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The Church in the Light of Scripture

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Introduction

Late Tuesday afternoon of the Passion Week the disciples sat with Jesus on the Mt. of Olives. Earlier, as they had left the Temple, several had called Jesus' attention to its massive structure. Addressing their natural pride, He had told them the Temple would soon be completely destroyed and that not one stone would be left on another. The solemn comment disturbed the disciples, because they associated the destruction of the Temple with the end of the world.

As the group rested on the side of the mountain, four of the disciples "privately" asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the world (Mark 13:3-4; Matt 24:1-3). Surprisingly, the first answer Jesus gave them was not a sign about His coming, but rather He expressed His heartfelt concern about their spiritual safety. "Take heed," He said, "that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am Christ,' and will deceive many. . . Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. . . [they will] show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt 24:4-5, 11, 24).¹

This conversation occurred only a few days before the Saviour's death. While He desired to share with them the signs of His coming,

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He was more concerned that his followers not be deceived. Jesus knew Satan would attempt to confound the faith of God's people, especially near the end of time. He would try to confuse them about the authority of Scripture, the meaning of Calvary, the prophecies of Daniel, and the importance of the church. In our present study we will focus on Satan's endeavor to confuse Christ's followers about the importance of the church.

In addition to the warnings Jesus uttered (Matt 24), are the pointed warnings given in the book of Revelation. John writes, "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17). Commenting on this verse Ellen G. White says, "I saw [in vision] that Satan bade his angels lay their snares especially for those who were looking for Christ's second appearing and keeping all the commandments of God. Satan told his angels that. . . sect of 'Sabbathkeepers we hate; they are continually working against us, . . . As they appoint meetings in different places, we are in danger. Be very vigilant then. Cause disturbance and confusion if possible. Destroy love for one another. Discourage and dishearten their ministers; for we hate them.'"²

Satan hates the church, because Jesus Christ gave His life for her (Eph 5:25). She is His bride (2 Cor 11:2). Satan also hates the church whenever the members and ministers of the church love their Savior and put their faith in Him. As Phillips in his translation says, "In all this stands the endurance of the saints—those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (Rev 14:12). Jesus is the Rock on whom the church is built and to whom we cling.

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say I am?" They told Him some thought He was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matt 16:13, 14). When He wanted to know who they thought He was, Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vss. 15, 16). Then Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not

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revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (vss. 17-18).

The rock Jesus referred to was not Peter, as some think, nor was it Peter’s faith, as others think, but Jesus Himself. David says, “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation” (Ps 95:1). Paul says that Christ is the Rock (1 Cor 10:1-4), and so does Peter (1 Pet 2:4-8). Ellen G. White agrees. “The Rock of faith” she says, “is the living presence of Christ in the church. . . . The Lord ‘is the Rock, His work is perfect.’ ‘Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him,’ Jer 17:5; Deut 32:4; Ps 2:12.”³

What is a Seventh-day Adventist? It is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Rock on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church is built and that all the onslaughts of hell will not prevail against it.⁴

In the light of these affirmations we will examine some strategies Satan is using to confuse us about the importance and function of our church: its authority, unity and universality.

The Authority of the Church

All genuine religious authority finds its source in God.⁵ He is above all authority, over all kings and rulers (Dan 2:20-22). God can delegate His authority to whomever He wills. And it was Israel’s responsibility and duty to uphold God’s authority.⁶ When the people showed disrespect for Samuel, they had shown disrespect for God (1 Sam 8:7). So those who despise and reject a prophet of God, or the message God sends through the prophet, are rejecting the authority of God.⁷ The Father has given authority to His Son (Matt 28:18), to the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16-17), and in a limited sense to the church (Matt 16:19).

The Church Under Scripture. Although Christ is the head of the church, and the church as His body is subject to Him (Eph 1:22-23; 5:22-24). When He became one of us, He submitted Himself to

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what was written in Scripture. This was evident in Christ's wilderness experience when Satan tempted Him by challenging His faith in the Father's declaration that He was the Son of God (Matt 4:3). Jesus replied, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (vs. 4). When confronted by the Sadducees, who challenged Him about the feasibility of a resurrection, Jesus said, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29). From these and other passages it is evident that Christ submitted Himself to and relied upon the authority of God's word. And if the Son of God, the head of the church, did so, then the church is obligated to do so as well.

When Jesus questioned His disciples about their understanding of His identity, Peter affirmed their belief that He was the Christ the Son of the living God (Matt 16:15, 16). Then Jesus laid out the parameters within which His church was to exercise its authority. "I will give you," He said, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (vs. 19).

This rendering could be understood to mean that whatever the church decides, heaven will do. Unfortunately, some Christians interpret the verse just that way. But the periphrastic future perfect constructions in these verses read literally, "whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."⁸ The church must make decisions in harmony with heaven's previously recorded decisions in Scripture, not the other way around.

While the authority delegated to Peter and the apostles, including Paul—who considered himself an apostle (Rom 1:1)—was given to them by Christ, their authority was not limitless. And though their authority extended beyond the local congregation, even beyond the numerous congregations which they founded, they always recognized the antecedent authority of Scripture. Peter could be inconsistent in his

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behavior (Gal 2:11-14), and Paul in personal judgment (Acts 15:37-40; cf. 2 Tim 4:11). But both knew that the ultimate authority of the church rested with the inspired Scriptures, not with any human being or collective human beings, not even with those who were used by the Holy Spirit to write Scripture.⁹

The Roman Catholic Position. The order of authority—Christ, Scripture, and the church—was gradually inverted. In a few short centuries after the apostles, the Roman Catholic Church assumed an authority that went beyond Scripture. This is the position it still holds today.

George Johnston, writing in the October 1995 issue of the Catholic journal, *Crisis*, says, “So far as we know, he himself [Christ] never wrote a word (except on sand). . . . Who, then, decided that it [the New Testament] was Scripture? The Catholic Church.”¹⁰ The 1994 edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is even more explicit. It says, “The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”¹¹ “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it.”¹² Furthermore, “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.”¹³

The Protestant Position. The claim by the Roman hierarchy that the church is above Scripture continues to be challenged by Protestants and more specifically by Evangelicals. In a recent Protestant publication, Dave Hunt challenges the Catholic Church’s claim to have sole authority to interpret Scripture, and the Pontiff’s claim to Apostolic succession, for these claims are not in harmony with divine Revelation.¹⁴

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However, while Protestants challenge the Catholic Church's claim to authority over Scripture, they do similarly by exchanging their belief in *sola scriptura* (the Bible and the Bible only) for *prima scriptura* (the superiority of the Bible as one source among other sources of authority).

Unfortunately, such concepts have also been suggested by some within the Adventist Church. In a recent scholarly paper it is stated that proper hermeneutics will not only take into consideration the authority of Scripture, but also the authority of tradition, natural reason, and experience. The paper states that "this is precisely the kind of process and outcome for which we Adventists, like others, should strive in all of our doctrinal efforts."¹⁵ However, this kind of hermeneutic raises the question: By what authority are tradition, experience, and natural reason to be tested? From what source do they derive their authority?

Another suggestion by some in the Adventist Church is to give more authority to the "community of faith." One publication claims that doctrines do not rise from the Bible alone, but from the interplay between the Bible and the experience of the members of the church. We must see the Bible through their understanding of truth. Doctrines, the author says, are not so much right or wrong as they are more adequate or less adequate expressions of religious experience. Each new generation of believers should study the Bible and reformulate our doctrines according to their understanding. He calls this hermeneutical approach *sola scriptura*, claiming that it stands for the superiority of the Bible.¹⁶

As the late Gerhard Hasel pointed out, "The Protestant principle of the 'Bible only' (*sola scriptura*), also often referred to as the 'Scripture principle,' was the battle cry of the Reformation. It involves the supreme authority of the infallible Holy Scriptures to the exclusion of all human authority as regards 'the standard of character, the revealer of doctrine, and the test of experience.'"¹⁷ And as Ellen G. White says, "Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for

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tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation."¹⁸

Throughout its history the Seventh-day Adventist Church has held to the "Bible and the Bible only" as providing the supreme authority to determine faith, doctrines, reforms and practice.¹⁹ And true Seventh-day Adventists will continue to do so.

The Unity of the Church

The church cannot achieve internal unity by working at worship, action, and mission if it fails to address unity of thinking. Unity in thinking will intensify the church's global mission and carry it beyond a simple growth spurt into the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ The reception of the Holy Spirit is in part dependent on a theology firmly and faithfully grounded in divine revelation.²¹

Theological Unity. The core beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were carefully crafted over decades of diligent Bible study and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy.²² As Ellen G. White says, "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God 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"²³

The modern phenomenon of theological pluralism, which allows for diversity of beliefs—not only on peripheral issues, but on the core of Biblical faith—is not conducive to greater unity and mission. In fact, the opposite is true. It slowly erodes the church's identity, unity, and mission.

Notice the effects of pluralism on the United Methodist Church. In his book, *The Problem of Pluralism*, Jerry Walls points out that in 1972 the United Methodist Church voted to adopt pluralism as official policy. Pluralism was seen as a promise of a new beginning. The church would be revitalized. She would be alive with dialogue.

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Members would be freed from the restrictive rules which had bound them to formally held doctrines. They would be stimulated to vital worship and celebration, as well as to significant, evangelistic outreach.

Has pluralism delivered to these Methodists, over the last two decades, what it promised? Has it helped to lay a more solid theological foundation for their ministry? Has it contributed to the unifying vision of the church's mission and the growth of the church's institutions? Why did the United Methodist Church begin to modify its official position on pluralism? According to Walls, the twenty-year-plus official era of pluralism has not brought about a greater unity, nor contributed to the growth of their institutions. To suggest that pluralism will hold the church together and be its most distinctive mark is to suggest chaos and disintegration. Pluralism has actually undermined the kind of unity needed for outreach and ministry.²⁴

The delegates to the 1972 United Methodist conference wrestled with such questions as the ordination of homosexuals, abortion, and the issue of sexual inclusive language in the worship of God. They decided that the church needed to be less judgmental and more tolerant. That was the thing to do. However, the United Methodist Theological Commission on Doctrine found it impossible to agree on which doctrines should constitute the core of the church's beliefs. There were theologians and pastors and laity on the Commission who represented every segment of the theological spectrum. All the Commission could do was to decide to let each board, each person, hammer out his or her own understanding of faith. As Walls points out, here was a group of official church representatives, serving on a doctrinal commission, whose theological views were so diverse that agreement was impossible.²⁵

The transition in the United Methodist Church from traditional doctrinal standards to official acceptance of pluralism was not made overnight. This transition must be seen against the background of years of gradual erosion of their adherence to Biblical authority, which

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eventually made its impact on the unity and mission of their church.

Organizational Unity. The church (ekklesia) is called out, summoned, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to proclaim the “good news of the gospel” to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Matt 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6, 7).²⁶ The church is a new body, but not without a continuity with the OT people of God. It is also the kingdom of God on earth to the extent that the followers of Christ have accepted God’s rule of grace with the understanding that they are heirs of the kingdom of glory to come.²⁷

Throughout the book of Acts the leadership of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit are unmistakably evident.²⁸ After Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road, Christ personally directed him to go into the city, to a street called Straight, to the house of a man called Judas, and there to make contact with the church (Acts 9:1-19). By placing Paul in connection with His church, Christ sanctioned an organized body of believers. He did not give him an experience independent of His church.²⁹ Though Paul had been personally taught by Christ, and continued to look to Him for guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers, and to lay matters of importance before the representative of the church.³⁰

God has not changed His way of directing the work. The Holy Spirit does not give one person an experience contrary to the experience of the church, nor does He give one person a knowledge of His will for the entire church, while the rest of the church is left in darkness. He brings men and women in connection with an organized body of believers so they may have less confidence in themselves and their own judgment, and greater confidence in the judgment of others whom He is also leading, especially those in the offices God has appointed.¹⁵

Any worker who thinks his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, places himself “in a position where he is liable to be deceived.”¹⁶ “When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is

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exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.”³³

As we near the final crisis, instead of feeling that there is less need of order and harmony, we should feel the need of more harmony. Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in disorganizing the work at a time when thorough organization is needed and will be a great force to refute false claims not endorsed by the Word of God. All lines should be held evenly, that there be no breaking down of a system of organization.³⁴

Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently. Ellen G. White was instructed that “In this work there is no such thing as every man’s being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. . . . [In] order that the Lord’s work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must also draw together.”³⁵

Soteriological Unity. In His prayer for unity, Christ lifted up His eyes to His Father and said, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, . . . that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21). One reason Christ prayed for unity among His followers was for the impact of their united witness on the unsaved. When unbelievers see what the power of God can do to bring people together into cooperative union in spite of their national and cultural differences, it provides a powerful witness to what Jesus Christ can do to change lives. Christ’s underlying motive in His prayer for unity was to save others. This is the motive behind members’ commitment to organization also. The salvation of men and women is at stake, and church organization is part of the means to reach out to save them.

The church is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. When

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probation closes and God says, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; . . . he who is righteous, let him be righteous still" (Rev 22:11), the work of the church will be finished. There will be no need for church organization. When that time comes, the church and those who keep God's commandments will not be able to buy or sell (Rev 13:17). The Church's funds will be worthless and the organization as we know it will no longer exist. However, the church as a movement, made up of men and women who love the Lord, will go through to the end.³⁶ As Ellen G. White said, "I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time."¹⁷

The Universality of the Church

The goal of the Good Shepherd is to bring all His sheep into one fold. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. . . . And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14-16). Christ envisions His sheep bound together in a global unity, yet each is individually known by the Shepherd; and they know Him.¹⁸

The New Ecumenism. The Roman Catholic Church also envisions one fold under one shepherd, one global body, but with a different view to organization. Commenting on the Pope's 12th Encyclical, in his article, "That They May All Be One," Richard Neuhaus says, "Ecumenism is not a program of the Catholic Church; ecumenism is in the nature of being the Catholic Church. The Church cannot be true to itself unless it is ecumenical. . . . the ecumenical mandate is indelibly imprinted on the Church's mind and mission."¹⁹ He continues by saying, "[the] earlier ecumenical movement, a movement too often marked by compromise and evasion, has been replaced by a new ecumenical movement that seeks no unity other

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than unity in the truth revealed by God. The difference now is the irrevocable pledge of the Catholic Church to take the lead, as only she can take the lead, in striving for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord that they may all be one.”²⁰

Over against this new ecumenism by the Roman hierarchy—in which global unity may be coerced if need be (Rev 13:1-18)—stands the self-chosen ecumenism of the remnant (Rev. 12:17; 14:1-5). The basis of this self-chosen unity is a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture and the total submission to Jesus Christ. It is this commitment that will eventually bring these two church organizations into conflict. For there is only one global faith (Eph 4:4-6).

The Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are the only two global organizations which oversee a global network under one central authority. But there is a difference. The authority of the Roman Catholic Church rests with the Pope and his appointed cardinals, while the authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church rests in the hands of its global representatives elected by churches and organizations around the world. It is through these two world bodies that the final movements of the “Great Controversy” will take place.

True Universality. The children of God, the world over, are one family.²¹ Some persons once said to Ellen G. White, “‘You do not understand the French people; you do not understand the Germans. They have to be met in just such a way.’ But I inquire: Does not God understand them? Is it not He who gives His servants a message for the people? He knows just what they need; and if the message comes directly from Him through His servants to the people, it will accomplish the work whereunto it is sent; it will make all one in Christ. Though some are decidedly French, others decidedly German, and others decidedly American, they will be just as decidedly Christlike.”²²

We are a universal church. There is not an American Seventh-day Adventist Church, not a French, German, Mexican, Japanese,

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African, or Russian Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the Seventh-day Adventist in America, France, Germany, Mexico, Japan, Africa, and Russia. We are members of a globally united church. We are part of the universal body of Christ whatever our culture, race, or country. We are Seventh-day Adventists first, then we are whatever other identity we have due to our nationality or birth. We all belong to Jesus Christ, who is the head of one undivided body. This is true universality, true global oneness, true brotherhood.²³

Conclusion

When we were baptized, we gladly responded to all thirteen questions in the baptismal vow. This included the question which asked, “Do you believe in church organization? Is it your purpose to support the church by your tithes and offerings and by your personal effort and influence?”²⁴ We answered, Yes. Then we were baptized—married to Jesus. This “marriage” vow is not to be taken lightly. We made a covenant with God to be faithful to Jesus and to His church forever. And we intend to keep that covenant.

This covenant promise means to stand up for what Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has taught our church. It also means to stand up for the church in spite of its shortcomings and human inconsistencies, as disappointing as some of these might be. It is an indication of our immaturity, if we expect a global church of nearly ten million members to be perfect. It is also a sign of our immaturity, if we refuse to support the “family” because we see among us human failings and imperfections.

Notice what Paul said to the Galatians, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel. . . there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed [anathema]” (Gal 1:6-8).

Let us be careful not to lose our first love for Jesus Christ (Rev

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2:1-7). It is, therefore, right and proper that we periodically reaffirm our vow of love to Him who loves us, and of our loyalty to His church. As Seventh-day Adventists we sincerely intend to do this.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).

Endnotes

1 All scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise specified.

2 White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945, Copyright, 1882), pp. 266-267.

3 White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940, Copyright, 1898), p. 414. For a discussion of Matt 16:18 see *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), pp. 430-432. The application of this verse to Peter as the rock came first from Pope Leo I, about A.D. 445. Leo claimed that his authority came from Christ through Peter, who was the rock, the foundation, the door-keeper of heaven. And through the Pope, Peter continues to carry out his responsibilities. From the original language we know that petros (Peter) means a small stone, while petra means a large mass of rock. Jesus said that on petra He would build His church, not on petros. The word petra is also used in Matt 7:24 for the rock on which the wise man built his house.

While the distinction between petros and petra is an acceptable interpretation, sometimes this distinction is given more emphasis than it should. For instance, the two words (petros and petra) both come from the same Aramaic root (kepha). Also we find that in the parable of the sower, Luke 8:5-15, the word petra is used for the stony ground on which the seed fell.

The best evidence against the Roman Catholic claim that Peter is the rock, is found in the immediate context of Matt 16:13-23. In vs. 23 Jesus rebukes Peter for allowing Satan to confuse him about the importance of the cross. Peter would certainly not be the one on whom Christ would build His church.

Protestants, on the other hand, interpret Matt 16:18 to mean that Peter’s faith in Christ is the rock on which the church is built. But our faith is too unreliable on which to build the church. Paul says, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest

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anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8, 9). Ellen G. White agrees and says, "Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, . . ." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 175.

A third interpretation of Matt 16:18 is that Christ Himself is the Rock on which the church is built and to which our faith clings. This is what Seventh-day Adventists believe.

4 In Matt 16:18 Jesus said, "On this rock [meaning on Himself] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it." This verse is often understood to mean that although Satan will attack the church, he will not be able to break down its gates. While this interpretation is allowable, it could give the church a fortress mentality and place our minds in a defensive rather than an offensive position. A more fitting interpretation would be: "The gates of the city of hell, Satan's stronghold called Babylon, will not be able to stand up against an advancing church." Figuratively speaking Satan guards the gates of hell (the grave), but Christ by His death, entered into Satan's stronghold and conquered it. And at the return of Christ, death itself will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). (See SDABC Vol. 5, p. 432.) The church is to be like a mighty army with banners, going forth to conquer the world for Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

5 Frederick Sontag, *How Philosophy Shapes Theology* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), pp. 219-227. Sontag is correct when he says that for contemporary men and women the question of authority is quite central in their lives, whether that authority be political, social, religious, or their own person. But religion requires the willingness of people living in a democratically-elected society to submit to an authority higher than that of the individual, or the vote of the majority. Therefore, the meaning of religious authority is crucial since it defines the context in which religious issues are to be considered. As Sontag points out, when submission to a king or obedience of a slave to a master was the norm, accepting religious authority did not seem as difficult. However, after the almost universal spread of democratic reform in recent centuries and in the resulting era of violent self-assertion and intense concentration on the rights of the individual, submission to an authority higher than oneself has become a major issue in religious life. For contemporary men and women, authority flows from the individual upward, not from some authoritative figure downward. Consequently, (and should we say, unfortunately) after the achievement of democracy, too often the acceptance of divine authority becomes much more difficult and is rejected as incompatible with individual freedom.

In modern times, more than in prior centuries, the problem of authority can

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scarcely be considered apart from that of individual freedom. But it is the unique nature of religious authority—as contrasted with social or political theory in which individual freedom is the fundamental question—that determines that freedom can only be defined in the context of authority. This is the proper order of procedure by virtue of God's particular status—of who He is, what He has done, is doing, and will yet do. If we would place authority in the individual, in his or her personal freedom, can we still grant God ultimate authority? The philosophical context that we accept—that is, where we place the locus of authority—will spell out our theological answer.

Not only is the issue of God's authority a major challenge to contemporary men and women with their preoccupation with individual freedom, but it also includes the question: How much authority has Jesus Christ delegated to humans? When believing men and women recognize no authority above themselves, then they cannot feel called and impelled to speak in God's name, nor be accepted in such a role. The question of a "divine spokesperson," such as a prophet or an apostle, is a crucial first step in settling the issue of delegated authority. The issue is not in the spokesperson but whether any authority lies behind them. And speaking of organized religion, every member must not only first reach a decision about the authority of prophet and apostle but also about the authority of church officials who are to carry on the "Great Commission." In one sense this is impossible if authority in full or in part has been removed from God or if the status of religious authority is uncertain or the method of its communication—such as the claim that "all Scripture is given by God" (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21)—is in doubt.

6 White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917), pp. 15-16.

7 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1890), p. 605.

8 Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 370-371. The New King James Version has a notation to this effect in the margin.

9 D. A. Carson, "Church, Authority in." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 228.

10 George Sim Johnston, "Scripture Alone" as part of "Catholics vs. Evangelicals" by Mary Jo Anderson, *Crisis*, October 1995, p. 27.

11 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 2 "The Transmission of Divine Revelation" (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994), No. 82, p. 26.

12 *Ibid.*, No. 78, p. 25.

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13 Ibid., “The Magisterium of the Church” No. 85, p. 27. In Article 9, “I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church,” Paragraph 4, No. 1, “The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church” the meaning of the authority claimed by the Catholic Church is made still clearer. No. 889, p. 235 says, “In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share of his own infallibility.” No. 890 continues, “The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium’s task to preserve God’s people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church’s shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms:” No. 891, pp. 235, 236 speaks to one such form, “‘The Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith and morals. . . . The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium,’ above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed,’ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.’ This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.”

14 Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), chapters 8 and 22, pp. 99-107; 329-344.

15 David R. Larson, “Beyond Fundamentalism and Relativism: The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and the Development of Adventist Theology” (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Adventist Society for Religious Studies, November 17, 1995), p. 9. Larson misunderstands John Wesley’s use of the word experience for understanding the Bible. What Wesley meant by experience is explained by Jerry L. Walls, *The Problem of Pluralism, Recovering United Methodist Identity* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Good News Books, 1986), Chapter 5, pp. 77-101. “The failure to grasp the objectivity of spiritual experience in Wesley’s thought can easily lead to misunderstanding of his theology. It has been argued, for instance, that Wesley’s emphasis on experience prepared the way for the classical liberal, experience-oriented theology of the nineteenth century. Wesley’s objective view of experience, however, is quite at odds with the subjective understanding of experience which was central to liberal theology in the following centuries,” pp.

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84-85. For a more complete explanation of the meaning of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and the authority of Scripture, see pp. 77-101.

16 Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (Riverside, California: La Sierra University Press, 1991), pp. 88-98. An example of attempting to make *prima scriptura* to be understood as *sola scriptura* appears in the following paragraph: "Noting the inevitable influence of Christian doctrine on the way we read the Bible raises the important question of Scripture and tradition. And this brings to mind the famous Reformation maxim, *sola scriptura*. People sometimes think of this as a call to eliminate everything but the Bible from theological consideration. This is not only impossible, as we have seen, but it is not faithful to the activity of the great Reformers themselves. As developed and followed by Luther and Calvin, for example, this principle represents an affirmation of the Bible's authority, rather than a procedural rule for biblical exegesis. For the Reformers themselves, the Bible was by no means the only object of theological reflection. Their writings contain references, appeals and allusions to a great variety of sources, from the writings of Augustine to the myths of pagan literature," p. 93. A careful reading of Rice's statement will show the confusion of thought between the legitimacy of using other sources for theological study and using such sources as authority for settling Biblical truth. The Bible alone is the sole source and final authority for truth, whereas theological sources have often been used to discredit the plainest statements of Scripture, even the bodily resurrection of Christ.

