denominator, namely the decided rejection of the Bible as the Word of God. A selective usage of the Bible may be maintained with perceived adjustable levels of authority. In one way or another modernity and its culture are lifted up to the level of highest norm in the interpretation

of Scripture. The Bible's inherent authority that remains valid for all times and in all places is compromised, curtailed, or fully rejected in all these schemes. The result is the subjective theological pluralism that exists all around us.

A relativizing of the Bible is achieved by typical historical critical scholars. They treat the Bible as a purely human production. It is customary for them to engage in the construction of pluralism in the Bible itself.<sup>8</sup> For example, they claim that the nature of Christ in the four Gospels is so diverse that it is disharmonious and frequently contradictory; or, that the concept of salvation by faith in some letters of Paul is contradicted in other letters denied to him; or, that an alleged salvation with works is taught in the New Testament whereas Paul taught salvation by faith through grace. Thus the Bible is depicted as containing real pluralism in theology. This argument, in turn, is used to justify modern theological and even denominational pluralism. The end result is that the Bible's own positions are claimed to be relativistic without containing final authority and non-negotiable truth.

Such reinterpretations have brought about new theologies and created new movements and new denominations. The relativizing of the Bible is the cornerstone of modern congregationalism and its accompanying breakdown of the unity of the church. All in all, pluralism in theology, so prized by progressives everywhere today, inevitably is joined by pluralism in faith, pluralism in the practice of worship, and pluralism in lifestyle.

A major threat to Seventh-day Adventists is a departure from the totality of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Such departure threatens to change the direction of the church. It undermines that which informs and gives direction to the mission of the Advent movement. It accommodates the Adventist church to the world. It tends to make us no longer simply "in" the world but part "of" the world. However, in order to fulfill our God-given mission for the end time in which we live, we need to continue to build on the sure foundation

of the Word of God as given to us in the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

#### Scripture Limited in Authority

How much of Scripture will those who would take a limited view accept? What principle or principles of selection will they support? These seem to be strange questions to ask of Seventh-day Adventists. Of course, the natural response is that all Adventists accept the Bible in its entirety with uniform authority for faith and life. Adventists of today need to maintain a high view of Scripture regardless of how much cultural pressure is exerted on them.

There are actions and practices in the Bible, it is claimed, that "embody God's ideal for a church in a particular time and place," and these "are to be observed." This sounds good, but what restrictions are implied? The key in this view seems to be that there are no longer universally valid actions or practices outlined in the Bible without being evaluated on what may be "an ideal for a church in a particular time and place."

But who decides what remains applicable "in a particular time and place"? That decision is obviously to be made in this case on the basis of what modern, cultural norms in different places and times expect or demand. It becomes evident that the key is not a sure "Thus saith the Lord" but a qualified "Thus demands my culture," namely, "in a particular place and time." In this way culture stands above the supreme authority of the Bible. The guiding Word of God is replaced by the ever changing needs of "particular times and places."

The questions must be raised, What is "God's ideal" for a particular church? What is His ideal for any "particular time and place?" On what foundations can a choice be made as to the right place and the right time for "God's ideal" to function, and what warrant is there for the claim that there is in the first place something like "God's ideal?" What God has revealed in the Bible is for real and is not to be made into some kind of abstract ideal. The Bible is filled with what has been



called by many Biblically oriented thinkers a Biblical realism. This realism is universal in design and purpose and is of divine origin. There is truth that is absolute, because it is of divine origin.

For many centuries the majority of Christians have taken the position that the Sabbath does not need to be kept at particular times and places. The seventh-day Sabbath was God's ideal for the Jewish dispensation. The majority view of today is that Sabbath keeping is not God's ideal for the Christian dispensation. In this case socio-cultural norms and experiences have determined what "God's ideal" is with regard to a day of rest for given churches at particular times and places. According to this view God's ideal is for us to rest simply on one day in seven, but not on the specific "seventh day." The argument that the specificity of the "seventh day" is for a particular time and place but the ideal of "one day of rest in seven" is for other times and places is plainly contradicted in the Bible.

Much could be said to indicate the inadequacies of the notion that Christians are called to make a selection of Biblical injunctions on the basis of time and place. The fact that the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ certainly is not based on a principle of selection based on time and place. It is likewise not based on some abstract ideal. The statement of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say unto you" (Matt 5:27-28, and repeated several times) is prefaced by the unqualified affirmation, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17). Jesus' affirmation is that he does not abolish or destroy the Law and the Prophets, that is, the Old Testament. He also emphasizes that none of the commandments shall be broken (see vs 18-20). What Jesus came to abolish were the unbearable man-made traditions of the rabbis,<sup>9</sup> not the revelation of God and Himself as given in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Word of God in its entirety from Genesis to Revelation is "the only rule of faith and doctrine," writes Ellen G. White.<sup>10</sup> She also maintains that, ". . . the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."<sup>11</sup> The Word of God does not contain any principle of selection. Speaking of our own period she says, "In our time there is a wide departure from their [the Scripture's] doctrines and precepts, and there is a need to return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty."<sup>12</sup> These counsels from the pen of the "messenger to the remnant" are refreshing and pertinent for God's people in the end time.

From the larger arena of history we can gain a better and broader perspective of the issue of the totality of Scripture as the Word of God. This seems essential because the danger is that history may repeat itself. Could this happen even in the Advent movement?

The first great heretic of Christianity appeared in the second century of the Christian church. It was Marcion of Sinope (died ca. 160). He claimed that there was complete discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between the picture of God in the Old Testament which Marcion interpreted as depicting a God of wrath and the picture of the God of love revealed by Jesus Christ contained in much of the New Testament. He also made a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church.<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, the unusual emphasis on the love of God in some segments of Christianity, and within recent years also in certain parts of Adventist thought, are not new at all. Biblical aspects of God, which include divine wrath<sup>14</sup> to which both Old and New Testaments consistently testify, should not be reinterpreted in such a way as to turn the Bible against itself. Some of these new trends have deeper historical roots than many realize.

Marcion argued that the God of wrath depicted in the Old Testament has no place in the Christian Bible.<sup>15</sup> Marcion

actually made his own Bible, rejecting the Old Testament and large parts of the New.

There is a "Marcionite strain," it is correctly noted,<sup>16</sup> even in our own time. We need to recall a famous quote from the major theologian of early twentieth century liberal theology. A. von Harnack stated the liberal position as follows:

To have cast aside the Old Testament in the second century was an error which the church rightly rejected; to have retained it in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation was not yet able to avoid; but still to keep it after the nineteenth century as a canonical document within Protestantism results from a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.<sup>17</sup>

In a similar way the influential New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann, the embodiment of mid-twentieth century liberal scholarship, insisted on the "miscarriage" of the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> He and others who depreciate the Old Testament have been charged with Marcionite tendencies.<sup>19</sup> This does not seem to be out of order. Many modern thinkers and theologians depreciate the Old Testament and diminish its authority for various reasons of their own.<sup>20</sup>

Not too long ago John Bright, an Old Testament scholar of Presbyterian background, notes insightfully that there is not a little Marcionism in the Christian churches of today. He observed,

That is to say, there are many of our people who have never heard of the name of Marcion before and who would be horrified to learn of the company they are in but who nevertheless use the Old Testament in a distinctly Marcionist manner.<sup>21</sup>

We shall have to remind ourselves that the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The Old Testament in its entirety and in all its parts is, and needs to remain, part of normative Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

How true and important all parts of the Bible are for Seventh-day Adventists, particularly today when there are attempts to restrict the teaching of creation in Genesis 1-2 to the reductionistic claim that all it says is that there is a God

who created. If this reductionism is true, then Adam and Eve were not historical persons and real beings made by God. The event of the fall of mankind would not stand either. If God wished merely to say that He is Creator, then He did not need to tell us "how" He created the world, "when" He created the world, "what" He created, and in what way.<sup>23</sup> But he did precisely that and extensively so in Gen 1-2 and in other parts of both the Old and New Testaments. How could we fully understand, adequately comprehend, and attractively present the Bible of Jesus and the apostles, if we Adventists, who are historically known as the "people of the Book," were to adopt the new reductionistic claims of modernists and progressives and become known as the "people of a booklet" of our own making?

#### Progressive Revelation as Unfolding Truth

Progressive revelation is a concept with rich and variegated meanings in Christian thought. The idea of "revelation" means intrinsically the divine disclosure and unfolding of what was previously unknown by humans. The idea of "progressive" has normally meant a progression of the truth in an ever greater unfolding and expansion of that which was previously revealed. Thus "progressive revelation" has historically meant the continuing unfolding of God's eternal truth that was initially revealed by divine revelation.

In Genesis 1-3, where there is a sharp distinction between Creator and creature, Adam and Eve at first enjoyed intimate fellowship with the Creator (1:26; 2:7-25). God revealed to the first couple, and thus to humanity, by His own initiative and through His own revelatory word, knowledge about himself as Creator, His creative acts, and the reality of continuing fellowship with God. This means that epistemology (the origin and study of knowledge) begins and has its roots in and through divine revelation as far back as the Garden of Eden.

In the course of time the revelation from God was written down by inspired writers aided and guided by the Holy Spirit.



The inspired prophets wrote down God's revelation in sixty-six books which make up the canonical Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. God, of course, issued by Himself, writing with His own finger, the Ten Commandments (see Ex 24:12; 32:15-16; 34:1). Deuteronomy 28:58 refers to "all the words of this law that are written in this book." At a later time the Lord commanded Jeremiah, "Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer 30:2). He also commanded, "Take a scroll, and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer. 36:2). Through the information provided by this special revelation of God we know the past, understand the present, and are informed about the future. A knowledge of the future falls outside the sphere of normal human knowledge. Isaiah 41:22 affirms this in its challenge to the heathen gods, "Let them tell us what is to happen . . . or declare to us the things to come." Only the true God can tell us by His own divine revelation what is to be in the future and what future there is to be. In the Bible alone are we given such knowledge by the revelation which God provided to His servants, the prophets. Thus in a continuous chain of revelation God unfolded His will and purposes. This continuous flow of divine self-disclosure is a continuous unfolding and enlargement of the body of truth given before. Later revelation does not contradict earlier revelation but expands and enlarges it. For a long time many Christians have called this unfolding of truth "progressive revelation." Used in this sense, the designation is proper and appropriate.

As is typical of all liberal (or progressive) theology, concepts of Scripture and theology are redefined and given new meaning. While using the same language and having the ring of what is true and correct, liberals use Biblical and theological concepts to say something different. Thus the designation "progressive revelation" refers, when liberal (or progressive) scholars use it, a vastly different concept from what it used to stand for.

"Progressive revelation" is used in liberalism as a desig-

nation for a "unilinear evolutionary progress"<sup>24</sup> in the development of religion. Liberals claim to find a development of Biblical faith throughout Biblical times based on the concept of an evolution from primitive ideas to advanced ones.

This evolutionary concept "was accepted with enthusiasm by virtually the whole of the scholarly world."<sup>25</sup> "Progressive revelation" thus perceived uses a developmental approach with later ideas seen as more advanced and thus superior to earlier ones on the same subject. Seen in this way, the earlier ideas in the Bible can be and indeed should be discarded. In the view of liberal theology today they are outdated.

F. W. Farrar, the well-known author of a widely read history of Biblical interpretation, expresses the "progressive revelation" view of modernism in a typical way. While many others<sup>26</sup> could be cited in its support, we are wise to listen to Farrar's precise words:

Is it not enough that, to us, the test of God's word is the teaching of Him who is the Word of God? Is it not an absolutely plain and simple rule that anything in the Bible which teaches or seems to teach anything which is not in accordance with the love, gentleness, the truthfulness, the purity of Christ's gospel, is not God's word to us, however clearly it stands on the Bible page?<sup>27</sup>

For Farrar and all who agree with him "progressive revelation" contains a "principle of selection" built on the concept that "God's word" is neither the Bible in its entirety nor even the New Testament in its entirety, but something that is "in accordance with love."

Does it not sound inviting to lift out a certain aspect of the teachings of Jesus as the highest and only norm for faith? Have we not heard in our own time something similar to this, voices encouraging us to use love as the single guiding principle for life and church unity?

Let me go back to Farrar for an additional point in his argument. He continues as follows,

Have we not the Spirit of God to guide us, or has He abdicated His

office since the days of St. John, or, at any rate, since the days of St. Augustine?<sup>28</sup>

Farrar's argument here is clear. The goal and crown of "progressive revelation" in the liberal and progressive understanding of Scripture resides ultimately beyond the Old and New Testaments. It resides in an alleged current guidance of the Holy Spirit. And this guidance, it is claims, can be totally different from what the Scriptures say. Here the final outcome of the liberal understanding of "progressive revelation" is directly enunciated.

Is it appropriate to ask, Does the Holy Spirit at a later time ever deny what the same Holy Spirit has spoken about at an earlier time? Is the Holy Spirit "progressive" in this sense? Does the Holy Spirit advance His views in such a way that a more recent word does away with an earlier one and the more recent substitutes for the earlier one? Does the Holy Spirit today say something different from what He has said in the Bible, because our situation or time is different? Is it possible that based on cultural settings the Holy Spirit adjusts or accommodates Himself in such a way that what He said at one time could be contradictory to what He says at another time? When this issue was raised during the lifetime of Ellen G. White, she stated unhesitatingly, "It is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word."<sup>29</sup> She continued to maintain that

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.<sup>30</sup>

A major Adventist leader, George I. Butler, who served twice as General Conference President in the last century, is known to have advocated "differences in degrees" of inspiration<sup>31</sup> on the basis of which he made distinctions in levels of authority in Scripture. These and other variations of the principle of selectivity for levels of authority in Scripture are too familiar to need repetition here.<sup>32</sup> Adventists in the past

have not followed these innovations and neither should Adventists do so today.

It is claimed by some persons at present that since our time is not that of the New Testament—or even that of the Victorian Age—the Holy Spirit is guiding our church in our time to make choices of the highest and best. Some suggest that we can make our selections from Scripture according to the norms that hold supreme value in the church's thinking and experience of today. It is suggested that our church can make decisions or take positions that will go beyond the Bible and may even contravene what the Bible explicitly states. This is a widely held view in Christianity at large but is it the way for us to go? Should we go down the seemingly attractive path of the liberal definition of "progressive revelation," or, perhaps, follow a culture-oriented, pragmatically relativized principle of selection of our own making? Is the Holy Spirit provided to assist us in such procedures of selection, change, or contravention? Shall our church go against the Scripture, even if it is for but a little time, or disregard some Bible principles as "time and place" may demand? Should the Seventh-day Adventist church ever follow this path, we must recognize that our church has used modern culture to elevate itself to stand above Scripture. This model of church authority over Scripture authority is best known in Roman Catholicism. Is it not valid to ask whether the "spirit" manifested by this way of doing things has anything to do with the Holy Spirit?

The relevance of the following words is penetrating: "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."<sup>33</sup> If any human beings "pass judgment upon what is divine and what is human [in the Bible], they are working without the counsel of God,"<sup>34</sup> for "the union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible."<sup>35</sup> The Bible by itself is Scripture in the form of the "union of the divine and the human," putting it beyond any



principle of selectivity, or any other approach, that determines what is of abiding importance and what is of supposed temporary importance. When the Bible is kept together in unity, then the community of faith, the church, will be kept together in unity as well.

#### Scripture Selectivity and Pluralism

The concept of selectivity from and in the Bible leads to pluralism. Pluralism is the mode of the present. Even such an influential reformer as Martin Luther had a principle of selection. He fought valiantly against the superior norms of tradition, the magisterium, and Church Councils as regards the role of the Bible for faith and life. The battle cry "the Bible only," *sola Scriptura*, rang out and determined the fate of the Reformation. Yet despite these advances, Luther himself used a principle of selection to decide what is superior in Scripture. "*Was Christum treibet*," translated "what points to [teaches, or manifests] Christ," became his principle of selectivity. He explained, "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if a Peter or Paul taught it."<sup>36</sup> Luther called this principle of selection the "Christological" principle and used it as a "canon within the canon,"<sup>37</sup> a rule within the totality of Scripture, to determine which parts of the Bible point to Christ. Those parts which he felt point to Christ are the true Scripture. What Luther found to be deficient, he could designate a "letter of straw" (viz. the letter of James). This principle caused distinctions of authority in the Bible. It was not based on something the Bible claimed for itself.

Luther may have been the first to distinguish between the Word of God and Scripture (Bible) in Reformation times. Scripture as a whole consists of the sixty-six books of the Bible, but the "*Word of God is not to be regarded as identical and coextensive with the Holy Scripture*,"<sup>38</sup> he said. Ironically, while Luther rejected the Pope as final authority on the meaning of Scripture, he made himself into a pope as regards what holds highest value in Scripture, although with the best

of intentions! But in this instance, as so often, the best of intentions were not good enough.

In recent years there has been an intensive search for the center (*Mitte*) in the Old Testament and the New Testament, if not in the whole Bible. This "center" is conceived as the key idea, unifying theme (J. Bright), central element (Th. C. Vriezen), fundamental principle (H. H. Schultz), unifying principle (E. E. Ellison, G. von Rad),<sup>39</sup> or the like. This modern attempt at finding a "center" is intimately related to the attempt to find in the Bible or in one Testament of the Bible an overarching principle, a "canon within the canon." Invariably, the "center" is to be used as the guiding norm for what ultimately counts or remains valid in Scripture. These attempts are largely necessitated because the Bible has been torn apart by the results of the application of the historical-critical method (also referred to as the critical historical method).<sup>40</sup> Many leading supporters of this method seek to distill some sort of central concept from the Bible to define what is essential and of abiding value for modern humankind.

Such dominant "centers" as election, promise, covenant, communion, kingdom of God, holiness of God, creation, rule of God and others have been suggested.<sup>41</sup> But there is no consensus or agreement as to what the "center" or guiding principle really is. The multiplicity of supposed "centers" leads to a pluralism of meanings for the Bible.

A similar quest for a center has been undertaken with regard to the New Testament. In this case the Lutheran scholar Ernst Käsemann suggests that the "center" of the New Testament, or the "canon within the New Testament canon," is the theme of the "justification of the godless"<sup>42</sup> (followed by others).<sup>43</sup> There is, of course, a rich variety of other suggestions for the "center" of the New Testament.<sup>44</sup>

This modern obsession with finding a superior principle of selectivity, a "canon within the canon," a superior norm within the Bible that functions as the center, has as its final goal the making of value judgments on the content of the Bible

(viz. "content criticism")<sup>45</sup> or abstracting some kind of abiding transcultural principle.

The reason for these attempts at finding a "center" is fairly evident. Those following this method have concluded that the Bible is no longer authoritative in its entirety. Something of the Bible has value for today, but not the whole Bible.

We return to the Sabbath commandment. The majority of Christians today see an abiding principle distilled from the Sabbath commandment, that of one day of rest in seven. The *norm* of the specificity of the Sabbath as the "seventh day" of every week and binding for all mankind everywhere is reduced to a *moral principle* to observe a day of rest after six days of labor. The keeping of the Sabbath on the "seventh day" is made optional. The principle departs from the plain and explicit meaning of the identity of the "seventh day" to one day in seven days. According to this principle a *literal* seventh-day Sabbath is but a *ceremonial* symbol applicable only to Jews,<sup>46</sup> namely to another people in another time. Evidently any principle of selectivity breeds pluralism in faith and practice.

Foot washing as practiced by Jesus has been viewed in the light of ancient custom, as something valid for another time and place but not for today. Indeed the wearing of open sandals, the dry climate, and the dusty roads did make foot washing in the Near East a familiar practice of hospitality. It is argued, "While recognizing that Jesus' performance utilized the common custom . . . Spiritual cleansing was the primary emphasis in the act . . ." <sup>47</sup> Most Christians today wish to recognize only "the primary emphasis," that is, the principle of spiritual cleansing, without following the explicit command of Jesus that his followers "ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:7). Based on "time and place" one could argue that since our customs have changed and few of us live in the Near East, there is no need to wash feet as Jesus commanded. In this case, what counts is the principle of spiritual cleansing. Furthermore, if one were to defend foot washing today as a

binding act based on the collective decision of the church, one would imply that decisions of the church have authority superior to that of the Bible. In place of these possible rationales based on modern culture a true follower of the Bible follows the Bible in all matters relating to faith and practice, foot washing included.

As we return to the matter of the "center," we recognize that there is an inability of scholars to agree on such a magic "center" for the New Testament (or the Old Testament, or the entire Bible). This demonstrates that "any selection . . . is bound to be subjective and arbitrary."<sup>48</sup> Even supporters of a "canon within the canon" admit that one "cannot make the 'canon within the canon' into the canon."<sup>49</sup>

Every suggestion for a "center" seems to be based on a preunderstanding grounded in the selector's own situation, circumstances, time, and place. Do not such attempts seek to be more Gospel-like than the Gospel, and in the end to be more Christ-like than Christ? We have seen that the principle of selection is shaped by modern concerns, pragmatic needs, political interests, cultural norms, and the like. Christ said authoritatively, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:37). He also said, "You search the Scriptures, . . . and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Contrary to Christ's emphasis on the totality and binding nature of Scripture, there is a "subjective arbitrariness"<sup>50</sup> in any attempt at choosing a principle of selection. Time and again a given preunderstanding based on modern socio-cultural foundations is at work. The acceptance of the Bible in its fullness as the standard of truth is opposed to all such endeavors. Any principle of selection no matter how well intentioned, or any number of such principles, tend toward limiting the total truth of Scripture in its entirety.

#### Scripture in Its Totality

Space does not permit us to develop in depth the varieties of views concerning the relationships between the Old and the



New Testaments.<sup>51</sup> On the basis that “all Scripture is inspired [*theopneustos*] by God” or “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16)<sup>52</sup> and that “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21) in the prophetic word of Scripture, there is an undergirding and essential unity throughout all Scripture, consisting of both Testaments. Unity and continuity are assured because both Testaments are the work of the same triune God and given by the same Holy Spirit. Unity in diversity is explicitly stressed in Hebrews 1:1, 2, “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he has appointed the heir of all things through whom he also created the world” (RSV). It is the same Father who spoke through the prophets and through the Son. The diversity of inspired Bible writers, who wrote at different times and places unfolding different aspects of truth, “broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds.”<sup>53</sup>

Without reciting the voices of numerous theologians on the reality of the unity of the whole Bible,<sup>54</sup> it is imperative to gain an insight from the pen of the “messenger to the remnant.” Ellen White has addressed the issue of the “totality of Scripture,” its unity in diversity,<sup>55</sup> the relationship of both Testaments to each other, and the concept of unfolding revelation in most profound ways.

Ellen G. White never used the expression “progressive revelation.”<sup>56</sup> This may come as a surprise. Ellen G. White put the concept of “unfolding of truth” in place of the reinterpreted idea of “progressive revelation.” For her, truth was always there, but the understanding of truth on the part of humans was limited. Thus God gave through various inspired prophets in various times an unfolding of the truth that was already available. Humans unfortunately are limited in their understanding and thus have often been unable to see the whole truth at any time. It seems appropriate to quote a few examples of the rich treasure from her pen: “The Old

Testament does not present a religion to be superseded by the New. The New Testament is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old.”<sup>57</sup> Instead of “progressive revelation” where later writings and ideas are seen as representing a superior development or evolution over earlier ones, Ellen G. White presents the alternative concept of advancement and unfolding. She maintains that

many who claim to believe and teach the Gospel are in . . . error. They set aside the Old Testament Scriptures, of which Christ declared, ‘They are they which testify of me.’ In rejecting the Old [Testament], they virtually reject the New; for both are parts of an inseparable whole.<sup>58</sup>

“The Old and the New Testament are inseparable, for both are the teachings of Christ.”<sup>59</sup> The Old and New Testaments are an “inseparable whole”; neither Testament can stand without the other. The Old Testament presents a torso-like appearance without the New Testament and the New Testament has no foundation without the Old.

Each Testament depends on the other, illuminates the other, unlocks the other, and unfolds the other. Ellen G. White is clear on this interdependence and reciprocity. “. . . the Old and New Testaments [are] . . . an inseparable whole—the one depending and illuminating the other.”<sup>60</sup> Thus there is “need to return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.”<sup>61</sup>

“The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ.”<sup>62</sup> Ellen White also holds that the “doors of the New Testament are unlocked with the key of the Old Testament”<sup>63</sup> and *vice versa* “the New Testament explains the Old.”<sup>64</sup> In this way “the Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture.”<sup>65</sup> “By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of Scripture will be evident.”<sup>66</sup>

What did Christ the Lord of lords and the Teacher of teachers reveal? Did he provide in His teachings a revelation

that superseded what had come before Him? Note the words of Ellen White on this subject:

Christ's lessons were not a new revelation, but old truths which he himself had originated and given to the chosen of God, and which he came to earth to rescue from the error under which they had been buried.<sup>67</sup>

Elsewhere she stated,

His [the Lord's] sayings were to the disciples as a new revelation; but they were not. He was but unfolding the old truths, long obscured. . . . He appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures, laying open in a clear light the spiritual truths that had become obscured through tradition and misinterpretation.<sup>68</sup>

The truth could not be fully perceived because of tradition and/or misinterpretation, but not "because God has sought to conceal truth."<sup>69</sup> The concept of unfolding of truth is supreme. There is no "progressive revelation" in the modernistic sense of discarding earlier revelation but instead a constant unfolding of truth.

But what about "new truth"? "In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new."<sup>70</sup> Here is another revealing sentence, "In all His teachings He [Christ] dwelt upon the *unchangeable positions* of Bible truth" (emphasis supplied)<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

In short, Christ maintained the unity, totality, and full authority of the entire Bible as Scripture without any qualitative distinctions, and so should we. The apostles followed their Lord in this, and so should we. Ellen G. White is in full harmony with the position that the entire Bible is authoritative Scripture without any qualitative distinctions, and so should we. The Advent movement will succeed in every aspect of its challenging and glorious mission on the basis of uplifting

the totality of Scripture as the indivisible "union of the divine and the human" and the continuing authoritative rule of faith and practice. In lifting up all of Scripture we lift up the full Christ of Scripture. As God's faithful remnant in the end time we should continue to maintain the unqualified authority of Scripture, which means maintaining the unqualified authority of the Christ of Scripture and of His mission and message for our time.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The designation "modernistic" is used here synonymously with "liberal" or "progressive" as a description of the cluster of modern theological endeavor which builds theology up from a basis other than the normativity of the Bible. "Modernistic" theology builds on contemporary experience and the requirements of reason, updating theological categories to fit contemporary cultural and social norms. Thus it is by nature relativistic and subjective, lacking the certainty of absolute truth as revealed in the Bible. See Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> See the previous note.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman, "What Shall We Do with the Bible?" *Interpretation*, 25 (1971): 95-112.

<sup>4</sup> See James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990); similarly David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroads, 1981). A sharp and justified critique of the Bible as a "classic" is provided by Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 103 (1984): 3-10.

<sup>5</sup> See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); idem, "The Bible and Christian Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 48 (1980): 385-402.

<sup>6</sup> Here Karl Barth and followers come particularly to mind. See Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, pp. 39-55.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Modern Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Darrell Jodock, *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> For the multiplicity of problems in this area of pluralism, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 140-70.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. ix.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>13</sup> See A. von Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924); E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948).

<sup>14</sup> For a balanced view on this topic, see Paul R. Raabe, "The Two 'Faces' of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament," *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth*



- Birthday*, eds. G. S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Chelsea, Mich.: Book Crafters, 1990), pp. 283-310.
- 15 John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), p. 60.
- 16 Bright, p. 64.
- 17 Harnack, pp. 221-222.
- 18 R. Bultmann, "Promise and Fulfillment," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 73.
- 19 Bright, pp. 69-72.
- 20 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th revised and expanded ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 141-173.
- 21 Bright, p. 74.
- 22 Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, pp. 171-203.
- 23 See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 1/1 (1990): 18-19, 24-26.
- 24 Bright, p. 98.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 126-46, 178-218.
- 27 F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1961), p. 431.
- 28 Farrar, p. 431.
- 29 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. vii.
- 30 Ibid., p. ix.
- 31 Butler published a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* beginning Jan 15, 1884. Ellen G. White opposed his views in Letter 22, 1889; see Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:23.
- 32 See Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 12-52.
- 33 White, *Great Controversy*, p. ix.
- 34 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:709.
- 35 Ibid., p. 747. See also White, *Great Controversy*, p. viii.
- 36 M. Luther as quoted by Farrar, p. 335.
- 37 H. Strathmann, "Die Krise des Kanons der Kirche," *Das Neue Testament als Kanon*, ed. Ernst Käsemann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 41, suggests that Luther discovered a "canon within the canon" in Rom 1:17. This is independently supported by O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 297, 298.
- 38 Farrar, p. 339 (italics his).
- 39 For additional designations, see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1976), pp. 379-80; for the debate on the OT, see Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-73, and on the NT, see Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 144-66.
- 40 For a criticism of this approach, see Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985).
- 41 Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-66.