17 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1980), p. 72.

18 White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.

19 Hasel, p. 73.

20 Fernando L. Canale, "Importance of Our Worldview," *Ministry* (December 1995), p. 14.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

22 R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), pp. 53-71.

23 White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), p. 196.

24 Jerry L. Walls, *The Problem of Pluralism, Recovering United Methodist Identity* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Good News Books, 1986), pp. 3-9.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-17. Walls speaks of the many faces of pluralism—such as equality among races, respect for human diversity, and the right for non-Christian religions to exist. Such generous concern for others—if this is what is meant by pluralism—he says, is not in question. What is in question is theological pluralism,

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pp. 18-28. Pluralism maintains that various theologies and theological-interest groups within the church must be legitimized, p. 31. It is hard to see how all of these theologies can be expressions of the same Christian message, p. 43. Must all doctrinal developments be open ended? Are all doctrinal and theological opinions viable? p. 44. Pluralism, as a truth-claim, is inconsistent with itself, for it is not open to any other serious theological opinions except those which support the principle that doctrines are neither right nor wrong, pp. 74-75. Accepting so many competing viewpoints, as pluralism requires, the question whether there is a non-negotiable theological core will inevitably arise, p. 77.

26 G. W. Bromiley, "Church" *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. One (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 693. Behind the New Testament term (ekklesia) stand both the Greek concept of democracy and the Hebrew concept of theocracy, and in the church the two are brought together in a theocratic democracy or in a democratic theocracy.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 693-694. The church is not a simple organism, but multi-dimensional in nature as the following expressions show: the church is the Israel of God (Gal 6:15-16); it is the planting of God (1 Cor 3:10-11); it is the household and family of God (Eph 2:19; 3:15; 4:6); it is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25); it is the body of Christ (Eph 4:15; 1:22-23); it is the temple of God (Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:4-5); it is a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9); it is under the government of the King of kings.

28 In the book of Acts the powerful leadership of the Holy Spirit empowers the apostles in their proclamation (Acts 2:1-4; 4:23-31). Deception and lying to church officials is lying to the Holy Spirit and is punished with death (Acts 5:1-11). Recognition of the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of deacons is a prerequisite for ordination (Acts 6:1-7). Refusing to listen to and to accept the gospel is considered as a resisting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-53). Difficulties and persecution are not evidence of the absence of the Holy Spirit in the church (Acts 7:54-8:1). The Holy Spirit cannot be purchased nor can His presence be guaranteed by large donations to the church (Acts 8:14-25).

The Holy Spirit directs and transports evangelists to those ready to hear the gospel (Acts 8:26-40). He directs church leaders to baptize former persecutors whose conversion is still in doubt (Acts 9:10-19). Through the power of the Holy Spirit members are added and churches are multiplied (Acts 2:47; 9:31). Through His power the dead are raised (Acts 9:36-40). Through visions and demonstrable evidence the Holy Spirit directs church leaders when to go contrary to their own convictions against accepting Gentile converts (Acts 10:1-48). The Holy Spirit guides the church to elevate local leaders to positions of prominence (Acts 11:19-

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26). He directs the church to set aside persons, by laying on of hands, for special ministries (Acts 13:1-3). The Holy Spirit guided officials and delegates in a general church council to decide that "it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit" not to require Gentiles to be circumcised (Acts 15:6-29). He designates which mission territory to enter and which one not to (Acts 16:6-10). Rebaptism, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, is made mandatory (Acts 19:1-10). The Holy Spirit uses one prophet to warn another of coming persecution (Acts 21:8-14). Christ, through the Holy Spirit, comforts those in prison (Acts 23:11). The Holy Spirit does not always prevent accidents and disasters (Acts 27:39-44).

29 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1875, reprinted 1948), p. 430.

30 White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 200.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

32 White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 164. Notice the following statements: Be afraid of those who turn their verbal weapons on the church. "They do not bear the divine credentials of heaven." White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), p. 22. The spirit of pulling away from our fellow workers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. Some regard all efforts to establish order in the church as dangerous, a restriction of personal liberty, and similar to popery. It is Satan's special effort to lead men and women to feel that God is pleased to have them choose their own course. This presents a grave danger to the prosperity of the church because God cannot then work with us and for us. See *ibid.*, pp. 488-489. Whenever there is a drawing away from the organized body of God's people, when the church is weighed in human scales and judgment is pronounced against it; it is evident that God is not leading those who do so. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, compiled 1980), p. 18. It is thought to be weakness to yield individual ideas of what is right and proper and to obey the voice of the church; but to yield to such separatist feelings is unsafe and will bring about anarchy and confusion. There comes a time when individual judgment must submit to the authority of the church. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1876, 1948), p. 19.

33 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 260.

34 White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, p. 26.

35 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 258.

36 White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 46-47. See

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also, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888, 1907, 1911), p. 396; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1904, reprinted 1948), p. 41; *Acts of the Apostles*, previously cited, p. 536; and *Review and Herald*, Sept. 20, 1892 where the following thoughts are expressed: The majority of God's people are still in the other churches. Company after company will leave the Lord's side, but tribe after tribe will come in. The remnant will endure to the end. God is at the head of the work and will carry the noble ship which bears His people safely into port. Also in *Selected Messages*, Book Three, p. 422, it says, "There are men who will receive the truth, and these will take the places made vacant by those who become offended and leave the truth. . . . The ranks will not be diminished."

37 White, Letter 54, 1908. (Jan. 21, 1908).

38 Paul had this same global vision for the church. In Eph 4:7-16, he mentions five spiritual gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The purpose of these gifts is to edify and strengthen the church as is the purpose of all the other spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12). They are to uphold the work of ministry, to equip the saints, and to keep the church from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine until we all come into the unity of the faith. This means that men and women are to grow up into Christ, who is the head, from whom the whole body is knit together by what every joint supplies.

39 Richard John Neuhaus, "That They May All Be One" (The Pope's 12th Encyclical), *Crisis*, September, 1995, p. 27.

40 Ibid. Neuhaus, commenting further on this new ecumenism says, "While acknowledging that much progress has been made in theological dialogues, especially with Lutherans and Anglicans, *Ut unum sint* recognizes that it cannot be assumed with Protestants, as it can be assumed with the Orthodox, that there is already a secure foundation for full communion."

"The encyclical lists five areas where much work is needed 'before a true consensus of faith can be achieved.' They are: 1) the relationship between scripture and sacred tradition, 2) the real presence and sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, 3) the sacrament of Ordination and the meaning of apostolic ministry, 4) the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church, and 5) Mary as Mother of God and Icon of the Church."

"Some may be discouraged by that list, since there are issues that have been in dispute between Protestants and Catholics for almost five centuries. The difference at the edge of the third millennium is that they are now the subject of a common exploration in the words of the encyclical, as 'we look at one another in the light of the Apostolic Tradition.' The difference now is that the exploration

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begins from the premise that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The difference now is that we mutually ask forgiveness for sins against unity in the past, and encourage one another, above all, to conversion to Christ, which of necessity is conversion to the unity of his body, the Church," p. 27.

41 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 132.

42 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 180.

43 White, Notebook Leaflets, *The Church*, No. 1. (Written Dec. 24, 1905). Ellen G. White says that the Lord has instructed us to rehearse the history of our past as we enter the closing work. Every truth He has given us is to be proclaimed to the world. We cannot step off the foundation that God has laid. We cannot enter into any new organization because this would mean apostasy from the truth. In *Selected Messages*, Book One (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 179, she says that as we near the end of time some will talk about a purer and holier people coming out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All this pleases the enemy and is not in harmony with the Testimonies.

44 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 15th edition, 1995), p. 31.

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Is the Adventist Faith Legalistic?

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Introduction

The Adventist church is often accused of legalism, mainly because of its emphasis on the observance of the Decalogue. The seriousness of this accusation derives from Paul's criticism of Judaism as a legalistic way to salvation. Adventists usually respond by placing the Pauline statements within the total perspective of the biblical doctrine on the Law since the Scriptures clearly establish the value of obedience. It is not necessary, however, to consign Paul to a minor place within that doctrine. It is preferable to understand in depth his thought on legalism. In so doing Paul becomes the best ally of the Adventist position.

In addition we should at the outset avoid false conceptions about Jewish legalism. Jewish legalism was not merely strict obedience to the Law. Such is not the charge made by the New Testament, rather just the opposite (Matt 5:17-20, Rom 2:17-24). In fact, you cannot be too obedient, according to the Bible.

Nor was Jewish legalism an effort to keep a multitude of minute commandments, as some Adventists have suggested. Each of the 613 commandments of the Pentateuch was meant to be obeyed. Neither

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can we attribute their error to human commandments added to those 613 precepts. Those additions existed, but the objection Paul makes to Judaism is not over human innovation but over an incorrect understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Law.

It is also insufficient to decry Jewish legalism as an effort to keep ceremonial laws outdated by the cross of Jesus. Paul, an Israelite Christian, kept the yearly Jewish feasts and obtained circumcision for his part-Jewish assistant Timothy (Acts 16:3, 20:16, 21:26). He did oppose the adoption of these practices by Gentile converts. But this in itself does not explain in what way Jewish legalism was wrong.

We are on more solid ground to say that their mistake was in trying to obtain salvation through obedience to the Law. But here, again, we should tread carefully, since by all means a Christian should avoid disobedience. Every sin threatens eternal perdition. Since obedience to the Law definitely has to do with salvation, we should thoroughly analyze the Jewish doctrine of the Law to see in what sense its effort to obtain salvation by Law-keeping is erroneous.

Judaism and the Law

By Jewish doctrine we mean, not the Old Testament, but the rabbinical teachings which originated in the last centuries before Christ. The New Testament calls it Pharisaism, which the present-day Synagogue acknowledges as a direct ancestor.

Some scholars have lately held that Paul does not really describe Pharisaism, since the latter supposedly emphasized the importance of the Covenant over work-righteousness. If this were true, Adventists, who also emphasize the New Covenant in the blood of Christ and keep the Decalogue, could be considered just as legalistic as the ancient Pharisees.

These revisionists admit that legalistic rabbinical writings are extant, but consider them medieval innovations. Undeniably, however, traditional Judaism in our days looks upon righteousness in the sight of God as a status obtained through good works. An advertisement

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for the Jewish community published in Argentinian newspapers in 1994, at a time when a beloved Rabbi was sick, made the following appeal:

We must each perform as many good deeds and Mitzwoth [“commandments”] as possible in order to obtain the piety of Heaven and aid his immediate recovery and Messianic redemption.¹

The phrase, “the piety of Heaven,” is the linguistic equivalent of the New Testament’s “the righteousness of God,” so what Paul objects to is alive and well in the synagogue of our day. This makes listening to Judaism very important, in order to understand precisely what Paul criticizes. If we overhear a man scolding another person on the phone, we would be able to ascertain accurately the scope of the reprimand by listening to the other side of the conversation.

Good deeds and mitzwoth mentioned in the advertisement are considered to have atoning value according to Talmudic doctrine. The Talmud is an extensive work with a rather complicated history. A typical page contains a central portion, the Mishnah, surrounded by a commentary, the Gemarah. The Mishnah, committed to writing about A.D. 200, contains teachings orally transmitted from before the Christian era. Its contents are mainly rules and standards for religious practice formulated by Rabbis and followed by the Jews in the times of Jesus and Paul. The Gemarah developed later, during the fourth to the sixth centuries.

Since the Mishnah is not theological but practical in character, it does not address the issue of salvation as such. But what little it does state, taken together with the Gemarah, exhibits a religious thought remarkably similar to the one refuted by Paul. Its main tenets may be summarized in the following:

1. Man establishes his own righteousness through especially deserving deeds. According to the Mishnah, in God’s judgment “everything is according to the reckoning” (Ab 4.22).² The Talmud, accordingly, employs a pair of scales as a figure of speech to describe

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God's judgment. The status of man in the sight of God depends on the relative weight of merits over transgressions:

As to the world to come, if the man has a larger measure of merits, he inherits the Garden of Eden, and if he has a larger measure of transgressions, he inherits Gehenna. (p Qidd 61d ff;³ cf. b Peah 16b).

On the same topic, another early Rabbinical teaching states:

Because the individual is judged by the majority [of deeds], the world is judged by its majority. And if one did one mitzvah, happy is he for he has inclined the balance for himself and for the world to the side of merit. If he committed one transgression, woe is he, for he has inclined the balance for himself and for the world to the side of guilt (T. Qidd 1.14).⁴

Those good deeds do not consist merely in refraining from transgression (p Qidd 1:9), since abstaining from sin is required, and, therefore, is not meritorious. *Atoning* mitzwoth are deeds beyond the call of duty, like deeds of mercy, hospitality, peace-making, etc. (Mishnah in b Qidd 38b; the Gemarah adds that such deeds "incline the scales"

2. In the case of exceptionally righteous people, such accumulated merit can be transferred to posterity, a principle called "the righteousness (or piety) of the fathers." This may be compared to the Catholic conception of a "hoard of merits" accumulated by the saints and dispensed by the Church, as in the practice of granting indulgences. A well-known Rabbi of our day utilizes such a comparison when describing the attitude of ancient Rabbinical works regarding the deeds recorded in the patriarchal narratives:

It is through those acts of supererogatory grace they perform that the[y] gain God's special love, for both themselves and their descendants.⁵

3. Merit is always rewarded with prosperity, and guilt with

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suffering, whether in this world or in the next. God acts like a gardener who cuts off the branches of a tree projecting into an unclean place: so He “brings suffering upon the righteous in this world in order to enable them to inherit the world to come,” and conversely, “causes the unrighteous to prosper in this world to destroy them. . . in the world to come” (b Qidd 40b).

4. Suffering has a purifying effect.

The school of Shammai say: There are three classes; one for “everlasting life,” another for “shame and everlasting contempt,” (Daniel 12:2; these are the wholly wicked) and a third class which is evenly balanced. These go down to Gehenna, where they scream and again go up and receive healing.

The school of Hillel say: He is “great in mercy” (Exod 34:6), that is, he leans in the direction of mercy. (T. Sanh 13.3).

5. The grace of God towards the sinner and the blessings of the covenant are real, but are dependent on human merits. This can be seen in the case of a person with merits and transgressions closely balanced:

If they are equally balanced? R. Yose b. Haninah said, “forgiving sin” (Mic 7:18). R. Abbahu said, “It is written, ‘forgiving.’ what does the Holy One, blessed be he, do? He snatches one of his bad deeds, so that good deeds outweigh the balance” (p Qidd 61d).

But it is also apparent in the case of common Jews, who by belonging to the covenant circle, enjoy the “righteousness of the fathers” transferred to them. In both cases God’s mercy adds merit to those the Jew has on his own, without which He could not reach salvation.

Since the history of the Talmud is somewhat complicated, the revisionists hold that this doctrine of salvation through mitzwoth belongs to medieval thinking rather than to doctrines from the days of Paul. However, the same ideas appear in Rabbinic works of

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undisputable antiquity.

For instance, the suffering imposed on the righteous so as to purify them from guilt appears in the Midrash, or traditional interpretation of the Bible. The oldest Bible version is the Targum, a translation into the Aramaic language of everyday use in the days of Jesus. Targum Onkelos is considered to be strictly literal, but at certain points some interpretation has crept in. This is the way Onkelos translates Deuteronomy 7:10:⁶

[God] pays those who hate Him a reward for their good deeds, in order to take vengeance from them in the world to come; He does not delay rewarding with good things those who hate Him; while they are living in this world He rewards them for the small mitzwoth they have in their hands.

Another midrashic work, the Palestinian Targum, has an explanatory introduction to the story of Abraham in Genesis 15:1.⁷

After these things, after . . . he had killed four kings and surrounded nine encampments, Abram thought in his heart and said: Woe is me now! Perhaps I have received the reward of my commandment-keeping (mitzwoth) in this world and there is no part for me in the world to come. . . or perhaps there were a few meritorious deeds (mitzwoth) in my hand the first time they fell before me and they may prevail against me. . . For this reason there was a word of prophecy from before the Lord upon Abram the just, saying: Do not fear, Abram. . . although I delivered up your enemies before you in this world, the reward of your good works (mitzwoth) are prepared for you for the world to come.

An easily dated author, Josephus (a contemporary of Paul) describes the same account of the battle, assuring the patriarch that he would not lose his heavenly reward:⁸

God commended his virtue and said “Nay, thou shalt not lose the rewards that are they due for such good deeds” (Antiquities of the Jews, I, x. 3).

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We can also find the scales of judgment to weigh merits and transgressions in midrashic narratives of the same age. In the “Testament of Abraham,” (written in 1st or 2nd century A.D.),⁹ the patriarch is taken for a ride through the heavens in a chariot driven by the archangel Michael. He sees, at the gates of heaven, a judgment presided over by “the just Abel” with the help of an angel who weighs deeds in a scale and another who tries them on fire. At that instant a soul arrives who is in danger of damnation for lack of “one righteous deed more than its sins,” but thanks to the intercession of Abraham is saved (12-14).

Viewpoints Contrasted

The presence of these ideas in ancient Rabbinic works implies that Pharisaism in the days of Paul, based the hope of salvation on human merits established through special good deeds. The “works of the law” questioned by Paul are, therefore, the mitzwoth of Pharisaism. They are not obtained simply by not sinning, but by performing certain commandments far beyond strict duty, and they are able to atone for sins.

This is why Paul could not arrive at a compromise with Judaizers who wanted to circumcise Gentile converts. The Judaizers understood salvation to be dependent on mitzwoth, which could be accessed by entering the Covenant. The gate of the Covenant was circumcision. They did not deny the blessings of the Covenant nor the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, but the latter was effective only in the way in which Isaac’s sacrifice was efficacious. That is to say, Calvary added weight to the pan of mitzwoth in the scales of the judgment.

Paul, instead, thinks that a Hebrew Christian might want to circumcise to obey God’s law for his nation and to avoid unnecessary trouble as in the case of Timothy, but the circumcision of a Gentile Christian entails yielding to the false salvation doctrine of Judaizers. The latter presupposes that in the dress of Christ’s righteousness there are threads of human making, the mitzwoth, and that Christ’s sacrifice

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is not all-sufficient. Such a Christian, as he warns Galatians, has fallen from grace (Gal 5:1-4).

Ironically, by placing the Law in a saving role, Rabbinism at the same time betrays it as Law. According to their view, it is only through mitzwoth, obedience beyond the call of duty, that we atone for our sins. In the Law, then, there must be two areas: (1) a required part, the transgression of which threatens us with death, but also (2) an “air space” of options we can take advantage of for merits.

Rabbinism designates the Law with names such as the Tree of Life, the Way, the Truth, Water of Life, Light of the World, etc. in virtue of this saving role. But Jesus took this false theology apart in his preaching. Looking at this almost worshipful attitude towards the Law—or the Will of God revealed in Scripture—Jesus applied all these names to Himself without trepidation, and confronted the Pharisees: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, but you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39, NIV).

Jesus’ teaching on the Law, by contrast, is that there are no commandments of lesser importance (Matt 5:19), nor is the fulfillment of the letter of the Law sufficient. The Sermon on the Mount holds that what the Law really demands is both internal and external perfection: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder. . .’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry. . .” (Matt 5:21-22). Jesus understood his mission to include “completing” the Law (5:17). With a Law “completed” by such elevated requirements there is no hope of going “beyond duty” and obtaining credit before God. The “air space” in the Law disappears, and for fallen man, a sinner by nature, Law means invariably death. Works of mercy and the like are not means to atone for sins, but a requirement of the Kingdom (cf. Matt 25:31-46). After fulfilling them we are just “unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:10, NIV).

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The Adventist Task

We Adventists know that an important part of Christ's mission was "to magnify the law and make it honourable" (Isa 42:21, KJV). But we have not always realized the relationship between this "magnifying" the Law and righteousness by faith. Some have even felt a tension between these ideas. Actually, one opens the way for the other. If we leave salvation entirely to the Messiah, then the Law is free to exercise its ministry of condemning sin and guiding us to Christ. To preach the high norm of the Law is an integral part of preaching Christ. It falls to our task, as Adventists, to explain why the true friends of the Law are Bible Christians, not Rabbinical Judaism.

This task is an urgent one. Some churches try to open a dialogue with the man on the street by proclaiming "Christ is the answer." More often that not, the puzzled man asks: "What is the question?" The great question, of course, is What must I do to be saved? But the man on the street may not sense this, because he has no idea of the depth of his predicament. He does not feel lost, because the Law has not been preached to him, or only in a diluted way. He may think, for instance, that those who do more good than evil will enter heaven—a popular version of the Talmudic scales.

Paul comes to our aid for this urgent task. He admits there is such a thing as righteousness by law, since Law is indeed holy, and just, and good. There certainly is a law-righteousness by which "the man who does these things will live by them" (Rom 10:5, NIV: cf. 3:31; 7:12). But such is not the righteousness of God, the righteousness that God offers.

The reason is that the Law, in contrast to Christ, cannot give life. No matter what Rabbinism thinks, *the Law lacks an integrated atoning mechanism by which we can redeem our guilt*. "If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law" (Gal 3:21, 10, NIV; Deut 27:26). Paul himself was once "faultless" as far as legalistic righteousness was concerned, but later decided that such righteousness was "rubbish" and came to

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God “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ” (Phil 3:4-9, NIV; cf. Titus 3:5; Rom 3:20; 4:5; 10:3).

As far as the Law is concerned, we can only have guilt, never merits, for, being a transcript of God’s character, we will never be able to overreach it. Therefore this holy, just and good law signifies “death” for fallen man when he tries to fulfill it and fails (Rom 7:7-13). That righteousness we receive from God by faith is an act of pure, undeserved grace on His part, and as such drags into dust human pride (Rom 3:22-26; 5:9; 2Cor 5:18; Gal 3:13). Our obedience to God’s Law will always be a loving response to that unfathomable grace, but never a meritorious step towards heaven.

All this means that the Adventist church has never been legalistic in the sense condemned by Paul. True, many Adventist sermons by 1888 needed a corrective, being as dry as the hills of Gilboa. But on the other hand our movement never preached Sabbath-keeping or any other commandment-keeping as a way to redeem sins. We have always understood obedience as something we owe God, not something that establishes our credit before Him. The apostle certainly does not include us in his criticism, but instead contributes the clearest presentation of the way of salvation to share with a perishing world. Let us, therefore, magnify Law; let us magnify Christ and His grace. These are sister ideas, and integral parts of our Adventist heritage and privilege.

Endnotes

1 Paid by Jabad Lubavitch, Buenos Aires.

2 Citations from the *Babylonian Talmud* are taken from I. Epstein, ed. (London: Soncino, 1948-52).

3 Citations from the *Palestinian Talmud* are from J. Neusner, tr., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* (Chicago: Univ. Press, 1984).

4 *Tosefta* citations are taken from the translation by J. Neusner (New York: Ktav, 1979).

5 Jacob Neusner, *Genesis and Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), p. 23.

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6 *The Bible in Aramaic*, A. Sperber, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1959-73).

7 *Neophyti*, A. Diez Macho, ed. (Madrid: CSIC, 1968-78).

8 H. Thackeray, tr. (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1930).

9 G. E. Ladd, "Pseudepigrapha," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 3:1042.

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Ellen White, Lifestyle, and Scripture Interpretation

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Ellen White writes much on the study of the Bible. She carefully spells out the importance and use of proper principles of interpretation. However, it may come as a surprise to some, that, in her opinion, the use of a proper method of interpretation is not the most important factor in arriving at new divine truth.

She indicates that a crucial factor in discovering truth is a lifestyle dedicated to following fully the light that God has already given to the interpreter. The lifestyle determines whether one is able to receive the impulses of the Spirit in the study of Scripture. Lifestyle ultimately impacts the “How readest thou?” Lifestyle, therefore, may explain why interpreters, who apparently use even the same biblical principles to interpret the Bible, arrive at opposite views on the meaning of a text.

Why is lifestyle so significant? This question Ellen White discusses in the context of God's creative design of the human organism. Each human being is governed by laws which deal with the interrelationships regulating the operations between the body, mind and spirit. When God created Adam and Eve, they had a perfect lifestyle which contributed to the harmonious operation of all these faculties. The entrance of sin distorted this relationship, resulting in a

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sinful nature and lifestyle with all their detrimental results on body, mind and spirit.

Through the magnificent plan of redemption Christ has been working incessantly to restore in the fallen race the image of the Creator. Especially since the 19th century God has provided an abundance of scientific knowledge about the laws of health and how they influence the proper function of the human body. This has led to a profound understanding of how the human organism might be restored to some degree to its original purpose—a harmonious operation of all human faculties. In this regard Ellen White provides much information on the best performance of body, mind, and spirit and their effect on the study of the Bible.

The Impact of Lifestyle on Spiritual Discernment

Ellen White presents the view that there exists an intimate relationship between the condition of the body and spiritual discernment. Said she, “Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong.”¹ This means that “every wrong habit which injures the health of the body, reacts in effect upon the mind.”² For the correct understanding of Bible truth we “need clear, energetic minds.” Wrong lifestyle habits weaken the “intellectual powers.”³ By contrast, “right physical habits promote mental superiority. Intellectual power, physical strength, and longevity depend upon immutable laws.”⁴

These convictions are based on her understanding of how God communicates His truth to humans. The part of the human body with which He interacts is the mind. Describing physiological processes, she states, “The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man and affect his inmost life. Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind”⁵ This firmly establishes the principle that there is a strong

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relationship between health and spirituality, making it an absolute necessity to have a clear mind when engaged in the study of God's word.⁶ She says, "It is impossible for men and women, with all their sinful, health-destroying, brain-enervating habits, to discern sacred truth."⁷

In analyzing the factors which influence the mind, I discovered that what Ellen White calls "natural remedies," recommended for restoring the sick, also play an important role in assisting the brain to achieve top performance. These "remedies" are frequently listed as nutrition, water, exercise, air, sunlight, temperance, rest, and trust in divine power.

One of these remedies, temperance, regulates most of the others. In defining its scope, she said, "True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful, and to use judiciously that which is healthful."⁸ As will be shown below, the impact of these remedies on the brain and the subsequent effect on mind and spirituality is profound.

Physical Habits

Diet. No lifestyle dimension receives as much attention in her writings as that of nutrition. Ellen White points out that a variety of good food provides the necessary nourishment for the efficient operation of the brain. Delivering the nutrients to the mind involves converting food by digestion into basic elements which the blood transports throughout the whole system. The digestive as well as the circulatory systems are in charge of assuring that all brain cells receive adequate fuel for maximum performance. Anything that impairs the brain's function should be avoided. Unhealthful foods jeopardize these functions and "the mind is darkened,"⁹ having in turn a negative effect on the outcome of one's study of the Scriptures.

The Quality of Food. Nutrition beneficial to the mind is found in a diet which strengthens the operation of the brain. The best foods, Ellen White says, are those that God originally provided for humanity:

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a vegetarian diet without the use of animal products. She writes: "In grains, fruits, vegetables, and nuts are to be found all the food elements that we need."¹⁰ This is "the diet chosen for us by our Creator"¹¹ and contains "all the elements of nutrition."¹²

Nutrition that is detrimental to the brain should be avoided. This includes all flesh foods such as meat, poultry and fish. The exclusion is very important since their use does not provide "pure blood and clear minds."¹³ Contrary to common opinion, flesh food produces "a poor quality of blood and flesh"¹⁴ and "excites the animal propensities to increase activity and strengthens the animal passions."¹⁵ Many fail to see that when this carnal nature is strengthened "the intellectual powers diminish proportionately."¹⁶ This in turn "enfeebles the moral and spiritual nature"¹⁷

Other substances that jeopardize the mind are condiments and harmful spices. The use of "mustard, pepper, spices, pickles, and other things of a like character" irritates the stomach lining and eventually destroys its natural sensitivity.¹⁸ Spices also arouse the animal propensities and consequently weaken "the moral and intellectual powers"¹⁹ and "becloud the reasoning faculties."²⁰

Sugar is also a problem for the mind. It should be used sparingly. Its free use is not good for the stomach because it "clogs the system," "hinders the working of the living machine,"²¹ and causes "fermentation" which "clouds the brain."²² In large quantities it is even "more injurious than meat."²³ Rich, sweet desserts, therefore, should be avoided.²⁴

Meals consisting largely of "soft foods, the soups and liquid foods" are not the best to produce "healthful muscles, sound digestive organs, or clear brains."²⁵ "Improper combinations of food" also create problems for the stomach. They produce "fermentation," causing the blood to be "contaminated and the brain confused."²⁶

Eating Patterns. Ellen White gives much counsel against overeating, calling it "the sin of this age."²⁷ The seriousness of this pernicious habit is underscored by the fact that the Bible puts the sin of gluttony in the same category as drunkenness (Deut 21:20, 21).²⁸

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Too much food overtaxes the stomach and seriously affects the mind. “The brain nerve energy is benumbed and almost paralyzed by overeating.”²⁹ Overeating even leads to “forgetfulness and loss of memory.”³⁰

Eating irregularly or too frequently also affects the mind. “Irregular hours” for eating exhaust “the brain forces”³¹ and “deprave the mind.”³² “The sin of intemperate eating, eating too frequently, too much, and of rich, unwholesome food, destroys the healthy action of the digestive organs, affects the brain, and perverts the judgment, preventing rational, calm, healthy thinking and acting.”³³

The impact of this type of lifestyle disqualifies a person for serious study of the Bible. “If our appetites are not under the control of a sanctified mind, if we are not temperate in all our eating and drinking,” she says, “we shall not be in a state of mental and physical soundness to study the word with a purpose to learn what saith the Scripture.”³⁴ She strongly appeals for the avoidance of all food “that has a tendency to irritate or excite the nerves. Excitement will be followed by depression; overindulgence will cloud the mind, and render thought difficult and confused. No man can become a successful workman in spiritual things until he observes strict temperance in his dietetic habits. God cannot let His Holy Spirit rest upon those who, while they know how they should eat for health, persist in a course that will enfeeble mind and body.”³⁵

“A disordered stomach is productive of a disordered, uncertain state of mind. A diseased stomach produces a diseased condition of the brain and often makes one obstinate in maintaining erroneous opinions.”³⁶ It is not until people deny the gratification of the appetite and practice temperance in all things that they “may comprehend the truth in its beauty and clearness, and carry it out in their lives”³⁷

Persons studying the Bible must keep the mind clear. Those who indulge perverted appetite in eating confuse the brain and will be unable “to bear the strain of digging deep” into the Scriptures.³⁸

Drinking Habits. Drinking habits also affect the proper function of the brain. Water is the drink of choice. Extolling its benefits, Ellen

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White writes, “Pure water is one of heaven’s choicest blessings. Its proper use promotes health. It is the beverage which God provided to quench the thirst of animals and man. Drunk freely, it helps to supply the necessities of the system, and assists nature to resist disease.”³⁹ Water also assists in removing impurities from the blood⁴⁰ and is the “best liquid possible to cleanse the tissues.”⁴¹

She recommends the use of “pure soft water”⁴² but expresses no objection to fruit juices provided they are “pure” and “free from fermentation.”⁴³ Grape juice she describes as a “wholesome drink.”⁴⁴

Drinks to be avoided at all times are tea, coffee and alcoholic beverages. The difference between them is that tea, coffee and alcoholic drinks “are different degrees in the scale of artificial stimulants.”⁴⁵ Describing their far-reaching impact on the body, White writes, “Through the use of stimulants, the whole system suffers. The nerves are unbalanced, the liver is morbid in its action, the quality and circulation of the blood are affected, and the skin becomes inactive and sallow.”⁴⁶

These beverages do not only affect the body but also the mind, distorting one’s judgment. She explains: “The mind, too, is injured. The immediate influence of these stimulants is to excite the brain to undue activity, only to leave it weaker and less capable of exertion. The aftereffect is prostration, not only mental and physical, but moral. As a result, we see nervous men and women of unsound judgment and unbalanced mind.”⁴⁷

As with eating, wrong habits of drinking lead to “errors in thought and action.”⁴⁸ Persons, therefore, whose appetite in drinking is perverted confuse their brain and mind. Consequently they will not be able to engage in deep Bible study.⁴⁹

Physical Activity. Physical activities in the fresh air and sunshine are indispensable to the efficient operation of the mind and the correct interpretation of Scripture. Individuals frequently involved in the study of the Bible—such as students, scholars, theologians and ministers—are often given to a sedentary lifestyle. These occupations, Ellen White warns, are “the most dangerous, for they take men away from the

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open air and sunshine, and train one set of faculties, while other organs become weak from inaction.”⁵⁰

Exercise. The activities Ellen White recommends are those that strengthen the mind. For the greatest benefit these are to be done on a regular basis. She stresses the need for daily physical exercise.⁵¹

Although all physical activities have some benefit, not all forms of exercise are recommended. Exercise should be regulated and balanced. She points out that “the discipline of well regulated labor” is “essential to the securing of a strong and active mind and a noble character.”⁵² For maximum results one should balance activity of mind and body.⁵³ She recommends useful manual labor as the most beneficial exercise, not athletics or sports.⁵⁴

The best place and time for exercise is out in the open air and during sunshine hours.⁵⁵ Gardening, which includes these components, is strongly recommended.⁵⁶ Walking, she considers as the best all-round form of exercise, because it uses “all the organs of the body,” improving greatly the “circulation of the blood.”⁵⁷ This form of exercise is readily available to all persons wherever they reside.

The benefits of exercise are extensive. It increases the circulation of the blood, improves the performance of muscles, veins⁵⁸ and lungs,⁵⁹ aids in “the work of digestion.”⁶⁰ and improves the function of the heart.⁶¹ It also strengthens the liver and kidneys.⁶² “Judicious exercise” will induce “the blood to the surface, and thus relieve the internal organs.”⁶³ The more one exercises “the better will be the circulation of the blood”⁶⁴ which is indispensable for the efficient function and strengthening of the mind. As with all good things, one must take into consideration the principle of temperance. Much exercise without a proportional development of the mental powers forms an unbalanced lifestyle which is likewise detrimental to personal well-being.⁶⁵

The Consequences of Inactivity. All who study the Bible seriously to discover truth must avoid inactivity at all costs, for it “is one of the greatest causes of debility of body and feebleness of mind.”⁶⁶

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The detrimental effects of inactivity are compounded when persons live in unhealthful conditions. Residences which do not provide opportunity for sunshine in the rooms should be shunned.⁶⁷ All rooms should have plenty of light and a good circulation of fresh air.⁶⁸ Places with unhygienic premises should also be avoided because the inhaling of impure air pollutes the lungs, poisons the blood, and makes the whole system diseased.⁶⁹

Persons who do not exercise in the fresh air are undermining their health. The absence of fresh air impedes the function of the skin. The pores of the skin through which the body breathes stay closed, Ellen White says, "making it impossible to throw off impurities." This leads to an overtaxation of "the liver, lungs, kidneys, etc." because these "internal organs are compelled to do the work of the skin."⁷⁰

Prolonged inactivity finally leads to hypotrophy. Bowels become "enfeebled"⁷¹ and muscles "decrease in size and strength," accompanied by a slowing down of the blood circulation.⁷²

One important factor often neglected in obtaining an adequate supply of fresh air is shallow breathing. She remarked, "Stomach, liver, lungs, and brain are suffering for want of deep, full inspirations of air, which would electrify the blood and impart to it a bright, lively color, and which alone can keep it pure, and give tone and vigor to every part of the living machinery."⁷³ In order to have "good blood, we must breathe well."⁷⁴

Thus "neglecting to exercise the entire body, or a portion of it, will bring on morbid conditions"⁷⁵ that will negatively impact the study of Scripture. A lifestyle with good habits of physical activity, therefore, is not optional, but a vital necessity for obtaining a strong, active mind which can clearly distinguish between truth and error.

Mental Habits

Mental activities such as reading and studying also have a profound influence on the mind. Ellen White recommends the reading of the Bible and books related to it as the best mental food for the

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development of the mind. The reading of story books, novels and frivolous exiting tales, however, have a detrimental effect on the mind. She explains that fictitious reading distorts the imagination and ultimately brings about a diseased imagination.⁷⁶ Consequently, it twists reality, leading to incorrect conclusions in the interpretation of the Bible.

Not only the type but also the amount of reading affects the mind. "Much reading" can weaken the moral and intellectual powers of the mind. "Strong minds," she says, "have been unbalanced and partially benumbed, or paralyzed, by intemperance in reading."⁷⁷ "Intemperate habits of reading exert a pernicious influence upon the brain as surely as does intemperance in eating and drinking."⁷⁸ This habit is very detrimental to the brain. She cautions against "the gathering together of many books for study," because these often provide "a mass of knowledge that weakens the mind and makes it incapable of assimilating that which it has already received."⁷⁹ Consequently, "the mind becomes dyspeptic." Wisdom is needed to distinguish between these many authors and the Word of God.⁸⁰

Persons in the habit of constantly studying the opinions of historians, theologians and other scholars are not much better off. She mentions that Christ "did not encourage any to attend the rabbinical schools of His day for the reason that their minds would be corrupted with the continually repeated, 'They say,' or, 'It has been said.'"⁸¹ The sixth chapter of John, she says, has more to offer than "libraries filled with ponderous volumes of historical and theological lore."⁸² "To a large degree theology, as studied and taught, is but a record of human speculation, serving only to darken 'counsel by words without knowledge' Job 38:2."⁸³ The "laborious study of the opinions of men" tends to enfeeble rather than strengthen a person.⁸⁴ She said, "A study of the many different authors confuses and wearies the mind, and has a detrimental influence upon the religious life."⁸⁵

The mental faculties are also weakened by an overload of studies. "Many," she said, "are crowding too many studies into a limited period of time. They are overworking their mental powers; and

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as a consequence they see many things in a perverted light. . . They become unbalanced in mind.”⁸⁶

Ellen White perceives that in the area of mental habits, a person needs to put the Bible in the center of all his/her reading and study. This will strengthen the mind and avoid any distortion of the imagination to prevent unsound conclusions in the interpretation of the Bible.

Pleasure Habits. Ellen White considers the indulgence of the passions very damaging. It “beclouds the mind, lessens physical strength, and weakens moral power.” As a result the “thoughts are not clear.” The subjection of animal passions to the higher spiritual nature is absolutely vital for having correct reasoning powers. Says Ellen White, “the control of all the passions will preserve the intellect and give mental and moral vigor, enabling men to bring all their propensities under the control of the higher powers and to discern between right and wrong, the sacred and the common.”⁸⁷

One passion she specifically identified is excessive sexual activity within marriage. This may cause “paralysis of nerve and brain.”⁸⁸ “Sensual indulgence weakens the mind and debases the soul. The moral and intellectual powers are benumbed and paralyzed by the gratification of the animal propensities.”⁸⁹ Another passion she warns against is the destructive effects of self-pollution, also termed self-abuse (masturbation).⁹⁰

Frivolous, worldly pleasure parties⁹¹ and exciting amusements have an unfavorable influence on physical strength and mental powers. Explaining the effects of these amusements, Ellen White writes, “The mind is not kept in a calm, healthful state for thought, but is, much of the time, under an excitement; in short, is intoxicated with the amusements it craves, which renders it incapable of close application, reflection, and study.”⁹²

Although Ellen White condemns the above pleasure habits, she recognizes that the human body and brain need diversion and rest so they can be restored. Overworking beclouds the intellect and decreases spirituality.⁹³ She says, “If the brain were given proper

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periods of rest, the thoughts would be clear and sharp.”⁹⁴ “Proper periods of sleep and rest” are essential to health of body and mind.⁹⁵ Irregular hours for sleeping impair the brain.⁹⁶

However instead of being involved in amusement that is “sought for the sake of pleasure, and is often carried to excess” she recommends that Christians should spend their leisure time in “recreation” which “when true to its name, recreation, tends to strengthen and build up. Calling us aside from our ordinary cares and occupations, it affords refreshment for mind and body.”⁹⁷ This form of activity prepares the mind for a renewed invigorating study of the Scriptures.

Spiritual Habits

The spiritual habits of persons in search of truth are the key to a total Christ-like lifestyle. Those imitating such a lifestyle realize that in themselves they are incapable of living the life which would place them in a position to receive new light on the Scriptures. They know that they must have the grace of God in order to be fully obedient to the laws of life. “Men will never be truly temperate,” she says, “until the grace of Christ is an abiding principle in the heart,” and “their hearts are transformed by the grace of God.”⁹⁸ It is the outworking of this grace which brings the desired results about. “The minds of all who are renewed by grace will be an open medium, continually receiving light, grace, and truth from above, and transmitting the same to others.”⁹⁹

A Relationship with Christ. Persons with a vital connection with Christ will receive further light. Ellen White says, “new light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness.”¹⁰⁰ The results are far-reaching. When the believer has such a relationship with Christ so that it can be said he/she eats His flesh and drinks His blood, as it were, “the old truths will be presented, but they will be seen in a new light. There will be a new perception of truth, a clearness and a power that all will

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discern.”¹⁰¹ As long as persons are growing in grace “they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths.”¹⁰²

Obedying the Light Already Revealed. Obedience to the light God has already given determines whether the interpreter will receive further light. Ellen White points out that “it is when we walk in the light that shines upon us, obeying the truth that is open to our understanding, that we receive greater light.”¹⁰³ “Those only who faithfully accept and appreciate the light God has given us, and who take a high, noble stand in self-denial and self-sacrifice, will be channels of light to the world.”¹⁰⁴ Those who do not follow the light as fast as the providence of God reveals it will be “in darkness.”¹⁰⁵

Depending on God. A lifestyle of continued dependence upon God is more significant than all education and scholarship. Ellen White explains: “It is sometimes the case that men of intellectual ability, improved by education and culture, fail to comprehend certain passages of Scripture, while others who are uneducated, whose understanding seems weak and whose minds are undisciplined, will grasp the meaning, finding strength and comfort in that which the former declare to be mysterious or pass by as unimportant.”

How is this possible? What makes the difference? She replies: “It has been explained to me that the latter class do not rely upon their own understanding. They go to the Source of light, the One who has inspired the Scriptures. and with humility of heart ask God for wisdom, and they receive it.”¹⁰⁶

Respect and Reverence for the Bible. The respectful treatment of the Scriptures is another important factor determining whether the mind will be enlightened during the interpreter’s study. “When the word of God is opened without reverence and without prayer; when the thoughts and affections are not fixed upon God or in harmony with His will, the mind is clouded with doubt; and in the very study of the Bible, skepticism strengthens. The enemy takes control of the thoughts, and he suggests interpretations that are not correct.”¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

From this investigation we have observed that the lifestyle has a very significant impact on the brain/mind and the outcome of the study of Scripture. It is clear that differences in lifestyle can be a determining factor in why interpreters of the Bible come to opposite conclusions on the meaning of Bible passages even when using the same principles of interpretation.

There are, however, so many lifestyle factors which may influence Bible interpretation—such as eating, drinking, level of physical activity, type of reading and amusements, a personal relationship to Christ, obedience to the divine light, an attitude of total dependence upon God and a reverence for the Bible—that it is impossible to draw conclusions regarding the validity of the interpretation simply on the basis of a given exegesis of the text. The difficulty of obtaining accurate information on all those factors is a major reason why Ellen White strongly encourages persons to bring their lives into full harmony with God's moral and health laws, imitate the life of Christ and focus their study on the Scriptures instead of Bible commentaries.

Her concern is for God's people to grow unitedly in the understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus. She strongly encourages God's remnant to purify their minds so that their blurred vision may clear up. This general lack of clear perception explains why she calls the remnant church Laodicea, a community with a distorted vision and a misconception of their true condition. They think they are rich, but really their poverty is plainly visible because they are naked and have nothing to give (Rev 3:14-19).

True, there are exceptions, but overall the picture is one of poverty. If they listen to the Heavenly Merchant, believe, and do what He tells them, their situation will improve. It is only when His people realize they are nothing in themselves and that their righteous deeds are like filthy rags, that there is any hope. When the truth is perceived as it is in Jesus, when the Lamb of God is lifted up in all His glory,

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then the Savior will disclose Himself with His present truth message.

It is, therefore, of crucial importance for His people to remove the last vestiges of a worldly and unhealthy lifestyle so that the love and righteousness of Christ can shine through their dedicated, transparent lives. Only then will the world see the unity for which Christ prayed—a unity in faith, doctrine, and lifestyle, powerfully proclaiming the good news of His imminent return.

Endnotes

- 1 Christ's Object Lessons, p. 346.
- 2 Healthful Living, p. 195.
- 3 Testimonies for the Church, 2:66.
- 4 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 29.
- 5 Testimonies for the Church, 2:347.
- 6 Testimonies for Ministers, p. 114.
- 7 Testimonies for the Church, 3:162.
- 8 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 562.
- 9 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 426.
- 10 Ibid., p. 92.
- 11 Ministry of Healing, p. 296.
- 12 "Practical Thoughts for Camp-Meetings," Review and Herald, May 8, 1883; Education, p. 204.
- 13 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 383.
- 14 Testimonies for the Church, 2:61.
- 15 Ibid., p. 63. She says: A meat diet "stimulates into intense activity the lustful propensities"; Healthful Living, p. 102.
- 16 Healthful Living, p. 101.
- 17 Ibid., p. 102. See also Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 83.
- 18 Ministry of Healing, p. 325.
- 19 Counsels on Health, p. 114.
- 20 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 150.
- 21 Testimonies for the Church, 2:369.
- 22 Counsels on Diet and Foods, pp. 331, 534, 535.
- 23 Testimonies for the Church, 2:370.
- 24 She counseled that instead of spending money on unnecessary things like candy, gum, ice cream, and other knickknacks, these savings should be used for God's work (Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 329).
- 25 Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 226.

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- 26 Testimonies for the Church, 7:257.
- 27 Testimonies for the Church, 4:454 (She warns that Seventh-day Adventists with all their profession of health reform eat too much. Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 135).
- 28 Testimonies for the Church, 4:454.
- 29 Testimonies for the Church, 2:414.
- 30 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 138.
- 31 "Word to Students," Youth Instructor, May 31, 1894, p. 174.
- 32 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 62.
- 33 Testimonies for the Church, 2:618, 619.
- 34 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 52.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 55, 56.
- 36 Testimonies for the Church, 7:257.
- 37 Testimonies for the Church, 1:619.
- 38 Testimonies to Ministers, p. 114.
- 39 Ministry of Healing, p. 237.
- 40 My Life Today, p. 139.
- 41 "The Duty to Preserve Health," Review and Herald, July 29, 1884, p. 481.
- 42 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 419.
- 43 Ibid., p. 436.
- 44 Ibid., p. 436.
- 45 Ibid., p. 421.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 422, 423.
- 47 Ibid., p. 423. A detrimental practice is the custom of drinking with meals. Using ice water during meals is especially harmful to the digestive system. Thirst can be quenched by drinking water a short time before or after the meal (Ibid., p. 420).
- 48 "Sanctification," Review and Herald, Jan. 25, 1881, p. 50. Irregularity in drinking depraves the mind. (Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 62).
- 49 Testimonies to Ministers, p. 114.
- 50 Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 319.
- 51 Gospel Workers (1892), p. 173, "Daily outdoor exercise" she especially emphasized for persons who exercise little and spend much time indoors (Testimonies for the Church, 2:531, 533).
- 52 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 601.
- 53 "Right Methods in Education," Signs of the Times, Aug. 26, 1886, p. 513.
- 54 Education, pp. 207-222.
- 55 "Right Methods in Education," Signs of the Times, Aug. 26, 1886, p. 513.
- 56 Gospel Workers (1892), p. 174; Ibid., (1915), p. 240.
- 57 Testimonies for the Church, 3:78.