- 42 Käsemann, *Das Neue Testament als Kanon*, p. 370.
- 43 So W. Joest, "Die Frage des Kanons in der heutigen evangelischen Theologie," *Was heisst Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, eds. W. Joest, F. Mussner et al. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1966), p. 198; and W. Schrage, "Die Frage nach der Mitte und der Kanon im Kanon des Neuen Testaments in der neueren Diskussion," *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann*, eds. J. Friedrich et al. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), p. 410.
- 44 Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 144-64.
- 45 E. Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 71, explains that content criticism "is the evaluation of the adequacy of what an author says when measured by the criterion of the central affirmation [or center] which he (or the entire Bible) makes."
- 46 F. R. Harm, "Sabbatarianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), p. 963.
- 47 H. A. Kent, Jr., "Foot Washing," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 419.
- 48 Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, p. 298.
- 49 Inge Linning, "Kanon im Kanon," *Zum dogmatischen Grundlagenproblem des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (München: Kaiser, 1972), p. 271.
- 50 A. Stock, *Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments* (Einsiedeln/Köln: Herder, 1969), p. 70.
- 51 See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Unity of the Bible," *Ministry* insert (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974); idem, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-73; idem, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 140-170.
- 52 On Biblical inspiration, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1980), pp. 66-82.
- 53 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:22.
- 54 See above n. 50 for literature on this subject and also Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible*, pp. 363-76.
- 55 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:25: "And as several [Bible] writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony."
- 56 A review of the new CD-ROM disk of the Ellen G. White materials now available reveals that the expression "progressive revelation" is absent from her writings.
- 57 Ellen G. White, "That I May Know Him", p. 208.
- 58 Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1902, p. 6.
- 59 Ellen G. White comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington D. C.: Review & Herald Publ. Assn., 1957), 5:1094.
- 60 Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:255.
- 61 White, *Great Controversy*, p. 205.
- 62 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 462.
- 63 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 579.
- 64 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.
- 65 White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 462.
- 66 Ibid., p. 187. Ellen G. White also insisted that to interpret a scripture passage without paying proper attention to its Biblical context was to "wrest" it. See, e.g., *Great Controversy*, p. 521.

<sup>67</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1689.

<sup>68</sup> Ellen G. White, "Christ's manner of Teaching," *The Signs of the Times*, Feb. 29, 1892, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Example and Teaching of Our Redeemer," *The Watchman*, April 23, 1907, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127.

<sup>71</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 313.

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## THE ROLE OF THE CENTRIST THEOLOGIAN IN THE CHURCH

By E. Edward Zinke

Silver Spring, Maryland

Throughout history, some individuals have changed very largely the way their contemporaries thought about God, mankind, and the world. For example, Plato, Aristotle and Kant, whether right or wrong, were catalysts for such radical key changes in world views.

Major movements have also vitally altered prior ways of viewing the world. The Reformation was such a movement. It was a religious and theological movement. Our thinking, it declared, ought not to be founded on tradition, whether of the church or otherwise, or on church councils, the pope, nature, or reason, no matter how useful these might be for other purposes. Rather, the foundation for our world view and faith must come solely from the Bible, the Word of God; hence the Reformation concept, *sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone.

A few occasions stand out in our personal lives as particularly memorable. My visit to Constance, Germany, is one such key event in my life. I stopped to meditate at the place where John Hus and Jerome of Prague were burned at the stake approximately a hundred years before Martin Luther started the Reformation. I contemplated the significance of their lives and their willingness to die for the Word of God.

A large boulder has been located at the place where Hus was killed, commemorating his martyrdom. After meditating for a few moments, I walked around the boulder and noticed



on the other side an elderly lady sitting on a park bench. She seemed to have lived nearby all of her life and probably had sat on that bench numerous times. As a good American tourist, I lifted my camera to take a picture of the rock. This startled the woman. She looked at the camera, then at the rock, then back at me. She walked around the rock looking at it the entire way, then back at my camera. Then she walked down the street, apparently wondering why this tourist wanted a picture of that boulder. Did she understand its significance?

Do we?

I wonder if we do understand the significance of the rock—the Word of God. It is part of our heritage. It was accepted as foundational to the existence of our Seventh-day Adventist church; but how many of us understand its full significance?

For the Reformers, accepting the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) meant that no other source of authority could function as the foundation of their theology, their thinking, or their lives. True believers during the Reformation did not turn to the church or church councils, nor did they turn to reason, empirical data, or existential experience. Rather, they turned to the Bible as the foundation for their faith and life. This did not mean that they felt that God had never spoken through the church, church councils, the pope, the natural world, or reason. It simply meant that for them the Bible was the authority by which they would determine how God had spoken, what He had said, and how what He had said should fashion their teachings and their lives.

They rejected the idea of building their system of thought and life on both the Bible *and* the church. They also refused to build on the Bible *and* tradition, the Bible *and* the pope, the Bible *and* reason, the Bible *and* nature, and—to extend the principle to our day—the Bible *and* history, science, psychology, sociology and existential analysis. Instead they said, “The Bible *alone* is our foundation.”

The Seventh-day Adventist church inherited and adopted

the concept of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone. Time and again the pen of inspiration reminds us of this. For example,

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority,—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.<sup>1</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist church arose within the context of the idea that the Bible is the touchstone of truth. As a church we assumed and adopted the concept that the Bible was the authority for our doctrine, for our lives, and for our manner of thinking. Our church depended on the Bible to provide the lens through which the world was to be viewed. We were the people of the Book. In practice, the Bible was our authority; in principle, however, not everyone seems to have understood the issues involved in the acceptance of that authority.

The authority of the Bible was assumed by our pioneers without grappling with the issue of Biblical authority. Later in our history we had to come back to the issue of Biblical authority. Our concerns to begin with were largely with doctrinal issues, which we approached from the adopted base of the authority of the Bible. To be a Seventh-day Adventist was, for some, to attend church, observe the Sabbath, pay tithe, believe in the conditional immortality of the soul, and have some understanding of 1844 and the Judgment.

Along with *sola Scriptura*, our church inherited from the Reformers the concept of righteousness by faith. The issue of salvation was not much discussed by our pioneers to begin with; it was taken for granted. But later our church found it essential to explore the issues relative to salvation. In the process, we came to a fuller recognition that a Seventh-day

Adventist is a person who has assented to specific doctrines and adopted a unique lifestyle, and who has also received by faith the righteousness of Christ and thereby entered into a personal relationship with Him as the Lord of life.

As an aside, it is important to note that there is a relationship between *sola fide* (by faith alone) and *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). When the latter principle is lost, the former is also eventually lost. When the Bible is no longer accepted as a divinely given supreme authority, then one must produce a human "work" such as philosophy, science, or history, in order to come to a faith in the existence of God and to prove that the Bible is His Word from sources external to the Bible. A human work is considered necessary in order to achieve the faith by which we are saved! But contrary to all such notions, salvation remains a gift. "It is not of works lest any man should boast."

Faith is not based on human philosophy, history, or science. (See 1 Cor 1-2). Faith is itself the substance. (See Heb 11:1). Faith is not produced by human effort; it is the gift of God (see Eph 1:8) that comes by hearing "the word of God" (Rom 11:17). Instead of being founded on man's knowledge, faith in the Word of God is the foundation of man's knowledge. (See Heb 11:3). Faith comes from the power of God rather than from the wisdom of man. (See 1 Cor 2:5).

#### Accommodating to Humanistic Reasoning

Since the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist church is centered on doctrine and lifestyle, some believers have come to think that doctrine and lifestyle may be separated from the Bible. In the view of these persons, the Bible was useful as a source book but not necessarily as an all-encompassing foundations. Pointing to other foundations for truth and faith their thought processes have begun to think in categories parallel to humanistic ones of the world around us. Some of them have begun to feel that reason and sense experience are the ul-

timate criteria for truth—and in doing so have gone a long way toward becoming humanists themselves.

A humanist is not necessarily an atheist or an agnostic. A humanist may not even be a secularist. A humanist may believe in God and desire to center his life in God. But the humanist, broadly defined, grounds his thinking in something other than Scripture. The humanist's preferred sources of knowledge are the natural world, human reason, sense data, experience, moral impulses, the will, and so on, each or all of which in some way become the foundation for his thought processes and thus the foundation for his qualified acceptance of God and the Bible.

Looking back over and assessing my life from the convictions that I hold now, I have to admit that I was raised and educated in our church as a kind of a humanist. I even earned two seminary degrees, without becoming fully aware of what was driving me in my intellectual and spiritual life. Although I knew some people who spoke about the absolute authority of Scripture, the Bible seldom functioned for me in the role of an absolute authority. The history classes I attended were not taught (to my recollection) from a Biblical philosophy of history as I understand it now. History and its interpretation were simply a matter of looking at historical "data" as if they were neutral and could be analyzed without guidance from the Divine hand. The task of the historian, I was taught, was to discover the "truth" wherever it might lie. The impression was left that the Bible was not the standard of truth, of all truth. Similarly, the psychology course I took found no foundation in the Biblical concept of the nature of man. Rather, the observed "data" were presented as the substance from which models of psychology were to be constructed. My psychology professor occasionally introduced something from the Bible and Ellen White but his doing so did not change the overall impact. In other classes I was taught to believe in the worldwide flood because it could be proven scientifically, not because the Bible recorded it to be factual. The existence of



God was supported by various philosophical arguments rather than by Scripture.

I want to be clear that my teachers were devoted, spiritual men and women. A number of them accepted and practiced the authority of Scripture in their lives; and I am grateful for their example. Furthermore, there were other voices, voices that acknowledged the full authority of Scripture for all thought and life.

I will have to admit, judging from my current perspective, that I was a well-educated "Adventist humanist." When such a person attends a secular university, as many of our young people are doing all over the world, there is little reason to remain an Adventist except as a "cultural Adventist," i.e. as an Adventist who likes the culture and the lifestyle of the religious community in which he grew up. There are also professors who are no more than "cultural Adventists." But heritage alone will not maintain a person as a vital link in the church and its mission, because other sources of authority are accepted to be either equal to or higher than the Bible function in decisive ways. In my view, the kind of "cultural Adventism" with the humanistic foundation that I have just described, and that many students have been exposed to and have consciously or unconsciously accepted in North America, is the seed bed of liberalism in our church. By the time students so molded leave our schools and go to a university they are preconditioned to follow the norms of the professors in the universities. In turn new secular ideas from outside educational institutions are brought into our church. But the beliefs of real Adventism are not founded in reason, sense data, or existential experience. They are grounded in the Bible. Anyone who does not accept the full Bible as highest authority cannot remain a Seventh-day Adventist in the fullest sense of the term.

When a Seventh-day Adventist theologian, scientist, or scholar questions the literal six-day creation of Genesis 1, the miracles recorded in Scripture, the giving of the Decalogue by

God on Mount Sinai, the unity of the book of Isaiah, the presence of bodily resurrection in the Old Testament, the historicity of Genesis 1-11, the authenticity of the words of Jesus in the Gospels, Christ's miracles, or the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, church leaders, administrators, constituents and parents understandably take alarm. It should be recognized that when a person reaches such conclusions it is usually the result of stepping onto a humanistic path years earlier.

#### Common Foundation Eroding

It seems fair to say that current theological discussions within the Seventh-day Adventist church are taking place at quite a different level from those of previous Adventist generations. The Adventist pioneers dealing with the identity of the kings of the north and south in Daniel 11, the interpretation of the "daily" in Daniel 8, the time for beginning the Sabbath, clean and unclean food in Leviticus 11, health reform, and the like, were in principle united in their acceptance of the Bible as their authoritative foundation for the binding answer. Today it appears that this common foundation has been eroding. Today it is the Bible itself, its role and authority, that is under question.

A basic uneasiness is felt by many Adventist lay people and church leaders that something in the church is wrong. They find it difficult to pinpoint the true causes of the problem. May I submit that the crisis in the life and theology of our church today—particularly in the North American Division and in other first world countries—is due in large part to an insufficient understanding of the issues surrounding the authority of the Bible for faith and practice?

Who wants to be the bearer of bad news? We like positive information and "good news." Too often I wonder why it is all right for an Adventist theologian to discuss the theology of such a figure as Karl Barth and how he differs from, say, Emil Brunner or Thomas Aquinas, and how his influence extends

into the present, but consider it awkward to discuss our own theological issues. Are we perhaps too close to home, too afraid of being attacked by brothers?

But should we shrink back from the challenges which confront us? Would we be faithful disciples of our Master if we hid our heads in the sand, or refused to look the issues in the face? Are we trying to hide something from someone? Is it not important for us to understand where theological trends within our church come from and where they may take us? Surely it is important for us to understand where we are with reference to the authority of Scripture in all of our thinking and doing. If we are unwilling to face the issues head on, will we be able to solve our problems constructively? Our entrusted stewardship of faith gives us little choice. There are times when even silence creates guilt.

More and more concerned Seventh-day Adventist parents are asking, "Where should we send our children to attend academy (secondary school) and college? Where will they get a Christian education based on Biblical rather than humanistic philosophy? Where will they be taught to think Biblically?" The parents who are asking these questions do not wish to spark a witch hunt. God forbid! But they do want us all to refocus on what counts most in genuine Christian, Adventist education. Meanwhile, students in various schools are being exposed to teachings that are radically divergent from the Bible and our historic positions. More and more pastors, parents and church members are asking questions regarding these matters, and rightfully so.

#### Liberal Versus Centrist

While labels can be misleading, it is necessary to find categories under which to discuss issues. Therefore, without attaching a pejorative meaning to terms, we will speak of the "liberal" and the "centrist" theologians in our church. (There are also some "right wing" persons in our church, but it is not the task of this paper to address their theology). There are

variations within both groups of theologians, of course, and some are to the left and to the right of the centrist theologians. Furthermore, the centrist is not in the right simply because he is in the center. The term "centrist" is appropriately applied only when Scripture is at the center of all theology. Some liberal theologians and scholars in our ranks prefer to designate themselves "progressives," a term used widely outside the Adventist framework for liberal theologians.<sup>2</sup>

Progressive theologians construct their theology on foundations other than those of Scripture. They do not wish to invoke the Bible's divine authorship and resultant unity as normative. The Bible is not accepted as the Word of God, nor is it considered self-authenticating. They reject or radically modify the Reformation principle that the Bible is its own interpreter. "Progressive" theologians use Scripture, but verify or interpret it from without. Truth to them is truth "wherever it may be found," and the Bible is not the final norm for testing all truth. They utilize external criteria to test the truth of the Bible. They apply methods of interpretation used for any other document, past or present, to the Bible as if the Bible were but a human book. Therefore, they employ the historical-critical methodology.

In sharp contrast to progressive theologians, centrist theologians base their methods of interpretation on the internal witness of the Bible, its own internal self-testimony. They acknowledge the divine authorship and resultant unity of Scripture. They allow the Bible to be its own authenticator and interpreter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Both centrist and progressive theologians desire to address the world. Progressive theologians feel that to reach the public, they must reinterpret Scripture according to the philosophies and norms of contemporary society. Centrist theologians argue, on the other hand, that, while communication must certainly be intelligible, the Bible is a heaven-given deposit of truth that confronts the world and must not be compromised by the world. They attempt to address the world



with the message of Scripture—no matter how radical it may seem to contemporary minds—in such a way that the world is challenged to renewal and conformity to Scripture. Their goal is conversion.

Liberal (or progressive) theologians make reason, or some other human norm, equal to the Bible and, in the end, superior to it, stating that nature and the Bible must be harmonized on some basis outside the Bible. Centrist theologians see Scripture as providing the foundation from which such harmony is to be experienced. They regard scientific deductions as valid only when they harmonize with the divine revelation of Scripture.

Progressive theologians hold that one cannot start simply with the Bible but should instead begin with reason or some other accepted norm. Centrist theologians accept reason as a tool and gift of God but reject the idea that reason or some other aspect of man can be made the foundation and structure of a believer's world view and theology.

A house must be built on a foundation with walls, windows, and a roof. Each component is essential and has its own proper function. But a house could scarcely remain a house if the roof became the foundation. Likewise, reason, culture, or any other norm must not be placed where the Word of God belongs. The Bible must remain the blueprint and foundation of one's theology, life, and thinking.

#### Distinctive Teachings Essential to Mission

The Seventh-day Adventists need to reaffirm the authority, internal unity, and full inspiration of Scripture. They need to reaffirm the Bible's authority in matters of science and history, including its accounts of a literal creation in six days, a single worldwide flood, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the truth of miracles, the final phase of the ministry of Christ that began in the real heavenly sanctuary in 1844, and an imminent, literal, and visible second coming. Is the mission of our church at all related to our message? Will

our church lose its identity, if it loses its distinctive teachings? Will our church remain itself, or will we become something else?

When the distinctive message of a church is lost, its mission centers in social concerns, even in liberation theology with its use of arms, rather than in the urgent need of men and women to become God's special people and to spread the distinctive Biblical messages of Christ's soon return.

#### Are "Progressives" on the Cutting Edge?

Surprisingly liberal (or progressive) theologians use the same language as centrist theologians—but they infuse it with new meaning. Thus, a new message, a new mission, a new theology are garbed in centrist language, making Adventists a different but not a renewed people. There are liberals (or progressives) in other churches, such as Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Lutherans (Missouri Synod) and so on, and we can learn from what they have done in their communities of faith. We are seeing the results of progressives in our community of faith.

Does this mean that self-proclaimed progressives are at the creative edge of Adventist theology? Are not progressives rather bearers of an amalgamation of thoughts and traditions stemming from the rationalism of the Enlightenment and various other forms of humanism? They are promoters of traditions incompatible with the foundational concept of *sola Scriptura*.

Progressives, we must be aware, ordinarily seek to change the church gently so that the church will not realize that it is being changed. They dare not move too quickly lest they sever the support of administration and funding provided, ultimately, by an unsuspecting conservative membership without which they cannot exist. They pull back if they sense that they have pushed their views too quickly and wait a while to test the waters. One successful approach used by progressives in attempting to alter the church is to take

control of its educational institutions, the intellectual power base of the church. In this way, young and formative minds can be carefully and subtly educated in "progressive" ways of thinking with only minimal disturbance to the laity at large.

Progressives seldom operate by discussing issues clearly and openly. They state theological positions cautiously and with implications glossed over or hidden. They prefer to minimize or discredit other points of view. While they insist on pluralism, tolerance, equity, and fairness, it has been seen time and again that whenever they gain control they deal out the opposite of what they demand. Why is there a constant push to replace centrist theologians, to discredit them, or to maneuver politically to block them from filling available positions?

One beneficial result of all this is that in recent years the mainline position of the church has had to be restated and finely tuned in contrast to the liberal position of progressives. Thus, the theology of mainline Adventism has been deepened and more thoroughly articulated.

Some church members have wondered what justification there is for the church to permit control of leadership in many of our educational institutions and publishing ventures to be vested in the hands of progressives. Is it that boards do not know who is who; or are there more complicated reasons? The real threat to the message and mission of the remnant church is from within, and it is even more subtle than any from without.

Progressives play a role in the church. But it is one that is as competitors against their own team, for their "progressive" philosophy and goals conflict with the Biblically based mission and message of our church.

Ethics! Our solid and conservative lay people have sacrificed to make the church what it is, to build its institutions and to support its administration, ministry, and teachers. The laity have sent their young people to be strengthened and renewed in their faith in our institutions.

Do progressives have a right to accept the funds and use the institutions developed by a laity that is overwhelmingly centrist? Would it not be more forthright, although perhaps suicidal on the part of the progressives, for them to declare their motives openly, make clear the origin and implications of their theological methods and Biblical interpretations and proclaim forthrightly their final goals?

These questions are not intended in any way to control the freedom to think or to explore new regions of knowledge. These questions are presented instead as a searching plea in order that the entire church may discuss them fully and exhaustively and accept whatever may be in harmony with the norms of the authority Scripture.

We are now presented with a golden opportunity in the history of the Advent movement—to unite our church on the principles of the Word of God. It is tempting to be complacent, to minimize the problems, and to take a "head-in-the-sand" approach when it comes to problems associated with the liberal, progressive wing of the church.

#### Church Must Reaffirm Its Theology

Administration plays a key role in supporting centrist theology. This centrist theology is Bible-based and Ellen White-affirming, and it represents the belief system of the vast majority of Adventist ministry and laity. It holds a bright future for the church and its renewal. If the church is to continue to be itself, it must reaffirm its theology.

Evangelists and pastors have an interest in the discussion. Their task is certainly at stake because their role depends upon "the message" and "the truth," upon a clear "thus saith the Lord." Treasurers have a stake in the issue. If we are no longer sure what God has said, we have little reason to sacrifice our tithes and offerings to support the proclamation of our message. The secretariat will want to consider its role. Why should an Adventist accept a mission assignment if there is no clear purpose, mission, and message associated



with that assignment? Missionaries, after all, are not social workers or anthropologists. They are God's messengers, sent out to bring a final warning message of salvation to a world doomed to die.

The space shuttle program of the United States was hampered for awhile by an O-ring problem that slowed the program nearly to a standstill. Are we not ourselves now faced with an O-ring problem? Is there not a justifiable feeling that something is wrong; and some have suggested possible solutions? So far, there have been few major catastrophes, but we continue to face the possibility of a Challenger disaster.

With concern many have read the *Washington Post* transcription of the dialogue between the pilots of the Air Florida flight that crashed in the Potomac after brushing a bridge because of iced wings. Before takeoff, the pilots chatted over coffee about the ice problem, even complaining that the wings were required to be de-iced. Their complacency cost the lives of many people including their own.

Do you know how to boil a live frog? I am told that a frog will immediately attempt an escape if thrown into boiling water. But a frog placed in cold water will not panic if the water is heated slowly. As the water reaches higher temperatures, the frog will never realize what is happening to him.

For the last twenty years or more, centrist theologians in the Seventh-day Adventist church have been a source of a renewal compared to that of Reformation times. They have been working at the cutting edge of theology in the church and beyond the church. By the grace of God and with the guidance of the Bible and the pen of Ellen G. White, they have initiated and fostered a deepening understanding, renewal, and affirmation of the beliefs of God's remnant church. They have strengthened the Biblical concept that the Bible is the basis of our understanding of God, man, and the world. The centrist has been at the heart of what the church is through teaching, preaching, researching, and writing. Rather than reformulating the theology of the church into a modernistic

structure, the centrist has rethought it from the standpoint of the authority of Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. Tremendous strides have been made in the understanding of Daniel and Revelation, the judgment message, the authority and centrality of the Bible and its attending method of interpretation, flood geology and creationism, to mention but a few areas. The work is by no means finished or complete, but the results have been substantial.

May I suggest that centrist theologians continue to consider additional areas of exploration as long as time lasts. The initial work on the nature of the Ellen White writings from the perspective of revelation needs to continue. There are extensive studies to be undertaken on the nature of the church, the nature of Christ, the nature of man, and the area of ethics. Deep explorations need to continue into the relation of Scripture to science and the humanities. These studies will make significant contributions to the church, provided they are conducted with respect for the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

The ongoing revival or strengthening of the authoritative role of the Bible within the church gives us a tremendous opportunity. Let us keep the Bible as the basis of our unity. Let us press together as administrators, pastors, evangelists, educators, health professionals, and lay workers to proclaim the three angels' messages from within the context of the entire Biblical message to a world living at the very end of time. May we glorify our soon coming Saviour in these endeavors.

Based on the right foundations and the humble efforts needed to protect these pillars of our faith, the future of the remnant church is a bright and glorious one—soon to culminate in the most splendid revelation of Christ to the world ever seen since He left this earth.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

<sup>2</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern*

*Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 15-33, designates the modern liberal theologian as "progressive" with the following definition: "Progressive theologians are those who are very impressed by the new insights and burning issues of their day and insist that Christian theology address them, even if to do so means major revisions in the beliefs Christian theology has formerly affirmed" (p. 15).

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## ANOTHER LOOK AT ADVENTIST HERMENEUTICS

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Hardly a more sensitive topic for discussion exists among Seventh-day Adventists than the question of how to treat the Bible. Although this issue lies near the heart of what matters to us most deeply, there is nonetheless a clear difference of opinion among us concerning it.

Two fundamental questions are worth examining, both essential to the lifeblood of the Advent movement. First, does a Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutic exist? Second, assuming the first question is answered affirmatively, can we confirm it? Free from commitment to status quo, we remain ready to examine on a recurring basis any previously accepted premise, recognizing that our understanding is always partial if human reason is a component. While we accept that which God has revealed, when it comes to the question of our understanding of it, we must examine the merits of each case.

### Does a Seventh-day Adventist Hermeneutic Exist?

In dealing with our first question, can we say a Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutic exists? Prior to 1950 there seems to have been substantial unity on the essentials, although not always yielding the same results. We could cite such exceptions as the king of the north, Armageddon, and sometimes rambling discussions on Daniel 11. There was agreement, however, on foundations, agreement that the Scriptures are



valid and authoritative; and that they contain authentic reports of God's acts both within human experience and beyond it; and that they remain the authoritative court of final appeal in matters of faith and practice.

Second, Scripture was understood quite literally unless coercive evidence suggested otherwise, evidence such as allegorical passages, literary figures of speech, prophetic symbols, typology, and obvious poetic constructions.

At the same time, Seventh-day Adventists gave continued attention to Biblical backgrounds, ancient Near Eastern history and Biblical archaeology, and Biblical languages. The study of backgrounds was intended to illuminate the Scriptures and garner evidence of their trustworthiness, not to provide arguments for reinterpretations or to conjecture new ideas of Biblical origins and teachings. Theology transcended sociology, anthropology, and critical studies, all three at that point already 150 years in the making. Adventists held a high view of Scripture, approaching it with a sense of respect at times bordering on reverence. Its meaning was enriched by the study of history.

The influence of Ellen G. White was important but not definitive. Where she made firm assertions with respect to meaning it was taken seriously, although the final meaning of the Bible was not determined by her statements. In general, this was the main frame of Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutic until around 1950.

Today this hermeneutical approach is criticized by some internal critics as naive, and to a point their observations have some validity. In many ways Adventist hermeneutics had been hammered out under the fire of non-Adventist critics. Unquestionably we reached certain conclusions which later measured consideration changed; for instance, relying on the "this generation shall not pass" (Matt 24:34) as a time marker for the second coming. Such minor abuses deserved correction and have received it; but such anecdotal problems hardly provide grounds for the disassembly of the entire hermeneuti-

cal mechanism built upon long experience. The real question is not "Were there errors?" but "Was the whole sound?"—and "Was it a help or an obstacle to the discovery of God's will?"

Today we face a much different picture. Another school of thought is developing on different premises. It maintains that the traditional Adventist hermeneutic has good features, but it insists that a major change is now in order along rather different guidelines. The proponents of the new hermeneutic demand (1) that it be designed to cope with troublesome problems, the "issues," rather than be structured to enhance our grasp of the main lines of Biblical teaching. In addition (2) it must factor in newly discovered challenges drawn from the social and natural sciences and adjust the understanding or interpretation of the Bible accordingly.

(3) The new hermeneutic must give greater weight to background cultural influences, or historical conditioning, as molding elements in the Biblical text and its theology. (4) It must recognize that the text has a developmental history and that the interpreter must accordingly select what can be accepted as firm, given the premise that influences on formulation of the text must be reconsidered at each given stage of development.

(5) It must recognize that our own contemporary biases impose meanings on the text, calling into question the idea that the reader can study an ancient document and, on that basis, find specific guidance for today. This (they say) requires a mediating interpretive level between the ancient text and contemporary application, one that abstracts from the text concepts that, upon careful consideration, may be found useful for the modern context. The mediating level involves a rational analysis that all but dismisses the possibility that a teaching might transfer directly from the ancient text to today. (6) The new hermeneutic disallows doctrine to influence the meaning of the text. Each text must be left to speak for itself without drawing from what other texts or Biblical authority figures tell us it should mean. (7) The new hermeneutic gives weight

to the alleged changing nature of revealed truth so that "present truth" needs to coincide well with modern value systems heavily indebted to Enlightenment humanism.

Unfortunately hermeneutics and theology are fad-ridden enterprises. Anyone with 30 years' experience in this field has witnessed the waxing and waning of at least five or six "theologies" and various hermeneutical systems, each acclaimed as the answer, but each quietly jettisoned to obscurity after a few years, leaving nevertheless a residual touch upon those who have abandoned it. Existentialism, God-is-dead theology, the theology of hope, and others gave way to a theology of liberation, and now a theology of stewardship (ecology) each resting on revision of the meaning of the Biblical text.

The "new hermeneutic" of the 1960s gave way to the structuralism of the 1970s. Now there are post-structuralist hermeneutics and reader-response oriented criticism, and so on.

The result is that we have among Adventists today more or less two hermeneutics, one the historical Seventh-day Adventist approach with minor modifications, the other a hermeneutic based on substantially differing foundations as we have described above. This latter involves modalities prominent in historical criticism (or the historical-critical method) but which claims to have purged its most obvious humanistic presuppositions, such as denial of the supernatural.

This dichotomy is well-illustrated by the discussion that followed the 1986 Annual Council approval of a document entitled "Methods of Bible Study." Although the bulk of the document was filled with practical suggestions especially for laypeople, three paragraphs of the preamble addressed some essentials of historical criticism.

Within two months following its approval the document was taken to task publicly at a meeting of Adventist Bible teachers, many of whom took strong exception to its rejection

of the historical-critical method, especially the sentence, "Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists." For well over an hour the preamble of the document was subjected to vigorous criticisms, although a proposed resolution of rejection was abandoned as injudicious. Several speakers charged that the members of the scholarly community had been denied a voice in formulating this document. However, correspondence from these persons on this subject was found later in the files of the Biblical Research Institute. The question was not that they had not been involved, but rather that in the end another point of view than theirs had been adopted.

The crux of the question is whether a blending of the historic Adventist approach with historical criticism is possible. Some argue that much in historical criticism is helpful in exegesis and theology. Ultimately a great deal rests on whether historical criticism is actually a system or whether it is simply a pool of isolated techniques that can be drawn upon pragmatically according to individual usefulness.

Comparison reveals that both hermeneutics have elements in common, but that there are significant differences in the way even these common elements are used. A case in point is the function of historical background studies. We may dismiss at the outset the most radical position that mythologizes all Biblical reports to the point of complete disregard for their authenticity. Those among us who practice the new hermeneutic do not defend such extremes. As noted earlier, historic Adventist hermeneutic maintains high interest in the study of backgrounds for the light they throw on the Scriptures. But these backgrounds do not determine the final meaning of the Bible.

The historical-critical method accords a decisive role to backgrounds, but there is profound difference between the usages in the two hermeneutics. The historical Adventist hermeneutic seeks to know how the background contributed



to events and teachings as the Holy Spirit transmitted divinely-given content within a local environment. In contrast the historical critic pursues how events as reported in the Bible could have arisen from the background such as we know it. This is treated as a normal historical process within a given culture. While supernatural activity is not necessarily denied in history, it is not accorded the likelihood of having shaped history in a decisive way. The approach used by historical critics may be willing to concede an existential or even mystical insight on the part of the person transmitting the report to us but it will not and cannot allow the full supernatural character of the Bible.

Although historical criticism and traditional Adventist hermeneutics do share a strong interest in background studies, how much do they really have in common? What they share is coincidental, because of the way the background functions is different. Although the historical Adventist hermeneutic performs certain functions historical criticism also performs, the aim and use to which these functions are put are so divergent that we can hardly call them shared functions. When interpreting meaning we enter immediately into areas controlled by governing presuppositions, which for the critical method are in conflict with genuine respect for the self-claims of God's Word. As a system, historical criticism is at such odds with God's self-revelation that no merger or blend of systems is possible without grave jeopardy to genuinely Biblical faith.

#### Can We Confirm the Historical Adventist Hermeneutic?

Two additional elements are worthy of brief attention. The first is epistemology, in essence how we know something. Inquiry here leads us into more fundamental questions yet, for it measures the building blocks of meaning, both at the personal level and that of world view. Some have labeled this field philosophical theology, a forbidding title indeed!

Momentous changes are taking place here. Thought

structures of 400 years' standing are coming apart. Contemporary thinking rests on a philosophical system based on (1) naturalism, the premise that our environment, properly studied, can yield satisfying understanding without reference to God; (2) optimism, the premise that since humans are capable of understanding, understanding leads to inevitable progress; (3) objectivism, the concept that the study of our environment must take place in a manner free from subjective opinion, governed by precise laws; and (4) materialism, in this setting meaning that all that is important lies within time and space and can be analyzed with high levels of precision, especially with mathematical tools.

Presently those scientists in touch with the universe in its extremities, with astronomical physicists and nuclear physicists in the lead, are presenting reports of a universe of such proportions that an organizing mind beyond nature must be postulated if what can be observed is to be coherent. Despite punctuating the equilibria of the evolutionary scale, biologists remain light years behind.

In addition there is an increasing sense of human corruptibility. A humanity that can conquer smallpox seems unable to contain the human greed that draws civilization ever closer to self-annihilation. Both Michael Polyani and Thomas Kuhn, neither "contaminated" with born-again Christianity, have conspired to perform a demolition of the supposed objectivity of science that demands a new examination of its foundations.

Voices from the contemporary community are calling now for the return of the supernatural to modern methodologies. These trends are accelerated with the widespread collapse of Marxist theory, which was the logical culmination of the modernist system.

Those working in Biblical hermeneutics must take note of these radical changes, for their impact on the immediate future will be profound. It is ironic that some among us, generations late in boarding the modernist bandwagon, have

stepped on board just as the contraption is beginning to disintegrate.

Ultimately a major criterion in deciding what hermeneutic should be followed lies in its fruits. Does our hermeneutic lead to a Christ-centered experience in which the Word testifies of Him? Does it produce a clearer grasp of what the Word actually says? Does it produce a clear definition of the will of God? Does it point up the abysmal lostness of humanity and the magnitude of God's rescue, as well as a grander global understanding of His sovereignty over all? Does it build a strong sense of mission and desire for unity in the church, firing up zeal for outreach to our neighbors? Does it lead to numerical and spiritual growth of the family of God and provide practical strength in meeting temptation? Does it lead to a resolve to be prepared for Jesus' early return in the clouds of heaven? Only such a hermeneutic carries the marks of being genuinely Adventist and will provide the framework for a growing understanding of God's will.

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## SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST DOCTRINES AND PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

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Progressive revelation has played an important role in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist church and its theology. By "progressive revelation" I mean God's continuous unfolding of prior revealed truth.<sup>1</sup> Without such progressive revelation, the unfolding of inspired truth building on truth previously revealed and never denying it, the Seventh-day Adventist Church would not exist.

Throughout their history Seventh-day Adventists have looked forward to discovering or receiving additional truth that would harmonize with prior truth. Ellen G. White, one of the principal founders of our church, kept this hope alive with statements such as: "Truth is an advancing truth"<sup>2</sup> and, "There are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker."<sup>3</sup>

In speaking of "truth" she always meant truth as given by God in His divine Word.

The preamble to the 1980 statement of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists reflects this attitude:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's



understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.<sup>4</sup>

This article looks at some trends among Seventh-day Adventists, having to do with the operation of progressive revelation.

#### Some Current Trends

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have viewed new light as something positive, a continuation or unfolding of previous revelation.

At times, however, some members have been skeptical of progressive revelation out of fear that it would destroy the foundations of Adventism. Such a fear was displayed at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference and during its aftermath. Ellen G. White responded frequently with appeals for openness to further understanding.

Today some members feel a need for significant changes in methods of Biblical interpretation and doctrine, and a transformation of the understanding of the Adventist experience. Among the underlying assumptions for their thinking is that our doctrines are not based simply on the Scriptures but rather they represent our church's understanding of what the Bible teaches at a particular time and place. They claim that our doctrines reflect the specific culture in which our community operated at the time of its formation. Consequently, the time has come they say, for indigenized theologies such as an African Adventist theology, an Asian Adventist theology, and a European Adventist theology.

The role of doctrine in the community of believers is both to safeguard the faith once delivered and to communicate the community's religious experience. At the first formulation of doctrines these two dimensions are integrated into the lives

of the believers. Doctrine clearly reflects harmony with the religious experience of the pioneers.

After the passing of the founders, a second, third, and fourth generation come onto the scene who, living in a changing society with different challenges and having a different religious experience, can still affirm the truth in one way or another but may feel it has lost its relevance. Thus there arises a call for change in doctrinal formulation, for a "present truth" adapted to current times and places.

The view just presented gives the impression that doctrines are open-ended, that they are molded by the interaction of the community of believers in its socio-cultural settings with the Scriptural testimony as understood in those settings, that whatever the community later decides on is acceptable as progressive revelation. But this view is not necessarily correct.

#### Doctrinal Developments

Analysis of the doctrinal statements of the Seventh-day Adventist church over the years is revealing. The early statements of 1872 and 1889 show clearly the impact of the 1844 experience on the Adventist pioneers. They thus demonstrate an integration of belief and religious experience.

The 1872 statement consists of 25 articles. These articles include the main truths of traditional Christendom, such as the doctrines of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, baptism, and the new birth, but clearly call attention to the distinctive doctrines that came as the result of proper progressive revelation and that contributed to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The 1872 formulation of Adventist doctrines gave an explanation of the nature and historical fulfillment of prophecy, revealing that the mistake of Adventists in 1844 was not related to the prophetic time calculations but to the nature of prophesied events. Christ began the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary as the antitype of the Day of Atonement

in 1844 as Scripture taught. They call the period since 1844 a time of investigative judgment, during which the blotting out of sins takes place for the righteous dead as well as the righteous living. Since the 1840's God has sent a proclamation symbolized by the three messengers of Revelation 14 that magnifies the law of God and its role in preparing people for the second advent of Jesus Christ.

In 1889 three additional articles were provided, concerning Christian conduct, modesty of dress, and tithing and freewill offerings—bringing the number of articles to 28.

In 1980 a thorough revision and rewriting of the Fundamental Beliefs was undertaken in which the articles were arranged more or less in categories of systematic theology: the Doctrine of God (1-5), the Doctrine of Man (6-7), the Doctrine of Salvation (8-10), the Doctrine of the Church (11-17), the Doctrine of the Christian Life (18-22), and the Doctrine of Last Things (23-27).

This new arrangement undoubtedly has advantages for comparing Seventh-day Adventist beliefs with those of other churches. However, in the process the Seventh-day Adventist distinctive doctrines lost some of their distinctiveness, because of the usage or superimposition of categories taken from the discipline of systematic theology.

Will people who join the Adventist Church exclusively on the basis of a limited exposure to the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs have a different religious experience and doctrinal view than earlier Adventist believers? This may indeed be so, because the belief system and faith experience are not as integrated as was the case for earlier believers and can lead to an attitude that some doctrines are irrelevant or outdated. On the other hand, those persons who have been exposed to the structure of doctrines in categories of systematic theology as set forth in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (1988) may develop a greater understanding of them than those who do not have such an opportunity.

Some Adventists have attempted a rewriting of the Fun-

damental Beliefs in the context of Christ and the cross. Others have called for doctrinal changes in order to increase the relevance of our beliefs to the religious experience of the present generation—even though it was as recent as 1980 that the current rewriting was undertaken and voted at the General Conference session held in Dallas. For the very purpose of updating them and bringing them together into a more relevant and harmonious unity.

What direction should the Adventist Church take to make its beliefs more relevant to its members as well as to the Christian community and the world at large? It seems that no matter how carefully one tries to rewrite the doctrines, or change their sequence and or categories, there will continue to be a demand for change, additions, and eliminations.

#### How to Understand Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines

In conversations between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Dr. Paul Schwarzenau, the WCC representative, made a significant observation. He said,

Prior to and underlying every particular church doctrine, however objectively it may be based on biblical exegesis and theological argument, are experiences of faith which have left an indelible mark on that doctrine and are the source which consciously or unconsciously determines the questions, inquiries and teachings of the church in question. The living resonance of the Protestant, "Scripture principle" rests on the fact that Luther had earlier experienced in the depths of despair the converting power of the Gospel (his so-called "tower experience"). And it is very much to the point that Adventist doctrine is rooted in and derives strength from an event which Adventists later referred to as "the great disappointment" (October 22, 1844).<sup>5</sup>

Schwarzenau concluded that "the full truth of a church's doctrine is therefore not yet grasped so long as, in its details or as a whole, we see it in isolation from such events and as mere doctrine."<sup>6</sup>

Anyone who wants to understand the soul and genius of



the Advent movement and wishes to perceive the full truth and continual relevance of its beliefs will never succeed as long as the current fundamental beliefs are studied in isolation from the action of God in the 1844 Advent experience.

The 1844 Advent experience “opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great Advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.”<sup>7</sup>

It was a progressive revelation that illuminated the past, present, and future of God’s loyal remnant people.

Many arguments used by those who seem to be dissatisfied with the relevance of doctrinal formulation have to do with a failure to see Adventist theology in the context of God’s opening providence at the time of the origin and rise of the Advent movement. The need to participate mentally in the 1844 Advent experience is one of the most crucial challenges for every Seventh-day Adventist and those desiring to understand the movement.

Emphasizing the crucial significance of understanding the past Adventist experience, Ellen G. White stated: “As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”<sup>8</sup>

She considers it of sacred importance for ministers and people to recapture God’s providence in this original Advent experience. A revival of this experience is indispensable to the relevancy of the church’s doctrines for believers and its proclamation to the world. She challenged believers “to revive and recount the truths that have come to seem of little value to those who do not know by personal experience of the power and brightness that accompanied them when they were first seen and understood. In all their original freshness and power these truths are to be given to the world.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet as vital as this experience is, Ellen G. White called on

believers to search for additional light, because God is more than willing to bestow additional light that harmonizes with previous light.

The questions now to be explored are: In what way should we expect progressive revelation to affect Adventist doctrines? What new doctrinal developments can we expect in the near future? Will some doctrines be replaced by others? How does new light change doctrine and the interpretation of Scripture? Is appropriate change to be determined by majority opinion? But before coming to these questions let us examine briefly the principles under which proper progressive revelation operates.

#### Operating Principles of Progressive Revelation

Ellen G. White’s comments have been quite influential. Many believers have quoted her views, especially those who have advocated a need for a change in doctrinal formulation. It is, therefore, most appropriate to analyze her views on advanced or new light.

**A. Nature and relevance of advanced light.** The light of truth advances constantly (Prov 4:18). Ellen White wrote that “we shall never reach a period when there is no increased light for us.”<sup>10</sup>

“In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation.”<sup>11</sup>

This further development of truth and the new light, also designated as present truth, “is a test to the people of this generation”—who are accountable for truth that past generations were not accountable for.<sup>12</sup>

**B. Its true source.** God is the source of advanced truth. “If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error.”<sup>13</sup>

**C. Particular areas of advancement.** The areas of advancement are associated in a special way with the practical dimen-

sions of Christian life. They touch upon matters necessary for the perfection of the faith and of the faithful.<sup>14</sup>

New light is intended to lead God's people "onward and upward to purity and holiness."<sup>15</sup>

One particular area of potential advancement is light on the character of God. Ellen G. White wrote, "It is our privilege to reach higher and still higher for clearer revealings of the character of God."<sup>16</sup>

And because Christ is the key to our understanding of God, it is vital for us to wrestle with truth "as it is in Jesus." We must bring "Jesus before the churches and before the world."<sup>17</sup>

Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scriptures looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The work of our Redeemer on this earth is and ever will be a subject that will put to the stretch our highest imagination. . . . The most diligent seeker will see before him a boundless, shoreless sea.<sup>18</sup>

Another special area for advancing light is Christ's righteousness.<sup>19</sup>

It is God's desire that finally "one interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,—Christ our righteousness."<sup>20</sup>

When this one interest does prevail, the brilliance of God's final message of mercy will illuminate the entire world. (See Rev 18:1.)

Additional light is to be expected also on final events,<sup>21</sup> the book of Revelation<sup>22</sup> and the antitypical significance of the Jewish economy.<sup>23</sup>

**D. Conditions for Reception.** The prerequisites for the bestowal of new light mentioned by Ellen White generally focus on individual spirituality. They involve diligent and prayerful study of the Bible,<sup>24</sup>

living a righteous life,<sup>25</sup>

growing in grace,<sup>26</sup>

having a vital connection with Christ,<sup>27</sup>

walking obediently in present light,<sup>28</sup>

purging sin from the life,<sup>29</sup>

having an attitude of humility,<sup>30</sup>

following the light of health reform,<sup>31</sup>

accepting and applying the old truths,<sup>32</sup>

accepting the Spirit of Prophecy,<sup>33</sup>

being chosen and illuminated by the Holy Spirit,<sup>34</sup>

and advancing in proportion to the light.<sup>35</sup>

**E. Harmony with previous revelation.** Ellen G. White stressed a close relationship between old truth and new truth:

1. **NEW PERSPECTIVES OF OLD TRUTH.** The long established truths of redemption continue to offer new perspectives, "though old, they are ever new, constantly revealing to the seeker for truth a greater glory and a mightier power."<sup>36</sup>

2. **AN UNFOLDING OF THE OLD.** "The old truths are all essential;" "new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. . . . It is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old. He who rejects or neglects the old does not really possess the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form."<sup>37</sup>

3. **IN HARMONY WITH THE FOUNDATIONS OF ADVENTISM.** New truth always will be in harmony with previous truth and will not divert the attention from Christ or the special Seventh-day Adventist mission.<sup>38</sup>

Progressive revelation understood in the proper sense in no way diminishes the relevancy of the truths upon which the Seventh-day Adventist church was founded. Ellen G. White cautioned: "Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundation of truth that has made us what we are."<sup>39</sup>

"Not one pillar of our faith is to be removed. Not one line of truth is to be replaced by new fanciful theories."<sup>40</sup>



The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise and still another, with new light which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. . . . We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories. . . . And while the Scriptures are God's word, and to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake.<sup>41</sup>

4. IN HARMONY WITH THE LANDMARKS. Ellen G. White strongly defended the theological landmarks of Adventism that were discovered around the time of 1844. "Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast," she said. "They are seeking to bring in uncertainties as to set the people of God adrift without an anchor."<sup>42</sup>

In 1889 she defined the landmarks as follows:

The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angel's messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, "The Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks.<sup>43</sup>

5. IN HARMONY WITH THE HISTORICIST HERMENEUTIC. Seventh-day Adventists interpret Scripture in a way similar to that of the Reformers and William Miller. Ellen White had a high regard for Miller's rules of interpretation, five of which she especially recommended.<sup>44</sup>

Miller's rules were part of the historicist method of prophetic and Biblical interpretation.

### The Acceptance of Progressive Revelation by the Church

Great care must be taken in the introduction of purportedly "new light."

A. Attitudes towards new light: Ellen White called for an openness to new light and strongly opposed the attitude that we have all the truth for our time.<sup>45</sup>

New light is not a private affair, for no one should claim that he or she has all the light.<sup>46</sup>

The investigation of new ideas is important. She stated:

Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us; for if it is truth, we need it. We are all under the obligation to God to know what He sends us.<sup>47</sup>

Ellen White illustrated the correct attitude toward new Scriptural insight with her personal experience in 1844.

In 1844, when anything came to our attention that we did not understand, we kneeled down and asked God to help us take the right position; and then we were able to come to a right understanding and see eye to eye. There was no dissension, no enmity, no evil-surmising, no misjudging of our brethren.<sup>48</sup>

B. Procedure for discussing new light: The way in which new light should be discussed is crucial. The Bible must be studied "with fasting and earnest prayer before God."<sup>49</sup>

The Bible is the norm for the evaluation of any new point. It is the "standard for every doctrine and practice. . . . It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies. . . . God's Word is our foundation of all doctrine."<sup>50</sup>

The baptism of Holy Spirit is indispensable for the elimination of the spirit of prejudice. "When the Spirit of God rests upon you there will be no feeling of envy or jealousy in examining another's position; there will be no spirit of accusation and criticism, such as Satan inspired in the hearts of the Jewish leaders against Christ."<sup>51</sup>

**C. Tests of new light:** The following tests are recommended to determine the genuineness of new light:

1. IS IT CHRIST-CENTERED? Ellen White recommended a simple test to determine new light: "Does this light and knowledge that I have found, and which places me at variance with my brethren, draw me more closely to Christ? Does it make my Saviour more precious to me and make my character more closely resemble His?"<sup>52</sup>

2. TO THE LAW AND THE TESTIMONY. God "has given direction by which we may test every doctrine,—'To the law and to the testimony if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' [Isa. 8:20]. If the light presented meets this test, we are not to refuse to accept it because it does not agree with our ideas."<sup>53</sup>

3. DOES IT PRODUCE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS? The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit which attends the advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true and Christlike, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth. But if he acts as did the Jews when their opinions and ideas were crossed, then we certainly cannot perceive such testimony, for it does not produce the fruits of righteousness.<sup>54</sup>

#### Implications for Adventist Doctrines

From the above discussion of the way progressive revelation operates it is clear that the doctrines Adventists hold are not open-ended or in a state of flux, ready to be changed at any time. We shall briefly list some implications of progressive revelation.

**A. The impact on current doctrine.** New light will not manifest itself in a form that is altogether different from the light the church already possesses. It will take the form of a further advancement of present truth. It is a fuller, clearer, and brighter unfolding of the old truth. There will be harmony with the theological landmarks, the Spirit of Prophecy, and

historicist principles of Bible interpretation. Thus it will not replace, substitute, radically change, or tear down the foundations of Adventist faith and practice.

**B. Expected new doctrinal developments.** Further developments can be expected, particularly in the areas of presenting the truth "as it is in Jesus." All teachings should be viewed in the light of Christ our Righteousness. Christ our Redeemer is "the center of all our faith and hope."<sup>55</sup>

The "sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster."<sup>56</sup>

**C. Conditions for changes.** All changes, whether in doctrinal positions or elsewhere, are controlled by the careful application of the revealed guidelines for the reception of new light.

First and foremost, the spirituality of those calling for change and claiming new light need to be examined. This is vital because God reveals new light only to those who diligently and prayerfully study the Scriptures, who live righteous lives, are growing in grace, and have a living connection with Christ. They have purified sin from the life, and attempt to walk obediently in the present light. They live in harmony with and support the full messages of the Spirit of Prophecy and are advancing in proportion to the light already given.

Suggestions for doctrinal change should be investigated, not simply by administrators, but by brethren of experience, who are diligent Bible students. The investigation should be done with fasting and prayer, calling upon God for a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Personal investigation is crucial. No one is infallible. No one should rely on the views of others. The Bible must be the norm by which any light is to be investigated and tested.

Every one should be clear on what the old landmarks are and support them. All prejudice should be eliminated so that everyone involved approaches the investigation with an open mind.

Finally, the tests for new light must be applied: Is it in



harmony with the law and the testimony, the Bible in its entirety? Does it support the Spirit of Prophecy, or is it in disharmony with it? Does the change produce a greater Christ-centeredness? Will it bring fruits of righteousness based on the foundation of the Bible as the Word of God?

During the investigation there should be ample time given to the study of the Scriptures in all its aspects. Nothing can be rushed. Nothing can be decided by a majority vote. When the procedures outlined above are followed, God will not leave His church in doubt about what direction it should take. When God is leading His people into further truth, the study of the Scriptures, together with prayer and fasting, will lead the body of believers as a whole to a general consensus just as He did in 1844 at the time of the Great Disappointment and its aftermath.

D. Change by majority vote. When the church follows proper guidelines for the evaluation of new light it can expect unity of faith and practice. If the body of the church, i.e., the General Conference in session, has taken an action on a point, then it is best for believers to let an issue rest for awhile, because further agitation at the time has the potential to divide and destroy the unity of the church. Majority votes by groups or committees are not the way to decide on Bible truth and doctrinal change.

During the Reformation the majority of Christians continued to follow the traditions of an apostate Christianity. The Reformers were a minority who dared to challenge the apostasy in Christendom with the Bible as the final norm of faith and practice.

It happened the same way during the nineteenth century second advent movement that had a great impact on many Christian denominations. Yet it was only a remnant of these churches that decided to submit themselves to the full teachings of the Bible. That remnant separated itself from other ecclesiastical organizations which placed creedal statements and man-made traditions above the Word of God.

These experiences in the history of the Christian Church are a lesson for us today. It is possible that, as in the past, a part of God's people will gradually slip into apostasy, give up their respect for the Bible as the final authority for all faith and behavior, and depart from Bible doctrines and practices.

When this takes place, a remnant, inspired by Scripture and the Testimony of Jesus, will continue to call upon God's people to return to the Word of God. Their mission will be successful in spite of heavy losses. The firm assurance is given that at the very end of time

God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one or all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support.<sup>57</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 For a critical discussion of contemporary usages of the concept of "progressive revelation," see Gerhard F. Hasel's essay, "The Totality of Scripture," in this issue.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 33.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:204.
- 4 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 1986 ed., p. 23.
- 5 Paul Schwarzenau, *So Much in Common* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1972), p. 106.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Diary*, Jan. 31, 1890; *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 2:574.
- 10 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:404; White, *Testimonies*, 5:650.
- 11 White, *Object Lesson*, pp. 127, 128.
- 12 White, *Testimonies*, 2:693. Cf. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 42, 43.
- 13 White, *Early Writings*, p. 124.
- 14 Cf. White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 48.
- 15 White, *Testimonies*, 5:534.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 464.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 259.
- 18 White, *Object Lessons*, pp. 128, 129.
- 19 Ellen G. White, MS 9, 1890; *1888 Materials*, 2:537.

- 20 White, *Sons and Daughters*, p. 259.
- 21 White, *Testimonies*, 2:692, 693.
- 22 White, *Object Lessons*, p. 133.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 27; White, *Sons and Daughters*, p. 259; White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 35.
- 25 White, *Writers and Editors*, pp. 34, 35.
- 26 White, *Testimonies*, 5:706.
- 27 White, *Editors*, p. 35; White, *Object Lessons*, pp. 130, 131.
- 28 Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 310; cf. White, *Testimonies*, 2:67.
- 29 White, *Ministry of Healing*, pp. 464, 465.
- 30 Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, "Be Zealous and Repent," Dec. 23, 1890.
- 31 White, *Testimonies*, 2:67, 70.
- 32 White, *Object Lessons*, p. 127; White, *Testimonies*, 5:369.
- 33 White, *Life Sketches*, pp. 198-200.
- 34 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 297; White, "Be Zealous."
- 35 White, *Testimonies*, 5:534.
- 36 White, *Object Lessons*, p. 127; cf. *ibid.*, p. 130.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.
- 38 White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 49.
- 39 Ellen G. White, MS 62, 1905, p. 5.
- 40 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 96.
- 41 White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 32; cf. White, *Selected Messages*, 2:115; Ellen G. White, MS 62, 1905, p. 5.
- 42 White, MS 62, 1905, p. 5.
- 43 Ellen G. White, MS 13, 1889, p. 3., *1888 Materials*, 2:518.
- 44 Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.
- 45 White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 33.
- 46 White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 107; White, *Great Controversy*, p. 343. For Biblical support she referred to Job 11:7; Isa 55:8, 9; 46:9, 10.
- 47 White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 301.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- 49 Ellen G. White, MS 13, 1889, *1888 Materials*, 2:517; Ellen G. White, "How to Meet Controverted Points of Doctrine," *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1990; *1888 Materials*, 2:534.
- 50 Ellen G. White, Letter, Aug. 5, 1888.
- 51 *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890; Ellen G. White, MS 2, 1890; Ellen G. White, "Open the Heart to Light," *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1890; Ellen G. White, Letter, Jan. 7, 1890.
- 52 White, *Testimonies*, 3:444.
- 53 White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 301.
- 54 Ellen G. White, Letter, March 13, 1890.
- 55 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 172.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- 57 White, *Great Controversy*, p. 595.

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## IN CONFIRMATION OF THE SANCTUARY MESSAGE

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For the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, "the subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people."<sup>1</sup> In 1906 Ellen G. White affirmed that "the correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."<sup>2</sup> For a century and a half the doctrine of the sanctuary has continued to lie at the foundation of Adventist theology and mission and has remained the most distinctive contribution of Adventism to Christian thought.<sup>3</sup>

The unique Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the sanctuary has frequently proven to be a storm center for disagreement and criticism both within and without the Adventist church.<sup>4</sup> Because in the decade of the 1980s considerable agitation once again surrounded this basic tenet of faith, Adventists have been constrained anew to rigorously test the soundness of their sanctuary teaching against the standard of God's Word.

The past ten years have brought agonizing doubts for many; for some it has meant rejection of the historic Adventist



interpretation of the sanctuary doctrine; and for some it has meant the rejection of Adventism *en toto* and the withdrawal of their membership.

Just ten years ago, in the summer of 1980, the Glacier View Conference took place.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of that momentous meeting, I had opportunity to read the 991-page published version of the document around which the Glacier View discussion had centered.<sup>6</sup> I freely admit that questions were raised that I had never considered before, questions which struck at the heart of the pioneer Adventist understanding of the sanctuary, Daniel 8:14, and the investigative judgment. As I read I encountered many arguments that, on the surface at least, seemed to have considerable weight.

At that time several of my colleagues from pastoral days were leaving the ministry and the Adventist church. They urged me to read additional material that they considered cogent refutations of the sanctuary doctrine held by Adventists. I read, and again had to admit I did not have satisfactory answers to many of the arguments used.

These experiences made me determined to study the truth of the sanctuary doctrine for myself—to get to the bottom of the issues. I consciously decided that I would be willing and ready to leave the Adventist church if its teachings on this most crucial doctrine were not Biblical.

Long months of wrestling with Scripture and agonizing in prayer followed. I was not alone in my study; during this time many of my colleagues, and others throughout the church, persevered in plumbing the depths of the Scripture teaching on the sanctuary. We determined that our criterion should not be, “What do commentaries and theologians say?” but “What does Scripture say?” I can testify to the presence of God’s Spirit of truth working mightily at Andrews University and elsewhere in the earnest searching of God’s word during those years. I am deeply indebted to many—too numerous to mention by name—whose insights have helped me along the way. I am indebted particularly to the Daniel and

Revelation Committee that was appointed by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to grapple honestly with issues raised at Glacier View and elsewhere. I am also deeply indebted to the detractors, because they have forced me to face squarely the crucial issues and not sweep anything under the rug.

The past ten years since Glacier View have convinced me that God in His providence has allowed these issues to be raised to stimulate Seventh-day Adventists to dig deeper into God’s word, to ground every belief more firmly on a “Thus saith the Lord.”

My testimony concerning the results of the past decade of Biblical study regarding the sanctuary is straight-forward: I have become overjoyed as I have seen ever more clearly that the Adventist sanctuary doctrine can stand the test of the closest investigation. Point by point the objections and questions in my mind have steadily melted away like hoarfrost before the warm light of Scripture. My conviction of the truthfulness of the historic position of Adventists on the sanctuary message is stronger than it has ever been before, and now it is a more informed conviction, based upon better reasons than I dreamed existed.

My study these past years has yielded not only better reasons for believing, but deeper insights into the old truths. The sanctuary doctrine, once dry and irrelevant to me, has come alive. I am excited about the sanctuary, yes, even about the investigative judgment! Deeper study into the sanctuary message has not caused me to remove a single pin or pillar of the old landmarks, but rather, a close investigation has made the sanctuary truth shine even more brilliantly and revealed in it greater beauty and richness than I ever imagined I would find.