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- 58 Testimonies for the Church, 2:529.
- 59 Ibid., 2:533.
- 60 Ibid., 2:530.
- 61 Testimonies for the Church, 3:490.
- 62 Testimonies for the Church, 2:533.
- 63 Ibid., p. 530.
- 64 Ibid., p. 525.
- 65 Testimonies for the Church, 3:157, 158.
- 66 Testimonies for the Church, 2:524.
- 67 Ministry of Healing, pp. 274, 275; Counsels on Health, p. 57.
- 68 Ministry of Healing, p. 274.
- 69 Healthful Living, p. 172.
- 70 Testimonies for the Church, 2:524.
- 71 Testimonies for the Church, 3:78.
- 72 Ibid., p. 76.
- 73 Testimonies for the Church, 2:67, 68.
- 74 Healthful Living, pp. 171, 172.
- 75 Testimonies for the Church, 3:76.
- 76 "Search the Scriptures," Review and Herald, Nov. 28, 1878. See also Testimonies for the Church, 7:165, 203; Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 134; Messages to Young People, p. 290.
- 77 Testimonies for the Church, 2:410.
- 78 Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 164.
- 79 Testimonies for the Church, 7:205.
- 80 Ibid., 7:205. She exhorts, "Let us close the door to so much reading." See also Fundamentals of Christian Education, pp. 446, 447.
- 81 Testimonies for the Church, 8:31.
- 82 Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 379.
- 83 Ibid., p. 380.
- 84 Ibid., p. 379.
- 85 Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 446.
- 86 Ibid., p. 350.
- 87 Testimonies for the Church, 3:491.
- 88 Testimonies for the Church, 2:477.
- 89 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 458.
- 90 Testimonies for the Church, 2:481.
- 91 Testimonies for the Church, 8:66.
- 92 "The Life of Christ, No. 9," Youth Instructor, Sept. 1873, p. 69.
- 93 Testimonies for the Church, 1:488; Testimonies for the Church, 2:71.
- 94 Testimonies for the Church, 7:256.

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95 Ibid., p. 247.

96 "Word to Students," Youth Instructor, May 31, 1894, p. 174.

97 Education, p. 207. The recreation she especially recommends takes place in the countryside where one can enjoy the beauty of nature. Family outings where parents and children join each other in healthy picnics and exercise in the open air will bring new life so all can face life's duties with new courage (Adventist Home, pp. 498-520).

98 Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 35.

99 Testimonies for the Church, 2:488.

100 Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 35.

101 Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 130, 131.

102 Testimonies for the Church, 5:706.

103 My Life Today, p. 310.

104 Testimonies for the Church, 5:534.

105 Testimonies for the Church, 2:67.

106 Testimonies for the Church, 5:704.

107 Ibid., pp. 704, 705.

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The Authority of the Bible from the Perspective of Isaiah 55

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Introduction

The text we usually cite when dealing with the issue of the inspiration and authority of the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16. However, the matter of Scriptural authority may be placed in a broader perspective, since every biblical corpus adds a significant contribution to this subject.

The debate revolves around the question whether one is in full or partial favor of the working hypotheses of the Neo-Orthodox approaches which postulate that the Bible is not the Word of God, but only contains or testifies to the Word of God. Even though it may be legitimate to say that the Bible testifies to the Word of God, that is, to Jesus, or that the Bible contains some direct utterances of God, such as the Ten Commandments and a considerable number of other declarations, all the biblical data on the issue needs to be taken into account.

Jesus, Himself, the prophets before Him, and the apostles after Him, regarded the Bible as the Word of God. (Cf. the unequivocal statement of the apostle Paul concerning the Jewish canon in Rom 3:1, 2). Jesus recognized the entire Jewish canon as authoritative. Each of

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the three divisions (Law, Prophets, and Writings) are mentioned (Luke 24:44). One of the most remarkable features in favor of the view that the whole Bible is to be considered the Word of God—in addition to the direct and explicit utterances of God—is the way “OT statements not made by God in their contexts, are quoted as utterances of God (Matt 19:4f; Heb 3:7; Acts 13:34 citing Gen 2:24; Ps 95:7, Is 55:3 respectively).”¹

For this article I have chosen to consider our topic from the perspective of the book of Isaiah. It will help to focus on what is at stake in the issue over the authority of the Bible, and how a clear understanding of the matter is of vital importance for the end-time people of God and for their mission to the world. We will examine Isaiah 55, and in particular vss. 6-13. This passage is considered “prophecy’s most comprehensive statement about the word of Yahweh and its effects. . . ; the dimensions are extended to the furthest limits of thoughts and even to the very foundations of Theology.”² R. M. Whybray calls this passage, along with Isaiah 40:8, “the most profound statement about God’s word to be found in the Old Testament.”³

Literary Analysis

The overall literary structure of the chapter may be arranged as follows:

- A1 The first picture: Individual renewal, needs met (1)
- B1 Hearing the Word of the Lord (2-36)
 - C1 The certainty of the promises (3c-5)
 - D The content of the word: a call to repent (6-7)
 - C2 The seriousness of the call (8-9)
- B2 The efficaciousness of the word of the Lord (10-11)
- A2 The second picture: world renewal, the curse lifted (12-13)⁴

The first part of the chapter (vss. 1-5) deals with an invitation to

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a banquet, a feast in a covenant setting.⁵ Different interpretations have been proposed concerning the nature of the invitation. in vs. 1.⁶ Some think it alludes to the cry of the water seller in the market place, or is a parallel to Wisdom's invitation in Proverbs, chapter 9. However, verse 2 specifies that the invitation is indeed to come to God, to listen; our lives depend on this very act of listening. This statement is followed by a messianic prophecy (vs. 3, cf. Acts 13:34).

In the last part of the chapter (vss. 6-13) the prophet uses figures which may be organized as follows:

	Heavens	God	Thoughts	Ways
The Means—	Rain and Snow		Word	
	Earth	Humankind	Thoughts	Ways
The Results—	It is watered		Liberation	
	It bears		Joys	
	It sprouts		Peace	
It furnishes	seed to the sower bread to the eater Universal Restoration Covenant Blessings Jubilation/Worship/Testimony			

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General Observations on Verses 6-13

A few observations are in order. First, there is an urgent invitation to “seek,” “call,” “forsake,” and “return.” Urgency is indicated by the temporal clauses in vs. 6, “while He may be found,” “while He is near” (NASB). Then the prophet turns to compare the surpassing height of the heavens to the earth, the transcendence of God’s thoughts and ways to our thoughts and ways (vss. 8-9).⁷ Between the above two emphases is stated the compassion which God is willing to manifest to the repentant, lost and confused sinner (the one who formerly spent money for what was not bread, and wages for what did not satisfy (vs. 2).

The phrases used to describe the sinner express both the distance separating him/her from God (seek, call, return) and the natural holding on to wickedness (forsake). It is significant that wickedness is noticeable in the ways of its casualties, and unrighteousness in the thoughts of the erring and confused human beings (vss. 6-7). From the perspective of this text, anything that is not precisely God’s thought and God’s way is alienating and ultimately destructive.

The call to conversion (vs. 7) is necessary, since the thoughts and ways which are not from above are bound to result in drought, famine and ultimately death. The Hebrew word (šûb) used to express the return to God points to a genuine conversion experience. This conversion implies not only a change of behavior, but also a change of mentality. Both the ways and the thoughts of humankind are to be deliberately abandoned, not for a limited time, but permanently. However, this is not for the sake of experiencing a mystical experience of emptiness, but rather so as to be shaped by the word of God.

Although the term “holiness,” an important word in Isaiah’s theology, is not explicitly mentioned in chapter 55, in reality it is present on a thematic level. The abandonment of the penitent’s thoughts and ways in exchange for God’s thoughts and ways is an experience of separation from our sinfulness for God’s holiness. The systematic theological category of “sanctification” can be used to

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label such an experience; the conversion to God, the reception of His forgiving grace, the clinging to Him for the transformation of our thoughts and ways, are all elements of sanctification.

After issuing the invitation, the prophet comments on the divine attitude which repentant sinners will meet when they come to God, that is, His compassion (vs. 7). The Hebrew word for “compassion” describes a powerful emotion of deep concern for the welfare of another. Commenting on this work, Andrew Purves notices that, “Unlike our common connection with the heart, the Hebrews connected emotions with the lower viscera, the organs located in the abdominal cavity.”⁸ He also describes this experience as meaning figuratively to have the bowels turned over, what he calls a “gut-wrenching experience.”⁹

Within the limits of anthropomorphic language, this description tells us about God’s response to the human predicament. Indeed, God is amazing. He promises to pardon abundantly. This disposition to give, to give beyond the limits of any merit, is at the foundation of the covenant mentioned in the first section of chapter 55.

The prophet now moves to the agricultural realm to employ a remarkable simile to show that our conversion to God is, in fact, an absolute necessity—a life and death issue. Without rain and snow there is drought; the land, parched and dry, becomes a desert; famine becomes the lot of the inhabitants. At this point it is useful to recall the first invitation in verses 1-2 in order to show the coherence of the whole unit in terms of themes, metaphors and configuration (“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat,” etc., NASB). In the sequence to the second invitation (vss. 6-7) the prophet describes the results of the outpouring of the rain and snow (vs. 10). The earth is watered, it bears, it sprouts, it furnishes seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The whole process ends at the table (so to speak). This metaphor was already employed in verse 2.

Is the prophet simply giving a lecture on agriculture? If this was

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the case, it would indeed be strangely superficial. On the contrary the prophet moves from the known realm of nature to explain the necessity for humankind to receive the word of God so as to change the desert-like life of the sinner. To say it differently: the covenant curse of a dry and unproductive life is changed into a blessing subsequent to the sending and reception of the word of God.

Defining the “Word of God”

Scholarly Views. In the literature commenting on Isaiah 55 the expression “word of God” is variously understood. For example,

1. As a prediction or a promise of return from exile.
2. As an announcement of God’s plan and the appointment of Darius.
3. As the powerful overriding word of God which has its decisive say in history.
4. As whatever proceeds from the mouth of God, not merely some specific prophecy or utterance which is revealed.
5. As God’s authoritative speech, the power by which He brings all things to pass according to His will, His personal presence with His creatures.

Biblical View. In the context of Isaiah several observations should be made for a biblical understanding of the expression “word of God.” These observations will clarify the issues regarding the authority of the Bible and will show the relevance of such issues for our practical life as end-time people of God.

1. Because of the synonymic parallelism between the “word of the Lord” and the “instruction of God” (1:10), the “law” (2:3), the “law of the Lord” (5:24), we may safely say that the “word of the Lord” is intended to provide guidance. This is its didactic aspect. We also find this aspect in Isaiah 30:20-21. “Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. And

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your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left." (NASB).

2. In the same context of Isaiah the prophet is commissioned to write the word of God on a tablet and scroll so that it might serve as a witness forever (Isa 30:8).

3. In Isaiah 8:20 the word, understood as "the law" and "the testimony," is presented as the only reliable source of truth. Instead of consulting mediums, soothsayers and the like, God's people are to rely on His word. The word of God is the foundation of life for His followers.

4. The predictive aspect of the word of God occurs several times in the book (16:13; 24:3; 39:8, etc.)

5. The juridical aspect of the word of God occurs in the setting of the covenant lawsuit as an indictment against covenant breakers (28:14; 32:9; 37:21, 22). This emphasis is relevant not only for God's people, but also for the whole of humankind. Human beings are to be judged by the word of God, not the other way around.

6. The word of God is eternal. "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever" (40:8, NASB).

7. The word of the Lord is efficacious. It accomplishes the Divine intent. "It [will] not return to Me empty" (Isa 55:11) especially, its creation of a genuine worshiping community. The Lord says: "I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance" (Isa 45:23, NASB).

8. From the same perspective of worship, the Sabbath is portrayed as a day when we are invited to desist from our ways, to refrain from seeking our own pleasure, and from speaking our own word (Isa 58:13). More positively, we are invited to cling to God's word which reveals God's thoughts and ways (Isa 55:8-9). Thus, the Sabbath is a sign of the giving up of our own thoughts and ways.

9. The word of God, because of its very nature produces in the believer a proper respect or "fear of the Lord." In Isaiah 66:2, 5, the

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characteristics of God's people are described: They are humble and contrite in spirit. These terms express a genuine attitude of repentance. The attitude is noted twice in the context of the chapter: "These tremble at the word of God" (vss 2, 5).

10. Finally, God's people, like Isaiah himself, the proleptic representative of God's remnant, hear the voice of God and respond positively to the call to "go." This is the missionary aspect of the word of God (Isa 6:7-8).

Along the same line of thinking, especially when we try to comfort hurting people, discouraged by life's wounds, we will benefit—and God's plan will benefit, if we remember the following: "The Lord has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple" (Isa 50:4, NASB). Although they may provide relief, if properly practiced, no psychotherapy, psychology, psychoanalysis, nor any section of the human sciences, will ultimately provide genuine and lasting solutions to human predicaments of any kind. Anything not based on the foundation of God's word will at best provide only ephemeral relief.

The Effective "Word of God"

Within the immediate context of Isaiah 55 the "word of God" is described in regard to its origin, its effectiveness, and its results. It is divine in origin for it proceeds out of the mouth of God (vs 11); is efficient as an agent of transformation (vs 11); and its results express the will of God in deliverance/salvation with their accompanying signs of liberation, joy and peace. Let us examine these aspects briefly.

Origin. God's word issues from His mouth, that is, from Himself, mainly for the purpose of accomplishing life-saving transformations. This is what God desires. This aspect of the word is indeed the core and the purpose of the whole demonstration. It is the main focus of the text.

Another insight which can be perceived from the descent of

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God's word is that He intends everything on the human level to be shaped by it and to find its root and justification from it (vss 10-11). The recent multiplication of theologies have here an urgent challenge to reconsider their "raison d'être."

Daniel J. Adams has formulated the issue as follows: "The question that confronts us, therefore, is what are the sources of theology? How does one define the center of theology? What are the parameters of theology beyond which one ceases to do theology but rather philosophy, sociology, psychology or something else."¹⁰ When culture, or any human structure and the realities they generate, is made to function as the norm, then the human predicament is caught in a circle. An intervention from above is indeed needed, not only for the transformation of our ways but also for the generating and shaping of our thoughts.

Effectiveness and Results. The reason why God sends His word through the prophets is ultimately to change our thirst, hunger, famine and death into an abundant life (vss 11-12; cf. John 10:10). We are assured that the word of God will not come back to Him empty, unsuccessful. It will accomplish the salvation of those who receive that word in an attitude of humility and repentance. The predicted result is that they will turn to God and espouse His thoughts and ways.

God's program is not like the so-called "liberation theology" with its merit of reminding the world of the relevance of doing something to address and eventually to reverse the plight of the poor, but whose primary humanistic agenda colored by Marxism has negated the divine solution.

J. Ronald Blue is correct when he assesses that: "Liberation theology begins with man and ends with man. The strong core of humanism is undeniable. Herein lies a grave danger in the proposed solution to injustice; liberation theology has overlooked the creative force of the transcendent Deity. Without God and His transforming power, it is doubtful that any lasting good can be realized in society.

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The alienation between human beings reflects their alienation from God. Humanistic attempts at reform fall short of the mark. Man needs more than a change of clothes; he needs a change of heart.”¹¹

The liberation implied in our passage is accompanied with joy, the result of God’s presence and reconciliation (vs 12). Moreover, instead of wandering helpless and hopeless, without guide or shepherd, following a hungry and thirsty horde, God promises that the repentant will be led in peace for such is the heritage of His flock.

Even nature, which awaits the revelation of the repentant ones vindicated by God (cf. Rom 8:19-23), bursts into an unprecedented celebration of gratitude, for it also is liberated from the thorn and the thistle (vs. 13). This celebration is occasioned by the reversal of the covenant curses. This will be a memorial to the Lord adds the text, an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.

“Conquerors in the ancient world were accustomed to set up memorials that would preserve their names and tell of their conquests. . . The transformed earth would be a memorial of God’s victory. . . forever a sign of the power of the living God. . . a transformed earth, a transformed community, a transformed humanity. . .”¹²

A transformed people in a transformed world, will be an everlasting sign. They will reveal who and what the Lord is to them and to creation. It is the Lord’s name, His reputation, which is revealed through His redeemed people.

An Excursus

Eschatology. The text of Isaiah 55 displays some eschatological aspects. For example, a time is coming when God will not be found (“Seek the Lord while He may be found,” Isa 55:6, NASB). This echoes what God Himself declares in the book of Amos (Amos 8:11-12).

Another eschatological note in the passage is linked to the promised Messiah. God says, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you according to the faithful mercies shown to David” (Isa 55:3).

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An inspired interpretation sees in this promise a messianic prophecy (Acts 13:34).

Jesus and the Word of God. The comparison between the descent of the word of God and the NT affirmations about the person and ministry of Jesus show striking similarities. These further our understanding concerning the word of God. All the claims about the origin, the effectiveness, and the results subsequent to the descent of the word apply to Jesus.

The Gospel of John, which focuses on the divine Word, also speaks about the descent of the Word to become flesh (John 1:1-3, 14). In the same Gospel the descent of the Word provides an opportunity for liberation, joy, and peace. Jesus said: “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:31, 36, NASB).

Jesus also said, “These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full,” (John 15:11, NASB). As the true shepherd, Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27, NASB).

Along with the same pastoral configuration (which evokes guidance, security and peace) the eschatological vision of the great multitude, drawn from every nation, tribe, and people, describes the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles. Then the redeemed are assured that they will not hunger nor thirst anymore, for “the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them to springs of the water of life.” (Rev 7:17).

Thus, as the Bible is the revealed written word of God, Jesus is the word of God who became flesh for the salvation of humankind.

Summary

Through our study we have come to realize that the connection between Heaven and humankind is made through the “word of God”

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which revitalizes our being and quenches our deepest hunger and thirst. Through the agency of the word, God transforms our famine into a banquet. This is the experience of those who come to God, who listen carefully, who incline their ear, who seek God, who call upon Him, who forsake their wicked ways and truly return to the compassionate God. These people adopt and espouse God's thoughts and ways in their lifestyle.

Those who respond to the invitation to receive the word enter the world of "an everlasting sign." This "breed of believers" demonstrate in daily living the presence and action of the Word who came down from Heaven so that humankind might have life and have it abundantly. The Word came down to transform humankind, to turn us to God, to save us from famine, from death, and to introduce us into an everlasting covenant.

The issue of the authority of the Bible is, therefore, of utmost importance. The contribution of Isaiah 55 places the debate into the perspective of a life and death issue. The response to the invitation to receive the word forms either a covenant with God which results in liberation, joy, and peace, when it is positive, or (to use Isaiah's words) a covenant with death when it is a refusal to give heed to God's word in a repentant attitude of heart and mind.

Other Descents. To broaden the perspective of the issue, it may be useful to note that the descent of the word from God is not a unique phenomenon in the setting of the book of Isaiah. The descent from Heaven which results in salvation pertains likewise to the Spirit of God (Isa 32:15-16). Significantly enough, the Spirit's descent also results in a transformation of the land, the city and the life of God's people. The descent of the Spirit is compared to rain, pouring down water from heaven, resulting in the upspringing of justice, righteousness, peace, and security. The role of the Spirit of God, as a transforming agent, as the blessing that reverses the covenant curses and restores the covenant relationship between God and His people, is further expressed in Isaiah 44:3-5.

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Another descent that is prayed for and expected is that of God Himself. This longing is expressed by the prophet. “Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Thy presence—As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—To make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Thy presence!” (Isa 64:1-2, NASB). This descent, like the one mentioned in Isaiah 31:4, is to wage war on behalf of His people, to rescue them from the hand of their adversaries.

Finally, in the setting of the book of Isaiah, the attitude of God’s people toward His word is enlightening. In fact, the group to which the prophet Isaiah himself belongs is characterized by a positive response toward God’s word. This is shown by their dependence and reliance on God’s law and testimony (Isa 8:16-22).

Some Conclusions

The condition which raises the issue of the authority of God’s word is the condition of humankind—a lost, confused and dying world. Since the intrusion of sin and the subsequent fall, our world has been in need of salvation. Humankind within the context of the great moral controversy between God and Satan needs infallible guidance in order to renew its relationship with God. Nature does not provide such guidance for the knowledge of God. Intuition, reason, and conscience are subject to mistake.

The real question underlying the issue of the authority of the Bible is simply this: What is the extent of the Creator’s authority in our lives, and where do we find infallible standards expressing His will for humankind? As created beings we are totally dependent on God for our very existence; His will is made known to us in the Bible.

The authority of the Bible extends to every aspect of our lives. No matter what domain one evokes, the Bible provides not only guidelines but also standards of what is right and what is wrong; what is conformed to God’s will and what is not according to His plan;

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what to believe and what not to believe; how to live and how not to live. This is so because the authority of the Bible is linked to the issue of God's sovereignty over our lives. Our true calling is to acknowledge God as our king and ourselves as subjects of His kingdom, living exclusively to glorify His name.

In other words, every aspect of our lives is to show that God, as revealed through His written Word, is the ultimate authority to whom our allegiance is due, whether those aspects be physical, psychological, spiritual, or social. The whole of our lives is to magnify His name.

In the area of our economic life, the tithe the Bible requires of God's people shows He is our Owner. In the management of our time, the Sabbath points to Him as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, the Source and reference of our thoughts and goal of our pilgrimage. The way we deal with our bodies reveals we are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Whether we eat, drink, or do anything else in words or in deeds, the Bible tells us to do it in the name of Jesus, under His authority and approval, to the glory of the Father. Marriage, the domestic life, the education of our children are to be modeled according to God's will and plan. Even the mercantile domain or the juridical sphere are no exception. In these areas of life, too, God's sovereignty applies. For all these important matters, God gives to us His Word as a lamp at our feet, and as a light for our pilgrimage on earth.

Endnotes

1 J. I. Packer, "Inspiration," *New Bible Dictionary* Second Edition (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 517.

2 Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 93.

3 R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 197.

4 J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 452.

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5 John D. Watts, Isaiah 34-66, *World Biblical Commentary* 25 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 246; Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah 55: Invitation to a Feast," *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth, Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 27.

6 J. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuteronesaja*, Rpt., 1969, *Theologische Bucherei* 20 (Munich: Kaiser, 1938), pp. 59-60, postulated that the call in verses 1-3a was an invitation by Wisdom to a banquet, comparable to Proverbs 9 and Sir 24: 19-22. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890) suggested that the verses allude to the cry of the water seller in the marketplace. See also J. Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Ed. G. A. Buttrich et al (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 381-773. For a summary of the various attempts to identify the voice and the genre of the summons, see Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 136-137.

7 The importance of the comparison has been highlighted by the tools of rhetorical analysis. See Kenneth E. Bailey, "Inverted parallelisms" and "Encased parables" in Isaiah and their Significance for OT and NT Translation and Interpretation," *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*. Eds. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard and J. P. Fokkelman (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), pp. 14-30. The procedure consists of an "encased parable" within an inverted parallelism.

A For my thoughts are not your thoughts Thoughts
B Neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord Ways
C For as the heavens are higher than the earth Parable
B' So are my ways higher than your ways Ways
A' And my thoughts than your thoughts Thoughts

8 Andrew Purves, *The Search for Compassion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 69.

9 Ibid.

10 Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theology of the Word of God," *Theology and Life* 9 (1986): 65-90. He wrote: "The seemingly endless varieties of theology appearing on the scene today are, to say the least confusing; indeed, it almost appears at times that theology has lost its center as a discipline. The parameters of theology have been stretched to the limit so that virtually anything said by a theologian about any topic qualifies as theology. Furthermore, one does not even have to be a theologian, for there are those who assert that 'true theology' comes from the peasants and workers in their struggle against oppression."

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- 11 J. Ronald Blue, "Major Flaws in Liberation Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1990): 89-103.
12 J. D. Stuart, *History and Theology in the Second Isaiah* (Epworth, 1965), p. 228.