In the presentation that follows, I wish to share with you some of these fresh, rich insights into the sanctuary doctrine that have been gleaned recently by various students of Scrip-

ture among us and that have given even greater reason to believe and rejoice in this profound truth.

#### The Preadvent Investigative Judgment

One of the points most widely rejected in recent critiques of Adventist sanctuary teachings is the idea of a preadvent, investigative judgment of God's people.

I was excited to find that the idea of an investigative judgment taking place in the sanctuary in heaven is supported by far more than the few standard Biblical texts that we have used traditionally. In the first volume of the Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, *Selected Studies of Prophetic Interpretation*, William H. Shea, the associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, has examined at least 28 different Old Testament passages outside of Daniel, all of which deal with judgment from the sanctuary.<sup>7</sup> In 20 of these 28 passages the judgment being discussed concerns the professed people of God. A number of these passages clearly involve the aspect of investigative judgment from the heavenly as well as the earthly sanctuaries.

The Old Testament passages on judgment from the sanctuary that occur outside of Daniel include all of the essential elements of the investigative judgment that Adventists have seen within Daniel. Even the word "investigative," which many claim is non-Biblical and for which they believe some other term should be substituted, is explicitly mentioned. For example, in Psalm 11:4 and 5, the Lord is said to *bachan*, to "examine, investigate," the children of men, from His heavenly temple.

Numerous other passages exist, besides the 28 cited in Shea's study, that do not mention specifically that the sanctuary is the place of judgment. But they do indicate God's *procedure* for dealing with His professed people before executive judgment is meted out. This procedure is often given a technical name in the Old Testament—a *rib*, or covenant lawsuit—and it regularly involves a divine *investigation* of the

evidence before sentence is pronounced upon God's professed covenant people. Note, for example, the covenant lawsuits or investigative judgments described by Hosea and Micah upon the Northern Kingdom, and that of Malachi in the post-exilic period.<sup>8</sup>

But perhaps the most dramatic and illuminating of the examples of an investigative judgment of His professed covenant people conducted by God is found in the first ten chapters of Ezekiel.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Investigative Judgment in Ezekiel

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, wrote in the last days of Judah's history before the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the monarchy. His task was to give God's last warning message to the professed people of God before the close of their probation as a monarchy and they would experience the executive judgment. Ezekiel especially is instructive for us in the last days because the book of Revelation is indebted heavily to Ezekiel; in fact Revelation follows the basic structure and detailed descriptions of Ezekiel even more than it does the book of Daniel.<sup>10</sup>

In particular, note that the picture of the seal of God and the close of probation in Revelation 14 and 15 is built on the passage in Ezekiel 9, where a mark is placed on the forehead of those sighing and crying for the abominations in Jerusalem. John the revelator's extended citations and allusions to Ezekiel 1-10 in his portrayal of God's dealings with His people in the last days give us a clue that the events surrounding the end of probation for Judah as a monarchy may be seen as a microcosm or type of God's antitypical procedure of dealing with His professed people before the final close of probation.

And what was God's procedure in Ezekiel's day, in the closing years of Judah's history before the curtain was pulled—before executive judgment was meted out? The procedure was an investigative judgment, conducted over an



extended period of time, from the most holy place of the sanctuary.

In Ezekiel 1, dated July 592 B.C., God came riding upon His celestial chariot, sitting on his *movable throne*. Does this remind you of the movable throne in Daniel 7? The description of the wheels and wings show movement, that God is going somewhere. Where? Ezekiel 9, 10, a vision given the prophet some 14 months later, show us where God was headed in Ezekiel 1, for the time of the later vision He was leaving the most holy place of the Jerusalem temple where He had taken up residence.<sup>11</sup>

In Ezekiel God comes to the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary for an extended period of time. But why has He come? Ezekiel chapters 3-8 give the answer. Israel is arraigned before the divine tribunal. There is a covenant lawsuit, an investigative judgment, not of the world at large, but of the professed people of God.<sup>12</sup> In chapter 8, the list of charges proceeds from lesser to greater until the climax comes in verse 16, the sin which causes God to bring down the curtain, with the words, "I will not spare." What is the climactic issue, the sign of rebellion, that brings the close of probation to Judah?

And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord; and behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty five men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun toward the east (Eze 8:16).

Worshipping the sun! Does this sound familiar in terms of the last great issue in Revelation, false worship centered in the day of the sun?

In Ezekiel 9, the investigative judgment has ended. The result has been a separation of the professed people of God into two classes: those who really serve Him, who sigh and cry over the abominations done in the city, and those who profess, but do not really serve Him, but rather practice a counterfeit worship. The former receive the mark on their foreheads, the mark of the *tav*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet: they

are the faithful remnant. The latter are in line for the execution of the sentence.

What then is God's procedure? *Before* the executive judgment He conducts an investigative judgment of His professed people in which He discloses a distinction is revealed between the true and false worshipers of God.

Ezekiel reveals not only the divine procedure before the close of probation, namely an investigative judgment, but also the attitude of God at this time. God is no vengeful Judge, waiting to condemn all that He can. To the contrary, over and over in Ezekiel God cries out, "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live." (Eze 18:32; 33:11).

This attitude can be perceived also in the way God leaves the temple at the conclusion of the investigative judgment. As we read Ezekiel 10-11 carefully, we see that the celestial chariot throne does not simply rush away as it had come. God's movable throne is first waiting empty, at the south side of the temple. Then the glory of the Lord slowly mounts up from its place of residence over the ark in the most holy place. The Lord moves to the threshold of the temple and pauses. Then in His chariot, He next pauses at the east gate of the temple precincts. It is as if the Lord is loathe to leave His people, as if He is waiting for still others to change their minds, to repent. He then moves slowly across the Kidron Valley, and pauses again on the Mount of Olives, as He would again pause six centuries later, the Son of man weeping over Jerusalem. The scene ends in chapter 11, with the glory of the Lord standing over the Mount of Olives. Does this picture in Ezekiel help us explain the nature of the delay in Adventist theology? Is the glory of the Lord even now hovering over the Mount of Olives, so to speak? God, with tears in His eyes, longing for more souls to come to repentance, before the curtain falls and probation closes?

Ezekiel adds a couple more brush strokes that further illuminate and enrich the picture of the investigative judg-

ment. The final chapters of Ezekiel (40-48) give a vision of a cleansed and restored Temple. And note the dateline for this vision, given in 40:1, the tenth day of the seventh month of the New Year.

That's the Day of Atonement, the day of the cleansing of the sanctuary, Yom Kippur. How crucial to note the date of the vision! The vision of the cleansed and restored temple is given on the day of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the Day of Atonement. Certainly God wants us to see the connection.

Next we note the emphasis of the book of Ezekiel upon the cleansing of the people. Ezekiel 36:25-27 presents not only a cleansed sanctuary but also a cleansed people.

Finally, Ezekiel even reveals the larger issue at stake in the investigative judgment. In chapter 36:22, 23, and again in 39:27, 28, the ultimate result of this entire divine procedure is pointed out: "Through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes" (RSV), the eyes of the onlooking nations. It is for their sakes, to vindicate the character of God before the onlooking intelligences through the experience of His people, that God acts.

To summarize, the message of Ezekiel is the message of the Day of Atonement. In the *type* presented by Ezekiel, we have the same contours as in the *antitypical* Day of Atonement of the last days. God is active in setting things right in His sanctuary, God is active in cleansing a people, and God is active in vindicating His holy name or character.

I find these insights from Ezekiel electrifying news, present truth.

#### Recent Developments in Understanding Daniel

So many rich insights have emerged recently from studies in Daniel that it is difficult to decide what to mention here. We could engage in an exegesis of Daniel 7 which clearly indicates the preadvent investigative judgment on behalf of the saints.<sup>13</sup> We could spend time on the major schools of prophetic interpretation, and show how the historicist view

was the view of the early church and of the Reformers, even though every major denomination today except the Adventists has abandoned this position.<sup>14</sup> It excites me to see how the torch of the Protestant prophetic heritage is still being carried aloft by the Seventh-day Adventist church.

We could show how the historicist view of prophecy alone is able to do justice to all the data in Daniel. The preterists must say that prophecy failed, and the futurists must posit a gap where none exists in the prophecy. But the historicists can be consistent with the entire sweep of the great time prophecies.<sup>15</sup>

The historicist interpretation is based upon the year-day principle. Yet even as I preached it in the past, I felt a little uncomfortable with supporting the year-day principle from just Ezekiel 4:6 and Num 14:34, only two texts, both outside of Daniel. If you have not yet been "surprised by joy" over recent discoveries in regard to the year-day principle, may I recommend chapters 3 and 4 of the Daniel and Revelation Committee volume *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*.<sup>16</sup> Here we find not just two or three lines of evidence but 23 different Biblical reasons for validating the application of the day-for-a-year principle to the time periods in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

Particularly exciting is the specific evidence *from within Daniel itself*. In Daniel 8:14, for example, the 2300 evenings and mornings—which grammatically by the way (with no article, no conjunction, and no plural), must refer to 2300 full days<sup>17</sup>—the 2300 days, answer the question of verse 13. Verse 13 asks, "For how long is the *vision*? the *chazôn*?" Then comes the answer, for 2300 days, is the *chazôn*, the *vision*. But what does this vision include? The first two verses in the chapter indicate that the *chazôn* includes the *entire vision*, not just part of it. This means it must at least stretch over the time of the Medo-Persian and Greek empires, which specifically are mentioned in the interpretation of the vision (vss 20, 21). Thus the 2300 evenings-mornings cannot possibly be literal days,



but must be recognized as years. Years are the only unit of time that would allow the prophecy to span sufficient time to cover the entire vision.

This internal evidence of the year-day principle in Daniel 8 is further confirmed by a comparison between the vision of Daniel 8 and the straightforward non-symbolic explanation of the vision in Daniel 11. In Dan 11:6, 8, 13, the days of Daniel 8 are explicitly called years. In verse 13, the literal translation of the Hebrew is actually "at the end of the *time years*."

Daniel used almost every conceivable way to alert us to the fact that the time prophecies do not refer to literal time. He used symbolic time *units*, such as "evenings-mornings" instead of days. He used symbolic time *numbers*, such as 2300 evenings-mornings, rather than six years, four months, and 20 days, the normal Hebrew way to express this in literal time. The same with the 1290 days (not the normal three years, seven months), and the time, two times and half a time (not the normal three and a half years). Not *one* of the time periods in Daniel's symbolic prophecies is expressed the way it would have been if it had been used to express literal time in the normal manner. Hebrew readers would naturally perk up and say, "This isn't referring to literal time." Thus in many ways the principle of a day for a year, which constitutes the prophetic key for our sanctuary doctrine, is derived from Daniel itself. I cannot speak for you, but this makes me rejoice!

I rejoice also in the further confirmatory evidence concerning the beginning and ending dates of the great time prophecies that concern the sanctuary. Regarding the beginning date for the 2300 days and the 70 weeks, you are no doubt familiar with the fascinating story of how, some years ago, the discovery and translation of double-dated Elephantine papyri from the fifth century B.C. demonstrated that the date of Artaxerxes' first decree was 457 B.C., as Adventists have believed, and not 458, as claimed by some.<sup>18</sup>

The various lines of Biblical evidence showing why this decree, and not some other, is the one which marked the

beginning of the 70 weeks and the 2300 days has been published in many Adventist sources.<sup>19</sup> But one aspect of this evidence that has come to light recently fascinates me particularly.

It has been recognized for some time that the 70-week prophecy is couched in the framework of the Levitical Jubilee.<sup>20</sup> The 490 years decreed upon Daniel's people are ten jubilee periods of 49 years each. If indeed this period is counted with reference to the Jubilee, it is natural to expect the beginning and ending dates to be jubilee years. Recent analysis of literary evidence has now made it possible to determine the precise sabbatical and jubilee dates in Biblical times.<sup>21</sup> Strikingly, the date of the decree of 457 B.C. alone, not of the other possible decrees, is a jubilee year.

No less stirring is the confirmation of the ending date of the 2300 days, October 22, 1844. I have heard it said quite often in the past few years that our Adventist pioneers were simple, unlearned men. They did not have the intellect or the sophistication to do responsible Biblical study, and thus we must discount many of the conclusions they reached. It is true that most of the pioneers did not have the advantage of higher theological education. It is also evident that they did not have all the light. But in my reading from the more than 1000 pages of pioneer articles on the sanctuary compiled by the Ellen G. White Estate,<sup>22</sup> I have been amazed at the way God guided those humble and teachable men to such profound and reliable conclusions.

The date *October 22, 1844* is a case in point. Scholarly detractors like to point out that the Adventist pioneers chose a date for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) that was proposed by an obscure Jewish sect, the Karaites, rather than taking the date accepted by the mainstream rabbinic tradition, which in 1844 came a month earlier than October 22. I fear I might have simply chosen the date calculated by the Rabbis if I had been alive in 1844. But not so the pioneers. They did their homework. It happens that the rabbinic cal-

ulation of the beginning of the religious year was and still is based upon fixed intercalation cyclical formulas for adding a second 12th month to bring the lunar calendar in line with the solar calendar. The procedure is linked to the spring equinox and *not* to the Judean barley harvest moon stipulation given in Scripture and thus often sets the festival dates one month too early. Only the Karaites, who rejected all rabbinic tradition and accepted *sola Scriptura* in 1844 still preserved the Biblical method for reckoning the festival dates, thus arriving at October 22 as the correct date for the Day of Atonement.<sup>23</sup>

I understand that shortly after 1844 even the Karaites abandoned the Biblical method of reckoning. I am thankful God kept them faithful to the Biblical method until 1844. And I thank God for His leading of our pioneers in solidly founding this doctrine upon Scripture rather than on tradition.

For those who may still be skeptical about the Karaite calendar, God has recently raised up another witness to the accuracy of the date October 22, 1844. Through study of Babylonian astronomical and mathematical data, it is now possible to arrive at the precise date for the Day of Atonement in 457 B.C. and by mathematical calculation to establish the modern equivalent for this date in 1844. Such a study was recently undertaken by William Shea and clearly demonstrates by mathematical and astronomical reckoning, independent of the Karaite calendar, that *October 22* is the correct date for the Day of Atonement in 1844.<sup>24</sup> We have a sure and firm foundation for our faith!

The Adventist interpretation of the date indicated by the text of Daniel 8:14 is solid, and so is the interpretation of the *significance* of this date. There is no space here for a detailed exegesis.<sup>25</sup> But note the following striking point: the word for “cleansed” in Daniel 8:14 is *nitsdaq*. It comes from a root that has such a breadth of meaning that it cannot be captured by a single English word.<sup>26</sup>

Three basic English nuances are associated with this

Hebrew word: (1) to “set right/restore” (as emphasized, e.g. in Isa 46:13), (2) to “cleanse” (as emphasized in Job 15:14; 4:17; and 17:9), and (3) to “vindicate” (as in Isa 50:8).

According to Hebrew thought patterns, it would not be unusual if all three of these English nuances were communicated in a single occurrence of this word. The context of Daniel 8 indicates that this is precisely the case in Daniel 8:14. In verse 13, we find a three-part question that can literally be translated: “For how long is the vision: (1) the *tamîd* (or ‘continual’), (2) the transgression that causes horror, and (3) the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled under foot?”

According to this verse, three problems exist. First, there is the *tamîd* (or “continual”), which according to vs 12 is taken away. This word *tamîd* is used in the Pentateuch to describe the various parts of the *daily service* in the sanctuary and therefore antitypically refers here to the “continual” or *daily* mediation of Christ. The passage warns us that an apostate power would attempt to substitute an earthly priesthood and salvation by works for Christ’s mediatorial ministry.

Second, there is the “transgression which causes horror,” which, according to verse 12 (as recognized also by noted non-Seventh-day Adventist commentators), is the transgression of the host, i.e., the sins of the saints.<sup>27</sup>

Third, there is the trampling underfoot of the sanctuary and host—the persecution of the saints, and yet more than persecution. In ancient thought, a host or army being trampled underfoot meant that the god of the host was weak and undependable. Thus, when the sanctuary and the host were being trampled, the true God and his system of worship were being defamed.

The joyous news for all three of these problems is contained in the three-fold semantic range of the word *nitsdaq*—set right, cleanse, and vindicate.

In verse 13, first the *tamîd*, Christ’s continual mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, the sanctuary truth that was taken



away (from the people), must be *set right* or *restored*. Second, the transgression of the sins of God's people that cause horror in the heavenly sanctuary, needs to be *cleansed*. And third, the God who has been defamed by the trampling down of the sanctuary and the saints must be *vindicated*.

There are separate Hebrew words for each of these ideas, "set right," "cleanse," and "vindicate," but *one* Hebrew word alone can simultaneously encompass all of these solutions, the word *nitsdaq*.

The full message of the investigative judgment is encapsulated in a single word. Seventh-day Adventists have been charged with interpreting Dan 8:14 out of context, but a closer look at the context (vs 13), far from overturning the doctrine, reveals instead the richness of the meaning of the investigative judgment. Thank God for the good news of the restoring, cleansing, vindicating investigative judgment of Daniel 8!

#### Evidence from the Book of Hebrews

In the New Testament book of Hebrews the basic issue is a hermeneutical one that concerns the nature of typology. This was pointed out to me forcefully by a teacher at an Adventist college who, shortly after the 1980 Glacier View Conference, felt compelled to reject the Adventist interpretation of the sanctuary. He subsequently left the ministry. Here is the gist of the argument he presented publicly just before he left the school. He stated that if one remained faithful to the typology set forth in Leviticus, then the Adventists were *right* in their teaching on the sanctuary. But he felt that the book of Hebrews contradicts the book of Leviticus and time after time manipulates the type to fit the antitype. Because he believed that Hebrews, being in the New Testament, was the norm for judging what is in the Old, he felt he had to accept the interpretation of the book of Hebrews and reject that of Leviticus. Furthermore, because he thought that Ellen G. White follows the book of Leviticus and not Hebrews, he had to reject her interpretation of the sanctuary as well.

Does the interpretation of Hebrews contradict the typology of Leviticus? Or is there a fundamental continuity between sanctuary type and antitype, between Leviticus and Hebrews? Is it possible that if we think we see a contradiction between Leviticus and Hebrews, the problem may not be with Leviticus, or with Ellen White who agrees with Leviticus, but with those of us who have not dug deeply enough to see the underlying harmony between the two?

Recent studies of the interpretation of sanctuary typology in Hebrews demonstrate that the author of Hebrews does not manipulate the Old Testament type to fit the antitype, but insists upon a fundamental continuity between type and antitype.<sup>28</sup> In fact the apostle so strongly affirms this basic continuity that he is able to argue from Old Testament earthly type to New Testament heavenly antitype.<sup>29</sup> He insists upon the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, the great original of which the earthly was a copy. He also implies a fundamental continuity between the earthly and heavenly, so that the earthly copy in its basic contours is instructive for our understanding of the original.

We do not have to decide between Leviticus and Hebrews or between Old Testament and New Testament typology. They are in complete harmony.

The major contours of the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary doctrine are taught clearly in the epistle. We have, first, Christ's death as the antitypical fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. This includes *all* the Old Testament sacrifices, even those of the Day of Atonement, because according to Psalm 40, *all* of the Old Testament sacrifices were to coalesce into the one Sacrifice. (See Heb 10:1-10 for exegesis of Ps 40:68).<sup>30</sup>

Second, when Christ ascended in 31 A.D., He did not immediately commence the antitypical Day of Atonement but *inaugurated* the entire heavenly sanctuary. This is indicated explicitly by the specific Greek word *egkainizo* "inaugurate," employed in Heb 10:20 and 9:18. The nominal form of this

same word is used in the LXX for the inauguration ceremonies described in Numbers 7. Note also that the goats, calves, and bulls (Heb 9:12, 13) are the very animals mentioned in Numbers 7 and Leviticus 9 that were to be used as sacrifices for the inauguration ceremonies.<sup>31</sup>

Third, the ongoing work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary at the time when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written was not the yearly Day of Atonement ministry, but rather the daily (*tamid*), holy place ministry. Repeatedly the continuing first-century work of Christ is compared with the *daily* work of the earthly priest. (See Heb 7:25-27; 10:11-14; 13:10-12).<sup>32</sup>

Finally, from the point of view of the apostle, the Day of Atonement work of judgment was still in the future. And this concept of future judgment is not limited to Hebrews 9:23-27. In fact, George Rice has shown that the entire epistle is structured by a five-fold warning of future judgment, and that this judgment includes an *investigative* as well as executive judgment that specifically involves the *professed people of God*.<sup>33</sup> This particularly is evident in Hebrews 10:26-31.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the epistle to the Hebrews is fully consistent with Leviticus and with the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the sanctuary doctrine. Of course, Hebrews focuses primarily upon first-century Christians and thus does not provide a detailed picture of the fulfillment of sanctuary typology still future to the apostle. For more comprehensive New Testament insights into this end-time focus, we must turn to the book of Revelation.

#### Fresh Insights into Revelation

The Daniel and Revelation Committee is just completing its work on Revelation. Fresh insights have rewarded diligent research. Several of my colleagues at Andrews have made significant breakthroughs in showing the soundness of basic Adventist interpretation and at the same time have opened

new windows into the depths and richness of the sanctuary theology in Revelation.

For example, it has been shown that the book of Revelation is structured by a series of visionary sequences and that each of the visions opens with an introductory sanctuary scene.<sup>35</sup> What is more, these sanctuary scenes move in sequence through the sanctuary. In the three series of visions dealing with the entire sweep of history through the Age of the Church—the churches, seals, and trumpets—the introductory sanctuary scenes (Rev 1; 4-5; 8:2-6) focus upon the *holy place* realities of the sanctuary, and describe activities in the temporal setting of Christ's "daily" or "continual" (*tamid*) ministry there.<sup>36</sup>

Then as the focus moves to the great controversy in the final period of time before the close of probation, the fourth introductory heavenly sanctuary scene in Rev 11:19 shifts to the *most holy place*, portraying events in a temporal setting of the antitypical Day of Atonement. Kenneth A. Strand has shown that, in this same chapter (Rev 11:1) clear allusion is made to the cleansing of the sanctuary as described in Leviticus 16.<sup>37</sup>

In the fifth sanctuary scene (Rev 15:1-16:1), the angels of the seven last plagues come out of the most holy place, the temple is filled with smoke, no one can enter, and probation is closed. All that follows in the book of Revelation occurs after the close of probation.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the introductory sanctuary scenes serve to structure the entire book of Revelation, and further serve as a guide as to where we are in the sweep of salvation history as we make our way through the book. They confirm that the first half of the book is the historical part delineating the Christian age during the holy place ministry of Christ up to the time of the antitypical Day of Atonement. Beginning with Revelation 11 the book moves to the eschatological events of the investigative judgment, second advent, millennium, executive judgment, and what takes place in the new earth.<sup>39</sup>



A final word about the investigative judgment in Revelation. Many facets of this topic are involved in the book, but one aspect needs more attention in our church. If we are in Christ, what should be our attitude toward the investigative judgment? According to the book of Revelation, we need not fear the judgment but rather we can welcome and even long for the judgment. God's saints (pictured in martyrdom as souls under the altar) cry out, "How long, O Lord, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:20). This is not a spiteful cry for vengeance; it is a cry for justice. How long will it be till the appeals court in heaven investigates our cases and reverses the false verdicts of earthly courts, in order that proper justice can be affected? This has as its background the law of malicious witness in Deuteronomy 19:26-29, where the judge investigates (the literal Hebrew word here means "investigate") the case of the one maligned, and if he finds him innocent, vindicates him and executes justice against the malicious witness.<sup>40</sup>

This is the context in which the Psalmist could cry out, "Lord, judge me!" (Ps 7:8; 26:1; 43:1). How many of us have prayed for the investigative judgment, for our names to come up as soon as possible? But if we are in Christ, this can be our stance. We can welcome and even long for the judgment. The investigative judgment becomes glorious news, in which we will be vindicated, our God will be vindicated, and the Accuser will be shown to have made false accusations. This perspective is not a new one to Adventism, although it has not always been properly emphasized. Ellen G. White in 1883 clearly expressed this perspective:

John in holy vision beholds the faithful souls that come up out of great tribulation, surrounding the throne of God, clad in white robes, and crowned with immortal glory. What though they have been counted the offscouring of the earth? In the investigative judgment their lives and characters are brought in review before God, and that solemn tribunal reverses the decision of their enemies. Their faithfulness to God and to His word stands revealed, and Heaven's high

honors are awarded them as conquerors in the strife with sin and Satan.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

This presentation has been in the form of a personal testimony. I believe in the truthfulness, the timeliness, and the richness of the sanctuary doctrine. To my personal testimony I can add the witness of my colleagues at Andrews University to whom I have listened as we have joined in a team-taught class in the doctrine of the sanctuary this past decade. I also rejoice in the testimony of students like the one I received not long ago. The student wrote on his final report, "I came to this class a sanctuary doubter; but after confronting the issues and the Scriptural evidence, I leave a sanctuary believer, and I can't wait to get back to my conference where I can share the beauty of this doctrine with my father, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, who is still a sanctuary doubter."

This confirmation of the sanctuary message is not presented here with the thought that the depths of the doctrine have been plumbed. Ellen G. White's statement remains valid, "The significance of the Jewish economy is not yet fully comprehended. Truths vast and profound are shadowed forth in its rites and symbols."<sup>42</sup>

There are deeper insights yet to be gained. Perhaps even more importantly, there is a deeper experience yet to be gained in the time of the antitypical Day of Atonement. This confirmation of the sanctuary doctrine calls us to capture the fervor of the Day of Atonement experience, the fervor of *repentance*, affliction of soul, and putting away of sin; the fervor of *assurance* in the substitutionary death of Christ; and the fervor of *joy* over a "good judgment" in Christ and the soon coming Jubilee.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review

and Herald, 1971), pp. 541-560, for an affirmation of the distinctive and central place of the sanctuary doctrine in Adventist theology.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of various detractors from the Adventist understanding of the Sanctuary, see Arnold V. Wallenkampf, "Challengers to the Doctrine of the Sanctuary," in *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 5, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), pp. 197-216.

<sup>5</sup> For a report of the background to, and proceedings of, this conference, see the "Special Sanctuary Issue" of *The Ministry*, Oct., 1980, and Holbrook, ed., *Doctrine of the Sanctuary*, pp. 217-233.

<sup>6</sup> Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Evangelion Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> William H. Shea, "Biblical Parallels for the Investigative Judgment," *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), pp. 1-24.

<sup>8</sup> The word *rib* explicitly introduces the covenant lawsuits of Hosea and Micah: Hos. 4:1; Mic. 6:1, 2. Sometimes the prophets use a synonym, *mipat* ("judgment"), as in Mal. 3:5; Eze. 5:8. The recent scholarly literature on the covenant lawsuit is immense. For introductory discussion, starting bibliography, and numerous Biblical examples, see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL* 88 (1969): 291-304; the article on *ribin* in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 2: 845-846; and Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib- Pattern)*, JSOT 9 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> For basic insight and much supporting data regarding the investigative judgment in Ezekiel 1-10, I am indebted to Shea, *Selected Studies*, pp. 13-20. See his discussion for details.

<sup>10</sup> See Albert Vanhoye, "L'Utilisation du Livre d'Ézéchiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica*, 43 (1962): 436-476; Jeffrey M. Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation," Ph. D. dissertation, Howard University, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> This analysis of the movement of the glory of God from the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary to the waiting chariot throne, is confirmed by the recent research of Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 195-198.

<sup>12</sup> Note that all the major elements of the classical covenant lawsuit are found in this section of Ezekiel, and especially well illustrated in chapters 5 and 6: preamble (5:5a), historical prologue (5:5b), indictment (5:6, 7), sentence of covenant curses (5:8-17, citing the covenant curses of Leviticus 26), and witnesses (Eze. 6—even the mountain witnesses are corrupt; cf. Mic. 6:1, 2). (13) See William Shea, "Judgment in Daniel 7," *Selected Studies*, pp. 94-131.

<sup>14</sup> See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946-1954), *passim*. (15) For examples of the contrast between these three main schools of prophetic interpretation, see Shea, *Selected Studies*, pp. v-vi, 25-55 (regarding Daniel 8) and Gerhard F. Hasel, "Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks," in *Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 3-63 (regarding Daniel 9).

<sup>16</sup> Shea, *Selected Studies*, pp. 56-93.

<sup>17</sup> For detailed examination of various exegetical details of Dan 8:9-14, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The 'Little Horn,' the Heavenly Sanctuary and the Time of

the End: A Study of Daniel 8:9-14," in *Symposium on Daniel*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 378-461; see especially pp. 430-433 for discussion of the 2300 evenings-mornings; cf. Siegfried J. Schwantes, "'Ereb Bôqer of Daniel 8:14 Re-examined," in *Symposium on Daniel*, pp. 462-474.

<sup>18</sup> This evidence is discussed by Siegfried Horn and Lynn Wood, in *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1970); summary in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 3:100-104. See now also the careful article by William H. Shea in this issue of *JATS*.

<sup>19</sup> See Arthur J. Ferch, "Commencement Date for the Seventy Week Prophecy," in *Seventy Weeks*, pp. 64-74; and William Shea, "The Prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27," in *Seventy Weeks*, pp. 84-88.

<sup>20</sup> See Jacques Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study," in *The Sanctuary and Atonement, Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, eds. A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshar (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), pp. 255, 256, for discussion and literature.

<sup>21</sup> See the unpublished paper of Douglas Waterhouse, "Is it Possible to Date the Sabbatical-Jubilee Years?," Andrews University; cf. Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 153-196.

<sup>22</sup> Paul A. Gordon, ed., *Pioneer Articles on the Sanctuary, Daniel 8:14, the Judgment, 2300 Days, Year-Day Principle, Atonement: 1846-1905* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1983); synthesized in *idem*, *The Sanctuary, 1844, and the Pioneers*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Following the Biblical method meant observing the ripening barley in Palestine to determine whether it would be ripe in time to wave during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and if it did not, adding a second 12th month in the lunar year to bring it in line with the solar year. In 1844 the barley harvest in Palestine required the addition of an extra month to the calendar, thus making the Day of Atonement October 22 that year, not a month earlier (September 23). For a discussion of the Karaites and the continuation of the Biblical method of calendrical calculation as opposed to the rabbinic departure from the Biblical method, see Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2: 196-199; 4: 792-797.

<sup>24</sup> See Shea, *Selected Studies*, pp. 132-137.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed study of the meaning of Dan 8:14, see Hasel, "Dan 8:9-14," in *Symposium on Daniel*, pp. 378-461.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed analysis of the meaning of *nitsdaq* in context, see Niels-Erik Andreasen, "Translation of *Nitsdaq/Katharisthesetai*," in Dan 8:14," in *Symposium on Daniel*, pp. 475-496; Hasel, "Dan 8:9-14," in *Symposium on Daniel*, pp. 448-453; cf. Jerome Justesen, "On the Meaning of *sadaq*," *AUSS*, 2 (1964): 53-61.

<sup>27</sup> See Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 172; cf. Hasel, "Dan 8:9-14," in *Symposium on Daniel*, pp. 440, 441.

<sup>28</sup> See Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), pp. 121-186; Alberto R. Treiyer, "Antithetical or Correspondence Typology?" in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, pp. 187-198.

<sup>29</sup> See Heb 8:3-5; 9:23. In the few instances where there is a modification of the Old Testament type in the New Testament antitype, the author of Hebrews shows how this change is already anticipated and foretold in the Old Testament. For discussion, see Davidson, "Typology in Hebrews," pp. 173-178.



<sup>30</sup> For further discussion, see Davidson, "Typology in Hebrews," pp. 177, 184.

<sup>31</sup> For further arguments supporting the conclusion that according to Hebrews Christ ascended to inaugurate the entire sanctuary and not to immediately commence the antitypical Day of Atonement in the heavenly most holy place, see *ibid.*, pp. 179-184. (This discussion includes treatment of the crucial terms *ta hagia* and *prote skene* in Heb 9:8, and interpretation of Heb 6:19, 20. Both these passages have reference to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary in fulfillment of Dan 9:24, and not to the antitypical Day of Atonement.)

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion, see *ibid.*, pp. 183, 184.

<sup>33</sup> George Rice, "Apostasy as a Motif and its Effect on the Structure of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 23 (1985): 29-35.

<sup>34</sup> In this passage note (1) the future timing of the judgment from the apostle's perspective (vs 27), (2) the investigative nature of the judgment (vs 28) as well as the executive (vs 29), and (3) the focus of the judgment upon God's professed people (vs 30). It is likely that the reference to "the Day" in vs 25 is a technical term, not for the Second Advent of Christ, but for the Day of Atonement, as the Aramaic *yoma* "The Day" is used for the title of the Mishnaic tractate on the Day of Atonement.

<sup>35</sup> See Kenneth Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 25 (1987): 107-121; *idem*, "The 'Victorious Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 25 (1987): 267-288; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares, vol. 2: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1985), pp. 156, 157; and Jon Paulien, "Intertextuality, the Hebrew Cultus, and the Plot of the Apocalypse," unpublished paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature national meeting in New Orleans, Nov. 18, 1990. For further discussion of what follows, see Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology in the Book of Revelation," in the forthcoming Daniel and Revelation Committee volume on Revelation.

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note how the activities connected with the sanctuary in the first half of the book correspond to the basic order of the daily ministry of the priests as described in the Mishnah tractate *tamid*. See Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology in Revelation," in the in Daniel and Revelation Committee volume on Revelation.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "An Overlooked Old Testament Background to Revelation 11:1," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 22 (1984/3): 317-325.

<sup>38</sup> Of course there are spotlights on last events already in the first half of the book, and flashbacks into history in the eschatological part of the book. See discussion in Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book Revelation," pp. 107-121; and Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> Not only does the book of Revelation move through the sanctuary from the holy place and daily services to the most holy place and yearly day of judgment. It also moves antitypically through Israel's festivals (as summarized in Lev 23). A close examination of Revelation reveals a movement from Passover (Rev 1-3) to Pentecost (Rev 4-7), trumpets (Rev 8-10), Day of Atonement (Rev 11-20), and Tabernacles (Rev 21-22). See Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology in the Book of Revelation" (forthcoming), for detailed analysis.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, "Investigative Judgment in the Book of Revelation," *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 13, 1980, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 361.

<sup>42</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 133.

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## WHEN DID THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL 9:24 BEGIN?

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In the first year of Darius the Mede (538 B.C.), Daniel, the prophet and Babylonian court official, set about offering up to God earnest prayers on behalf of the exiles from Judah.

In his prayer (Dan 9:1-19) Daniel plead with the Lord to forgive His rebellious people and restore them to their land and capital city. He sought the Lord for the fulfillment of His promises to the prophets that Jerusalem and its temple would be rebuilt after the destruction that it suffered.

God answered Daniel's prayer. He saw to it that His people were sent back to their homeland by Cyrus (Ezra 1, 2), rebuilt the temple (Ezra 5, 6), and eventually rebuilt the city of Jerusalem (Neh1-5, 6:15-16). And God went beyond Daniel's requests. Through the prophetic word transmitted by Gabriel (Dan 9:21-23), God gave Daniel instruction about the Messiah who was to come to His people after the city and temple were rebuilt.

In this prophecy, God designated the time when the Messiah would come. It was to be marked off from the time of the event Daniel had been praying about, the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Gabriel said to Daniel, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times" (Dan 9:25).

Clearly, this remarkable prophecy is a major prophetic landmark. It offers a valuable criterion by which the true Messiah could be distinguished from false ones. If a person claiming to be the Messiah did not come at the right time, he could not be the true Messiah. Given this major significance of this prophecy we do well to pay careful attention to its details. The minor focus of our study of this prophecy will be on the length of time involved; our major focus will be on its starting point. We will deal briefly with the length of time first.

#### The Time Period

A. Length. The first matter to deal with in terms of the length of the period has to do with the units by which it was to be measured off. Older translations such as the KJV translated the word involved here as "weeks," while a more recent one, the NIV, prefers the translation of "sevens." The net effect of both translations is the same length of time, for those commentators who prefer the translation of "sevens" acknowledge that they are sevens of years.<sup>1</sup> For those who retain the older translation of "weeks," each of the weeks is made up of seven prophetic days, and each prophetic day is taken as a historical year according to the apocalyptic hermeneutical principle of a day for a year. (See Eze 4:6; Num 14:34).<sup>2</sup> Thus the only real difference between the two schools of thought is whether or not the year-day principle needs to be invoked here. In both cases the total number of years comes out to 483 years ( $7 + 62 \times 7 = 483$ ). While the translation of the crucial word is of interest, it need not detain us, for the linguistic evidence relevant to the question still favors the translation "weeks."<sup>3</sup> Even the NIV puts "weeks" in the margin.

B. Punctuation and division. The other question involved with the length of time before the Messiah would come has to do with punctuation. Should the passage be translated in such a way as to indicate that the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks belong together as a compound unit, or in such a way as to apply it to two separate events. Some modern transla-

tions separate them, whereas older translations keep them together. The RSV, in speaking of the prince, says that "there shall be seven weeks." Then after inserting a period to close the sentence, it begins a new sentence, "Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again." This punctuation gives the seven weeks to the prince and allows sixty-two weeks for the reconstruction of the city. But if the two time units are kept together, then both the seven and the sixty-two weeks must be fulfilled before the Prince could come.

The rationale by which these time units have been separated in translations, such as the RSV, involves the amount of stress and weight put on the punctuation mark, *'athnah*, in the Hebrew text as pointed by the Massorettes. There are a number of problems with this treatment. In the first place, an *'athnah* is not a *soph pasûq*, just as a comma is not a period. A *soph pasûq* ends verses of the Hebrew text just as a period ends an English sentence, but the *'athnah* is used only at the approximate middle of the Hebrew sentence, in contrast to the comma, which sets off phrases. To divide the Hebrew sentence into two sentences with a period as a divider in English just because an *'athnah* is located in the middle of it goes far beyond the significance of the *'athnah*, turning it into a *soph pasûq*. Doing such a thing is not warranted by the Hebrew accent and is not good translating.

The arbitrary nature of the RSV punctuation here can be borne out by a comparison with what it has done with the rest of Daniel 9. No other examples occur in the RSV text of Daniel 9 in which an *'athnah* is represented with a period. Further, there are four cases in which the RSV does not represent even a *soph pasûq* with a period. Daniel 9:1 treats a *soph pasûq* as a hyphen, vs 4 as a comma, and vss 5, 20 as a semicolon. When measured against its own practice, what the RSV has done with the *'athnah* in Daniel 9:25 is not only poor translating but also quite an arbitrary case of special pleading. The older paired translation of the time units should be retained. Even the LXX supports the paired translation in this case.



### The Starting Point

Our conclusion thus far is that the seven and sixty-two weeks in Daniel 9:25 belong together as a compound making up sixty-nine weeks or 483 historical years until the coming of the Messiah. If the starting point for this period can be found, then the date for his coming 483 years later can be fixed. So we turn next to the important starting point.

Daniel 9:25 states that the starting point was to be a going forth of a "word" (Hebrew *abar*) to restore Jerusalem. Before looking for specific decrees and the actual rebuilding, we should ask a few questions about the term, "word."

A. The decree. The reason why the term comes up is because an effort has been made by some historical-critical scholars to equate this "word" in Daniel 9:25 with the "word of the Lord to Jeremiah" to which Daniel referred in verse 2 of this chapter.<sup>4</sup> Daniel was studying the scroll of Jeremiah about the prophecy of the desolation of Jerusalem for seventy years. Jerusalem was to be restored at the end of that period. Because the message that came to Jeremiah was termed a "word" and the same Hebrew term was used in Daniel 9:25, should they be equated? Doing so would place the commencement of the 70 weeks of Daniel back in the time of Jeremiah, about 593 B.C.

This type of interpretation overlooks the fact that the term for "word" is used again twice in Daniel 9:23. If one is to look for linguistic connections, here in vs 23 is a far more reasonable one to use than the reference in vs 2 to the time of Jeremiah.

But even here there is a difference between the "word" of Gabriel's introduction and the "word" in the prophecy itself. In the first part of verse 23, Gabriel told Daniel that a word had gone forth (*yasa'*), obviously from God who sent the message to Daniel. The fact that the perfect form of the verb is used indicates that the word had already gone forth, and having gone forth it had reached Gabriel, who was now going

to give it to Daniel. The reference is to a past action or communication which Daniel is now to understand.

But the word which Daniel is to understand is not the decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It is the entire prophecy, all of which constitutes this particular "word." Thus the "word" about the reconstruction of Jerusalem was contained in the entire overall prophetic word or message that Gabriel brought to Daniel. That word was a description of future events. And one of those future events was to be the going forth of the "word" or decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Thus the "word" of vs 25 is neither the word of the Lord to Jeremiah in vs 2 nor the word of the Lord through Gabriel to Daniel in vs 23. It is something to be fulfilled in the future. For corroboration we note that the term for "going forth" (Hebrew *mosa'*) that is used in vs 25 is neither the term that is used for the word in vs 2 (Hebrew *hayah*) nor the verb used in vs 23 (Hebrew *yasa'*). A further contrast between vs 2 and vs 25 is that the former is specifically "the word of the Lord," in a construct chain with God's name in the genitive relationship, whereas in vs 25 it is just "a word" with neither a divine name nor an article used with it.

B. The king of the decree. The next point to be covered here is what it was that the prophecy foretold was to be rebuilt. The verse in question uses the specific name of the city, Jerusalem. There can be no question, therefore, that we must look to the circumstances under which that city was rebuilt. The specific mentioning of the name "Jerusalem" helps avoid confusion with the rebuilding of the temple within Jerusalem. A city is not a temple and a temple is not a city, although a city may contain a temple or be located near one. This distinction is important because the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2-4 specifically mentions authorization for the rebuilding of the temple but does not mention the city. In response to that decree, and to a supplementary decree by Darius I, the temple was in fact rebuilt (Ezra 6:14-16); but even after its reconstruction the city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and this was the condition

in which Nehemiah found it in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, some 70 years later. The temple was completed in the 6th year of Darius I, 516 B.C., but the city was still unreconstructed in the time of Artaxerxes in the middle of the following century.

We must now attempt to discover the decree that had the effect of leading to the rebuilding of the city. It was not the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1; nor was it the decree of Darius in Ezra 6, which was in actuality an authorization to carry out the stipulations of the original decree of Cyrus. Both of these decrees dealt with the temple and both of them were brought to their final consummation when the temple was finished. We must look beyond the rebuilding of the temple for the next major building project relating to Jerusalem. There actually were two decrees, or a decree and an authorization, that were involved in this later event, much like the previous two decrees focused on the temple. This new pair of official rulings is found in Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2. The circumstances and contents of these decrees require close examination in our quest for the starting point of Daniel's time prophecy.

C. The nature of the decree. The decree given to Ezra is recorded in Ezra 7:12-26 as an official decree of Artaxerxes. It is quoted in the text as a copy of the decree in the original Aramaic language. Because the decree of Darius in Ezra 6 actually contains a reiteration of the antecedent decree of Cyrus, the decree of Artaxerxes is longer than that of Darius. The decrees get longer as one goes through the book. The decree of Cyrus in chapter 1 is the shortest, the decree of Darius in chapter 6 is of medium length, and the decree of Artaxerxes in chapter 7 is the longest and should, therefore, be accorded a special measure of importance.

Contributing to its importance is the wide-ranging authority it accorded to Ezra in this decree. By this decree he was not only given privileges to pay for and offer sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem, but he was also given power to appoint magistrates and judges in the province of Beyond the River. The province of Beyond the River included more than

Judea. It included all of Syria that was located west and south of the Upper Euphrates River. Thus by this decree Ezra was given authority not over the Jews alone, but also over the persons and territory outside of Judea (Ezra 7:25). He was also given permission to draw on the treasury of that province up to the amount of 100 talents of silver. (See Ezra 7:21-22.)

Included among Ezra's responsibilities under this decree of Artaxerxes was the authorization to teach the law of His God to Jews and non-Jews alike in the same extended territory. For anyone who would not obey his teachings in these matters he was authorized to execute punishment up to the death penalty. (See Ezra 7:25-26.) His authority over non-Jews is probably the most remarkable feature of the decree. The extent and importance of Ezra's position should be noted carefully in order to understand the nature of his action that followed upon his arrival at Jerusalem.

A second major return of Jews (Ezra 8) took place under this same decree. This was only the second official large-scale return of Jews since the Persian conquest of Babylon, the first being under Cyrus. (See Ezra 1-2). While a trickle of Jews may have returned between these two events, the full and official nature of this authorized return should be noted. (See Ezra 7:13). In the same way that an officially decreed return initiated the reconstruction of the temple, this second officially decreed return served as the stimulus to commence the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

D. The results of the decree. Now we come to the question of what Ezra did upon his arrival at Jerusalem. We know that he had to deal with the question of mixed or foreign marriages (see Ezra 9, 10), but what else did he do? His other main activity is recorded in Ezra 4:7-16, in a letter from the western governors to Artaxerxes, the king who had issued the decree. The governors struck a note of alarm, reporting, "Be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the



foundations" (Ezra 4:12 RSV). Then the governors went on to threaten the king where it could hurt him most, in the treasury or pocketbook: "If this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired" (vs 13 RSV).

Some important aspects of this report to the king need to be considered. First, the report is recorded in a letter from the western governors. It is found in Aramaic in the book of Ezra as an official document of the Persian archives (see vss 7-11). There can be no question about the identity of the king to whom it was addressed. The title to the letter bears the name of Artaxerxes (vs 11), who allowed a group of Jews to return to Judea. The Jews had stopped to see the governors on their way to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4:12 with 8:36). This information fits well with the authorization given to Ezra to draw upon the treasuries of the western provinces. Undoubtedly, the western governors were saddened that their resources had been depleted by authorization from the king. When they wrote their letter finances was uppermost in their minds.

After stopping for their official visit with the governors the returning Jews had gone on to Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned by name in Ezra 4:12 and its character is described rather extensively by the governors in their report. The only question is, what group of Jews is under discussion? The book of Ezra provides the answer. Ezra brought a group of Jews back from Babylon under authorization from Artaxerxes. The governors then reported to the king that a group of Jewish returnees had come to them and gone on to Jerusalem. Because no other officially authorized return of Jews is known in the Persian period since the time of Cyrus, and certainly no other is known to have taken place in the reign of Artaxerxes, this group is unquestionably the Jews who returned with Ezra. The only way that one can avoid such a conclusion is to posit somebody just like Ezra doing the same work that Ezra did. Such conjecturing is unnecessary.

The logical conclusion that Ezra and his returnees are the

group referred to here has been hinted at obliquely by other scholars. For example, L. W. Batten states,

We note that the Jews here denounced are recent arrivals. There must therefore have been an extensive migration in the time of Artaxerxes, of which we have no other record [sic!]. From their undertakings the company must have been a large one.<sup>5</sup>

F. C. Fensham notes that "the reference to a migration in v 12 probably refers to a return of certain Jews before Nehemiah."<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons why some scholars have been loathe to accept Ezra as the leader of this group of returnees has to do with the long-discussed question of the sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah. Did Ezra precede Nehemiah or did Nehemiah precede Ezra? Scholars unsure of the answer to this question are, of course, unsure about the identity of the group that preceded Nehemiah back to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes. But if one agrees to the idea that Ezra preceded Nehemiah, then Ezra and his fellow returnees are the only logical candidates to fit the text. The sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah is too large a question to be discussed here.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that the traditional, classical, and canonical order of Ezra followed by Nehemiah is accepted and utilized here. The Persian period history is described from its beginnings in Ezra but Nehemiah discusses only his own experiences during the reign of an Artaxerxes, the same name of the king with whom the book of Ezra ends. And Nehemiah uses a date later in the reign of that king according to the regnal year number. This also makes good sense out of the references to Ezra in the book of Nehemiah (8:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13 and 9:6). If one reverses the order of these two men, these references and this narrative needs to be emended or changed in some other fashion. The logical and direct interpretation of the data is that Ezra returned before Nehemiah did and was present for the events of Ezra 8 and 9. The book of Ezra tells how he came to be there beforehand.

With this order applied to the events described in Ezra

4:12-23 (but not including vs 24), Ezra now becomes the person who led out in the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem upon the return of the wave of exiles who came with him during the reign of Artaxerxes I, before the time of Nehemiah. Reconstructing these events in this way, however, creates something of a problem in the order of the text. The return of the Jews under Ezra is described in chapters 7 and 8 but their rebuilding of the city is described in chapter 4. Why are things out of order like this?

It should be pointed out that there is more than one way in which to organize a book, Biblical or otherwise, and an author does not always have to subscribe to the strictly chronological approach. He might also follow a topical approach. And this is what has happened here. There is a parenthesis between Ezra 4:5 and 4:24-5:1. The parenthesis continues its own recital along chronological lines, the topic or subtopic being opposition to the Jews. This opposition is cited first for the reign of Cyrus in Ezra 4:1-5, then for the reign of Ahasuerus (or Xerxes) in Ezra 4:6, then for the reign of Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7-23. Then with Ezra 4:24 the narrative returns to the time of Darius—between the times of Cyrus and Ahasuerus.

The topic treated in this subsection (Ezra 4) is opposition to the Jews. The opposition is in the first case to rebuilding the temple (time of Cyrus), then a more general opposition (time of Xerxes), and finally an opposition to building the city of Jerusalem (time of Artaxerxes). Fensham has given a nice evaluation of this problem, in his statement that

In spite of this [the chronological order of Persian kings in chapter 4], Rudolph presumes that the Chronicler had no idea of the historical sequence of the Persian kings and mentioned typical names which are accidentally correct chronologically. Rudolph arrives at this conclusion because of the sudden switch to Darius in 4:24. . . . Thus it is understandable that modern schol ars, reasoning from their own logic, should regard the historical reliability of this chapter with suspicion. But there is another kind of perfectly legitimate logic to the reasoning of the author of this chapter: he is referring in this chapter

in chronological order to the hindrances placed in the way of Jews to rebuild the temple and the wall of Jerusalem. When he discussed the problems of the building of the temple in 4:1-5, it reminded him of later similar troubles with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and so 4:6-23 has been inserted, almost parenthetically, before the argument of the building of the temple has again been taken up in 4:24ff (already noted by C. F. Keil in the last century).<sup>8</sup>

Thus there is a perfectly good explanation as to why the decree and the return are described in chapters 7 and 8 but the rebuilding undertaken by the very same people who returned in these chapters is described in chapter 4. There is no conflict. The chapter arrangement merely reflects the author's decision to treat his materials in a topical rather than in a strictly chronological manner.

Two final questions about these events arise before we turn to more specifically chronological matters. The first question is, Why did Ezra undertake the rebuilding of the city when it was not mentioned specifically in the authorizing decree from Artaxerxes? The second question is, Why did Artaxerxes stop the rebuilding if he authorized it and was so favorable to Ezra?

In answering the first question we can simply supply the historical proof. Ezra 4:12, 13 indicates that Ezra did indeed go ahead and undertake the rebuilding. He appears to have made no effort to conceal what he was doing. He did not do it surreptitiously but full view of the western governors. Given the open nature of the project, one can only say that Ezra understood that the rebuilding fell within the jurisdiction of the authorization given to him. As conscientious an observer of the law of God as he was—and even Artaxerxes noted this point—he made no attempt to deceive anyone in regard to what was being carried out. Ezra had been granted legal and judicial courtroom authority (Ezra 7:25, 26) which needed to involve the establishment of places of judgment. Such places were typically the “gates” of the city wall where the judges met for their judgment activities. There seems to be here a



clear indication that Ezra must have provided the building facilities where proper civil judicial activities were to be carried out. Jerusalem was also a religious precinct surrounding the temple area in a sense, and Ezra's authority over legal religious matters seems to have to include also the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

E. Response of the king. What kind of king was Artaxerxes, who reversed his own decree? Historians describe him as two-faced. Probably the classic example of his duplicity occurred in the disposition of Inarus, who rebelled against him in Egypt. After Inarus was defeated and captured by Artaxerxes' general, Megabyzus, in 454 B.C., Artaxerxes promised him safe conduct to Persia and assured him that he would not be executed. Artaxerxes honored this promise for some five years but eventually, at the pleading of the Queen Mother Amestris, he had Inarus impaled. Megabyzus was so upset at the king's perfidy that he raised a revolt in Syria.<sup>9</sup>

#### Chronology

We now turn to the question of the chronology of the events involved. Once the chronological issues are settled a direct calculation of the date for the Messiah can be proposed and history can be examined to see who fits.

The date for the beginning of this period of the prophecy must coincide with the going forth or issuing of the word or decree that led to the commencement of the reconstruction of Jerusalem. According to the interpretations discussed above, the decree that led to that commencement can be identified as the decree that Artaxerxes I gave to Ezra. Now that decree needs to be dated. The narrative connected with it indicates that Ezra and his fellow returnees left Babylon on the first day of the first month of Artaxerxes' 7th year (Ezra 7:9), or 1/1/7. After a journey of four months they came to Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month of the seventh year (vs 10), or V/1/7. Two main issues are involved here: (1) absolute dates

for the reign of Artaxerxes, and (2) the kind of calendar according to which these dates were reckoned.

A. Regnal years of Artaxerxes. Absolute dates for the reign of Artaxerxes I can be established through knowledge of the dates for the two preceding kings, Darius I and Xerxes. The dates for those kings are well known because both men conducted invasions of Greece and Greek historians dated their reigns in terms of the well understood Olympiad dating system. In addition we have sources from the Ancient Near East which include papyri from Egypt dated to the reign of Artaxerxes and a constant flow of contract tablets written in cuneiform when Babylonia was under Persian control. We also have Ptolemy's Canon, in which the reigns of ancient kings back to the mid-eighth century B.C. were dated and fixed by means of eclipses and astronomical-mathematical calculations. In other words, we are in a very good position to give an accurate fix to the dates for Xerxes and of his son Artaxerxes, who followed him.

1. CLASSICAL HISTORICAL SOURCES. We will start with some of the latest sources and work our way backwards. At least half a dozen classical (Greco-Roman) historians mention something about the time or circumstances surrounding the death of Xerxes. The Greek historian Ctesias tells us the most about the circumstances involving Xerxes' murder by Artabanus, but he does not date the event precisely.<sup>10</sup> Diodorus of Sicily gives us the more precise date for those events, dating both by the Athenian archonship and the Roman consular year. These two types of years overlap to indicate that Xerxes was murdered sometime during the last half of the Julian year 465 B.C.<sup>11</sup>

2. AN EGYPTIAN ASTRONOMICAL SOURCE. Because the Egyptian solar calendar was 1/4th day short of a true solar year it advanced regularly in relation to the Julian years used to calculate B.C. dates. This feature has been used by modern historians to work out ancient Egyptian dates by figuring backwards in the Egyptian calendar. It was used also by the

astronomer Ptolemy in his *Almagest*.<sup>12</sup> For the year in which Xerxes died, 465 B.C., the Egyptian New Year's day, Thoth 1, fell on our December 17. If Xerxes died before December 17, then Artaxerxes' second regnal year would have begun on that day; but instead, Artaxerxes first year began on December 17, and this means—according to the Egyptian system—that Xerxes died between December 17 and the Persian Babylonian Spring New Year, Nisanu 1, in the spring.

3. A BABYLONIAN ASTRONOMICAL SOURCE. The Babylonians were aware that solar and lunar eclipses repeated themselves almost exactly in cycles of 18 years. Ancient astronomers called these periods "Saros cycles." Cuneiform tablets recording Saros cycles in terms of the years of reigning kings are known from the Hellenistic period.<sup>13</sup> Tables derived from these tablets measure off these cycles from the 9th year of Xerxes to the 6th year of Artaxerxes to the 24th year of Artaxerxes. Aside from the fact that modern astronomers can determine when these astronomical phenomena took place, they also measure off for us the number of years between these regnal dates. In this way this cycle dates the 18 years between the 9th year of Xerxes and the 6th year of Artaxerxes to the span between 477 B.C. and 459 B.C. This fixes the year of Xerxes' death and Artaxerxes' accession in 465 B.C.

4. EGYPTO-JEWISH HISTORICAL SOURCES. Papyri from the fifth century B.C. written in Aramaic by Jewish military mercenaries in Persian employ on the island of Elephantine in Egypt supply us with additional valuable historical and chronological information. These documents carry dates in terms of both of the overlapping Egyptian and Persian-Babylonian calendars. The mathematical junctures at which these two variable calendars intersect with double dates help to fix the dates for the reigns of the kings during which these documents were written. A case of special importance here is Cowley Papyrus No. 6, which was dated to both the 21st (and last) year of Xerxes and to the accession year of Artaxerxes.<sup>14</sup> The day and month dates utilized in this document fix its

writing to January 2, 464 B.C. This text itself indicates that Xerxes' death had been reported in Egypt by that time. Since the Persian "pony express" type of courier system was in effect by that time, the delivery of that news in Egypt may be located late in 465 B.C. This supports the other indications that Xerxes died late in that year, toward the very end of 465 B.C. (In the previous section we reviewed evidence that he died after December 17, 465 B.C.).

5. BABYLONIAN HISTORICAL SOURCES. The flow of contract tablets from Babylonian scribes continued under the Persian kings, but our sources have a tendency to thin out towards the later Persian kings of that period. Thus these tablets have not been as helpful as one would wish in terms of pinning down the precise date of the transition between Xerxes and Artaxerxes, in spite of the recent publication of additional collections of these tablets<sup>15</sup> and of catalogues of unpublished collections of these tablets.<sup>16</sup> They do, however, abundantly confirm the previously established pattern which indicates that 465 B.C. was the 21st and last year of Xerxes and that Artaxerxes I's first full regnal year began on Nisanu 1 in the spring of 464 B.C. Recent publication of astronomical tablets from the 11th and 24th years of Artaxerxes I have provided even more precise support for that same chronological pattern.<sup>17</sup>

6. SUMMARY ON ARTAXERXES' REGNAL DATES. In summary, we can say that there are a number of very important chronological lines which focus on dating the regnal years of Xerxes and those of his son Artaxerxes I. A knowledge of these dates was never lost, because they were preserved by the classical historians of Greece and Rome and in the tables of Ptolemy's *Almagest*. These documents indicate clearly that 465 B.C. was the 21st and last year of Xerxes and that 464 B.C. was the first full official year of Artaxerxes I. Archeological discoveries from late in the nineteenth century and from this present century have provided ample confirmation of the accuracy of those calculations. Support for these dates have been found in the Elephantine papyri and in a more general but still



strongly accurate way in the Saros tablets and the compilation of Babylonian contract tablets from the Persian period. There need be no doubt for anyone familiar with the available chronological sources that we have the regnal years of Artaxerxes I accurately fixed. Indeed, the dates are so well set in the cement of these sources that it is hard to imagine any kind of future discovery that could possibly move them.