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The Remnant Concept as Defined by Amos

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Introduction

The study of the remnant concept from a linguistic perspective has revealed that this theme in Hebrew is basically represented by several derivatives of six different roots.¹ Five of them are used in the eighth century B.C. prophetic writings.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the earliest prophetic writing, the book of Amos, in order to understand not only what is meant when the term “remnant” is used but also the reason for its use. We will try to answer the following questions: What was the prophet Amos saying when he used this designation (whether by itself or in association with patriarchal figures)? What are the characteristics of such an entity? What is the theological intention of the prophet?

We have chosen this era because the eighth century prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah) were messengers to God’s people at a crucial time in their history. All of them were sent to announce a message of judgment. Without a doubt the eighth century was “the time of the end” for the northern nation of Israel.

Historical Setting

An understanding of the era in which Amos delivered his oracles to Israel will help to define the context in which he used the remnant

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theme. Amos preached about 760 B.C., less than forty years before the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Because he is the first writing prophet, in the prophetic literature, and also the first who unequivocally announced the end of "Israel,"² it is appropriate to spend some time to define the issue of the book for a better understanding of the remnant theme.

In the fashion of a typical covenant lawsuit (a common format in the eighth-century prophets) the prophet Amos not only reminds his audience of the stipulations of the covenant, but also of the consequences or the curses in store for the apostate people.³ The language of the covenant curses is abundant in every chapter of the book. Judgment pervades the book.

Throughout the book the prophet deliberately proceeds to unmask the people and to strip them⁴ of all security or hope that they might escape the judgment of God which is about to fall on them as a result of their abandoning the law⁵ and covenant.⁶

One by one all the beliefs and institutions—religious, social, political or military—which nurture the people's complacent attitude of confidence that God is in their midst⁷ and on their side,⁸ are targeted, reversed or dismantled. Before the threat of encountering the covenant curses, the competence of the people is irrelevant for survival; all expectations other than the announced coming judgment are discouraged.

Physical ability to shun danger is dismissed; there is no escape, for flight will perish from the swift (Amos 2:14, 15), courage is unavailable (2:16); all defenses or offenses are useless, for he who grasps the bow will not be able to stand (2:15); military enterprise will fail, for the city that goes forth a thousand (strong) will have a hundred left, and the one which goes forth a hundred (strong) will have ten left to the house of Israel (5:3).

The city defenses will crumble, the citadels will be looted (3:11); the palaces, the summer or winter houses, are not spared either (3:15). Even the land, clearly a gift of God, formerly the land of the Amorites,

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is surrounded by an enemy (3:11); moreover, it quakes, and along with the sun and moon, departs from its appointed function (8:8-9). The people are trapped.

The protection once available within the religious or cultic sphere is frustrated, for the horns of the altar will be cut off and destined to fall to the ground (3:14). The sanctuaries, themselves places of reconciliation where the worshipers express their gratitude, have become places where the very acts of worship are called transgressions (4:4, 5), and they are therefore destined to be destroyed (5:5, 6; 9:1).

The expressions used in popular beliefs to designate Israel as “virgin Israel” (5:2), the leading or the foremost of peoples (6:1), are of no value before God and His prophet, for the “virgin Israel’s” fate is sealed, so that her dramatic fall is described by means of a dirge (qinah), framed in a prophetic perfect (the usage of a past tense for the description of a future event):

Fallen is Virgin Israel,
never to rise again,
deserted in her own land,
with no one to lift her up (5:2, NIV).

Likewise, the head of the people will go into exile at the head of the exiles (6:7). Thus, on God’s behalf the prophet lamented.

The joy and pride subsequent to military conquest, narrated in Amos 6:13, is negated and turns into affliction by an enemy, land-loss and exile (6:14).⁹ Even the “day of the Lord,” which was understood to be a time when God vindicates Israel by confounding and defeating her enemies, will be a day of disappointment. Darkness will come instead of the expected light (5:18). Instead of the anticipated joy of liberation, the overwhelming sound that prevails in that day will be that of mourning. There will be wailing not only in all the plazas and in all the streets, but also in the fields; farmers switch jobs to join the

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professional wailers (5:16). There is indeed no escape.

One of the most graphic illustrations of this unanticipated tragedy is provided in the fifth chapter of the book. It is “as when a man flees from a lion, and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall, and a snake bites him (5:19, NASB).” The nation is so entrapped in her sins that neither sheol nor heaven, neither the summit of Carmel (which is dry anyway, according to Amos 1:2, subsequent to covenant curses, and, therefore does not provide pasture), nor the floor of the sea, nor even captivity, will provide a refuge (9:2-4). The space is closed, the horizon is indeed bleak. It appears as though there is no way out. There are no fugitives in this portrayal (9:1).¹⁰ The end has come.

Prophetic Insights on the Remnant

This leads to a crucial question: Is there any future whatsoever for God’s people? If not, how about the promises made to the patriarchs? Is the end absolute?

A Prophet of Doom? Facing this gloomy picture described above, a number of scholars have contended that Amos is an unconditional prophet of doom. Furthermore, any indications of hope in the book that bears his name must be later additions by a postexilic redactor (or, redactors) who, stunned by the harshness of the prophet’s message, determined to smooth it out. The “original” Amos is then labeled as a consistent prophet of doom.¹¹

An increasing number of scholars, however, have adopted a different perspective. They are endeavoring to understand the prophetic message from the available Masoretic text and are meeting with fruitful results without resorting to emendations or reconstructions.¹²

It is true that God, through Amos, announced the fate of His people Israel in terms of end and exile. As a matter of fact, the very remnant theme is at times used with a negative connotation. This is the case in Amos 3:12; 4:1-3; 5:3; 6:9-10; 9:1-4. In all these texts

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remnant terminology heightens the picture of judgment, because of its meaninglessness.¹³

Certainly judgment pervades the book of Amos, however, salvation is not out of the picture. There are significant hints of hope implying the possibility of a remnant. This is indisputably the case in Amos 5:3. After the devastation of Israel's armies, we are told some will be left to the house of Israel. Moreover, the next explicit occurrences of the word or concept of "remnant" are even more revealing and indicate that this theme is indeed the essence, center, or core issue of the book both literarily and theologically.

Identifying the Remnant Theme. From a literary point of view it has been demonstrated that the center of the book is Amos 5:14-15.¹⁴ "Taken together the two verses are a capsule of the book's essential message, but they also have a specific function in the immediate context."¹⁵ The remnant theme appears precisely in verse 15 with the expression "remnant of Joseph."

Theologically also the remnant idea is a dominant feature. The book authenticates the existence of God's true people, a real and visible entity within national Israel. It signifies the miraculous continuation of God's true people as in the time of the prophet Elijah when seven thousand in Israel resisted the tide of apostasy.¹⁶

As acknowledged by Lawrence O. Richards, the doctrine of the remnant underlies the OT teaching on faith.

It affirms that however great Israel's apostasy and God's judgment, a core of the faithful will still exist (e.g. 1 Kings 19:18; Mal 3:16-18). It is prophetically important, for it pictures the fulfillment of the divine purpose in only part of the people Israel.¹⁷

It is important to notice that Amos, as well as the other eighth-century prophets, uses the designation "Israel" sometimes alone or sometimes qualified in expressions like "sons of Israel," "house of Israel," "my people Israel," to designate several entities such as the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom, or the kingdoms combined.

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At times he refers to the historic Israel of the past, to Israel of the eighth century (or part of it, that is, the people as distinct from the leadership, see Amos 6:1), or to a future entity. These designations sometimes bear a national, political, social, cultic, or religious connotation depending on the context.

More significantly, Amos mentions the names of important figures in their past history whose experiences parallel those current with or expected from God's people. Did Amos use these names (such as Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, David) just for stylistic variations or for other reasons? In particular, did the Holy Spirit have a theological purpose to help the nation (and us) to better understand the message of the prophet?

Francis Landy, commenting on the parallelism of these names with the designation "Israel," writes: "In Amos 7-9, for example, Jacob and Isaac are not simply synonyms for Israel; each brings with it a cargo of national and theological associations. A reader—any reader—has to bear this in mind."¹⁸

The situation described in Amos 6:4-6 is particularly enlightening for answering our question in the affirmative. The group targeted by the reproaches of the prophet is characterized by carelessness and self-centeredness.

Those who recline on beds of ivory
And sprawl on their couches,
And eat lambs from the flock
And calves from the midst of the stall,
Who improvise to the sound of the harp,
And like David have composed songs for themselves,
Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls
While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils,
Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.¹⁹

The analogy with the story of Joseph cannot be overlooked. This

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is particularly so in the record of Genesis 37. After Joseph's brothers stripped him of his tunic, they threw him into a pit and sat down to eat a meal, caring little about his fate (vs. 25). Likewise, in the immediate context of Amos 6:4-6, the leaders are denounced for this luxuriant living accompanied with an uncaring attitude about the impending fate of the nation. As Shalom Paul puts it:

While devoting themselves to all their creature comforts of personal pleasures and delights—banqueting and imbibing, music making and cosmetic ointments—they nevertheless remain totally indifferent, apathetic and oblivious to the perilous situation in Israel. . . . According to the prophet, Israel, despite (and because of) the self-indulgent attitude of its leaders and their false confidence of security anchored in their bon vivant life style, is actually on the brink of impending disaster.²⁰

In this setting the expression “ruin of Joseph” is chosen because it echoes the predicament of Joseph brought about by his brothers (Gen 35; 45; 50). The plight of Joseph is used in an analogy to designate the ruin of the people because of their wrong allegiances and worship described in the previous chapters, In the context of Amos 6:1-7 the leaders, who ought to have brought about reforms, are targeted by the indictment of the prophet. Their complacent, self confident, and careless attitude towards the continuing deterioration of the nation contributes to the continuing exploitation and oppression of the people.²¹ The “ruin of Joseph” therefore, is a metaphorical allusion to Israel's ancestor to describe the present distressful condition of the people under the oppression and exploitation of an indifferent and wealthy leadership of both the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

In Amos 5:14-15 the name “Joseph” in the expression “remnant of Joseph” also shows an analogy with another experience of this hero of faith. In Genesis 50, Joseph himself clearly indicates that he understood God's plan. He told his brothers: *“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring*

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about the present result, to preserve many people alive” (vs. 20, NASB, italics added).

Likewise, Amos 5:15 speaks about the possibility totally dependent on God’s sovereignty, of the preservation of a remnant, called here the “remnant of Joseph,” to indicate the Joseph-like experience relevant to the new people of God, to carry on His purpose. In the fifth chapter the remnant is precisely called the “remnant of Joseph” as the indication of the entity God preserves, as He preserved Joseph, despite the course of the events of his life, to fulfill His purpose. This entity which is eschatological in the sense that it survives the end of national Israel, is characterized on the one hand by the mercy of God which they graciously receive, and also by their search for God, which shows their faith in God. The criterion therefore at the foundation of its existence is a covenantal faith in God, which expresses itself in a total allegiance to God’s will, negated by the apostate people described all through the book of Amos.²²

These apostate people have failed to be moved by “justice and righteousness.” These are covenantal terms. They imply the sovereignty of God and the allegiance due to Him and to His reign and world order, which is the criterion for the remnant identify. In fact, the “remnant of Joseph” in Amos 5:15, like those who will remain from the “house of Jacob” (9:8), is the repentant Israel who, according to the context of 5:14-15 in parallelism with 5:4-6, returns to the covenant stipulations not only by the negation of illegitimate cultic activities and places, but also by commitment to a moral-ethical lifestyle conformed to the covenant.²³

There are two aspects present in the usage of the name “Joseph.” The first is as an eponymous ancestor who is linked to the main tribe (Ephraim) of the Northern kingdom. The other, concerns his commitment to God as a faith hero, even in the midst of adverse circumstances. The socio-political and religious entity “Israel” of the eighth century, as described in the book of Amos, identifies with the first. Even if the Israelites of Amos’ time used the second aspect as a self designation, they clearly missed incarnating its reality, which only

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a genuine remnant, the “remnant of Joseph,” truly experiences. Moreover, the name “Joseph” in itself indicates the possibility of salvation.

Another reference to a genuine remnant occurs in Amos 9:8 by implication. Yahweh announces He is going to destroy the sinful kingdom from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, He will not totally destroy the house of Jacob.

Douglas Stuart points out the issue in this verse when he writes:

Destruction will not be total, as v 8b insists. Here enters the theme of the escape of a remnant so clearly promised in the Mosaic Covenant (Lev 26:44; Deut 4:31; 30:3; 32:36-43) and so strongly reaffirmed by the pre-exilic prophets (e.g., Hos 2:1-2 [1:10-11]; Joel 2:18-19; Micah 2:12-13; Isa 11:10-11). God’s plan for His people envisioned their destruction as a nation and their exile, but explicitly avoided their total annihilation.²⁴

In other words part of the house of Jacob will experience the continuity of God’s purpose for His people. These are those who repent, unlike the hardened sinners who pretend no calamity or evil will overtake nor confront them.²⁵ Amos is very specific about the target of the destruction. He specifies the sinner, that is, those who say that the calamity will not overtake or confront them.²⁶ This is an expression of a complacent, even arrogant mind.

It is clear that the ultimate target of the prophet’s indictments are here the unrepentant, those who are confidently complacent in their sins (described throughout the book), and who have not given heed to the prophetic message. They are the apostate entity among the people of Yahweh, bound by the illusions of invincibility before danger, because of the fact they are the chosen people of Yahweh.

Amos 9:8 indicates that a remnant within the people of God, designated by the phrase “house of Jacob,”²⁷ or more thematically accurate “the remnant within the house of Jacob,” is the entity through whom God will carry out His plan. National Israel as merely a social and political entity in the book of Amos does not constitute the true

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people of God. There is an entity within that group, however, the remnant to whom this title may be properly given.

Eschatological Overtone

The eschatological tone of all this subunit of Amos 9:7-15 indicates that God's plan for His people is not over as a consequence of the end of national Israel. There is indeed a sifting. Actually, the prophet uses this very image taken from the agricultural realm to indicate what is going to happen: "I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground" (vs. 9, NIV).

Even more significant is the specification of a new entity called people of God in the same chapter of the book of Amos. Amos 9:11 reads: "*In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches: I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old*" (NASB, italics added).

The interpretation of this verse has been problematic because of the so-called incongruous suffixes which are said seemingly to defy explanation.²⁸ However, an insightful perspective has been acknowledged according to which the suffixes attached to the words "breaches," "ruins," and the verb "build" to describe God's ultimate intervention for His people (here designated "the booth of David") are shown to be theologically significant.²⁹

The third-person feminine plural suffix in the word "breaches" (literally, "their breaches") is best understood to refer to the collapse of both kingdoms (north and south).³⁰ The third-person masculine singular suffix in the word "ruins" (literally "his ruins") refers to David, more specifically the new-coming David, namely the Messiah (not to the "booth/tent" which is a construct feminine). Finally, the third person feminine singular suffix in the phrase "build her" refers to the fallen "booth/tent."

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. suggests that the key to the passage is the clause "as in the days of old," for it points back to the promise in 2

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Samuel 7:11, 12, 16, implying that what is in view in this passage is a remnant, an eschatological one, which will also include those from the nations who belong to Yahweh, for they are called by His name.³¹

Another entity will emerge, not in the form of a nation of Israel per se, but an entity encompassing the repentant people from the fallen booth of David joined by the remnant of Edom, namely, the nations who are called by Yahweh's name.³² This is clearly fulfilled with the existence of the NT church in Acts 15 (see especially vss. 13-19).

The expression "my people Israel" in Amos 9:14 is best understood to refer to those who would be faithful to God's purpose, the repentant remnant comprising those from Israel the northern kingdom, Judah the southern kingdom, dispersed among the nations, promised to receive blessings and restoration in covenantal language.³³ This last occurrence of a designation for the people of God concerns an eschatological restored entity, which can theologically be called the remnant, similar to "the remnant of Joseph" in Amos 5:15.

Conclusion

In the book of Amos "the remnant" is not the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom, per se; nor is it Judah as a political entity after the collapse of the northern kingdom. Judah never receives Amos' endorsement to represent the continuation of God's people to carry on His plan. God's people, as remnant, is composed by the part of Israel (but not limited to those from Israel) who repent and have true faith in God. Prophetically, it included the remnant from the nations who truly belong to God, the fulfillment of which began with the NT Church.³⁴ Their experience of faith is a Joseph-like faith and a Jacob-like faith. The former because of his unwavering attachment to God, no matter the circumstances; the latter for his search and true return to God in repentance.³⁵

The usage of the patriarchal names, Jacob and Joseph, indicates not only the continuity of God's people but also the criteria by which the identity of the true Israel of God, the remnant may be ascertained.

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Joseph and Jacob provide a model for the delineation of the identity of God's people just as later in the NT era, Jesus, the remnant par excellence, son of Abraham and son of David, is the model for the end-time remnant as described in the book of revelation.

The end-time remnant ("who keep the commandments of God and hold to the truth of Jesus," Rev 12:17, NASB) is mentioned in the setting of a cosmic conflict. They hold on to their allegiance to God and His kingdom despite the deception and oppression of the dragon. They are victorious because their supreme value is found not in their own lives but in God. Just as Jesus unswervingly committed His will to the Father, so the remnant follow in His steps.

From an existential perspective (not to neglect the historical and prophetic perspectives in their corporate aspects in Amos), one of the main characteristics of the remnant (in any era) is their wholehearted dedication to God, to His kingdom, and to His righteousness.

Endnotes

1 These are: š'r, plt, mlt, ytr, śrid, ḥ^arit. See G. F. Hasel, "Remnant" *ISBE* (1979-1988) 4: 130-34. See also idem, "'Remnant' as a Meaning of 'acharith,'" *The Archeology of Jordan and Other Studies*, ed. L. T. Geraty and L. G. Herr (Berrien Springs, MI, 1986), pp. 511-524; idem, "Remnant," *IDB*, Supp. Vol. (Nashville, 1976), pp. 735-736; idem, "Semantic Values of Derivatives of the Hebrew Root _r," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 152-96; idem, "Linguistic Considerations Regarding the Translation of Isaiah's Shear-hashub: A Reassessment," *AUSS* 9 (1971): 36-46, idem, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972).

2 Amos 8:2.

3 All the components of the covenant or treaty common in Ancient Near Eastern literature are discerned by scholars in the book of Amos.

4 Andersen and Freedman, *Amos: A Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday), p. 462, observe that participles to describe the actions or behavior of the covenant violators are significant for their identification. They wrote: The book contains nineteen such participles in all, and when they are taken all together, they give a comprehensive picture of the

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wrongdoers in Israel against whom Amos directs his reproaches, along with a list of the evil deeds of which they are guilty.

5 Amos 2:4.

6 Douglas Stuart, "Hosea and Jonah," *Word Biblical Commentary* 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987), XXXii-XLii and pp. 288-289, has forcefully demonstrated that the book of Amos can only be intelligibly understood by reference to the covenant background which precedes and underlines its message.

7 Amos 5:14.

8 The expectations of the "day of the Lord" in Amos 5:18ff are an example.

9 Amos 6:14. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land, Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 100-103.

10 Amos 9:1. See Samuel Amsler, *Le Dernier et L'Avant Dernier: Etudes sur L'Ancien Testament* (Geneve: Labor et fides, 1993), p. 225.

11 R. Smend, "Dan Nein des Amos," *EvTh* 23 (1963): 404-423.

12 See Shalom Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991); F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989); J. H. Hayes, *Amos, the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching I* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988).

13 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos: Basis Issues in Current Interpretations* (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1991), pp. 113-114.

14 Andersen and Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation*, p. 53.

15 Ibid.

16 1 Kings 19.

17 Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), p. 521.

18 Francis Landy, "Vision and Poetic Speech in Amos," *HAR* 11 (1987): 223-224.

19 Amos 6:4-6; NASB.

20 Shalom Paul, *Amos*, p. 209.

21 These accusations have been made already all through the previous chapters. See Amos 2:6-8, the bulk of the oracle against Israel; Amos 3:9-10; 4:1; 5:7, 10, 11, 12.

22 Hasel, *The Remnant*, pp. 204-206.

23 Paul, *Amos*, p. 176 points out that "for Amos, 'seeking' signifies a total dedication to and concern with the 'good' (*nwb*)." The term "good" has the sense of covenant as pointed out by Szabo, pp. 504-505; see also W. Bruggemann, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historian," *Int* (1968): 387. Furthermore, the expectation of God is that justice and righteousness, which are the best summary

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of the covenant responsibilities of God's people are to be the essential component of the people's life and activity (Amos 5:24). These responsibilities are precisely those that the people have negated in turning justice into wormwood and in casting righteousness down to the earth (Amos 5:7). In doing so "Israel" dissociates and distances itself from God who is the guarantor of the order characterized by His justice and His righteousness.

24 Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 394.

25 Amos 9:10.

26 Walter Vogels, "Invitation à l'alliance et univèralisme en Amos IX 7" *VT* 12 (1972).

27 Charles Hauret, *Amos et Osée* (Paris) Beauchesne, 1970), p. 114.

28 James D. Nogalski, "The Problematic Suffixes of Amos IX 11," *VT* 43/3 (1993): 411-418.

29 See Walter c. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago, IL: Moody Pres, 1985), pp. 181-185.

30 Already suggested by C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 1:330.

31 Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 184-185. In this perspective, the expression "remnant of Edom" refers to the nations, the conjunction "waw" before the expression "all the nation" is best understood to be exegetical. Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 473, who adheres to the messianic and eschatological interpretation of verse 11 states that "Amos proclaims that Yahweh, after the exile and dispersion of Israel and Judah, and the eclipsing of the Davidic house, will restore it so that the citizens of the nation Edom which had a history of hating Israel and Judah, will become blessed members of the household of David's offspring."

32 Amos 9:11-12. We understand the conjunction to be epexegetical.

33 Paul, *Amos*, p. 292, who observes that this unit "refers to Israel (and Judah) as well as to the other nations analogous to the beginning of the book, forming an overarching inclusio."

34 We share the insights pointed out by Gerhard F. Hasel that the remnant theme is used by Amos in a threefold sense: 1) to refute the popular remnant expectation which claimed all Israel as the remnant (Amos 3:12; 4:1-3; 5:3; 6:9-10; 9:1-4); 2) to show that there will indeed be a remnant from Israel in an eschatological sense; 3) to include also "the remnant of Edom" among and with the neighboring nations as a recipient of the outstanding promise to David. See G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972), pp. 393-394.

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35 The prophet Hosea uses the same procedure in Hosea 12. This is an indication that this procedure is not an isolated incident unique to the prophet Amos. Concerning the usage of the name “Jacob” for example, Hosea uses two phases of the experience of Jacob. On the one hand his deceitfulness to describe the present condition of the apostate people (Hosea 12:2-3), and on the other hand his repentance which is what God expects of His present people (Hosea 12:4-6). Moreover, in Hosea 6:7 the name “Adam” is used to parallel the transgression of the covenant by Ephraim and Judah. Likewise in Hosea 13:1-3, the past experience of an early phase of the tribe of Ephraim in the midst of the tribes of Israel is evoked to illustrate the present idolatrous condition which prevailed in the northern kingdom.

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The Cosmic Controversy: World View for Theology and Life

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World views affect the way we look at reality, including God, humanity, nature, Scripture and theological method.¹ There are at least thirteen major world views classified under three types: Material (Naturalism, 5 kinds), Spiritual (Transcendentalism, 5 kinds) and a Personal God (Theism, 3 kinds).² All systems of thought in philosophy or theology, as well as all systems in science, are thought out within a given world view. A popular world view in theology is “personal salvation.” Many Christians can tell you the date when they were saved, and their personal death, or secret rapture, is allegedly the time when they go to heaven. The cosmic controversy with its issues and final advent are not determinative.

Science has outgrown several world views. The Ptolemaic world view suggested that the earth is the center of all things. Everything in space revolves around planet-earth. This was the accepted world view for 1,400 years. Then Copernicus and Galileo challenged this world view by suggesting that the sun was the center of all things. The earth, together with all else in space, revolves around the sun. This was a broadened world view. This was believed for 400 years. Then Einstein, with his theories of relativity, suggested that everything in space is in motion. This is the most expansive world view in science.

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What has been done in science now needs to be done in theology. Theology needs to break beyond the man-centered world view about human salvation to the cosmic world view about the great controversy. Seventh-day Adventists have an opportunity to lead out in this Einsteinian-like breakthrough into the broader world view.