B. The dalendar for calculation of the king's years. Having established the absolute dates for the reign of Artaxerxes, we come now to the point of how the Jews of Ezra's time used contemporary dating methods. Ezra, living under this same Artaxerxes as a citizen of Babylonia, knew very well when Xerxes was killed and when Artaxerxes took the throne. Thus, when he dated his own return to Judea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7), he was making use of this living, active, and on-going chronological information. The only question is whether he used that information, according to the Persian and Babylonian system of dating, or according to his own Jewish calendar.

The difference can be illustrated quite simply. The Babylonian calendar year began with the month of Nisanu (Jewish Nisan) in the spring of the year, March-April in our calendar. If Ezra followed the Babylonian system, which continued to be used by the Persian kings, he dated the regnal years of Artaxerxes, including the seventh year mentioned in Ezra 7, as beginning in the spring. By way of contrast, there was the Jewish civil calendar which began in the fall with Tishri 1 (Tashritu of the Babylonians). In the case which we are considering, this provides us with a difference of 6 months.

If Ezra began Artaxerxes' years according to the Persian-Babylonian system then his first regnal year of Artaxerxes began in the spring of 464 B.C. But if Ezra began Artaxerxes' years according to the Jewish civil year then his first year began in the fall of 464 B.C. In both systems a king's first *regnal* year began on the system's New Year's day. The period between the moment when a king died a new king officially

came to the throne on his first New Year's day was known as his *accession* year. In Ezra and Nehemiah we are dealing with regnal years only.

These considerations effect the date for the beginning of the 70-week prophecy, because we have looked to the decree of Ezra 7 as representing the going forth of the "word" in response to which the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem began. Ezra says that he left Babylon on I/1/7 of Artaxerxes and arrived in Jerusalem four months later, on V/1/7 of Artaxerxes. (See Ezra 7:7-9.) If he gave these dates according to the Persian-Babylonian spring-to-spring year, then they fell in the spring and summer of the year 458 B.C. The decree would then have been given before Nisan 1 of 458 B.C., or sometime in the 6th year of Artaxerxes, 459-458 B.C. But if these events are calculated according to the Jewish civil year, which began with Tishri 1 in the fall of 458 B.C., then the decree would probably have been given during that winter of 458-457 B.C., and the journey took place during the spring and summer of 457 B.C. (In the case of the fall-to-fall year, the month numbers do not change. They run VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, I, II, III, IV, V, VI).

The matter may be boiled down to the fact that, if Ezra was using the Persian-Babylonian calendar, the decree and the return occurred in 458 B.C.; whereas, if the decree and the return were dated by Ezra according to the Jewish civil year, they fell in 457 B.C. Which of these two alternatives is correct and why? The overwhelming evidence is in favor of Ezra's use of the Jewish fall calendar, as the paragraphs below will reveal.

1. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR DURING THE UNITED MONARCHY. First, it should be noted that there were two calendars in use in ancient Israel, the religious calendar that began (like the Babylonian calendar) in the spring, and the civil calendar that began in the fall. The Jewish new year of Rosh Hashanah, that survives in the liturgical calendar of synagogues today, is a survival of the civil calendar. The use of the fall calendar for

civil or political purposes goes back to the time of Solomon. As E. R. Thiele has shown so effectively, the regnal years of Solomon as they were applied to the record of building his palace and the temple were dated by a fall calendar.<sup>18</sup>

#### 2. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR DURING THE DIVIDED MONARCHY.

When we compare together the various synchronisms and regnal-year records in 1-2 Kings, we see that the use of the fall calendar predominated in the south, in the kingdom of Judah, while the spring calendar was more commonly used in the northern kingdom of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

3. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR AT THE END OF THE DIVIDED MONARCHY. The use of the fall calendar in Judah can be elucidated with special detail at the end of the kingdom of Judah, during the years of its last kings as they went down to defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and his troops from Babylon. The use of a fall calendar in these records of 2 Kings can be demonstrated especially well because the Biblical text gives not only the years of the kings of Judah involved, but it also gives some references to the years of king Nebuchadnezzar. With the publication of Nebuchadnezzar's own royal chronicles down to the year 593 B.C.,<sup>20</sup> the dates in the Bible and in those chronicles can be compared. When such a comparison is carried out it can be demonstrated that the writer of 2 Kings was indeed using the fall calendar of the Jews to calculate these dates.<sup>21</sup> Only in such a way can these Biblical and extra-Biblical dates be harmonized.

The use of the fall calendar for the civil or regnal years of the kings who reigned in Jerusalem can be demonstrated at the outset from the Biblical dates for Solomon. Their use continued through the divided monarchy, as demonstrated by the synchronisms in the Biblical record, and they are readily evident as checked with an extra-Biblical source at the end of the Judahite monarchy.

#### 4. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR DURING THE BABYLONIAN EXILE.

The fall calendar continued in use among the Jews in exile in Babylon. This is evident from the system of dating employed

in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet who wrote from exile in Babylon. He did not date his visions according to the regnal years of the Babylonian kings under whom he lived, but rather dated them according to the years of the exile of the Jews. This is apparent from the date in the title to the book found in Ezekiel 1:2; 8:1; 40:1.

#### 5. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR AFTER THE BABYLONIAN EXILE.

We come now to Ezra himself. Is there any evidence from his book that he used a fall calendar? Unfortunately, there is not; however, we have precisely that kind of information in Neh 1, 2. Because Nehemiah was a contemporary and compatriot of Ezra's, the use of a fall calendar in Nehemiah's book can be taken as strong evidence that Ezra used it too. What then is the evidence for the fall calendar in Nehemiah?

In the first chapter of Nehemiah we are presented with circumstances in which Nehemiah found himself at the court of Artaxerxes. He had received recent news that Jerusalem had been damaged and burned. (See Neh 1:1-3.) We should emphasize that this was recent news about recent events. Nehemiah was not talking about what Nebuchadnezzar did to the city more than a century before.

If we understand that Ezra had already gotten the reconstruction of the city underway when he returned (see Ezra 4:12-26), then some future assault upon the city would be what Nehemiah was concerned about. Seeing Nehemiah's distress, the king inquired about its cause. When he found out, the king authorized him to go to Jerusalem and tend to the matters there himself.

Of chronological interest in this narrative is the way in which the two dates involved are stated. Nehemiah 1:1 dates Nehemiah's receipt of the news concerning Jerusalem in the ninth month of Artaxerxes' 20th year. The authorization given to Nehemiah to attend to these matters was of course given later, yet according to Neh 2:1 it was given in the *first* month of the same 20th year of Artaxerxes! There can be only one way in which to explain these dates historically as they



stand, i.e., that they were reckoned upon the base of a fall-to-fall year which began in the seventh month—for as we noticed a few paragraphs ago, in the fall-to-fall year the number of the months ran VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, I, II, III, IV, V. Thus in the fall-to-fall year the first month came six months *after* the seventh month.

As the text stands, and this is the basis upon which scholars should draw their conclusions, these dates in Neh 1, 2 present the strongest possible evidence that Nehemiah used a fall-to-fall calendar, and, that therefore, it is most reasonable to conclude that his contemporary colleague Ezra did too.

6. THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR DURING THE CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN EXILE. A final supplementary line of evidence is found in the Elephantine papyrus, a second batch of which was published in 1953. Among these papyri is one which has direct implications for the type of regnal year that was employed by Jews who served in Egypt. Kraeling papyrus No. 6 contains dates which locate it in the month Tammuz, the 4th month of the Jewish year (or July) 420 B.C. Kraeling papyrus No. 7 is dated to Tishri (or October) of the same year, 420 B.C. But the regnal year number of Darius II, under whom these texts were written, changes between the texts from year three of the July papyrus to year four of the October papyrus. This change means that the year number of the king, according to the usage of the people who wrote these papyri, changed at the fall new year of Tishri 1 rather than of the spring new year of Nisan 1.

This has been examined and explained in detail by Siegfried Horn in his study of these and related texts.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while Ezra and Nehemiah used the Jewish fall calendar in their documents, other Jews exiled in Egypt were also using it a quarter of a century later in their part of the diaspora.

7. SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE JEWISH FALL CALENDAR. To summarize, it may be noted that the Hebrew monarchy started out using the fall calendar for the regnal years of Solomon and continued to use it in the kingdom of Judah. Its

use is specifically demonstrated by a comparison between 2 Kings and extra-Biblical documents at the end of the monarchy. Jews carried the fall calendar into exile with them into Babylon and continued to use it there, as evidenced by the dates in Ezekiel. In the post-exilic period Nehemiah, Ezra's fellow worker, provides direct textual evidence of the use of this kind of calendar. Other exiles elsewhere also continued to use the same fall calendar. Thus the conclusion that Ezra used a fall-to-fall calendar for the dates in his book rests upon very solid ground. This means that "the seventh year of Artaxerxes" in Ezra 7 is 457 B.C. rather than 458 B.C. as would be suggested if he had been using a spring calendar.

C. Conclusions on chronology. Through these two chronological procedures, a search for an absolute date for the regnal years of Artaxerxes and an examination of the question of which kind of calendar Ezra used, we have arrived at 457 B.C. as the date for the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7. Because this was the decree which led to the commencement of the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem, we have come to an absolute date for the specification for the prophecy of Daniel 9:25. That passage may now be paraphrased to identify its starting point as, "From the going forth of the word (the decree of Artaxerxes I) to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem (by Ezra according to the decree of Ezra 7 and the actions of Ezra 4), in 457 B.C. . . ."

D. Nehemiah's decree. Two final points need to be made in relation to the "decree" to Nehemiah recorded in Neh 2. The first has to do with its relationship to the antecedent decree of Ezra. Actually, this later communication was not quite on the same level as the official decree given earlier to Ezra. Nehemiah was given a letter that authorized him to receive recognition and assistance for the tasks that the king permitted him to perform. It had the net effect of a decree, but it was not quite the same thing. The relation between the two communications was that of initial authorization and supplementary authorization. What Ezra started was taken up

and carried to partial completion by Nehemiah. As in the preceding case of Cyrus' initial decree in Ezra 1 and Darius' supplementary authorization in Ezra 6, Artaxerxes' two decrees in Ezra 7 and Neh 2 can be seen as a pair. In both cases, the initial decree led to the commencement of the project, but both reconstruction projects required supplementary authorization to complete them; with the temple in the first case and the city in the second.

E. Alternate interpretations. Because it really was the first decree of the second set, the one given to Ezra in 457 B.C., which led to the commencement of the construction of the city, is the decree to which we should look for fixing the point for the start of the prophetic and historical period outlined by Daniel. But some Evangelical commentators hold that we should work instead from the date of 444 B.C. (the communication given to Nehemiah) to begin this period. In order for this period to predict when Jesus of Nazareth would become the Messiah, however, those beginning in 444 B.C. are forced to shorten it. A full 483 years from 444 B.C. overshoots the ministry and death of Jesus by at least five years by almost any standard.<sup>23</sup> There is no way to reconcile the date 444 B.C. and to have the 490 years terminate anywhere close to the time of Jesus Christ death.

#### Conclusion

When the procedures described above are carried out, it can be seen that the prophecy of the 69 weeks, or the 483 full historical years of Daniel 9, culminates in A.D. 27. The final question of this study is, What do the words "unto Messiah the Prince" mean? They should indicate the time for the coming of the Messiah. It should be noted carefully what a Messiah is. According to its verbal root, Messiah means an anointed one. Thus the Messiah is one who is anointed. Before being anointed the person involved was not fully the Messiah yet. Thus we are not talking here about the time of the Messiah's birth or the time of His death; we are talking about

the time when He would appear as the Messiah. There is one person and only one who fulfills this requirement, and that is the one who was anointed as the Messiah in A.D. 27—Jesus of Nazareth. His anointing at the Jordan River by both John the Baptist and His heavenly Father, took place in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar according to Luke 3:1, 21, 22. While there are other possible ways of reckoning this regnal year of Tiberius,<sup>24</sup> it certainly is a reasonable and standard procedure accepted by many commentators, chronographers, and historians to reckon it from A.D. 12. Utilizing that procedure and starting from the beginning point established above in 457 B.C. lead us to one specific individual as the Messiah of this prophecy—Jesus Christ. In other words, the establishment of 457 B.C. as the starting point of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 is one of the strongest indicators among the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament that Jesus truly was all that He claimed to be.

#### Endnotes.

- <sup>1</sup> L. Wood, *Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1973), p. 247. Wood gives four main reasons why he holds that each unit of the "sevens" should be interpreted as a literal and historical year.
- <sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion of the year-day principle as applied to apocalyptic time prophecies see my study in chapter three of *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute 1982), pp. 56-88.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-77.
- <sup>4</sup> J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), p. 378.
- <sup>5</sup> L. W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), p. 173.
- <sup>6</sup> F. C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 73.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9. The literature on this subject is extensive and cannot be cited in detail. For one study among many that upholds the traditional order of Ezra-Nehemiah see C. G. Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 12 (1974): 47-62.
- <sup>8</sup> Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, pp. 69-70.
- <sup>9</sup> A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 308-312.
- <sup>10</sup> *Persica*, 29-31.
- <sup>11</sup> Diodorus Siculus, xi. 69.1-6.
- <sup>12</sup> For an extended treatment of Ptolemy and other works in relation to this



problem see J. Neuffer, "The Accession of Artaxerxes I," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6 (1968): 60-87.

<sup>13</sup> Basic studies of the Saros tablets may be found in J. N. Strassmaier, "Einige chronologische Daten aus astronomischen Rechnungen," *ZA* 7 (1892): 197-204, and Idem, "Zur Chronologie der Seleuciden," *ZA* 8 (1893): 106-113.

<sup>14</sup> A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B C* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1923). Papyrus No. 6 appears on pp. 15-18 of this work.

<sup>15</sup> *Cuneiform Texts From the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vols. 55, 56, and 57 (London: British Museum, 1982). These three volumes present an extensive collection of previously unpublished Neo-Babylonian tablets.

<sup>16</sup> The massive Sippar collection of Neo-Babylonian contract tablets has now been catalogued, but most of the tablets remain unpublished. For the catalogue see E. Leichty, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol. VI: *Tablets from Sippar 1* (London: British Museum, 1986) and E. Leichty and A. K. Grayson, *ibid*, vol. VII: *Tablets from Sippar 2* (London: British Museum, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> A. J. Sachs and H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia, vol. I: Diaries from 652 to 262 B C* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> The Biblical texts involved are 1 Kings 6:1, 37-39; 7:1. For a detailed discussion of the dates in these passages and the way in which they fit a fall calendar better than a spring calendar see E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1965), pp. 28-30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 18-20, 30.

<sup>20</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 BC) in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1961).

<sup>21</sup> S. H. Horn, "The Babylonian Chronicle and the Ancient Calendar of the Kingdom of Judah," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 5 (1967): 23; A. Malamat, "A New Record of Nebuchadnezzar's Palestinian Campaigns," *IEJ* 6 (1956): 148.

<sup>22</sup> S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953).

<sup>23</sup> An excellent review of how evangelical commentators have handled these dates with a critique can be found in Gerhard F. Hasel, "Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks," in F. B. Holbrook, ed., *70 Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 3-64, see especially pp. 14-21 for the type of calculations cited above.

<sup>24</sup> For the different ways in which the regnal years of Tiberius were calculated see J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1964), pp. 259-272. Note that at least four or five of the solutions discussed lead to A.D. 27 as the date for the commencement of Jesus' ministry.

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## In Confirmation of Prophetic Interpretation

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On January 8, 1981, the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists asked the General Conference Biblical Research Institute (BRI) to form a special committee to restudy the books of Daniel and Revelation. BRI responded by forming the Daniel and Revelation Committee (DARCOM), chaired by Richard Leshar who, at the time, was director of BRI. Leshar continued to serve as chairman of the Daniel and Revelation Committee even after George Reid replaced him as director of BRI upon Leshar's becoming president of Andrews University in 1984. Initially composed of 21 members (among whom I was privileged to be included), the committee eventually peaked at 25.

Like other ad hoc committees formed by the General Conference, DARCOM would normally have been disbanded at the General Conference session subsequent to its formation, that is, in 1985; but at the chairman's request it was authorized to continue until the 1990 session.

During its nine and a half years of existence, DARCOM has met at least once a year, usually on a college or university campus in order to encourage participation by the local religion faculty. In 1987 we met at Marienhöhe, the Seventh-day Adventist college in Darmstadt, Germany. In 1988 we met at Newbold College in England. March 14-18 this year we met at Oakwood College, and on May 4-6 at Andrews University.

The Daniel and Revelation Committee has gone about its work by assigning topics to its own members and also to scholars who are not members. When the papers have been ready, the authors have read them aloud to the other members, who have reacted to them with questions and suggestions, and the authors have been invited to revise their papers in response. At the close of a typical annual session the committee members have reviewed the papers and decided which ones seemed to make a sufficiently substantial contribution to deserve publication. DARCOM claims no authority to require all Adventists to interpret the Bible precisely alike, but because it senses a serious responsibility to be helpful, it has attempted to publish only those papers that reflect a general consensus of the committee. Thus far it has published collections of papers sufficient to make up five volumes<sup>1</sup> and it hopes to put out two more. All volumes are made available at the lowest possible price and certainly deserve widespread attention.

The rigorous scholarly methods imposed on one another by the members of the committee have led to fruitful suggestions for improving certain minor aspects of Seventh-day Adventist prophetic interpretation; but these same rigorous methods have also resulted in stronger support than ever for the main aspects of Adventist interpretation. This is true not only for the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation but also for the message of Hebrews—for in view of the importance of the heavenly sanctuary to an understanding of Daniel and Revelation, several papers<sup>2</sup> were assigned to the study of the book of Hebrews.

With this introduction, let me touch briefly on a few of the highlights of the committee's research that are related closely to the book of Revelation.

### 1. Year-day Principle.

Volume 1 of the *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series* of publications contains two chapters by William H. Shea on

the year-day principle: "Year-day Principle—Part I" and "Year-day Principle—Part II." Pastors and ministers who worry that the "year-day principle" is based only on Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 can discover in these two articles no fewer than 23 *kinds* of Biblical evidence pointing to the interpretation of a symbolic day as a literal year. In addition to providing this much Biblical evidence, Shea's chapters also show that, outside the Bible, Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman periods—including authors of the Dead Sea scrolls—also made use of the year-day principle.

Inasmuch as Shea's material has been available since 1982, little more need be said about it here. Suffice it to say that the Daniel and Revelation Committee has found abundant evidence to confirm the year-day principle and thereby to support the standard prophetic dates, 1798 and 1844.

### 2. Basic Chiastic Structure of Revelation.

That Revelation was composed as a literary chiasm was discovered one step at a time by Kenneth A. Strand of Andrews University while analyzing Revelation over a period of twenty years. Strand has presented his discovery in *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*.<sup>3</sup> In 1975 he also presented it to an enthusiastic audience at the quinquennial History of Religions Convention in Britain.

The Daniel and Revelation Committee has in general accepted Strand's research and considers the chiasm a valuable hermeneutical tool.

The concept of "chiasm" does not need to frighten people. The word itself (KIE-asm) is short enough, and the concept which it embodies is quite easy to understand. It means simply that selected key elements which are introduced in the first half of a document are *reintroduced in reverse order* in the second half of the document. Instead of being organized in the sequence A B C D, the normal order in modern western writing, key elements in Biblical and classical times were often arranged in the sequence A B B' A' or A B C B' A'.



Couples who sit together in church form a chiasm when the wives sit together and their husbands sit outside them. The chiastic sequence in this instance is first husband, first wife, second wife, second husband. One can visualize a chiasm any time by spreading the fingers of both hands, placing the thumbs together, and naming off the digits from the left little finger to the left *thumb*, then from the right *thumb* to the right little finger.

Although chiasms are unknown to most Christians today, scholars have been discovering them in the Bible since at least 1818, the first appearance of T. H. Horne's three volume set, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scripture*. In 1953 Oxford University published a work by John L. Myres<sup>4</sup> showing convincingly that even the *Histories* of Herodotus were written in chiastic form! To be sure, the actual events of history do not occur in a neat chiastic sequence, but in ancient times a literary genius like Herodotus—or like John the Revelator—could organize in chiastic order the literary elements in his *recounting* of history.

Before I read Strand's book I was skeptical that it could prove to me that Revelation is organized as a chiasm; but the evidence quickly convinced me, just as it has convinced most of the members of DARCOM.

The *first* division of Revelation deals with seven churches located in seven different cities, troubled by heresy and persecution, and much in need of warnings and promises. By contrast, in the *final* division of Revelation we find the church united, dwelling at peace (the gates are never closed) in a single city, New Jerusalem, with everyone enjoying the fulfillment of God's promises.

The *second* division of Revelation (the seven seals) has responding elements in the *second-from-the-end* division of the book (the millennium). For instance, the souls of God's beheaded saints seen under the altar begging for justice in the

fifth seal are seen during the millennium seated on thrones, themselves doing the judging. And so on.

The members of the Daniel and Revelation Committee consider the chiastic structure of Revelation a valuable tool when evaluating Dispensationalist eschatology, so popular among American Evangelicals. Dispensationalist eschatology has encouraged the idea that in Revelation only the seven churches survey the course of history from the prophet's day to the end of time. It says that the rest of the book—the seals, the trumpets, the deadly wound, and the 1260 days as well as the seven last plagues and the fall of Babylon—are all unfulfilled prophecies confined to the *future and the end time*.

But when Revelation is seen as a chiasm, the shift from historic-survey prophecy to unfulfilled end-time prophecy does not come at the end of the seven churches, where Dispensationalism sees it. The shift comes instead after the three angels' messages at the end of chapter 14 and before the seven last plagues of chapters 15 and 16. This is precisely where Seventh-day Adventists in the past have always found the shift, even without the benefit of understanding chiasms.

Discovery of Revelation's central chiasm has helped authenticate a major basis for Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of prophecy.

### 3. Sound Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White.

Because the interpretations offered by Ellen G. White are of significance to Seventh-day Adventists, DARCOM asked Jon Paulien to prepare a paper on "Ellen White and the Exegesis of Revelation: The Seals and the Trumpets."

Most Seventh-day Adventists are aware of such rules as (a) taking into account the *time, place, and circumstances* of an Ellen White message, (b) taking into account the *general tenor* of her writings, and (c) trying to *discover the principle* involved in a given statement. Paulien's paper assumes these basic rules and goes on to offer some new ones addressed specifically to those passages in which Ellen White uses Bibli-

cal words or phrases. Paulien's observations may loosely be summarized this way:

*First*, when Ellen White uses phrases and sentences from the Bible, we should determine carefully whether her intention is to do exegesis and discuss the *actual meaning* of the passage that the words come from, or whether she is merely *using phrases* that are suitable for expressing her own inspired thought.

An example is Ellen White's frequent use of the clause, "I will make a man *more precious* than fine gold." The clause as she uses it is taken from Isaiah 13:12 in the King James Version. But the Revised Standard Version of Isaiah 13:12 gives the clause as "I will make men *more rare* than fine gold," and the context shows that this translation is to be preferred. Isaiah was predicting a future destruction that would result in such a depletion of population that men would become rare indeed (and *therefore* precious).

Examination reveals that Ellen White's use of the passage was not intended to serve as exegesis or commentary. Instead, she found the KJV phraseology useful for expressing God's high evaluation of the *redeemed*,<sup>5</sup> of Christian *character*,<sup>6</sup> and of a well-disciplined *family*.<sup>7</sup> This illustrates the rule that we should distinguish mere use of phraseology from exegetical and other possible uses.

*Second*, we should allow Ellen White's later writings to clarify her earlier ones. As her writing skills improved, her ability to express accurately and clearly the thoughts she received from God improved correspondingly. When an occasional early statement became the subject of controversy, she would offer a clarification. A well known example of this is found in *Early Writings*, pp. 85-86, where she explains her earlier statement that believers would proclaim the Sabbath more fully "at the commencement of the time of trouble."

A more complex illustration of using her later writings to interpret her earlier ones is found in comparing something she said on pp. 279, 280 of *Early Writings* with her later

treatment of the same theme in *The Great Controversy*, p. 613. In *Early Writings* she wrote,

An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, throw down the censer. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, "It is done." And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still [etc.]."

Some of the language in this passage is reminiscent of Ezekiel 9 (the writer with the inkhorn who comes back to report) and of Revelation 16:17 (the words, "It is done," spoken with a loud voice).

But the passage is of special interest to Seventh-day Adventists because some readers think the words "threw down the censer" are an allusion to the angel at the golden altar in Revelation 8 who "cast" his censer "into the earth" before the seven angels sounded their trumpets. These readers use the *Early Writings* passage to argue that the seven trumpets all occur after the close of probation.

So let us examine the statement closely, looking first at what it does and does not say and then analyzing it in the light of a later similar statement. As we look at the statement closely we find that it says nothing at all about the trumpets of Revelation 8, or about the golden altar in Revelation 8. Nor does it speak of an angel's casting down a censer. The person who throws the censer down is Jesus, and the location of His action is the ark in the most holy place. We are impelled to assume that Ellen White had no intention here of exegeting Revelation 8:1-6; she but borrowed a single convenient phrase.

Now let us apply the rule of allowing a later writing to elucidate an earlier one. Let us see how this *Early Writings* statement appeared some decades later in *The Great Controversy*, p. 613:



An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received "the seal of the living God." Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, "It is done"; and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still [etc.]"

We observe that the basic point of the statement from *The Great Controversy*, p. 613 is identical to the basic point of *Early Writings*, pp. 278, 280, namely, that when the sealing work is finished an angel will report the fact and Jesus will cease His intercession. And we observe that two-thirds of the wording is the same in both statements. But we also note that significant changes have been made. The later passage omits entirely the phrases from both Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 8:5. Evidently when revising the *Early Writings* statement into its later *Great Controversy* form, Ellen White did not feel that the phraseology of Revelation 8:5 was needed to express her thought.

Thus we conclude that her early statement (in *Early Writings*, pp. 279, 280) was *not* intended by Ellen White to constitute an exegesis of Revelation 8:5.

It seems apparent that when revising the *Early Writings* statement, Ellen White wanted to avoid giving the false impression that the close of probation is the same as the work described in Ezekiel 9. Apparently she also wanted to avoid giving the impression that the close of probation is the same as the angel's casting down a censer in Revelation 8:5. Thus the *Early Writings* statement should not be used to prove that the trumpets all follow the close of probation. Thus there is nothing in *Early Writings* to disturb the well established Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of the seven trumpets as spanning the sweep of history from John's day to the end of time.

In his DARCOM paper Jon Paulien had much else to say

on the general topic of a responsible use of Ellen G. White, but we move to other matters.

#### 4. Inauguration Not Judgment in Revelation 4, 5.

In fairly recent DARCOM meetings, two papers were read attempting to show that Revelation 4 and 5 describe the investigative judgment. But the members of DARCOM, though giving the papers their close attention, were not convinced by them. They indeed felt a strong sympathy for the authors' conviction that Bible prophecy—in Daniel 7 and 8 and many other places—foresaw the investigative judgment. They just have not been convinced that the investigative judgment can be found in Revelation 4 and 5.

The argument that Revelation 4 and 5 must be the investigative judgment is based largely on similarities between these chapters and Daniel 7:9-14. In both passages the Father and the Son are mentioned, there is at least one book and one throne, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels also appear.

But what about the differences?

In Daniel 7 Jesus arrives dramatically as the Son of man on the clouds of heaven, whereas in Revelation 5 He just appears when needed.

In Daniel 7 the books (plural) are opened *before* the Son of man appears, whereas in Revelation 5 the book (singular) remains closed—thoroughly closed, seven-seals closed—until *after* the Lamb appears. And whereas the scene in Daniel 7 is specifically referred to as a judgment three times (in 7:10, 22, 26), the word "judgment" does not appear even once in Revelation 4 and 5.

After a thorough analysis, the Daniel and Revelation Committee recommends the view that Daniel 7:9-14 and Revelation 4-5 describe two different events, both involving the same personnel but each occurring at a distinctly different time. Daniel 7 clearly refers to the investigative judgment, but the songs and other content indicate that Revelation 4-5

pertains to Christ's inauguration in the heavenly sanctuary following His resurrection.

#### 5. The Gospels Rather Than the Churches as Matrix for the Seven Seals.

Seventh-day Adventists have always seen the seven seals as spanning the course of history from John's day to the end of time, just as the seven seals do, and the four major prophecies in Daniel. There is no reason to depart from this historic position on the seals. But when interpreting the seven seals we have attempted to parallel them one by one with the seven churches—and in doing so have sensed at times an incompatibility. The rider on the white horse is obviously a symbol of gospel purity, but Ephesus, having lost its first love, is not so certainly a pure church. The rider on the red horse is given a sword to kill with, a concept just the *opposite* of the persecuted (rather than persecuting) Smyrna church. And it has always been difficult to parallel the half-hour silence of the seventh seal with anything Revelation 3 says about Laodicea.

Thus it was a matter of great interest when DARCOM first took up the seven seals to discover that several members of the committee had privately begun to compare the seven seals with the gospels rather than with the churches. More specifically, they were comparing the seven seals with the lineup of events given in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, the "Olivet Discourse" or "gospel apocalypse."

Think of Matthew 24 for a moment. The gospel is to be preached in all the world from Christ's day to the end of time. And throughout history there are to be wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences. Here we have the four horsemen, white for the gospel, red, black, and sickly green for war, famine, and pestilence. (War, famine, and pestilence are actually named as the definition of the three colored horsemen in Rev 6:8.)