Origin of Sin and Issues in the Controversy

Scripture mentions the origin of sin in the universe. There was war in heaven (Rev 12:7) between Satan (Rev 12:9) and Christ (as Michael, Jude 9, 1 Thess 4:16; John 5:26-28). Satan sought to establish his throne in the place of God's (Isa 14:12-14). Ezekiel 28 speaks of this covering cherub, who later came to the garden of Eden, (see Gen 3). It says, "Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence and you sinned" (Ezek 28:16, NIV).

Richard M. Davidson tells of his discovery of the etymology for the word "trading" from the verb *rākal* which means trade or gossip. "The noun derivative *rākīl*—found six times in the OT, one being in Ezekiel 22:9—means "slanderer or talebearer." Instead of choosing the more common term for trade, *sāhar*, Ezekiel chose *rekullāh*, with its play on meaning. He purposely uses this word to point to the trading of Tyre, but especially to the slander of Satan. For Ezekiel is the only writer who chooses this word for trading, and all four instances are in connection with Tyre (Ezek 26:12; 28:5, 16, 18).³ Here we have Satan the slanderer. What an apt description of his controversy!

Sin's origin and the issues in the cosmic controversy are presented well by Ellen G. White in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492-504. Sin originated in Satan, and not in Christ. Satan became proud, coveted Christ's position, and bent his energies towards obtaining His power. He pretended to be reverent to God, but under this guise worked to call His government into question. He sought to win the sympathy of angels, and charged that God had unjustly honored Christ instead of him. Note that his controversy was Christ-centered from its inception and continues that way.⁴ Within this context, Satan's

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charges against God are numerous. His fairness is called in question. His justice is called in question. His law is called in question. His mercy is called in question. Satan portrays God as severe and tyrannical. Satan clothes God and Christ with his own attributes, and presents himself as just the opposite.

Consider twelve ways Satan expressed these charges: (1) The Father and Christ have no self-denial.⁵ (2) They are selfish.⁶ (3) God is “oppressive.”⁷ (4) Christ is not self-sacrificing.⁸ (5) Satan “represented God as claiming all and giving nothing, as requiring men’s service for his own glory, but denying himself nothing for man’s good.”⁹ (6) On the one hand, in opposition to God’s law Satan claimed that “angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right.”¹⁰ (7) On the other hand, Satan “cast contempt upon the law of God, and declared that it was impossible for men to keep God’s commandment.”¹¹ (8) Furthermore, he “declared that men could not enter the kingdom of heaven unless the law was abolished and a way devised by which transgressors could be reinstated into the favor of God. . . and saved in their sins.”¹² (9) He “declared that the principles of God’s government make forgiveness impossible.”¹³ (10) Hence, he “charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love.”¹⁴ (11) After Christ’s death, “Satan declared that mercy destroyed justice, that the death of Christ abrogated the Father’s law.”¹⁵

Consider his strategy. (12) “Uniting fallen man with himself, he kept a series of false theories in regard to God in continual circulation.” Satan caused humans to disobey God. He hoped to “exhaust the forbearance of God. . . He thought to so work with human agents as to cause the last spark of love to die from the heart of God, and cause him to lift the sword of justice and destroy the rebel race. Then Satan supposed that his claims would be vindicated before un-fallen worlds, before un-fallen angels.”¹⁶ What he obviously overlooked was the fact that God had not destroyed him, the arch rebel.

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It is necessary that the truth about God, Christ and Satan be made manifest. The real story of all three is involved in the cosmic controversy. The revelation of who they really are must be made so that all created beings, angelic (fallen and unfallen), humans (redeemed and lost) and the unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar, may all vote unanimously on who is right and who is wrong. Only one side can win, yet all from both sides must vote, and vote the same. This is done with complete freedom, and is done purely on the evidence given by both sides.

Importance of Focus. I grew up near London, in England. I listened to mission appeals about the needs in Africa. I wanted to become a medical doctor and go to Africa. But one day I felt drawn to my parent's bookcase. In that bookcase were some red-covered books, written by Ellen G. White. I reached in for *Messages to Young People*. I began to read that book, and the Holy Spirit worked on my mind and heart. I sensed a longing for something deeper. You know what I mean? God put within my heart a longing to know Him better and to know His Word better. So I decided to go to Newbold College to study the Bible.

I was eighteen. It was my first time to be away from home. Every evening the lights went out in the dorm at 10:00 o'clock. I would wait for the lights to go out and then slip to my knees at my bedside. There I would pour out my heart to God. I would picture Christ in my backyard at home. That backyard became the visual place where I met Christ every evening and morning. I still meet Him there. I would try to picture Him and talk to Him as a present friend. Those were wonderful meetings that blest my soul and set me free from myself. I was coming to focus on Christ through the day. The image of Him in that evening prayer time worked on my mind during the night, and looking to Him became the first thing I did in the morning.

This approach brought me, at an early age, to realize that everything revolves around Jesus. I still pray this way. I have made many mistakes. I am a sinner saved by grace. But I know one thing:

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my deepest joy and lasting peace is found in focusing on Jesus instead of on myself. This is crucial to making a practical application of the great controversy.

The Conflict of the Ages Series. Ellen White wrote a set of five volumes known as the *Conflict of the Ages* series. These works, discussing biblical and historical events, extend from the beginning of the great controversy to its end. Notice how she begins and how she ends the series: “‘God is love.’ His nature, his law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,’ ‘whose ways are everlasting,’ changeth not. With him ‘is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’”¹⁷ The fifth book ends with these words, “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”¹⁸

So the first words and last words of Ellen White’s depiction of the great controversy are “God is love.” The cosmic controversy has to do with the love of God. Satan’s charge about the law being impossible to keep is merely a questioning of God’s love. It says, God made a law that we cannot keep, so He is not a God of love. This is why Jesus said that the whole law may be summed up as love to God and love to mankind (Matt 22:37-40). God’s side of the great controversy reveals love. Satan’s side of the great controversy reveals the opposite to love. This is why we must ask: Which side of the great controversy is revealed in my church? Which side of the great controversy is revealed in my family? Which side of the great controversy is revealed in my life? Does love reign in all three? Where Jesus is, there is love. Where Jesus is not present, there is no lasting eternal love. The practical question is: How can I be sure to reveal God’s love? The answer has to do with our focus.

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The Centrality of Christ. Satan's attack is against Jesus. He wants to take His place, and become God. He wants the position, but not the character of Christ. In stark contrast, Jesus became a human being and gave up everything in order to save mankind. In so doing, He revealed what the Trinity is really like. No wonder Paul talks about "the truth as it is in Jesus," (Eph 4:21). If Christ could be seen as central to all our doctrines, and if they were arranged concentrically around Him, what a power they would have! If every doctrine was an opportunity to say something about Jesus, and if Christ was the perspective from which each was thought through and unfolded, what a system would result!

1. The first thing, then, is to consider the centrality of Christ to the cosmic controversy. Ellen G. White proposed this. "In every school established the most simple theory of theology should be taught. In this theory, the atonement of Christ should be the great substance, the central truth."¹⁹ "The atoning sacrifice, the righteousness of Christ, is to us the vital center of all truth."²⁰ "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary."²¹ What a mandate! In reference to the final message we are told, soon "one interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other—Christ our righteousness."²² Look at our mission. "Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world."²³ We are told that "The cross of Christ is to be so distinctly presented before the world that every other power will be eclipsed, and the human race be drawn in homage to Christ Jesus."²⁴ He is the core of Adventist beliefs. What mighty power there is in the cross—and in the cross alone. Christ promised, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32, cf. Gal 6:14).

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Jesus proclaimed “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus knew that truth needed to be looked at in a fresh way. He declared that He was the truth. In other words all doctrinal truths relate to Him just as the sanctuary types and services did. Ellen White says, “While Jesus did away with the old forms, he re-instated the old truths, placing them in the frame-work of truth. He matched and joined them together, making a complete and symmetrical system of truth.”²⁵ If Jesus did this, no wonder we read, “The gems of truth are imperishable, and the Lord would have them gathered up and placed in their proper relation, that they may embellish and adorn the doctrine of Christ our Savior.”²⁶ Reflection on how the teachings of the Bible should be considered. They “are not uncertain, disconnected doctrines, but are living truths, that involve eternal interests that center in Christ. In him is the complete system of divine truth.”²⁷ This is because “The Bible contains a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy.”²⁸ This is also because, “The story of a crucified and risen Savior is the great central theme of the Word of God.”²⁹

No wonder that, “To-day Satan endeavors to keep hidden from the world the great atoning sacrifice, which reveals the love of God and the binding claims of His law. He wars against the work of Christ.”³⁰ In utter contrast, God desires all truth to be Christ-centered and Calvary-centered. “This is the vital, all-absorbing truth on which God would have men in all ages fix their attention. He would have the death of His Son the great center of attraction.”³¹

On the basis of this mandate, I propose that we examine our 27 fundamental beliefs and ascertain how they reveal Christ and the cross. For it is precisely in Christ’s mission, and specifically in His death, that He reveals that God is love. Some years ago I asked the world renowned evangelical theologian, Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, if the cult view that some other denominations have of Seventh-day Adventists could be overcome by placing our 27 fundamental beliefs in a logical,

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orderly and Christ-centered arrangement. He concurred. I believe it is time to do this.

2. Secondly, we need to consider the arrangement of our 27 fundamental beliefs. Before Seventh-day Adventists are ready to make a contribution to the theological world by presenting the cosmic controversy, we need to rearrange our 27 fundamental beliefs. The cosmic controversy should be the world view within which all the doctrines are unfolded. Thus, it seems to me, it would be to our advantage to place the cosmic controversy as our first fundamental belief. This is because it is our world view, or better put, it is the biblical world view. It has primary importance as the context within which all other doctrines should be unfolded. So many Christians have a “my salvation” world view. There is little, if any, time given to the larger picture beyond and behind the plan of salvation.

Consider the present arrangement of the 27 fundamental beliefs as given before the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*,³² and still remain in that book. They are a list of 27 beliefs in a chain-link, with no apparent connection. The order of the 27 is not chronological. Would it not be more effective if it were? For example, for Christ as Redeemer (FB 4) comes before creation (FB 6), and creation is presented before the cosmic controversy (FB 8). Then there is the loose arrangement of beliefs that would better be placed together. For example, there are three on Christ but scattered between 4, 9, and 23. The experience of salvation (FB 10) and Christian behavior (FB 21), far distanced in the 27 can be brought together.

3. Thirdly, we need to think through the reasons for the fundamental beliefs. They are not merely found in Scripture to give knowledge. They have a practical purpose, and that purpose is discerned in the biblical world view. This is why the cosmic controversy needs to be placed up front before the rest. The cosmic controversy broke the unity of the universe, introducing sin and its severance of relationships with God and other created beings. This began in heaven and continues on planet earth. Broken relationships

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are the tragic result of the cosmic controversy, not only during life, but for most people, in everlasting destruction. The function of the Godhead, Scripture, and the Church is to restore broken relationships with God and fellow beings. So the plan of salvation is more than personal salvation. It has to do with the restoration of community with God and fellow created beings. Thus the fundamental beliefs provide not only *information*, but also *inspiration* to change lives.

A Suggested Arrangement of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs

Doctrine of God (Theology)

Cosmic Controversy	Angels break relationship with God; cause mankind to do the same. FB 8.
Trinity	Perfect relationship. FB 2.
Father	Father gives to restore relationship. FB 3.
God's self-revelation	Scripture given to restore relationship. FB 1.

Doctrine of Man (Anthropology)

Human Creation	Humans created for relationship with God and each other. FB 6.
Human Fall	Human nature is in broken relationship with God and mankind. FB 7.

Doctrine of Christ (Christology)

The Son	Christ came to earth to restore broken relationships. FB 4.
Life, death & resurrection	Christ came to earth to restore broken relationships. FB 9.
Intercession	Christ ministers to earth to restore broken relationships. FB 23.

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Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)

Holy Spirit	To restore relationships now and for heaven. FB 5.
Experience of Salvation	To restore relationships now and for heaven. FB 10.
Christian Behavior	To restore relationships now and for heaven. FB 21.

Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

The Church	The Community of restored relationships. FB 11.
Baptism	Public declaration of relationship with Christ. FB 14.
Lord's Supper	Celebration of restored relationship with Christ. FB 15.
Unity in the Body	Relationship of members to each other and to Christ. FB 13.
Stewardship	Manifestation of restored relationships. FB 20.
Marriage and Family	Manifestation of restored relationships. FB 22.

(Unique to SDAs, with law as background to Sabbath, and spiritual gifts as background to the Gift of Prophecy)

Remnant and Mission	End-time truth and restoration of relationships. FB 12.
The Law	To preserve relationship with God and mankind. FB 18.
The Sabbath	Resting in Christ as essence of relationship. FB 19.

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Spiritual Gifts/Ministries	To work for restoration of human relationships. FB 16.
The Gift of Prophecy	To restore relationship with Christ and mankind. FB 17.

Doctrine of Final Things (Eschatology)

Second Coming	To restore relationship to face to face communion. FB 24
Death and Resurrection	All saints enter relationship with each other forever. FB 25
Millennium	Loss of eternal life seen as rejection of relationship with Christ. FB 26.
New Earth	Sin and sinners gone; redeemed and God with rest of universe live together in unbroken relationship. FB 27.

This new arrangement is under six major sections, going in concentric circles around Christ and Calvary at the center. Thus all of our beliefs would convey the solution to broken relationships found in Christ and Calvary. This would take them beyond being vehicles for information. It would make them channels for affecting practical life, and restoring a relationship with God and mankind.

The 27 beliefs would then unfold as a story, as follows:

1. The cosmic controversy biblical world view.
2. A look at God, the One who has been called in question by Satan's charges.
3. The creation of mankind and their joining the cosmic controversy.
4. Christ comes to reveal what God is like and to save humans.
5. The meaning of salvation is explored.
6. Those being saved together form the church.

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7. The church moves through history to final events, and the resolution of the cosmic controversy.

Insights into the Cosmic Controversy

Lucifer at the Throne. Come with me to heaven. We are gathered around the throne of God. The Father is there. Christ is there. Lucifer is there. Christ is the One through whom the Father has created all things, and this includes Lucifer (Heb 1:1-2; Col 1:16-17). What is it like to gaze on God in His throne room?

Isaiah exclaimed, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty'" (Isa 6:1-5). God is holy. Even unfallen seraphs cover their eyes. As John D. W. Watts says, they cover their "eyes in deference to God's glory."³⁴ All they can do is cry out "Holy, holy, holy." They are in awe of His majesty, His magnificence, His holiness. Gazing at Him, their whole being is absorbed in willing response to the awesome self-revelation of God. They cannot help it. This is their joy to praise the only One who is worthy of such adoration. To be in His presence calls forth worship.

Ezekiel saw the throne. It moved with the speed of lightning (Ezek 1:14). Four living creatures moved with the throne. "When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings. Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what

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looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. . . . This was like the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown. . . .” (Ezek 1:24-28). Like Isaiah, Ezekiel was overcome by the awesome presence and majesty of a holy God.

In utter contrast Lucifer is spoken of as having “pomp” at the throne (Isa 14:11). No prostration here. No falling down in adoration and worship. No overwhelming sense of the majesty and holiness of God. Rather he is full of his own pride. How tragic that pride could come into the heart of one who had once worshiped like Isaiah and Ezekiel, and who sang the praises of his Creator. But not now. Pride robs one of the vision of God's majesty and power. Self snatches the sacred from view. Pride enthrones a puny self in place of the Almighty God. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isa 14:12-14, KJV). Here was a pompous bid to become his own majesty, to become his own king, to become his own god. It was a daring, blasphemous, blind bid to unseat God from His eternal throne, upon which He had sat for an eternity before creating Lucifer.

Ellen White says, “Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation. The Scripture says, ‘Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness,’ [Ezekiel 28:17]. . . . Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator.”³⁵

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The great controversy is Satan's hatred of Christ. God and angels pled with Lucifer. But he "allowed his jealousy of Christ to prevail, and became the more determined. To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels."³⁶ Satan struggled. "Unutterable love thrilled his entire being," but "again he was filled with pride in his own glory. His desire for supremacy returned, and envy of Christ was once more indulged. The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as God's special gift, and therefore called forth no gratitude to his Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God."³⁷ "Sin originated in self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven. He sought to gain control of heavenly beings, to draw them away from their Creator, and to win their homage to himself."³⁸ Satan wanted to be worshiped in place of Christ.

Note the words describing Satan before his probation closed. Notice how far he had gone in his shameful rebellion. They are found in *Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 37-38. He was envious and jealous of Christ, he was proud of his own glory, he desired supremacy, he diffused discontent, he insinuated doubts, he used subtle deceptions and wiles, he misrepresented, he was artful, he distorted God's purposes, put them in a false light, misconstrued, was cunning, crafty, excited opposition to God's law, and he secretly fomented discord and rebellion. What a treacherous traitor and downright liar! He knew the truth about Christ. He had stood nearest to Him at the throne. He had experienced His extravagant love.

In unerring and relentless love God convinced Lucifer of his error. His disaffection was shown to be without a cause. He was shown the results of his revolt. "Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong. He saw that 'the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works' (Psalm 145:17); that the divine statutes are just, and that he ought to acknowledge them as such before all heaven. Had he done this, he might have saved himself and many angels. He had

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not at that time fully cast off his allegiance to God. Though he had left his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office. . . . He nearly reached the decision to return; but pride forbade him. It was too great a sacrifice for one who had been so highly honored to confess that he had been in error, that his imaginings were false, and to yield to the authority which he had been working to prove unjust."³⁹ "Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission."⁴⁰

In blind disdain Lucifer refused to come back. Then follow terrible words. "He would never again acknowledge the supremacy of Christ;"⁴¹ "he was determined never again to acknowledge the authority of Christ."⁴² No wonder it is the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Satan rebelled against His Creator—the One who gave Him life. Its like rebelling against one's mother. He wanted to take His place to receive the worship and adoration and praise Christ had been given. He thought that he, a mere creature, had the right to oust His Creator and receive adulation from created beings, as if he were the eternal Creator. That's how blind and dumb the devil is! He was devoid of the Holy Spirit and spiritual discernment. He was out of control, a loose canon, a horrible counterfeit.

Satan claimed to offer a superior government, superior freedom, and a life free from the restrictions of the law. "Therefore God permitted him to demonstrate the nature of his claims, to show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him."⁴³ The cosmic controversy is a demonstration interlude between the eternal peace of the past and the eternal peace of the future. It's a time when Satan demonstrates his claims and in which Christ demonstrates the character of God. The very fact that He had worked so untiringly with Satan since his rebellion, and had even given him a chance to come back and be reinstated in his office at the

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throne, shows how extravagant and wondrous is the limitless love of God! When Satan rejected such love there was sadly no more that God could offer him. He became the devil through failing to accept Christ's love.

Christ on Earth. Whereas Lucifer wanted to usurp Christ's throne for his own glory, Christ left His throne to save sinners on planet earth. Paul says about Jesus Christ; "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [in contrast to Lucifer] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:6-8). Oh wondrous Savior! What utter condescension! What magnificent glory!

What did Jesus give up? He gave up the throne. He left the adoration and worship of angels and came to this world as a little helpless baby boy. Being a helpless human thrust Him into a "fearful risk."⁴⁴ Yet the wise men from the east, who were not of the Jewish faith, came under the leading of the Holy Spirit to bring gifts and to worship Him. Not so Satan. This was his opportunity. Fancy Christ coming as a mere babe! Satan was a powerful, brilliant, shining angel, and his enemy. Christ whose throne Satan wanted to usurp (Isa 14:13-14), the mighty Michael who had thrown him out of heaven (Ezek 28:16; Rev 12:7-8), was now a mere child. Satan gloated at the prospect. The battle had never been so tilted in his favor as now. Victory seemed assured. Satan worked through Herod to put Christ to death soon after birth (Matt 2:13), but the scheme back-fired. The Holy Spirit, who gave Christ birth, led Joseph and Mary with the child to flee to Egypt, and the gifts from the wise men paid for the journey and the stay (Matt 2:13-18).

Consider Jesus as presented in *The Desire of Ages*. "He possessed a dignity and individuality wholly distinct from earthly pride and assumption; He did not strive for worldly greatness, and in even the lowliest position He was content." "Of the bitterness that falls to

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the lot of humanity, there was no part which Christ did not taste.”⁴⁵ “He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently.”⁴⁶ “He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the saving remedy to every soul.”⁴⁷

“Yet through childhood, youth, and manhood, Jesus walked alone. In His purity and His faithfulness, He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him. He carried the awful weight of responsibility for the salvation of men. He knew that unless there was a decided change in the principles and purposes of the human race, all would be lost. This was the burden of His soul, and none could appreciate the weight that rested upon Him. Filled with intense purpose, He carried out the design of His life that He Himself should be the light of men.”⁴⁸

We cannot even begin to imagine the enormous responsibility that rested upon His young shoulders. As a child and as a lad He was carrying this load. And Satan did everything to cause Him to stumble and become disqualified. How would you like to live with that burden? How would you cope if one sin would cause you to lose your eternal future with God. That’s what He faced. No wonder He prayed entire nights!

Consider the temptations in the wilderness before He launched His public ministry. “When Jesus entered the wilderness, He was shut in by the Father’s glory. Absorbed in communion with God, He was lifted above human weakness. But the glory departed, and He was left to battle with temptation. It was pressing upon Him every moment. His human nature shrank from the conflict that awaited Him. For forty days He fasted and prayed. Weak and emaciated from hunger, worn and haggard with mental agony, ‘His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.’ Isa. 52:14. Now was Satan’s opportunity. Now he supposed that he could overcome Christ.”⁴⁹

Satan arrives as a bright angel from heaven with a message from God. He claims that God is satisfied with Christ’s willingness to enter

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the bloodstained path. Christ has passed the test. The fast could now end. Just as Abraham did not have to sacrifice his son, so Christ was freed from His future sacrifice. "If you are God's son, make these stones bread." Notice the doubt. Just as in Eden he had said, "Did God say you would die?" casting doubt upon God's word, so now he said if you are God's son, casting doubt upon the words of the Father forty days before when He said at the baptism, "This is My beloved Son" (Matt 3:17).

Then Satan had another ploy. As an assumed heavenly angel he says, "One of the most powerful of the angels. . . has been banished from heaven. The appearance of Jesus indicates that He is that fallen angel, forsaken by God, and deserted by man. A divine being would be able to sustain his claim by working a miracle."⁵⁰ So make the stones bread.

Skipping to the third temptation, we read: "Placing Jesus upon a high mountain, Satan caused the kingdoms of the world, in all their glory, to pass in panoramic view before Him. The sunlight lay on templed cities, marble palaces, fertile fields, and fruit-laden vineyards. The traces of evil were hidden. The eyes of Jesus, so lately greeted by gloom and desolation, now gazed upon a scene of unsurpassed loveliness and prosperity. Then the tempter's voice was heard: 'All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine.'⁵¹ What incredible gall! Here was the one who had once worshiped Christ as His Creator; now he is asking Christ to worship him! This was more than wanting created beings to worship him instead of Christ. This was wanting Christ Himself to join them. This was asking Christ to accept the original rebellion, and participate in it. This exposes what Satan desired all along. He wanted to be worshiped by His Creator.

Christ refused. For His "mission could be fulfilled only through suffering. Before Him was a life of sorrow, hardship, and conflict, and an ignominious death. He must bear the sins of the whole world. He

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must endure separation from His Father's love."⁵² Jesus lived on earth as a dependent human. We knew what it was to be hated, ridiculed, misunderstood, laughed at. Satan threw his full fury at Him. The greatest evidence of a cosmic controversy is the fact that this perfect man, who was also God, had to meet temptations. Satan dogged his every footstep.