In Matthew 24 we also have the great tribulation, fol-

lowed by signs in sun, moon, and stars and the appearing of the Son of Man. Similarly, in Revelation 6 we have (in the fifth seal) the souls of God's persecuted saints crying under the altar, followed (in the sixth seal) by signs in sun, moon, and stars, and the appearing of the Son of man.

Comparing the seven seals to Matthew 24 rather than to the seven churches makes not a whit of change in their theological significance and none either to the concept of prophetic fulfillment. But I can testify say that when I have tried following the DARCOM recommendation and have presented the seals in parallel with Matthew 24, I have felt far more confident and convincing than when attempting to present them in parallel with the seven churches.

DARCOM's suggestion that we relate the seven seals to the gospel apocalypse (or Olivet Discourse) rather than to the seven churches serves to confirm—and improve—our long-standing interpretation of the seals.

#### 6. The Seven Trumpets.

At its latest few meetings the Daniel and Revelation Committee has taken up certain details about the interpretation of the seven trumpets. The members are solidly convinced that the trumpets began in John's day and extend to the end of time, that is, that their fulfillment is continuous throughout church history—just as the fulfillment of Daniel 2 is continuous, the fulfillment of Daniel 7 is continuous, the fulfillments of Daniel 8 and 11 are continuous, the fulfillment of Matthew 24 is continuous, and the fulfillment of the seven churches is continuous, and of the seven seals.

(a) The seven trumpets like the seven seals occur in the first half of the Revelation chiasm, along with the seven churches and the great controversy scenes (Rev 12-14), all of them survey-of-history prophecies. The trumpets do not occur in the second half of the Revelation chiasm, which is confined to end-time events.

(b) The fifth trumpet contains an extensive time prophecy



(the "five months" of Rev 9:5)—not to mention "the hour, the day, the month, and the year" (Rev 9:15) of the sixth trumpet—which on the year-day principle cannot possibly be confined to the end time.

(c) Only the seventh trumpet reaches to the end time, for under it "the mystery of God" will at last be "fulfilled" (Rev 10:7).

(d) It is under the seventh trumpet that God's "wrath" appears (Rev 11:18)—and God's wrath is the seven last plagues (Rev 15:1). The seven plagues are not the same as the seven trumpets. The seven plagues constitute only a small portion of only the seventh trumpet.

(e) And to anyone looking to *Early Writings*, pp. 279, 280, for evidence that the trumpets follow the close of human probation, the Daniel and Revelation Committee points out, as we have seen above, that this passage says nothing about the golden altar, the angel standing at the altar, or about the seven trumpets, and when Ellen White revised the statement for *The Great Controversy*, she removed even the hint of Revelation 8:5.

#### 7. Other Matters and Conclusion.

Richard Davidson has presented the Daniel and Revelation Committee with some very helpful insights into the use of sanctuary imagery in the book of Revelation. I omit further comment because he himself is presenting a paper on this theme at this meeting of the Adventist Theological Society.

Various other papers are still in preparation, on the United States in Prophecy, the mark of the beast, the millennium, and several other topics. They—and the five volumes already published—deserve widespread recognition and use.

The serious work of the Daniel and Revelation Committee during the past nine and a half years has done much to confirm—and to refine—the essentials of long-standing Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of prophecy.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The five volumes are: vol. 1, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*; vol. 2, *Symposium on Daniel*; vol. 3, *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*; vol. 4, *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*; and vol. 5, *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey (1845-1863)*.

<sup>2</sup> See vol. 4 in note 1 above.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, rev. and enl. ed. (Naples, Florida: Ann Arbor Publishers, Inc., 1970, 172, 1976, 1979). This work originally appeared as *The Open Gates of Heaven*.

<sup>4</sup> Compare George E. Duckworth, *Structural Patterns and Proportions in Vergil's Aeneid: A Study in Mathematical Composition* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962), which says of Vergil's *Eclogues* that "certain *Eclogues* in the second half of the collection correspond to poems in the first half, and in reverse order."

<sup>5</sup> As in the Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1150.

<sup>6</sup> As in Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> As in Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, p. 32.

## HOW TO SURVIVE THE COMING SUNDAY-LAW CRISIS

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Recent world events have riveted Christian attention, with breath-taking urgency, on the approach of the second advent. To many, time suddenly seems very short. The end appears to be at hand.

Two ideologies competing for world domination, Communism and Catholicism, have "made history" in very notable ways. In some European countries, Communism has been crashingly overthrown. The Berlin wall has crumbled to bits, and the Soviet Union has established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. More recently, events focusing on the Persian Gulf have found the United States leading a "world coalition" composed of many member states of the United Nations.

Such developments seem to have almost cleared the way for "all the world to wonder after the beast" in fulfillment of Revelation 13 and related Bible prophecies as Seventh-day Adventists understand them. In these prophecies, Seventh-day Adventists have long foreseen that the United States shortly before the second coming would lead out in establishing a new world order—a world order in which, unhappily, the United States would, on behalf of the Vatican, assume the burden of persuading the rest of the world to enforce coercive Sunday observance.

A century ago, when the United States was far from being

a world power, Seventh-day Adventists saw that even then "agencies of evil are [were] combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great conflict." We believed even then that "great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones."<sup>1</sup> If that seemed true a century ago, what about today?

If indeed the Sunday-law crisis that Adventists see in Revelation 13 is almost upon us, it really is time to ask again, "How will we survive the coming Sunday-law crisis?"

### The Sabbath in Crisis

Just off the press (1990) is "Sabbath in Crisis," written by Dale Ratzlaff,<sup>2</sup> a former Seventh-day Adventist minister.<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson writes the foreword, and Carson was the one who edited *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (1982),<sup>4</sup> which was essentially a response to Samuele Bacchiocchi's *From Sabbath to Sunday* (1977).<sup>5</sup> Ratzlaff's book is a popularized version of the basic thesis found in the more scholarly Carson tome. In order to understand one dimension of the coming Sunday law crisis, it is necessary to grasp the basic arguments in these recent rejections of the seventh-day Sabbath. However, in view of space limitations, only passing reference will be made to them in this article.<sup>6</sup>

As nearly always in Christian history, there are today three basic attitudes toward the Sabbath: (1) Sunday sabbatarianism, which considers Sunday to be the Christian Sabbath (transfer/modification theory), (2) Saturday sabbatarianism, which considers Saturday as the continued Sabbath (reformation/continuation theory), and (3) non-sabbatarianism, which considers the Sabbath to have culminated and ceased in Christ (fulfillment/transformation theory). The Ratzlaff and Carson books subscribe to the non-sabbatarian view. Their thesis is that the fourth commandment Sabbath was given only for Israel,<sup>7</sup> being essentially different from the creation Sabbath, and was merely a type of the salvation-rest that Christ was to bring. Like the priest-



hood, the sacrifices, and the Messianic prophecies, the Sinaitic Sabbath, they say, met both its reality<sup>8</sup> and its fulfillment in Christ.<sup>9</sup> Thus the Sabbath has undergone *transformation* from physical rest to salvation rather than *transference* from Saturday to Sunday.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, the major thrust of Ratzlaff's book is that creation Sabbath was a permanent rest (not a literal seventh day), interrupted by sin, acted out by the Sinaitic Sabbath, and restored with Christ's rest. And now that Christ's rest has arrived, the seventh-day Sabbath has been replaced by it. Biblical passages are to be interpreted within this framework.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Ratzlaff posits a radical dichotomy between the old and new covenants.

#### The Deeper Meaning of the Sabbath

Surely there is a deeper meaning to the Sabbath than appears in these recent books—and I believe that that deeper meaning holds the clue to survival in end-time events.

Basically, the Sabbath teaches "the distinction between the Creator and His creatures."<sup>12</sup> and this meaning of the Sabbath is unfolded more and more as we move through the Bible. In this article we will consider some of the key moments in this unfolding process.

Although the Carson book denies the Sabbath as a creation ordinance,<sup>13</sup> scholars of the past as well as some recent writers have supported his claim. The fact that the manna did not fall on Sabbaths before the commandments were given at Sinai (Exod 16), and the very term "*remember the Sabbath*" in the fourth commandment (Exod 20:8), both presuppose a Sabbath commandment before Sinai. Evidence supports the Sabbath as a creation ordinance.

Prior to creation week neither marriage, the weekly cycle, nor the Sabbath existed.<sup>14</sup> The creation of each was important to the creation of humanity. "Companionship" is a theme that runs through creation week. (See Gen. 1 and 2.) (1) Creatures provided for companionship for man's enjoyment at the

lowest level. (2) Man and woman were created for each other to be companions at a much higher level. And creation week climaxed in the Sabbath<sup>15</sup> where (3) man can be seen as having been made for God—for companionship at the very highest level.

Being omnipotent (see Job 42:2, Ps 115:3, Isa 43:13, Jer 32:17, Luke 1:37) God could have brought everything into existence instantaneously. But He did not. He chose to take a week to do so in order that, subsequently, man might be able to focus on the ultimate purpose for his creation. When we consider that man was not made merely for fellowship with animals or fellowship with a human partner but for fellowship with God, we can begin to enter the depths of Christ's desire to be with man. We grasp this fact even more thoroughly through re-creation at the cross. At the cross we see that Christ was willing to die in order to have man live with Him forever. Properly understood, then, each Sabbath has this commitment of Christ as its very essence—Christ gave everything in order for man to be able to fellowship with Him. If Christ went to that extent, then the Sabbath, far from being legalistic or tied to one covenant, opens up the very heart of the everlasting gospel.

Adam and Eve spent their first full day of human existence in Sabbath fellowship with Christ. What a vantage point from which to go down into the work-a-day week that followed! Here is an insight into the Christian life: work should issue out of time spent with Christ, never the other way around.

In the same way that creation week has a theme that unfolds to its climax in the Sabbath, the meaning of the Sabbath itself unfolds as we move through the Scriptures. Later passages add to the meaning already found in earlier ones. Further, as the events of creation week help make the purpose of man's creation understandable, so the key events in salvation-history throughout Scripture unfold the fuller meaning of the Sabbath.

## Old Testament Examples

With respect to the meaning of the Sabbath, let us consider briefly three major texts, Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, and Ezekiel 20:12. The first insight into the Sabbath comes in the setting of creation. Exodus 20:8-11 calls us to remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy, in memory of creation. Man is reminded by the Sabbath that he is not God or an emanation from God, but merely a creature. There is an infinite qualitative distinction between the Creator and man. Man's creaturely dependence is fundamental to his very existence. He is totally and forever indebted to Christ's power, outside and beyond Himself, to give Him life. Each Sabbath is a call to remember his dependence, because it is so easy for him to think that he is independent and can make it on his own. The Sabbath reminds the race that there really is no "self-made" man.

Deuteronomy 5 contains a notable reminder of the Sabbath command. In it the Israelites were asked to remember something in addition to creation. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deut 5:15). Here the fourth commandment asks that Israel remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy, in memory of the exodus.

These two presentations of the fourth commandment, in Exodus and Deuteronomy, are complementary. The Sabbath is a memorial of both creation and of the exodus. Although God gave both to Israel, we cannot apply the first to mankind as a whole and limit the second to the "called out" nation. The fact that Christ liberates has as much universal appeal as the fact that He created.

Until the exodus, Sabbaths were only a memorial of creation. But following the exodus, the newly "called-out" people had another divine act to remember. The same prein-

carnate Christ who created mankind (Heb 1:1-3), liberated Jewish slaves from Egypt (Exod 20:2, John 8:58)<sup>16</sup> and, through the exodus, formed a new people, a new nation—the covenant movement through whom He wished to prepare the world for His incarnation. The Sabbath thus took on added meaning. It celebrated two completed works of Christ, creation and exodus, a new creation.

Ezekiel 20 focuses on the exodus, unfolding again the meaning of the Sabbath. Christ rescued an unrepresentative people from Egypt. Because they were enslaved to false idols as well as to the Egyptians, Christ longed to free them from the greater as well as the lesser slavery. The exodus was a self-revelation of Christ to them. He said, "I had revealed myself to the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt. Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the Lord made them holy" (Eze 20:9-12).<sup>17</sup>

The word "holy" (*qodesh* in Hebrew and *hagios* in Greek) means "set apart." In the exodus Christ set His people apart from the Egyptians with a view to taking them into Canaan to become a separate nation. The exodus therefore typified historically what Christ longed for His people experientially—separate them from the world so they could become one with Him.

In this context He gave them the Sabbath as the sign of their freedom. They were not set apart merely to be set apart. They were set apart precisely to be with Christ. And only in that relationship with Him could they come to be set apart in reality. In the same way that the Sabbath is time "set apart" from the other six days and Israel was a nation "set apart" from the other nations, each freed slave was "set apart" to Christ—to be sanctified, changed, re-created and thus experience what "being set apart" means. The Sabbath is



“sacred relationship-time” when Christ and the Christian enjoy togetherness, sharing.

In a special sense, the Sabbath is “being” rather than “doing,” but the “being together” moves the Christian to worship. The exuberance of Psalm 92 illustrates the freedom of a “set-apart” person. The Sabbath rest, to such a one, is not merely a cessation from work but also an entering into the good works of adoration, praise, and worship of his Creator-Redeemer in joyful celebration.<sup>18</sup>

Unless Sabbath-keeping opens up our deepest expressions of praise, we’re not experiencing its full potential. Nor are we experiencing the full potential of the three angels’ messages, even though we may be Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>19</sup> The coming Sunday law test is, in part, a test of *worship*,<sup>20</sup> in relation to *commandment keeping* and unfaltering faith in Christ. (See Rev 14:6-12.)

Ezekiel speaks of the re-creative, inward work that only the Creator can actualize. In the same way that Christ created mankind, only Christ can re-create mankind. This is what sanctification is—a work of God. The Sabbath is a sign of sanctification, because it focuses on the distinction between the Creator who alone sanctifies and the creature who but cooperates with God in receiving His sanctification. The Sabbath is a time for communion with Christ, and 1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Christ is our “sanctification.” The Sabbath rest is a sign of sanctification, for it reveals where the source of our sanctification lies: in Him.

#### New Testament Examples

In announcing His earthly mission, Jesus said that He came to set the prisoners free. (See Luke 4:18, 19; cf. Isa 61:1, 2.) The Jews of His day groaned under a slavery worse than the Israelites, their ancestors, had suffered in Egypt. Bound by the chains of their own traditions, they were attempting to work their way to heaven. Rabbi Johanan states that, post-

exilic Judaism taught “1521 derivative laws,”<sup>21</sup> laws which were not only numerous but also wearisomely exacting.

Christ strode among those prisoners calling them to a new exodus as real as the first. In order to do so, He exposed their slavery by revealing the truth about the Sabbath. He came to show that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). He often healed on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21-31, 3:1-5; Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-4; John 5:1-15, 9:1-7) in order to reveal His desire to set men free. Those languishing in “Sabbath-keeping bondage” desperately needed to hear and see His good news. So, to the woman crippled for eighteen years He cried out, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity” (Luke 13:12). Physical freedom promised spiritual deliverance. He recognized that knowing the truth makes people free. (See John 8:32.)

Some scholars disagree with the concept that Christ healed on the Sabbath in order to reveal its true meaning. They see His Sabbath miracles as performed either simply to help the needy or as purposely violating the Sabbath with intention to overthrow it.<sup>22</sup>

The truth is, He did not heal in order to overthrow the Sabbath but to demonstrate His rejection of the people’s false understanding of it. (Halakah).<sup>23</sup> He repudiated the Jewish misunderstanding of the Sabbath by revealing its true meaning.

The Jews were willing to save life on the Sabbath in an emergency but not to do ordinary works of healing.<sup>24</sup> Christ’s placing of human need above human tradition riled the legalists, and presented a recurring problem.<sup>25</sup> “The strongest clashes between Jesus and his religious contemporaries were occasioned by disputes over the sabbath.”<sup>26</sup> These became one of the factors as to why the Jerusalem leaders turned against Christ,<sup>27</sup> though they were not included in the charges they brought against Him at His trial.<sup>28</sup>

Consider another Sabbath healing miracle. The man at Bethesda’s pool had lain ill for 38 years (see John 5:5), a span

of time beginning some 5 or 6 years before Christ's incarnation. Could not Jesus have waited one more day—until Sunday—to heal him? (The fact that He did not wait until Sunday on this occasion yet rested in His grave until Sunday after Calvary, gives us a special insight into His teaching about the Sabbath.) As Jesus gazed on the emaciated remains of a man on the verge of death, He did not feel it inappropriate to recreate him on the Sabbath. Christ knew that he would always link his miraculous "re-creation" with the Sabbath—and with Himself—and lead to his re-creation.

To be what God intended it to be, the Sabbath must open up to us the presence of Christ and do so in a way that makes a radical difference in our lives. Anything less is not the "Sabbath-experience," even if we do "keep" the seventh day.

Yet another Sabbath passage raises the question, "Why did Christ die on Friday?"

The answer derives from a comparison of creation Friday with crucifixion Friday, both marking an end for the human race—the end of creation and the "it is finished" end of Christ's earthly sacrifice for sin (His re-creation sacrifice). But though they mark historic "ends," these two Fridays also mark two noteworthy beginnings. Man began life on the first Friday, and he began eternal life on the second Friday.

The Sabbath always celebrates a finished work of Christ.

On crucifixion weekend, the Sabbath took on an additional meaning. Subsequently the Sabbath would be a memorial not only of creation and the exodus (both finished works of Christ) but also of the cross, another finished work of Christ, His "once-for-all" blood-sacrifice (Heb 9:26, 27, 22) for mankind.

His crucifixion constituted potentially the greatest exodus ever, making available the re-creation of the world and everyone in it. It was a work, a very costly work, infinitely more expensive than creation and the exodus. If no one else could create or liberate as He did, it is a thousand times more true that no one else could give us life by dying.

Calvary represents the acme of the Sabbath's significance, to be unfolded throughout the limitless reaches of eternity. Christ's "It is finished" calls in question every human work, and His Sabbath rest that followed invites us all to rest in His work alone—to rest in it as completed. The Sabbath always celebrates a finished work of God.

No wonder Hebrews 4 speaks of a seventh-day "Sabbath rest" (a *sabbatismos*) that "remains." Although not primarily concerned with the weekly Sabbath but rather with our resting in Christ,<sup>29</sup> it does apply secondarily to weekly Sabbath keeping. (See Heb 4:4; cf. Isa 66:22, 23.)<sup>30</sup>

Just prior to A.D. 70, the approximate date when the epistle to the Hebrews appeared,<sup>31</sup> there did remain a Sabbath rest for Christ's followers, for the Sabbath had followed His death some thirty years earlier as surely as it had followed His work of creation at the beginning of the world. (This is why Jesus warned His followers not to flee on the Sabbath during the attack on Jerusalem which was to take place some 40 years after Calvary. See Matt 24:20.) This powerful parallel<sup>32</sup> between creation Sabbath and Crucifixion Sabbath is not given its proper place by those who say Sunday has replaced the Sabbath.

In the Carson volume, A. T. Lincoln admits that "if the hypothesis of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance could be established, then, whatever the temporary nature of the Sabbath as part of the Mosaic covenant, the appeal could still be made to the permanence of the mandate for one day of rest as inherent to humanity made in the image of God."<sup>33</sup> The Bible supports the seventh-day Sabbath as a creation ordinance, given to mankind as a perpetual memorial, to celebrate the finished works of Christ.

In my opinion, the most serious failure of the Carson and Ratzlaff books is their unbiblical dichotomy between the work of Christ as Creator and His work as Redeemer, with the resulting discontinuity between the Sabbath of the Old and New Testaments. They fail to do justice to the everlasting



Gospel revealed throughout scripture and revealed precisely through the Sabbath.

#### The Real Issue Regarding the Sunday Law

It is important to keep the right day, but it is even more important to have the right experience.

The Jews kept the right Sabbath day but crucified the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:8). When the final "loud cry" invitation is given to the world (see Rev 18:1-4), "notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side."<sup>34</sup> These are Sunday keepers who already have a right relationship with Christ. All they need do is change a day, and God will give them time to do it.

By contrast, there are those who keep the right day but who do not have a right relationship with Christ. To change a day takes a moment; to change a relationship takes much longer. Sabbath-keeping today does not necessarily mean that Sabbath keepers will remain committed to Christ when the Sunday laws come. In fact, we are warned that in that imminent crisis "a greater proportion than we now anticipate will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils"<sup>35</sup> and depart from the church. How many will that be? So many will leave that "the church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out. . . . This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place."<sup>36</sup>

When Sabbath-keepers face starvation through not being able to buy or sell (see Rev 13:17), and even face death from a universal decree (see Rev 13:15),<sup>37</sup> what will lead them to stand true to Christ and His true Sabbath?

Far more than just knowing which day of the week it is! Not until giving up the Sabbath is considered giving up Christ will we be willing to die for the Sabbath (cf. John 14:15). Sabbath keeping is not so much keeping a day as it is being kept by Christ on that day. At its deepest level of significance,

Sabbath-keeping is not something man can do but something Christ does.

God's work is radically different from our work. God brought man into the world; man did not bring himself. And God has patiently and graciously undertaken the responsibility for getting us into His next world. We had nothing to do with being brought into this world, but we do have the choice of accepting or turning down the opportunity of getting into the next world.

As for the question, "How can a person withstand the pressures of a world?" (see Rev 13:3) we should rather be preoccupied with the *who* question, "With whom shall we withstand the pressures of the world?" The answer of course is, *With Jesus*, whom to know aright is life eternal. (See John 17:3.) And the Sabbath was given to provide time for us to get to know Him.

To get to know Him is our responsibility. To get man to heaven is a responsibility God has compassionately taken upon Himself.

It was the job of the three Hebrews' to stand loyal to God on the Plain of Dura, but God assumed the responsibility of keeping them alive in the fiery furnace. (See Dan 3:4 30; cf. 2 Tim 4:16-18, Heb 11:33.)

It is urgent that we know the distinction between the Creator and His creatures. It is imperative to realize that only a resting in Him will carry the remnant through the final crisis. We must rest in Christ's finished work at Calvary—realizing that ever since Calvary He has "ever lived" to save us (Heb 7:25) Realizing too that His death and resurrection irreversibly assure us that this world is His, that human destiny is ultimately under His control, and that eternal life is certain for those who choose daily to abide in Him and by His grace obey His commandments. (See John 17:3.)

Calvary ushered in the great Sabbath rest—a resting in the work of the Creator which guarantees that nothing

whatever in the present or in the future, can separate His people from Him. (See Rom 8:38, 39).

The Conqueror of Calvary enables those who love Him to keep His commandments (See John 14:15), for He "is able to keep" them "from falling and to present" them "before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24 NIV).

### Endnotes

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9: 11.
- 2 Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (Applegate, Calif.: Life Assurance Ministries, 1990).
- 3 Ratzlaff, p. 310.
- 4 D. A. Carson, ed. *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1982). That same year the Seventh-day Adventist Church published its own contribution: Kenneth A Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*. (Washington, D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982). These contributions make no reference to each other, but some of the arguments found in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* are answered in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*.
- 5 Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).
- 6 Because of space limitations, the fuller evaluation of these books is held over for a separate article, to be published later.
- 7 Ratzlaff, p. 41. The Sabbath originated in Israel (Carson, pp. 23-24), was not a creation ordinance (p. 34, cf. pp. 349, 350), and is transcended by Christ (p. 364).
- 8 Ratzlaff, pp. 267-68; Carson, pp. 84, 126; cf. pp. 215, 376, 377.
- 9 Ratzlaff, pp. 223-36, 293; Carson, pp. 113, 369, 373, 374.
- 10 Ratzlaff, pp. 265; Carson, pp. 134-35, 214, 216, 374; cf. p. 282. Those denying any connection between Sunday and the fourth commandment include Tyndale, Peter Heylyn, J. A. Hessey, and Willy Rordorf. Among those accepting Sunday as connected to the fourth commandment are Roger Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott. See Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday, A Biblical and Historical Study*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. vii-x.
- 11 For example, Ratzlaff, p. 135.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 437, 438; cf. *Sabbath in Crisis*, pp. 245, 263-64.
- 13 Though the Carson book, pp. 34, 351, denies the Sabbath as a creation ordinance.
- 14 Genesis, marriage, the weekly cycle, and the Sabbath did not exist. Years are determined by the sun's rotation, months by the moon's rotation, but the weekly cycle is dependent upon the Sabbath. This day was instituted in Eden.
- 15 Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 3/1, p. 223.
- 16 "It was Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, who was the 'God' of the Israelites throughout their history (Ex 32:34; John 1:1-3, 14; Heb 1:1-3; Rev 1:17, 18)." F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Washington

D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954) 1:601; Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 366.

17 This has roots in Exod 31:12-18, where the Sabbath is designated as a sign between God and Israel from the giving of the Decalogue on Sinai.

18 "Nowhere does the OT express its sheer joy in sabbath worship more exuberantly than in Psalm 92, which has the title "A Song for the Sabbath," as quoted in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 1876.

19 The first angel's message, experientially, is worshiping Christ as Creator, and can only issue out of a heart/mind that keeps the distinction between the Creator and creatures uppermost. Worship wells up in the heart/mind of one who knows the "worth" of the One he worships. "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev 14:7 NIV).

20 The three angels' messages describe the two groups of mankind in the end-time as those who worship Christ (see Rev 14:7) and those who worship the beast (see Rev 14:9). The historical examples in Daniel, that give insight into the eschatological confrontation, indicate worship as a key factor. For example, (1) worshiping the golden image in Daniel 2, and (2) worshiping King Darius in Daniel 6. The three Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den represent those who will stand true in their worship to Christ in the coming Sunday-law test. Genuine Sabbath keeping will see them through, as we will note in the final section of this paper.

21 "The multitude of meticulous and casuistic regulations (according to Rabbi Johanan there were 1521 derivative laws) produced to guard the Sabbath, turned the observance of the day into a legalistic ritual"; Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 33.

22 Jean Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), p. 226; W. Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 70.

23 Cf. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2: 1877.

24 See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 60.

25 See George R. Beaseley-Murray, *The Gospel of John*, in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p. 72.

26 Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1981), p. 942.

27 Merrill C. Tenney, *John*, vol. 9 in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981) p. 62.

28 Such a religious charge based on Jewish legal tradition was of no interest to Roman law. But the charge about destroying the temple, which the Romans had helped to build, carried clout.

29 *Katapausis* is not the word used in Hebrews 4:9. *Sabbatismos* is used. For further study see F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 77, 78.; Morris, p.43; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960), 1:362; and John Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 340: 2-8-30.

30 See A. B. Davidson, *Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, n.d.), p. 97; W. S. Plummer, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul: The Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 156; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 114.

31 See Bruce, pp. xlii-xliv.



<sup>32</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), speaks of a rest that followed the two Fridays of Christ's finished work.

<sup>33</sup> Carson, p. 346.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

<sup>35</sup> Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1891, p. 257.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 2: 380.

<sup>37</sup> The test will be as worldwide as the Sabbath command itself. It will be seen that the Sabbath is a "creation ordinance" and "loyalty test" for the race as was the tree in Eden. Both the Sabbath and the tree have universal implications, far beyond any national significance that might be confined to Israel.

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## THE ROLE OF THE LAW IN SALVATION

By Lewis R. Walton

Attorney

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the law has a vital role to play in the process of salvation. Implicit in our denominational name and explicit in our preaching is the assumption that the law—particularly our understanding of the Sabbath—will become the end-time test that will one day bring the world to judgment. One writer, in a thought-provoking essay, has put it this way:

Even though salvation is now accorded to many persons of many churches despite their wide and conflicting array of beliefs, we [Adventists believe that we] will set the house of truth in order so decisively that salvation will eventually be confined exclusively to those who embrace our beliefs. Our message will thus emerge as a universal test of truth and of character. . . . With complete effectiveness we will one day serve as instruments of both salvation and judgment for the entire planet.<sup>1</sup>

Such a perspective is not unique to this one writer. In a similar (if less articulate) way, most "mainline" Seventh-day Adventists agree that our message will challenge the world with a final, catastrophically important decision about obedience or rebellion. And therein lies an irony: there is little present evidence that we are anywhere near accomplishing our objective. The writer just quoted insists urgently that "by no projection of current trends can such a future be seen for the Advent movement. We are simply one denomination

among many, slightly above average in growth rate, though not even on the road toward expectations of this order."<sup>2</sup> In other words, he says, we have not begun to live up to the potential of our faith.

His observation is illustrated dramatically in the statistics of our own youth. It is now clear that by the time they reach eighteen years of age, well over half our young people functionally "sever their church connections."<sup>3</sup> Roger Dudley has reported some unflattering remarks by Adventist youth about the message that we believe will challenge the world at the end of time:

"No fun on Saturdays until the sun is down."

"It's just a bunch of do's and don'ts."

"Dull, and it gets in the way."

I personally remember a young relative, brought up in an impeccably Adventist home, romping gleefully through the house late one Sabbath afternoon while saying, "Oh boy! Oh boy! Only ten more minutes till sundown."

Throughout such remarks one finds a common theme: they relate negatively to the law—the same law that we believe judge the world.

A reverse (but equally illuminating) view of this problem can be found in remarks by Adventist youth who have decided *not* to leave the church. According to Dudley,<sup>4</sup> even "faithful" young Adventists said the following:

"I have a lot of work to do if I want to be saved."

"I wish I could be completely good, but it's not always easy."

"I don't know if I'll be able to stand up for it when the time of trouble comes."

Once again, my memories corroborate this. I well recall the words of an academy classmate, reflecting the uncertainties we all shared:

"I wish I knew if I'm going to be saved, because if I'm not, I sure want to have a ball."

If all church members had the gift of frankness so unique

to youth, many Adventists of mature years might express similar sentiments. Indeed, some have—in a phenomenon we may have oversimplified with the term "new theology." Perhaps we have reached a point where it is time to ask a question heretofore seldom addressed among "conservative" Seventh-day Adventists: granted that the law is a vital part of our theology, have we nevertheless made a basic mistake in our relationship to it, unintentionally programming ourselves (and our young people) for failure?

### The Problem

As one listens to the remarks of Adventist youth, three predominant factors stand out: a desire for heaven, a dread of hell, and a haunting fear that they might try and fail to reach heaven, thus losing this earth's pleasures as well. Put all these ingredients in a blender, mix well, and a single substance emerges: egocentricity. Religious interest (or lack thereof) comes to depend upon what religion can do for "me" at any given moment. Implicit in such an outlook is the real danger that, when confronted by a self-centered temptation, one's religious motivation crumble.

We might be tempted to dismiss religious egocentricity as a frailty peculiar to young people. In fact, it is not. Young people have, after all, learned their religion largely from us. They have heard us tell mission stories—then watched us spend our money. Heard us pray—then heard us argue. Heard us plan for the time of trouble—with heavy emphasis on our own survival, and all-too-little genuine concern for a world full of souls soon to be "judged" by our theology. When one examines the basic motives that seem to have driven our youth, a disquieting truth emerges: these same motives have often driven adults as well.

### Our Motives Deserve Examination.

1. *Desire for Heaven.* Scarcely a Sabbath passes in any Adventist church without prayerful requests for the soon



coming of Jesus so that we can go home to heaven. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; any rational being would naturally want to be there. But upon examination, the motive is basically self-centered. We want heaven's freedom from pain and worry, reunification with departed family members, and freedom from temptation. Rarely do we dwell on heaven's other attributes: a realm where supreme joy is found in selfless service; angels who longed to be in the King's entourage but who lingered instead on stony Olivet with a few bewildered and lonely disciples; infinite Deity imprisoning Himself forever within human tissue for a sacrifice that only a handful would even recognize let alone accept.

A desire for heaven based only on selfish benefits not only distorts heaven but contains a defect that predisposes us to failure. If our only motive for religion is a selfish desire for reward, Satan can overwhelm us with temptations that appeal to the very same motive—and he has the advantage of proximity. His rewards can appear to be immediate.

I suggest that we have too often given our young people this motive, thus programming them to fail. On Sabbath morning they hear about the rewards of far-off heaven. In their own way, they want to be there. And on Saturday night the devil presents a self-centered temptation with a more immediate reward. In giving them a basically selfish reason for religion, we have not equipped them to face temptations that appeal to selfishness.

2. *Fear of Hell.* Unlike the desire for reward, fear of hell is negative rather than positive. There is nothing inherently wrong with it; no one wants to face the terrors of eternal destruction. But in the same way that the reward motive is self-centered, this one is too—sometimes powerfully so. Fear will drive even the meekest citizen to acts that under other circumstances would be murder. A struggling swimmer will stand on the lifeguard's head, if given a chance, to avoid the terrors of drowning. And a crowd will readily trample fellow

human beings to escape fire in a crowded theater. No offense is intended. Those doing the trampling simply want to survive.

If fear is not an intrinsically evil motive, neither is it a good one. Like the desire for reward, it is essentially selfish. And it certainly is not *stable*.

If we are driven by fear, we are likely to succumb to whatever threat is most immediate—the fear of present ridicule, for example, rather than the more distant threat of hell. Motivated by it, we may superficially appear to “keep” the law—until a more immediate and intense fear challenges us with a conflicting demand.

For the Adventist rooted in a fear motivation, I submit that the end of time will be perilous, because it will be a time of fear. There will be a loss of vital services, collapse of constitutional guarantees, and finally a death decree. By using fear as a religious motivator, are we unconsciously programming ourselves to fail in the very test we so proudly plan to pass, the “mark of the beast?”

Is it possible that this is why so many Seventh-day Adventist young people fail to stand successfully against peer pressure?

If this is so, then we may unwittingly have been trying to keep a holy law and a holy Sabbath for reasons that are basically selfish. Ellen White states bluntly that selfishness is “the root of all evil.”<sup>5</sup> If we have brought the “root of all evil” to our quest for obedience, it is not unreasonable to assume that other self-centered behavior may surface in our religious life—judgmentalism, for example, harshness in applying the standards of the law to other people, and even internal dissension among those who claim to believe the same obedience-oriented ethic. Come to the law with a rotten motive, and it logically follows that the resulting “obedience” will give off a spoiled aroma.

With these things in mind, let us search for a Biblical model upon which to test our hypothesis. An appropriate place to begin would seem to be Sinai itself.

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings . . . and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. . . . And the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex 19:16, 18).

The response of the people to this pyrotechnic display was stark terror. Because they perceived themselves to be in danger of death, they promised that “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex 19:8). At this point the Scriptures give no hint of insincerity. Indeed, driven by abject fear, they appear to have been every bit as serious about the law as is the average Adventist—whose view of end-time perils is, after all, still largely visualized from artistic illustrations in denominational publications.

The Biblical record reveals that this fear-motivated obedience lasted Israel for the better part of forty days—not an unimpressive record when compared with the short duration of many of our own New Year’s resolutions. *But they failed!* Motivated by fear, they *encountered* fear—the raw fear of being leaderless in a hostile desert. And with this fear came the allurements of turning to a heathen religion that sanctioned immorality. Driven by selfish religious motivations, they collapsed when confronted with selfish temptations.

Yet God chose to use this scene of intimidating fear to enunciate His law. Why?

#### Different Circumstances

While pondering that question, we are reminded that God visited this same mountain a second time. Five hundred years later He came here again, this time to an audience of one. The story is recorded in 1 Kings 19.

“And he . . . went . . . unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; . . . And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, . . . but the Lord was not in the wind: and after

the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still, small voice” (1 Kgs 19:9-12).

Back when I was studying law, my professors took perverse delight in choosing two apparently contradictory cases and asking the class to distinguish them. Why the difference? Was the court really saying two different things? How could the cases be harmonized? Such an approach seems useful here. It was the same mountain, the same God, the same law, but the circumstances were different. At Sinai of old, God appeared in a thunderous display and gave the law. On the same mountain 500 years later, He pointedly spurned physical force and spoke instead in a quiet voice. Why? What distinguishes the two events?

I submit that there was just one difference—the religious maturity of those present.

Israel at Sinai consisted of essentially unconverted people. They scarcely knew God. Indeed, they even had to relearn His name. Among them were non-Jewish people who had not broken away from raw paganism. To them all, God spoke in terms designed to reach the unconverted mind, using brute force, awesome power, and a negatively framed law containing more don’ts than do’s. That kind of language is necessary only for the unconverted. The converted person, like Joseph, would not even consider the prohibited things to be an option. Instead, his or her reply to temptation would be, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

Contrast Elijah, a man now only 300 earthly miles from the place of his own translation. For him the egocentric motivation of physical fear was nearly meaningless. Earthquake, wind, and fire held no inspiration for him. Instead, he recognized the quiet voice of God.

Here was a lesson that Israel in general never seemed to learn. Somehow their relationship to the law did not mature beyond that of fear-reward motivation, leaving them patheti-



cally unprepared for temptations such as licentious heathenism and the imagined glories of a human monarchy. Periodically driven to despair by foreign invasions, they were prompted by fear to several short-lived reformations. On Carmel, Elijah re-created in miniature the fiery experience of Sinai, only to lose the effects himself within a day. Fear and reward proved useless then as always in bringing Israel to true obedience.

These motivations may be equally useless in dealing with a phenomenon known as Laodicean Adventism—useless for reasons rooted deep in the human psyche.

Students in Psychology 101 routinely learn about a manifestation called the approach-avoidance gradient. Early studies by B. F. Skinner, confirmed that animals can be taught specific behavior forms through fear or reward.<sup>6</sup> Later studies enlarged on this. For example, mice were placed in small runways, with a nest box at one end and a feeding dish at the other. Each day food was dropped into the dish and the mice quickly learned to run to the dish for their meal. After this habit pattern was established, the researchers introduced a variable. In front of each dish they placed wires that carried a painful but harmless charge of high tension electricity. As they heard the food drop, the mice ran expectantly to their dishes, only to be greeted by a painful shock. They began to exhibit signs of confusion. They badly wanted to eat, but they also feared pain. They did not advance toward the food, because that would increase their fear. Neither did they retreat to their nests, because that would take them farther from food. Instead, they remained halfway to their goal, paralyzed by the equilibrium of their own conflicting motives. They were stranded on the approach-avoidance gradient and went nowhere. To put it in the Adventist vernacular, they became certified Laodicean mice.

All of which leads the thoughtful student to a logical question. If fear-reward motivations are not stable bases for obedience, why does the Bible sometimes use terms that

appeal to them? Why did God give the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28? Why did He also give the occasional (if remarkably few) glimpses of heaven, with its jewelled city, its mansions, and its freedom from pain? I submit that the answer is pragmatic. The Bible, like the law at Sinai, is designed to reach even the unconverted mind.

Few people, if any, come to God for unselfish reasons. Their motivations typically are centered in their own personal needs: a splitting hangover, a failing marriage, a sense of emptiness in the soul. Like Israel in the desert, most of us look to the cross first because we know that we are dying and we want to live. It is a marvel of God's nature that He not only accepts us thus, He *seeks* us with all our objectionable traits still in place. "While we were yet sinners . . . we were reconciled to God" (Rom 5:8, 10).

But are the egocentric motivations that bring us to the cross sufficient to *keep* us there? What about Peter's admonition to "grow" in grace in 2 Peter 3:18? And what about Paul's fascinating allusion to milk and meat?

In Hebrews 5:12, Paul makes an astonishing comparison, likening the most sophisticated theologians in the world to babies. For 1500 years Israel had basked in the afterglow of Sinai, with its lucid view of law, judgment, and salvation. For a millennium, successive prophets had brought further illumination. No people in the world had come so close to truth. The Israelites were to be keepers of the flame, teachers of the world. Yet Paul tells them they have to be instructed themselves, in the most basic truths of God. Why?

"For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe" (Heb 5:13).

Like the drowning swimmer, a baby means no offense toward anyone. He cries for milk at 3 A.M., blissfully ignorant of the inconvenience doing so may cause his mother. He means no harm at all; he merely wishes to survive. He is operating quite simplistically on a fear-reward basis, and no one criticizes him for it. He is, after all, a baby.

If, however, he still exhibits these traits at the age of 10, our judgment of him will be far less tolerant. We will probably mutter something about a developmental defect.

Carry the analogy a step further. Suppose he still exhibited these self-centered traits at 40—while professing to have “the truth” that will judge the world? Our reaction would probably be one of contempt—*nauseating* contempt. “*Mello se emesai.*” “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will *spew thee out of my mouth*” (Rev 3:16). The Greek root *emesis* is the source of our word emetic. The connotation is one of impending nausea. And the allusion to lukewarmness reminds us of the conflicting motivations that paralyze someone on the approach-avoidance gradient of religious commitment. Why paralyzed? Because he or she is basically motivated by selfish reasons and cannot decide which conflicting selfish demand to meet.

“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Heb 5:13, 14). Fascinatingly, the term of *full age* is rendered “perfection” in the KJV margin.

Like babies, most of us come to the Lord for selfish reasons. In His mercy, He accepts us as we are. But we cannot live on milk forever. Somewhere we must learn that there are better reasons for the second coming that escape from arthritis and property taxes. What about heaven? What about the pain felt there every day as long as sin goes on? On occasion, television news gives us a view of other people’s agony—the starving child in east Africa, the little boy blinded by an explosive device left over from the Iran-Iraq war. When we have seen all of this that we can stand, we have the option of turning off the television. Heaven does not have that option. *Heaven has to watch.*

“Those who think of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves,” Ellen White once wrote, adding:

Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ’s agony;

but that suffering did not end with His humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every cruelty, every failure of humanity, brings fresh grief to Him.<sup>7</sup>

Language could not be plainer. Heaven is hurting now, and so is Jesus. There are far better reasons for hastening His coming than our own selfish needs. We should long for the second advent in order to ease *His* pain as well as ours; and, if we are the mature Christians we claim to be, with a message that will send the world to judgment, we ought to see this more clearly than any other group of people in the world.

Perhaps we do, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Our generally lackluster spirituality; our own youth who complain of “no fun on Saturdays until the sun goes down” and who openly worry about failing in the time of trouble; and the bickering that goes on, even among believers who consider themselves “conservative,” are symptoms that disturbingly remind us of Israel. Somehow the words of the heavenly Witness seem to fit: Thou “knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17).

### The Remedy

There is a remedy, of course, found in the uniquely Seventh-day Adventist concept of an end-time Day of Atonement.

“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls” (Lev 16:19). The Hebrew word rendered “afflict” is the word *anah*, which suggests intense and unsparing self-examination. It occurs in other places, such as Daniel 10:12, where Daniel chastens his soul while struggling to understand prophecy. It implies a searching for sin that includes not only acts but motives as well.

“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you . . . that ye may be clean from *all* your sins before the



Lord" (Lev 16:30). David, one of history's experts in falling (and falling hard), expressed it this way: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps 19:12). Ellen White amplifies this idea in language that is little short of astonishing:

God's law reaches the feelings and motives as well as the outward acts. It reveals the secrets of the heart, flashing light upon things buried in darkness. . . . The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity.<sup>8</sup>

There is no exclamation point after the last phrase, but the astounded reader is strongly tempted to add one. The very law we preach (and try to keep) searches our hearts and reveals a reservoir of selfishness that we ourselves do not even understand. Until we find a remedy for that deep-seated egocentricity, we may linger forever on the approach-avoidance gradient of surrender, dreaming of victories that we never see. There could not be a more eloquent proof of our need for a Savior.

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," Paul said, "that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24). The Ten Commandments, Ellen White assures us, are "ten promises."<sup>9</sup> If this is so, then law keeping is a *result* of our conversion, not the cause. And the evidence suggests that many of us have unintentionally inverted that truth.

When the wind blows, the curtains shake. It does not therefore follow that if I shake the curtains the wind is blowing. Yet I think we have often made just that mistake.

Most Seventh-day Adventists agree that before the end of time there will be a visitation by the Holy Spirit called the latter rain. It will bring majestic results—great personal victories, large numbers of baptisms, and a clear vindication of truth. We long for the latter rain because we know that until it falls we will not see the Lord.

I suggest that perhaps unconsciously we have tried to create the latter rain by synthesizing its results. It will bring many people to the church, so we devise programs to bring

people into the church, assuming that therefore the latter rain has begun. Because it will bring great personal victories, we strive to "keep" the law, reasoning that if the effect is seen, the cause must also be present. And I fear that we have deluded ourselves. For every thousand souls we baptize each day, hundreds of thousands are born who do not hear the Advent message. Until we come to grips with our own wrong motivations, our efforts to "keep" the law will probably continue to confuse our young people, whose acute minds are quick to detect a gap between profession and reality. We may be shaking the curtains, but I have yet to sense the wind of Pentecost.

It is worth noting that the disciples did nothing to "force" Pentecost. Instead they engaged in deep repentance, reconciled their differences, and talked about the Lord they loved. In the lingering afterglow of Calvary's great explosion, they saw themselves *and* their motives—hot tempers, unsanctified ambition, and egotism that could turn to cowardice. They saw themselves; and then they looked again at the cross, and were converted.

Ten days of this was all that heaven could endure without a response. The upper room was filled with the Holy Spirit—*ruach*, the mighty wind out of the morning of creation. The same force that helped to form a world now energized human lives so powerfully that they took the gospel to the world in a single generation. I suggest that we do not attempt to manipulate power such as that. What we must do is get self out of the way and let it happen.

In Adventism today there is a regrettable trend toward downgrading the importance of the law of God. It is neither Biblical nor sensible, for it removes the moral standard that defines Godliness. But to a greater degree than we realize, this may be a reaction to another mistake—that of claiming to "keep" the law with unsanctified motives, forgetting that the law is proof of conversion, not the cause.

Until we recognize this fact, I fear that we will continue

to hear our own failure described in the blunt but descriptive words of our own youth.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Randolph E. Neall, "An Essay on the Remnant," monograph, October 3, 1983.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Roger L. Dudley, "Why Teenagers Reject Religion," *Adventist Review*, (1978), pp. 20, 21.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 226.
- 6 See, for example, Woodworth and Schlosberg, *Experimental Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1956).
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 11.
- 8 Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1085.
- 9 Ibid., 1:1105.

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## CHRIST-CENTERED PULPITS FOR CHRIST-CENTERED PEOPLE

A Sermon by Mervyn A. Warren  
Oakwood College

A coterie of literary men of the Romantic Movement is meeting in a London clubroom. The conversation has veered to a discussion of famous personalities of the past when one of them asks, "Gentlemen, what would we do if Milton were to enter this room?"

"Ah," replies one of the circle, "we would give him such an ovation as might compensate the late recognition accorded him by men of his day."

"And if Shakespeare entered?" inquires another.

"We would rise and crown him master."

"And if Jesus Christ were to enter?" suggests a third.

"I think," says Charles Lamb, amid intense silence, "I think we would all kneel and fall on our faces."

Christ deserves, and reverence demands, no less than this, that at His presence "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11 NIV). Such reverence must be expressed in the bowed knee of every worshiper who adores Him, the bowed knee of every creature whom He created, the bowed knee of every angel who escorts Him. The occupant of every pulpit that proclaims Him must bow before Him, because Christ is center and circumference of the plan of salvation devised for us "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4).



Christ-centeredness has its detractors, of course, as was evidenced in the first real test of post-lapsarian loyalty to God. Cain and Abel were acquainted with the provisions God had made for the salvation of the human race (announced in Gen 3:15). They also understood that the system of offerings ordained by God invoked active faith in the atonement promised by the Saviour. (See Gen 4:3-5.) Abel responded as directed, but Cain contrived an alternative. Abel brought a blood offering, while Cain offered the fruit of the ground. Both men were challenged to Christ-centered living. One succeeded, the other failed.

The story of Cain and Abel contains a homiletic allegory. The sermon preached by Abel's actions was Christ-centered. The sermon preached by Cain's missed the mark like a drunken carpenter. In reference to the actions of these men, Ellen G. White observes that

Many of our ministers have merely sermonized, presenting subjects in an argumentative way, and scarcely mentioning the saving power of the Redeemer. Their testimony was destitute of the saving blood of Christ. Their offering resembled the offering of Cain. He brought to the Lord the fruit of the ground, which in itself was acceptable in God's sight. Very good indeed was the fruit; but the virtue of the offering—the blood of the slain lamb, representing the blood of Christ—was lacking. So it is with Christless sermons. By them men are not pricked to the heart; they are not led to inquire, What must I do to be saved?<sup>1</sup>

This brings us right to the point. Putting Christ at the center of our preaching must not be thought a matter of window dressing or aesthetic taste. On the contrary, it is a matter of life and death—eternal life and eternal death. George Sweazey taught the meaning of putting Christ at the center of the sermon in these words:

When the minister from the pulpit tells of Jesus Christ, he is not talking of someone who is dead and gone, he is offering an encounter with the living Lord. Jesus Christ is present in the church, coming down the aisle, moving along the pews, entering into the consciousness of the people, ready to reconcile them with God and with each

other, to give new life, joy, beauty, and strength, ready to make their minds like Him. Christ can be the trademark on an institution that was named in grateful tribute to His memory, but with no more real connection with what happens in the church than Chief Pontiac has with the automobile factory, or William Penn has with the Penn Central Railroad. It is the business of the sermon, not to remind people of what Christ once did, but to tell them what he is ready to do now. The implied text of every sermon is "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."<sup>2</sup>

Spurgeon expresses the same point even more effectively when he admonishes preachers as they begin their sermons to make tracks as fast as possible to Calvary.

Enter Paul the apostle. Among the Corinthians, he is determined "to know nothing" among them "except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). But is it true that Paul never talked about anything else in Corinth but Christ? Of course not! Yet again, yes, it *is* true. From a mere topical point of view, the first epistle to the Corinthians mentions a galaxy of local concerns and problems, such as factious divisions, laxity in church discipline, lawsuits, incest, immorality, marriage, and food offered to idols. Nevertheless, while addressing these practical problems of life, Paul makes tracks as fast as he can to Calvary, focusing the light of the cross on the human situation. He attends to human problems only as a part of the fabric of Christian sanctification and holiness. He stitches the name of Jesus Christ into First Corinthians some sixty-four times. (He does so in Romans sixty-seven times.) As the Corinthians listened to their first epistle being read to them, they heard such phrases as "apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), "sanctified in Christ" (1:2), "Christ confirmed in you" (1:6), "the mind of Christ" (2:16), "ye are Christ's" (3:23), "ministers of Christ" (4:1), "the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:4), "the gospel of Christ" (9:12), "the blood of Christ" (10:16), "the body of Christ" (10:16), and "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:57). Thus we can affirm that the only thing Paul really talks about in 1 Corinthians is "Christ."

What a pity that before Christ can get to the heart's door of our congregations and knock on it, He often has to stand outside the door of our sermons first and knock to get into our preaching. If, as Ellen G. White affirms, "The preaching of the gospel is God's chosen agency for the salvation of souls,"<sup>3</sup> why must Christ have to plead and beg and cajole for even an edgeways entry into our sermons? Is it possible that the problem is related, at least in part, to our lack of belief in, respect for, or understanding of the centrality that preaching ought to characterize within the gospel commission? We know that preaching *per se* faces tough times if not stiff resistance on several fronts these days, even within the Seventh-day Adventist church.

According to my personal observation, preaching, as a subject, had to stand outside the door and knock on our ten volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, and apparently it failed to find abundant entry. Other than in brief, almost passing, comments on four New Testament texts, preaching as a subject for study and contemplation is conspicuous by its absence from the entire ten volumes. Alphabetized topics in volume eight, the *Bible Dictionary*, skip from "Prayer" to "Precept;" in volume nine, the *Bible Students' Source Book*, they leap from "Prayer" to "Predestination"; and in volume ten, the *Encyclopedia*, they bounce from "Prayer Meetings" to "Thomas Preble." Volume eleven, currently in process of production, by its very purpose of covering all our doctrinal beliefs promises nothing better.

However, I for one would like to go on record predicting that if volume eleven does not include, at least in its preface or in a special separate article, some clear and bold statement on the primacy of preaching those fundamental beliefs, then our church will continue with the not-so-subtle self-concept of being mere custodians of the truth of the gospel rather than proclaimers of the gospel. Flowing streams provide more life-giving nourishment than do grim self-contained Dead Seas.

Tough times for preaching reach even the halls of seminaries and religion departments when, occasionally, preaching finds itself in the peculiar stance of having to justify its reason for existence among the so-called "content disciplines." David Randolph takes a swipe at this tension between preaching and other theological disciplines by proposing that "ultimately . . . a good theological school does not have a 'chair' of homiletics, but a 'bench' of homiletics, on which the whole faculty sits."<sup>4</sup> In saying this he advances the concept that all theological disciplines exist for the ultimate purpose of proclaiming the gospel of Christ and thus in this sense are members of the homiletical enterprise. C. K. Barrett claims that "scholarship waits upon preaching as its handmaid," and thus he would press the point further by declaring that:

Biblical preaching and biblical scholarship are not two things, but one. The biblical scholar is a preacher or he is no true scholar—he has not understood his own subject. The Bible demands to be preached. The scholar may not, of course, be good at the technique of preaching—that is quite another matter; God shares out his gifts as he wills. But preacher he must be. Again, the biblical preacher is a scholar, or he is unworthy of his office. He may not be a good scholar; he may have no head for Greek. But when he comes to the sacred office of expounding the Word of God he dare not do less than his honest best, with all the tools at his disposal, to find out what God wills to communicate out of Scripture, through him, to his congregation.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps what I am describing is symptomatic of a deeper reality among the movers and shakers of Seventh-day Adventist thought. A candid look discloses a tendency more toward being doctrine-centered than person-centered. While doctrine-centeredness leads to knowledge, person-centeredness leads to a relationship. One Adventist mind-set will squirm anxiously to retort, "But ah-h, Christ is a doctrine." That's true; but only secondarily is Christ a doctrine. Primarily, after a salient manner of speaking, Christ is the Center of experience. Again, we draw from Ellen G. White, who declares, "Christ must be enthroned within. . . . The science of salvation cannot be explained; but it can be known by experience."<sup>6</sup>



In another setting she appeals for an effective balance between the faith of Jesus and the law of God (Rev 14:12) by asserting, "Faith in Christ as the sinner's only hope" has been "largely left out, not only of the discourses given but of the religious experience of very many who claim to believe the third angel's message." Consequently, she noted, their sermons were "Christless."<sup>7</sup>

She further states in her article entitled, "Christ the Center of the Message," that

The third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and this truth must be brought before the world; but the great Center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel's message. By many who have been engaged in the work for this time, Christ has been made secondary, and theories and arguments have had the first place. The glory of God that was revealed to Moses in regard to the divine character has not been prominent. . . .

A veil has seemed to be before the eyes of many who have labored in the cause, so that when they presented the law, they have not had views of Jesus, and have not proclaimed the fact that, where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. It is at the cross of Calvary that mercy and truth meet together, where righteousness and peace kiss each other. The sinner must ever look toward Calvary; and with the simple faith of a little child, he must rest in the merits of Christ, accepting His righteousness and believing in His mercy.<sup>8</sup>

"Abraham, . . . take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt offering" (Gen 22:1, 2). "My father: . . . Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb?" (Gen 22:7).

We, too, have the *fire*—the feeling, the emotional attachment and response. We, too, have the *wood*—hard timber of theological thought and reason and intellectual genius. But where is the *Lamb*? Can He be found in our lives? Can He be found in our sermons? Can He be found in all forms of our witnessing, our *kerygma* and our *didache*?

Come with me to Calvary. There God provides for Himself (and for us) the Lamb. There, stretched between heaven and

earth, against the horizon of dark Golgotha, Christ *is* center! The center of controversy between Jew and Roman. The center of confusion between Jew and Jew. The center of salvation for you and me.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 156.
- 2 George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 18.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5: 87.
- 4 David J. Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 21.
- 5 C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Problems and Biblical Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 48, 49.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 494, 495.
- 7 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1888; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1:203-229; and *Review and Herald*, Sept. 4, 1888.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1: 383, 384.

## LIKE THE LEAVES OF AUTUMN

A Final Word from the Editor  
Leo R. Van Dolson

Fall leaves are spectacular when they turn glorious browns, yellows, and reds while still on the trees. However, they become something of a nuisance when you have to rake them off your lawn.

But there is one impressive quality of leaves on the ground. You cannot escape them. Even after you carefully rake up every leaf on your lawn, they often are replaced quickly as the swirling fall winds blow them your way from neighboring lawns and more flutter down from the trees.

I have been thinking of this again as I have been reviewing denominational history in connection with teaching a couple of Adventist Heritage classes at Southern College.

How impressive the place of literature has been in establishing our work around the world. For example, John Byington, our first General Conference president, received a single issue of the *Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald*. He accepted the truth that he read.

The Seventh-day Adventist work in Scandinavia developed largely from a monthly journal for Danes and Norwegians published in the United States by John G. Matteson.

A box of literature sent to Pitcairn Island in 1876 by James White and John Loughborough prepared the way for the islanders to accept the Adventist message when the mission ship *Pitcairn* would arrive.

in the Kimberley diamond mines led Wilson and several others in South Africa to decide to become Seventh-day Adventists.

Yet we are a long way still from following the instruction God gave us through His prophet that we should scatter Adventist publications "like the leaves of autumn." Our "leaves" includes books (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9: 72), as well as leaflets, and pamphlets (*ibid.*, p. 231).

We are to sow the seed and leave the results with God. "When we give ourselves wholly to God, and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 363).

It is *our* responsibility to give people the opportunity to become acquainted with the truth. What is one of the best ways to do that?

"If there is one work more important than another, it is that of getting our publications before the public, thus leading them to search the Scriptures" (*Christian Service*, p. 13).

"The world is to receive the light of truth through an evangelizing ministry of the Word in our books and periodicals. . . . We have been asleep, as it were, regarding the work that may be accomplished by the circulation of well-prepared literature. . . . Our publications should go everywhere" (*Testimonies*, 9: 61, 62).

"More than one thousand will soon be converted in one day, most of whom will trace their first convictions to the reading of our publications" (*Evangelism*, p. 693).

The "silent witness" of our publications can reach behind many closed doors to lead people to their "first convictions."

I was impressed the other day when I received a report from the *Steps to Christ* Project operating out of Western Springs, Illinois. The handful of lay people operating that project on a volunteer basis, in cooperation with the leaders of many of our conferences, have now sent *Steps to Christ*, along with a packet making Bible studies and other books available to those who receive this material in the mail, to



every home in Alaska and Wyoming and to approximately 50 percent of the homes in Vermont and Illinois.

They have sent mailings to every state in the Union. At the time of this recent report they had sent our publications to more than 4 million homes in the United States out of an estimated 82 million homes.

If we are ever to finish our work, every one of us must be engaged in effective seedsowing. We cannot expect the harvest to come before the seed has been sown.

What better way can be found to sow the seed than through scattering our truth-filled publications like the leaves of autumn?

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