Christ in Gethsemane. In Gethsemane Christ's wilderness experience is magnified. Now, for the first time, He, who knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). "Now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God's sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.'"⁵³

"He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man's sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression. Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, 'Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.' Zechariah 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself."⁵⁴

Christ knew that the issues in the great controversy were at stake here. "With the issues of the conflict before Him, Christ's soul was filled with dread of separation from God. Satan told Him that if He

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became the surety for a sinful world, the separation would be eternal. He would be identified with Satan's kingdom, and would nevermore be one with God. . . . The sins of men weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God's wrath against sin was crushing out His life. Behold Him contemplating the price to be paid for the human soul. In His agony He clings to the cold ground, as if to prevent Himself from being drawn farther from God. . . From his pale lips comes the bitter cry, 'O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.' Yet even now He adds, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'"⁵⁵

"The human heart longs for sympathy in suffering. This longing Christ felt to the very depths of His being. . . . The One who had always had words of sympathy for them was now suffering superhuman agony. . . ."⁵⁶ During that awful night the disciples could hear "the strong cries of the sufferer." When they saw Jesus they could hardly recognize Him. "His face was so changed by anguish. . . . Again the Son of God was seized with superhuman agony, and fainting and exhausted, He staggered back to the place of His former struggle. His suffering was even greater than before. As the agony of soul came upon Him, 'His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.'" He was "wrestling alone with the powers of darkness." "He was like a reed beaten and bent by the angry storm." Jesus "fell prostrate, overcome by the horror of a great darkness. The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. . . . The awful moment had come—the moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. He might wipe the bloody sweat from His brow, and leave man to perish in his iniquity."⁵⁷ Three times His humanity shrank from the sacrifice ahead. But He remained committed to the human race, whatever the price He must pay. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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Christ on the Cross. “Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon his heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation.”⁵⁸ He had spent his entire life talking about the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. But now, as our Sin Bearer, He could not see that gracious and forgiving Father. “The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt. Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”⁵⁹

“Christ the sinless became sin for man. He bore the guilt of transgression, and the hiding of His Father’s face, until His heart was broken and His life crushed out.”⁶⁰ “Sin, so hateful to his sight, was heaped upon him till he groaned beneath its weight.”⁶¹ “He bore the sins of the world, and endured the penalty which rolled like a mountain upon his divine soul.”⁶² Troubled within and reviled without, He expired amidst derision. Oh, “Look to Calvary until your heart melts at the amazing love of the Son of God!”⁶³

Both in Gethsemane and Calvary Christ felt separated from His Father and His love, He felt agonizingly alone. He suffered the horror of hell—eternal separation from God as a guilty man. No not as a guilty man, but as the representative of the whole race of guilty

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humans! It was crushing out His very life. It was discouragement and despair all wrapped up in one, and compounded because He was the substitute for the entire race of sinners! In Gethsemane Satan tried to get Christ to believe that He would be forever separated from His Father. On the cross Jesus thought that this would truly be the case. There is an apparent intensity involved from Gethsemane to the cross, which makes the eternal separation seem so real. Now He could not see beyond the tomb, even though before He spoke of His resurrection (Matt 12:39-40) and coming in the second advent (Matt 26:64; John 14:3). Now He bore the sins of all mankind and His very life—His future with His Father—was being crushed out. In His agony He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:46). It was as if Christ said, “Father if I will never be with you again in order to save mankind, if it means that I will perish forever so that the redeemed can live with you *in my place*, then so be it.” And He plunged into the abyss and perished! How utterly incredible! How infinite and eternal was His giving for mankind!

The mournful cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46), were wrung from the parched lips of Christ dying in our place. He plunged into hell—into God-forsakenness to restore relationships now and heaven for us. Yet it is true that “God himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father.”⁶⁴ What magnificent, incomparable and amazing love God has for mankind! What stark contrast to the selfish, deceptive, tyrannical works of Satan against the human race! At Calvary Christ “reinstated man in the position from which Satan had hurled him through temptation and sin.”⁶⁵

You see, only Jesus knew what it was like to live with the Father. They had been together from eternity. He knew that at God's right hand there are pleasures forevermore (Ps 16:11). Here at Calvary He was giving up that greatest joy in order to save you and me. What a startling, staggering and forever defining contrast with Satan. *The devil aimed to take Christ's place. Jesus plunged into death so that*

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we could take His place. You see, it wasn't that He was unwilling to give it up. Calvary forever proves that. "In the contest between Christ and Satan, during the Savior's earthly ministry, the character of the great deceiver was unmasked. Nothing could so effectually have uprooted Satan from the affections of the heavenly angels and the whole loyal universe as did his cruel warfare upon the world's Redeemer. . . . The pent-up fires of envy and malice, hatred and revenge, burst forth on Calvary against the Son of God, while all heaven gazed upon the scene in silent horror."⁶⁶ "When Christ cried out, 'It is finished,' the unfallen worlds were made secure. For them the battle was fought and the victory won. Henceforth Satan had no place in the affections of the universe."⁶⁷

For "At the cross of Calvary, love and selfishness stood face to face. Here was their crowning manifestation. Christ had lived only to comfort and bless, and in putting Him to death, Satan manifested the malignity of his hatred against God. He made it evident that the real purpose of his rebellion was to dethrone God, and to destroy Him through whom the love of God was shown."⁶⁸

While Christ ever lives to intercede for His followers (Heb 7:25), while He rebukes their accuser Satan (Zech 3:1-4), "Daily He suffers the agonies of the crucifixion. Daily men and women are piercing Him by dishonoring Him, by refusing to do His will."⁶⁹ Who can ever measure the depths of His suffering? It is too great for humans to comprehend. Ellen White says, "The plan of salvation is too high to be fully reached by human thought. It is too grand to be fully embraced by finite comprehension."⁷⁰ Even "through the eternal ages new truth will continually unfold to the wondering and delighted mind." No wonder the cross will be the science and song of the redeemed throughout eternity!⁷¹

Final Events

According to Revelation 12 Calvary was the final, moral casting down of Satan (Rev 12:9-11). He was exposed as the murderer of

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Christ. "The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken."⁷² Then, why didn't the second advent take place soon after Calvary? "The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness."⁷³ His end-time ruling of planet earth as an assumed Christ and His final battle against Christ after the millennium would further expose his real mission to created beings. But these further exposures do not add anything to what happened at Calvary. Consider the following analogy:

Have you ever stood by the face of a mountain? You may scale it, and find more above the ridge. And that can be repeated several times. Up close to the mountain a climber really cannot take in the whole view of the mountain range. So it was at Calvary. The cross is the ultimate exposure of Satan and revelation of God. But up close to it, the full impact of what happened there could not be fully comprehended. In one sense, that will take all eternity.

When we come to final events we must ask, Why doesn't the second advent take place at the close of probation? For by probation's close God's saints will have finished the gospel commission and are translation-ready. But they must remain a little longer, through the worst time of trouble, to allow time for Satan to accomplish what he has all along wanted to do. He will then take over as the ruler of the world, and he will do it in the guise of being Christ. The utter mess that he will make of the demonstration will expose him still further, and the patience of the saints during that time will be in stark contrast to Satan and his people. They will make a demonstration that God is able to keep them and bring them through this final exodus (Jude 24) even as He did through the escape from Egypt (Exod 14-15). In the following remarks we will examine the end-time events in the light of the cosmic controversy.

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Satan is angry with the end-time church and seeks to destroy it (Rev 12:17). This is more fully shown in Revelation 13, with the whole world led into counterfeit worship, and a Sunday law and death decree enforced upon those who don't comply (Rev 13:11-17).

Consider Satan's strategy. If he can wipe out the saints, then he will have won the world—in spite of Calvary. So he throws everything he can at the saints. He gets them to look to *what* is coming instead of to *Who* is coming, to look to the *crisis* instead of to the *Christ*. From the inception of the cosmic controversy it has always been his consummate craft to deflect attention away from Christ. He doesn't care where the attention is placed—whether on him, our personal problems/sins, or our fears of end-time events—just so our Saviour is forgotten and our bond with Him is weakened.

America Causes World to Worship the Papacy (Rev 13:12). This could happen more easily with the collapse of communism. Now there is one super power. America may be moving to take its final role in world affairs. Events which may lead to this climax are happening quickly in America. The Christian Coalition is influencing politicians. Best selling author Philip Yancey, in his recent book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, says, "I worry about the recent surge of power among U.S. Christians, who seem to be focusing more and more on political means. Once Christians were ignored or scorned; now they are courted by every savvy politician."⁷⁴ Dominionists in America want to enforce Sunday keeping with a death decree.⁷⁵ This is a part of the desire to reestablish Old Testament laws and make America a theocracy. Even now all the world wonders after the beast and will be caught up in a false worship (Rev 13:3). Satan will come as Christ and reign over the world. This is what he has always wanted to do—to take Christ's place and rule.

Satan is preparing the world for this counterfeit. Never before have so many angels come to human beings. Never before have so many messages allegedly from Mary come to the human race. Pope John Paul II worships Mary. He has seen her in vision and follows her

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bidding. Never before have so many channeled books been on bookshelves. Channeled Bibles confuse and mislead the masses. Psychics are blatantly claiming to know the future, and multitudes seek them instead of Christ.

Good News about Coming Events (Rev 14). This is a special chapter for Seventh-day Adventists. It presents the three angels messages, which are the symbol of our mission. We want to look at the following segments: scene on Mount Zion (vss. 1-5); the three angels' messages (vss. 6-13); the other three angels' actions (vss. 14-20); and to compare Revelation 14 and 19.

1. Scene on Mount Zion. In Revelation 14:1, the translated saints are pictured standing on Mount Zion with Christ. In the OT Mount Zion was the place of deliverance (Isa 11:9-12; Joel 2:32; Mic 4:6-8). In the NT it says, "you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (Heb 12:22). So now Mount Zion is in heaven and remains there during the millennium. Then the New Jerusalem, or Mount Zion, will come to the earth made new (Rev 21:1-3). Mount Zion seems to be the name given to the mount on which God's throne is placed. It is the mount on which Satan wished to establish his throne. The translated saints are pictured there after the second advent, either during the millennium, or beyond in the new earth. Because they will follow Christ wherever He goes throughout eternity (Rev 14:4). I believe it refers to this eternal dimension. So we are given insight into the eternal experience of those who live through final events.

Scripture says, "they sang a new song before the throne" (Rev 14:3), which further supports the fact that Mount Zion is God's throne. It says that "No one could learn the song except the 144, 000 who had been redeemed from the earth" (Rev 14:3). Notice it does not say, the 144, 000 who have endured the great time of trouble. It says the 144, 000 who have been *redeemed*. The emphasis is not upon what they will do during final events, but upon what they received during final events. They were redeemed!

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What is this new song? “None but the hundred and forty-four thousand can learn that song; for it is the song of their experience—an experience such as no other company have ever had.”⁷⁶ They alone had passed through the great time of trouble, and thus lived after the close of human probation. No other group has ever done that. What do they sing about? Revelation records their song. It is called the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. It gives glory to God, just as the message of the first angel (Rev 14:7). It says, “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Rev 15:3-4). This is the song of their experience. They worshiped God when all the world worshiped the beast (Rev 13:3-4, 12-15). They witnessed what God did to these false worshipers, and what He did for them as those who worshiped Him. The final test has to do with worship. For it is the final outworking of the cosmic controversy during which Satan and his angels refuse to worship God anymore.

This song is called the song of Moses and the Lamb. The song of Moses was sang after the mighty deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 15:1-21). The Song of Moses brings glory to God. “Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea” (Exod 15:6-8). Not one word is mentioned about what the Israelites did. That's because they didn't bring about the deliverance. They were the recipients of the deliverance. Had not Moses told them, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exod 14:13-14).

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What about the Egyptians? “The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them’” (Exod 15:9). They reflected the spirit of Satan who said, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa 14:13-14). These were boastful words in the heart of one in the presence of God. The Egyptians likewise boasted in the presence of the Shekinah glory with Israel (Exod 14:19-20).

It is true that the final exodus, as it were, will be through the great time of trouble. But Daniel 12:1 puts this future into proper perspective. “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered” (Dan 12:1). The greater the trouble—the greater the deliverance! Note that the 144,000 do not even mention the trouble, just as Israel after the Exodus did not mention the ordeal of going through the Red Sea. The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb are songs about God’s deliverance. And if they are singing about this in the millennium and beyond in the new earth—then *it must be worth going through!*

It is called the Song of the Lamb. He is the focus and the subject of worship. Christ, or Michael, is the One who delivers them, and Michael has never lost a battle. He was the One who threw Satan and his fiends out of heaven (Rev 12:7-8). He will banish them again in the end time and deliver His people. Isaiah speaks of this day. “Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and

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rain” (Isa 4:5-6). Ellen White comments on this passage, saying, “In one of the most beautiful and comforting passages of Isaiah’s prophecy, reference is made to the pillar of cloud and of fire to represent God’s care for His people in the great final struggle with the powers of evil.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, “Jesus is the only refuge in these perilous times.”⁷⁸ I have developed this theme more in a recent book, entitled *Christ our Refuge* (1996).⁷⁹

2. Why the Three Angels Follow this Scene. The three angels message follow the Mount Zion scene because they show the focus of the end-time saints who will be translated. The messages, as we will see, are Christ-centered. Therefore they are opposite to Satan, who is self-centered. I will confine my remarks on the three angels messages to their relation to the experience that the end-time saints will have, and about which they will sing throughout eternity. In other words, the three angels messages answer the question, “How can I be in that translated group? What preparation should I be making now?”

To answer these questions, we will not take up the historical dimension of these messages. Our interest is simple: how do they prepare the end-time saints to go through the end-time trouble? The focus of the first angel’s message is Christ the Creator. Reverence Him. Give Him glory. His judgment hour has come. Worship Him (Rev 14:7). The first angel’s message says, especially in the judgment hour, look to Christ. And in that focus, Paul says, By beholding we are becoming changed (2 Cor 3:18). Put all this together and the first angel’s message says: In this judgment hour look to Jesus and be changed.

How far does that change go? Enter the second angel’s message. Babylon is fallen (Rev 14:8). Babylon reminds us of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). This was a rebellion of the post-deluvian peoples who said, “We will build a tower to save ourselves from the next flood. You got our forbears, but you won’t get us!” This defiance represents self-dependence, a type of self-salvation. Put the two messages together and this is what you have: By beholding Christ we

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are becoming changed, so that self-dependence crumbles.

Enter the third message. It has to do with the image to the beast, or a union of church and state in America that mirrors the union of church and state in the Vatican. What is this as an experience? It is trying to be religious (church) through one's own secular (state) strength. Apart from Christ all effort is secular, even if one is trying to be religious. Now let's put the three messages together: *By beholding Christ I am being changed, so that I no longer depend upon myself, even to the extent that I no longer try to be religious through my own strength. Here is a picture of total dependence upon Christ*, the same kind of dependence that Israel had in the Red Sea, the same kind of dependence that the saints will have in the end-time. This is completely opposite to the self-dependence of the Egyptian army, the Babel builders before them, and Satan and his angels in the beginning.

In other words, the cosmic controversy impacts the experience of each person. The genuine people of God will rest fully in Christ (the deeper meaning of the final Sabbath rest test)⁸⁰ and will depend upon Him alone, because they are looking to Him alone. In marked contrast Satan and his angelic and human followers depend solely upon themselves. It is from these latter forces that Michael will deliver the end-time saints. So that our victory in passing through last day events is due to Christ and never to ourselves. This is why we should not fear end-events. We should not look to the crisis but to the Christ. Satan knows this. He knows that if he can deflect attention away from Christ, then he will get people in the end. So he will cause the saints to become preoccupied with the crisis and thereby lose sight and sense of Christ.

3. The Other Three Angels. There are six angels in Revelation 14. The first three have a message; the second three have a mission. The three with a mission are depicted in connection with the second advent. The first of these angels says to Christ "Take your sickle and reap" (vs. 15), and He harvested the saints (vs.16). The second angel

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has a sharp sickle (vs. 17), as does Christ (vs. 14). The third angel says to the one with a sharp sickle “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe” (vs. 18). “The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath” (vs. 19). Clearly this is the destruction of the wicked. Here is a destroying angel coming in judgment, just as the destroying angel came at the Passover, just before Israel left Egypt.⁸¹ The Exodus from Egypt is a local type of the global exodus from this world at the second advent of Christ.

4. Comparison of Revelation 14 and 19. Both Revelation 14 and 19 portray second advent scenes and describe the climax of the cosmic controversy in human history. There is a remarkable difference in the presentations. In Revelation 14 Christ comes seated on a white cloud, and is “‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head” (Rev 14:14). The Greek word for crown in this verse is *stephanos*, or a laurel wreath of victory that an Olympiad received after winning a game. Here Jesus is pictured as a fellow human being, who has won the cosmic controversy through His life and death. He comes solely to harvest His saints in this chapter. The angel does the work of destroying the lost.

In complete contrast, in Revelation 19, Christ comes seated on a white horse. He comes to judge and to make war. He comes with many crowns on His head (vss. 11-12). He comes with the armies of heaven on white horses (vs. 14). He comes with a sharp sword to strike the nations. He comes to rule with an iron scepter. He comes treading “the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (vs. 15). He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords (vs. 16). The Greek word for the multiple crowns He wears is *diadem*, worn only by those of royal lineage. Here is a portrayal of Christ as the divine, eternal God coming in vengeance against the enemies of His people. Here is Michael coming to deliver His people.

“Then I saw the beast [Catholicism] and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on

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the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet [Apostate Protestantism] who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf” (vs. 19. See Rev 16:12-16). With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image (see Rev 13:11-15). The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh (vss. 19-21).

The Cosmic Controversy Ended

After the close of the millennium all the wicked are raised from their graves. “Every eye in that vast multitude is turned to behold the glory of the Son of God. With one voice the wicked hosts exclaim: ‘Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!’ It is not love to Jesus that inspires this utterance. The force of truth urges the words from unwilling lips.”⁸² Then Christ descends upon the Mount of Olives. The New Jerusalem descends and Christ, His saints and angels enter it.

Satan then prepares for his final attempt for supremacy over Christ. “He claims to be the prince who is the rightful owner of the world, and whose inheritance has been unlawfully wrested from him. He represents himself to his deluded subjects as a redeemer, assuring them that his power has brought them forth from their graves, and that he is about to rescue them from the most cruel tyranny. The presence of Christ having been removed, Satan works wonders to support his claim.”⁸³

The wicked are those who have “devoted all their skill and knowledge to the exaltation of themselves.”⁸⁴ They look at their numbers compared to the number of those inside the city and declare that they can overcome the city. Time is spent in organizing the greatest army ever to march. Instruments of war are made. The greatest kings and generals of all history are engaged with Satan in

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this final attack on Christ. They surround the city. Then Christ appears again to them, seated on a throne high above the city. Christ is surrounded by the redeemed.

All humanity are alive at the same time. Those surrounding the city glory in their pride and numbers. What about the redeemed. Ellen White says, “As the redeemed have beheld the power and malignity of Satan, they have seen, as never before, that no power but that of Christ could have made them conquerors. In all that shining throng there are none to ascribe salvation to themselves, as if they had prevailed by their own power and goodness. Nothing is said of what they have done or suffered; but the burden of every song, the keynote of every anthem, is: Salvation to our God and unto the Lamb.”⁸⁵

Then the coronation of Christ takes place. Above the throne, flung across the heavens, is replayed major moments of the cosmic controversy. Christ, His life of sacrifice, His death—all are seen in vivid detail. The heavens form a gigantic three dimensional screen and all created beings stand absorbed. “And now before the swaying multitude are revealed the final scenes—the patient Sufferer treading the path to Calvary; the Prince of heaven hanging upon the cross; the haughty priests and the jeering rabble deriding His expiring agony; the supernatural darkness; the heaving earth, the rent rocks, the open graves, marking the moment when the world’s Redeemer yielded up His life.”⁸⁶

All created beings will on this day be Christ-centered and will gaze on Calvary—even though briefly. But it will be enough for all to know that Christ is just in the cosmic controversy. Each will have witnessed Calvary, and they cannot help but see the extravagant mercy and profligate grace of Christ. The wicked “witness the outburst of wonder, rapture, and adoration from the saved; and as the wave of melody sweeps over the multitudes without the city, all with one voice exclaim, ‘Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints’; and falling prostrate, they worship the Prince of life.”⁸⁷

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“Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned. Every lying excuse will be swept away. Human apostasy will appear in its heinous character. Men will see what their choice has been. Every question of truth and error in the long standing controversy will then have been made plain. In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil. It will; be demonstrated that the divine decrees are not accessory to sin. There was no defect in God’s government, no cause for disaffection. When the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed, both the loyal and the rebellious will unite in declaring, ‘Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name. . . for Thy judgments are made manifest’” (Rev 15:3, 4).⁸⁸

Satan stands among those looking at the coronation of Christ and the great scenes of Calvary. Satan “recalls his constant efforts to oppose the work of Christ and to sink man lower and lower. He sees that his hellish plots have been powerless to destroy those who have put their trust in Jesus. As Satan looks upon his kingdom, the fruit of his toil, he sees only failure and ruin.”⁸⁹ “In his last great effort to dethrone Christ, destroy His people, and take possession of the city of God, the arch deceiver has been fully unmasked. Those who have united with him see the total failure of his cause. Christ’s followers and the loyal angels behold the full extent of his machinations against the government of God. He is the object of universal abhorrence. . . . His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence.”⁹⁰

The Verdict in the Controversy

Through Isaiah God invites, “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. . . Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of

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me, In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:22-24). The appeal is, Why not respond now and be saved, instead of waiting to respond when it is too late. Paul observes that this universal acknowledgment happens at the final judgment. “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God’” (Rom 14:11).

What causes this unanimous vote for Christ? Do created beings judge God? Is this what it means when it says, “the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7). As we have seen above, the final scenes of Christ’s life will be replayed. In all its terrible detail, across the heavens, will be shown Christ’s crucifixion for all mankind. The swaying multitude will take in the scene. They cannot look anywhere else. They remain riveted to the drama as it unfolds. Too late they gaze at Christ and at Calvary instead of to self and other things. Too late they stand absorbed in the supremely central Person and act of the cosmic controversy. Too late they realize that God has done everything to save them. The fact of their being lost is due only to their rejecting His death for them. It is then that every knee will bow and confess the justice of God. Even Satan and his angels join in this confession. Though coming from unwilling lips, they cannot help but confess. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear. They cannot escape it. There is no other option. Calvary has forever demonstrated to the universe that God is just. Satan stands fully unmasked.

This confession by all intelligent created beings is not a case of their sitting in judgment on God. That would be no different from biblical critics sitting in judgment on Scripture. Rather, it is a confession that issues out of the self-revelation of God in the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is also a response to the unmasking of Satan. His assumed role as Christ has been utterly exposed, before the second advent and again after the millennium. It is in these attempts to take the place of Christ, and to battle openly against Him, and to

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take the city that Satan is seen for what he has always been since the inception of the cosmic controversy.

So the actions of both Christ and Satan have revealed their characters. It is this self-revelation of each which convinces the onlooking universe. They cannot help coming to the verdict they do because the evidence is so overwhelming. The contrast between the authentic Christ and the counterfeit Christ is so startlingly different. There is an infinite qualitative distinction between the two. Christ was willing to die for the lost world, and never live again so that they could live in His place. Satan was only willing to take Christ's place and rule as a tyrant over his followers. Christ is other-centered. Satan is self-centered. But more than anything else, the greatest evidence of the distinct difference between them—the uncrossable dividing line—is seen at Calvary. There Christ perished for His created beings. There Satan as a created being took the life of His Creator.

“Never will evil again be manifest. Says the word of God: ‘Affliction shall not rise up the second time.’ Nahum 1:9. The law of God, which Satan has reproached as the yoke of bondage, will be honored as the law of liberty. A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom.”⁹¹ All unfallen and redeemed beings will delight to study the cross forever. “The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. . . . The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.”⁹²

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The Controversy and Adventist Christians

In light of what we have considered above, we now ask the question: What is an Adventist Christian? The answer is simple. An Adventist Christian is one who loves Jesus and therefore hates Satan. An Adventist is one who is Christ-centered in all he or she does. This means Calvary is ever kept in mind. Calvary is the guarantee of sins forgiven, of present acceptance and of future assurance. With Paul, an Adventist declares, “For to me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). The prayer of an Adventist is, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

Satan boasts in himself, even in the presence of God at the throne. In utter contrast Adventists fall down and worship Christ and boast only in His death for them at Calvary. Their cry is, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev 5:12). This is the essence of the first angel’s everlasting gospel—to give glory to Him (Rev 14:6-7). This is why Adventists should have no fear of final events. Because, for them, *the final event was Calvary* (Rev 12:8-11). There Jesus triumphed over Satan. So they look forward to the ultimate effect of that victory for them in the final events when Jesus will deliver them and destroy their enemies (Dan 12:1). They have no fear of the *coming crisis* because they depend alone in their loving relationship with the *coming Christ*. They revel in the assurance He has promised: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5), for “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). And throughout eternity the end-time generation will “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). Our destiny is to be with Jesus and praise Him for His infinite gift of salvation. To do that now is to be an authentic Adventist Christians.

No wonder God has admonished His end-time people, “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let

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the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”⁹³ It is precisely this that separates the redeemed from the lost. It is precisely this humility at Calvary that is so Christ-like, and so different from Satan. This is the place where the cosmic controversy was seen for what it is, and the place where it was forever decided. It is in this place, in our love for Christ and His substitutionary death for us, that makes us a true Adventist Christian.

Our greatest need is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “When the Spirit of God, with its marvelous awakening power, touches the soul, it abases human pride. Worldly pleasure and position and power are seen to be worthless. ‘Imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God’ are cast down; every thought is brought into captivity ‘to the obedience of Christ’ 2 Cor 10:5. Then humility and self-sacrificing love, so little valued among men, are exalted as alone of worth.”⁹⁴ The Spirit of Christ within the Adventist life makes the person like Jesus. This is where the cosmic controversy is won for each Adventist, where the self-sacrificing love of Calvary is applied to the life in forgiveness and transforming power to love Christ with all the heart and to be His channel of unconditional love to other human beings.

Endnotes

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2 Naturalism includes Atheism, Physicalism, Humanism, Existentialism and Hedonism 2. Transcendentalism includes Pantheism, Animism, Panpsy-chism, Panentheism and Polytheism. 3. Theism includes Deism, Finitism and Traditional Theism. See W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), pp. 41-67.

3 Richard M. Davidson, "Saints, Celestial Slander," *Perspective Digest: A Publication of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 1 #1, 1996, pp. 31-34.

4 See an illuminating book by Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University, 1996), where the author documents that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are examples of postmodern thinkers who oppose the God of Scripture. They set up the god of their own thinking as better than the God of revelation. This has been Satan's strategy from the beginning, so that the eschatological Christ of Satan's impersonation will be accepted as the authentic Christ. Throughout the cosmic controversy Satan's attack has been consistently against Christ.

5 "His death has now answered the question whether there was self-denial with the Father and the Son." Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 9, 1886.

6 Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 16, 1900.

7 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 57.

8 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 27, 1902.

9 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1893.

10 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 499.

11 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, June 18, 1894.

12 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 5, 1894.

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- 13 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 37.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1896.
- 15 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, March 7, 1895.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.
- 19 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 223.
- 20 Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 29, 1891.
- 21 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.
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- 31 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 22, 1899.
- 32 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988). Although there are headings given to six major sections, the order of the fundamental beliefs remains the same. I view this as a step in the right direction, but it overlooks the needs to rearrange the 27 in a different order for the reasons presented in this article.
- 33 For those who desire more on the above suggestions, see my article in *Ministry*, July 1996.
- 34 John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary, Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), Vol. 24, p. 74.
- 35 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.
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- 37 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 37.

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- 38 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.
- 39 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 39.
- 40 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 496.
- 41 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 40.
- 42 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 40-41.
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- 46 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 89.
- 47 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 91.
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- 67 Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 12, 1901.
- 68 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 57.
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74 Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), p. 246.

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76 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 649.

77 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 283.

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79 Norman R. Gulley, *Christ Our Refuge* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996).

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84 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 664.

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87 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 668-669. The wicked have no negative vote. Ellen White says, "The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped" (*The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899.)

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Good News About the Time of Trouble

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Near the beginning of a recent semester a student blurted out in my “Last Day Events” class, “I want to go to heaven via the resurrection!” Another student told me, “I don’t want to run to the mountains in the great time of trouble!”

In an anonymous questionnaire taken by students in Last Day Events classes at Southern Adventist University the following data surfaced:

1. 49% worried about the present pre-advent judgment.
2. 56% were scared of last day events.
3. 41% would rather die than go through last day events.
4. 37% believed we gain entrance to heaven through Christ’s sacrifice plus our human works.
5. 50% were not sure if they would be saved if they died today.
6. 88% claimed they know Christ as a personal friend.

This is a stunning revelation, when you realize these students represent a cross section of Seventh-day Adventist youth, from around the States and other countries, studying a variety of majors. These may be among the final generation, yet do not want to be. There is something radically wrong here.

The Great Time of Trouble

When the Sunday law is enforced by a death decree (Rev 13:12-15) Seventh-day Adventists will be in the Great Time of

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Trouble. Daniel 12:1 says, “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.”

This text speaks of two things: 1. The greatest time of trouble ever! 2. The greatest deliverance ever! These two need to be held together. If we study this verse in its biblical context in Daniel and Revelation, then there is no need for Seventh-day Adventists to be afraid of the great time of trouble.

The Greatest Time of Trouble Ever. This period begins with the close of human probation. It is a time when Christ’s mediation is finished in heaven (Dan 12:1): “the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor,” and the Spirit of God is withdrawn from the wicked world. It is a time when nation will rise against nation, and the whole world will be “in confusion.”¹

“Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.

A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians, and filled the land with mourning. . . The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits. There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere.”²

“The angel of mercy is folding her wings, preparing to step down from the throne and leave the world to the control of Satan.”³ Then “Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent.”⁴ It is a time when there is no goodness in the wicked. It is a time when “Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it” (Amos 8:12). It is a time when the whole world is wondering after and worshipping the

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beast (Rev 13:3-4). It is a time when America leads the rest of the nations to give homage to the papacy (Rev 13:11-12). It is the time when Satan is here on the planet pretending to be Christ.⁵ It is the time of Jacob's trouble, when a wrestling with God akin to Jacob's will be experienced (Gen 32:22-32). It is the time of the last seven plagues that will decimate and destroy (Rev 16:1-21). It is the time of Armageddon, the final preadvent battle in the great controversy, when Satan plans to annihilate Sabbathkeepers and become supreme ruler of the world, a dream he has had for millennia (Rev 16:12-16; 19:11-21).

It is the time when a death decree is issued to enforce Sabbathkeepers to conform or die (Rev 13:15). "Says the great deceiver. . . 'Our principle concern is to silence this sect of Sabbathkeepers. . . We will finally have a law to exterminate all who will not submit to our authority.'"⁶ "It is the purpose of Satan to cause them to be blotted from the earth in order that his supremacy of the world may not be disputed."⁷

This is the time when "many of all nations, and of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, black and white, will be cast into the most unjust and cruel bondage. The beloved of God pass weary days, bound in chains, shut in by prison bars, sentenced to be slain, some apparently left to die of starvation in dark and loathsome dungeons. No human ear is open to hear their moans; no human hand is ready to lend them help."⁸

It is the time when "Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons."⁹ It is the time when spirits of devils will go to the whole world, using miracles to deceive (Rev 16:12-16). It is the time when fire falls from heaven (false Mt. Carmel, 1 Kings 18:16-40) to deceive the world to worship of the papacy (Rev 13:13-14). These items listed above are numerous. No wonder Daniel 12:1 calls it the worst time of trouble ever! But these events are only one side of the

story. Daniel 7 begins to open up the other side of the great time of trouble.

The Preadvent Judgment and Implementation

Daniel 7: An Additional Insight. Perhaps some Seventh-day Adventists read about certain aspects of the great time of trouble and overlook the full picture of what will happen during that time. It is true that the whole world will be against Sabbathkeepers, but it is also true that God will be against the whole world. God will manifest this fact by bringing a far greater time of trouble upon the wicked than will be experienced by Sabbathkeepers. We need to see the judgments upon the wicked in all their stark reality in order to comprehend the care God will extend over His people during this period. This comparison will enable us to reject the idea that the time of trouble is all bad news for God's saints.

We begin by looking at Daniel 7. This chapter introduces the little horn for the first time in Scripture. Daniel 1-6 is history, followed by 7-12 as prophetic insights into last day events. The facts of history give a sneak preview of what is coming in the future. This is true in Revelation¹⁰ and in *The Great Controversy*.¹¹ God has used the same method in all three: to give insights into the future from the historical accounts.

The historical accounts of Daniel record two decrees about worship: the worship of the image on Dura's plain (Dan 3), and the worship of king Darius (Dan 6). Both worship decrees contained a death decree for non-compliance (Dan 3:6; 6:7). God's saints, the three Hebrew worthies and Daniel, were thrown into their great time of trouble, into a fiery furnace and a lion's den respectively.

But that was not the end of the stories. In both incidents these loyal worshipers of God were gloriously delivered (Dan 3:25-27; 6:21-23). Furthermore, those who conspired to enforce the false worship onto the three worthies and Daniel were themselves destroyed (Dan 3:22; 6:24). These two historical incidents are a

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powerful insight into the eschatological scenes of Daniel 7 and Revelation 16-19.

The preadvent Judgment is vital to the context of the great time of trouble. It forcefully shows that the great time of trouble is only bad news for the confederation of the wicked who oppose God's people with a Sunday law and a death decree. Three times the little horn is mentioned (Dan 7:8, 20, 25), and the little horn is mentioned (Dan 7:8, 20, 25), and each time the judgment is immediately mentioned (vss. 9-10, 21-22, 26). So the papacy, whom the whole world will worship (Rev 13:3-4), is itself under judgment. It is important to notice that the little horn is introduced in Scripture as a power that will be judged by God. Any control it may exercise over mankind in the end-time is fleeting, and is doomed to failure.

The first mention of the little horn is in verse 8. "This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully." Then immediately come the words, "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. . . The court was seated, and the books were opened" (Dan 7:9-10). "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire" (Dan 7:11).

The second reference is in verses 20-21. "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan 7:21).

The third reference is in verses 25-26. "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him"

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(Dan 7:25-27).

Some Seventh-day Adventists are fearful of the preadvent judgment, wondering what will happen when their name comes up. We saw that the students also were afraid in the survey referred to above. I have written on the preadvent judgment in greater detail elsewhere,¹² but for our purposes here, it is important to note that the preadvent judgment in Daniel 7 compares the verdict given to the little horn with the verdict given to God's people. This is the crucial comparison which dominates the chapter.

God's people are vindicated, delivered, and given the kingdom. The little horn is destroyed. Although it is true that the names of all who have ever professed to be followers of Christ will come up for review in the judgment, although it is true that the entire record of their lives will be looked into, it is essential to notice that Daniel 7 compares those who truly are Christ's followers with those who are only so in name. Two groups are contrasted: true Christians versus the counterfeit Christians. The comparison is clear—Christ's saints receive a good verdict, those espousing the papal position will not.

The reason for the preadvent judgment is to allow the onlooking universe to see that God is just in keeping some people out of heaven while allowing others entrance. The difference is simple. Acceptance or nonacceptance of Christ and His death. The first is the only way to gain entrance. God's saints are far more focused on Christ's work for them in their place than upon their own works, good or bad. They accept that a fitness for heaven is necessary. They believe that the forsaking of all sin is vital. But they cling to Christ as the only One who can make this possible.

By contrast, the papacy, by definition, is a system that refuses to accept Christ as the sole means of salvation. It depends upon its own works and is thus found wanting. The message of Daniel 7 is forceful. Any dependence upon human works, or over-preoccupation with one's own life, is papal, whether one is a Protestant, humanist or a Seventh-day Adventist. Could it be that some who are scared of the great time of trouble are overly preoccupied with themselves—their

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own safety, security—instead of focusing on Christ, the only One who can take them through? One thing is sure, the focus in the preadvent judgment affects one’s focus about the great time of trouble.

Revelation 16-19: The Implementation of the Preadvent Judgment Verdict. We will focus on Revelation 16-18, leaving chapter 19 to the section on Armageddon. All the events of these chapters take place during the great time of trouble specified by Daniel (Dan 12:1). They give insight into what happens to the whole wicked world who war against Sabbathkeepers. What happens includes the seven last plagues (Rev 16) and the punishment of Babylon (Rev 17-18).

Plagues. The seven last plagues fall on the enemies of God’s people, and not on God’s people. Joseph instructed his family to settle in the region of Goshen during their stay in Egypt (Gen 45:10). In the last seven plagues that fell on Egypt God said, “I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarm of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people” (Exod 8:22-23). In that time “Ruin and desolation marked the path of the destroying angel. The land of Goshen alone was spared.”¹³

This Egyptian experience is a type of the coming plagues. While the seven last plagues implement the preadvent verdict against those opposing the saints, God will protect His own. “While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous, and supply their wants. To him that ‘walketh righteously’ is the promise: ‘Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.’”¹⁴ This is why the final invitation to those in Babylon is, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

Punishment of Babylon. The punishment of Babylon includes the plagues, and more. In Revelation 17 one of the plague angels shows the judgment (Gr. *krima*, punishment, vs. 1) which implements the judgment process of Daniel 7. The woman, Babylon the great, sits on

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a scarlet beast, representing the false churches using the government. Babylon is “the mother of prostitutes” (Rev 17:5) because she has united with the kings of the earth (Rev 16:12-16; 17:2; this is global, cf. Rev 18:3) instead of uniting with Christ who is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16). The union of church and state is a wrong union. It is an adulterous union, because it denies the marriage of the church to Christ as the only lawful Bridegroom. This is what the Christian Coalition has not considered in its drive to control the houses of Congress.

This woman is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (Rev 17:6; cf. Rev 12:17). For in the probationary end-time, martyrs “had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands” (Rev 20:4; see Rev 13:12-17). But now the time has come when ten horns, or kings (Rev 17:12) “will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. . . The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:16-17). Thus the woman who rules over the kings of the world, the Babylonian conglomerate that hates God’s people, will not only receive plagues from God, but a devastating divorce and destruction from her illicit lovers.

Revelation 18 looks at both of these judgments upon Babylon, her plagues and destruction. “Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her (cf. “one hour” vss. 10, 17, 19, signifying a quick judgment) death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her” (Rev 18:8). Then the chapter links this double judgment to the way Babylon has oppressed the end-time saints. “Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you” (Rev 18:20). Then Revelation 19 records the response in heaven. “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has

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condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (Rev 19:1-2).

Whereas the illicit union between church and kings has ended in utter destruction, the great multitude in heaven shout with a great roar, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready” (Rev 19:6-7).

This is Wedding Day

It should never be forgotten that the great time of trouble is a part of the wedding day which precedes the Bridegroom’s coming to receive His bride. What bridegroom worth his salt would not stand up for his bride, especially on her wedding day. Christ will do so magnificently. Christ’s bride is already sealed when she enters the great time of trouble (Rev 7:1-4). What is that seal? It is “a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved.”¹⁵ The bride of Christ is immovable. The bride can say with Paul, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39). Christ, the Bridegroom, has promised His bride, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5), for “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

A very close relationship between Christ and His bride will exist during the great time of trouble. Yes, they may be in prisons, but “angels will come to them in lonely cells, bringing light and peace from heaven. The prison will be as a palace, for the rich in faith dwell there, and the gloomy walls will be lighted up with heavenly light as when Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises at midnight in the Philippian dungeon.”¹⁶ In fact some events in the book of Acts will be repeated in last day events. God says, “Study carefully in the book of

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Acts the experiences of Paul and the other apostles, for God's people in our day must pass through similar experiences."¹⁷ Just as most of Acts follows after the first Pentecost (Acts 2), so final events come after the second Pentecost and the outpouring of the Latter Rain.

When we read that there will be no mediator in heaven, that is right. But it does not mean that Christ's bride will have to live alone without Him. For He will be with His bride through the Holy Spirit. When it says that the Spirit will be withdrawn from the world, this is true. But it is only from the wicked world that the Spirit is withdrawn. The Spirit is never withdrawn from Christ's bride. In fact, the Latter Rain, with unparalleled power, comes precisely to take the bride through all the final events. So, although the time of trouble is the worst ever, the power of the Holy Spirit is the greatest ever!

In fact, "It is impossible to give any idea of the experience of the people of God who shall be alive upon the earth when celestial glory and a repetition of the persecutions of the past are blended. They will walk in the light proceeding from the throne of God. By means of the angels there will be constant communications between heaven and earth. . . In the midst of the time of trouble that is coming—a time of trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—God's chosen people will stand unmoved. Satan and his host cannot destroy them, for angels that excel in strength will protect them."¹⁸

During the "time of Jacob's trouble" God's people can only cling to Christ, just as Jacob did. Sensing their great need, they cry to Him. "As the wrestling ones urge their petitions before God, the veil separating them from the unseen seems almost withdrawn. The heavens glow with the dawning of eternal day, and like the melody of angel songs, the words fall upon the ear, 'Stand fast to your allegiance. Help is coming.' Christ the almighty victor, holds out to His weary soldiers a crown of immortal glory; and His voice comes from the gates ajar, 'Lo, I am with you. Be not afraid. I am acquainted with all your sorrows; I have borne your griefs. You are not warring against untried enemies. I have fought the battle in your behalf, and in

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My name you are more than conquerors.’

The precious Saviour will send help just when we need it. The way to heaven is consecrated by His footprints. Every thorn that wounds our feet has wounded His. Every cross that we are called to bear He has borne before us. The Lord permits conflicts, to prepare the soul for peace. The time of trouble is a fearful ordeal for God’s people; but it is the time for every true believer to look up, and by faith he may see the bow of promise encircling him.”¹⁹

Looking up to their Bridegroom, what do they remember? He too faced a union of church and state. Just as crafty Caiphas said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50).²⁰ So in the end-time it will be urged, “It is better for them (God's people) to suffer than for whole nations to be thrown into confusion and lawlessness.”²¹ They realize the parallel. Christ faced a death decree just as they do. . . . But there is a decided difference. He died in place of His bride, crying, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). The bride does not die, and is not forsaken by Christ (Heb 13:5). This is, perhaps, best illustrated by the Battle of Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon

The Battle of Armageddon takes place at the end of the great time of trouble. It is prepared for during the sixth plague (Rev 16:12-16) and fought during the seventh plague (Rev 16:19). The fullest record of the battle is found in Revelation 19:11-21. Christ is pictured riding a white horse (Rev 19:11) with the armies of heaven riding white horses (Rev 19:14). “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations” (Rev 19:15). He comes as King of Kings to smite the nations of the world confederated against Him and His followers. “Then I saw the beast (papacy, see Rev 13:1, 16:13) and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet (apostate

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Protestantism, see, Rev 13:11; 16:13)²² who had performed miraculous signs on his behalf (see Rev 13:12-14). With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh” (Rev 19:19-21).

It is in this battle that the types of Armageddon in Daniel are realized. Just as the three Hebrew worthies and Daniel were delivered, and those who had put them into the fiery furnace and lions’ den perished, so Christ’s end-time bride will be delivered and her enemies destroyed. This is the final outworking of the double verdict of the preadvent judgment of Daniel 7—destruction of the little horn and deliverance of God’s people.

Revelation gives two presentations of Christ’s coming for His bride in the Second Advent. In Revelation 14 He comes on a white cloud, and comes as a “son of man,” with a crown on His head. This crown is a *stephanos* in the Greek text, that is, a laurel wreath of victory worn by the winner of an Olympic game. Three angels are symbolically linked with Christ’s return. I call these, “the other three angels of Revelation 14.” The first three angels have a message (Rev 14:6-13). These other three angels have a mission (Rev 14:15-20).

Christ and an angel have a sickle. They come to implement the double verdict (deliverance/destruction) of the preadvent judgment. The first angel calls for Christ to take the sickle and reap (Rev 14:15). Christ reaps the harvest of the righteous (Rev 14:16). The second angel is introduced, the one who also has a sharp sickle (v. 17). The third angel calls “in a loud voice to him who has the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine’” (Rev 14:18). “The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath” (Rev 14:19).

So Christ is pictured as coming to deliver His people, and the

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angel is portrayed as coming to destroy the wicked. It is significant that Christ is not presented as destroying the wicked in this scene. Rather, He comes as the Son of Man, as a fellow human, with a laurel wreath reminiscent of His victory over sin to win His bride.

In stark contrast is Revelation 19. Christ comes on a white horse leading an army to make war (Rev 19:11). He has many diadems on His head, crowns worn only by royalty. Here Christ comes as King of Kings (Rev 19:16), and as such He comes to destroy the enemies of His bride.

Two Second Advent scenes. *Christ comes as a fellow human being who has been through the greatest time of trouble* that any human has, or will ever have to endure. He understands the experience of His people in their great time of trouble. He comes to take them home. *Christ also comes as God to defeat the world conglomerate moving to annihilate His bride.* This is the greatest rescue mission of all time, an experience that will be forever unforgettable. Christ comes to deliver His people and destroy their enemies. Christ actively implements the double verdict of the preadvent judgment at His Second Advent.

The Great Time of Trouble as Remembered by Christ's Bride

The good news of Daniel 12:1 is found in the great deliverance, and not in the greatest time of trouble ever. We have noted both the trouble and the deliverance, but how do we know that the deliverance far outweighs the trouble endured. It is true that the reward of being with Christ and in heaven forever does far outweigh any fleeting time of trouble. But the bottom line is, How do those going through the great time of trouble evaluate their experience? After all, their view is more authoritative than any other estimate.

The book of Revelation provides the answer. It depicts Christ with His end-time bride on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1). It is of interest that in the OT Mount Zion was considered a place of deliverance. For

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example, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance” (Joel 2:32; cf. Isa 11:9-12; Mic 4:6-8). In the NT Mount Zion is in heaven. For example, “You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God” (Heb 12:22). Thus, Christ’s end-time bride is pictured standing with Christ in heaven, either during the Millennium or in eternity. For, this bride will “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). Whichever you choose, it is a long time after the great time of trouble. Yet, notice what the bride is doing. She sings “a new song before the throne” and “No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Rev 14:3).

We are told that no one else can sing that song “for it is the song of their experience—an experience such as no other company have ever had.”²³ This is because it is a song about their experience during the great time of trouble. This song is recorded in Revelation 15. Notice the focus. “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Rev 15:3-4). There is nothing said about the perils of the great time of trouble. The song concentrates solely upon God and His mighty deeds during the great time of trouble.

Now because this song is sung by God’s end-time people in the Millennium and beyond, it must tell us something about the experience of the great time of trouble. It tells us this: *If it’s worth singing about so long after it happened, it must be worth going through!* Surely the song rejoices in the deliverance part of Daniel 12:1, rather than the greatest time of trouble part. Looked at from the perspective of the deliverance, the time of trouble is worth going through. This is because of what Christ does for His bride during the great time of trouble, rather than for what His bride does for Him.

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The Final Exodus

The great time of trouble is likened to the Exodus from Egypt. The song of the end-time deliverance is called “the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3). “The eye of God, looking down the ages, was fixed upon the crisis which His people are to meet, when earthly powers shall be arrayed against them. Like the captive exile, they will be in fear of death by starvation or by violence. But the Holy One who divided the Red Sea before Israel, will manifest His mighty power and turn their captivity.”²⁴

The great time of trouble can be likened to the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. The slaves from Egypt felt helpless when they stood in front of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army closing in behind them. But the preincarnate Christ was there with them.²⁵ The song of the psalmist said, “Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps 77:19-20). “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. . . . Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy’” (Exod 15:1-2,6). Throughout the song there is no mention of the terrible trouble Israel went through. The deliverance far outweighed any fear and trouble at the Red Sea shore and in the passage through it.

So it will be in the future great time of trouble. Christ will open up a way through the final events and will bring His bride safely to the heavenly shore. Even now, those who have their eyes focused on Christ, and depend on Him alone, can sing in the words of Israel after their crossing, and apply it the great time of trouble. “In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling” (Exod 15:13). He says to His bride, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). After finding the lost sheep,

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the Shepherd carries it all the way home (Luke 15:5-6). That's the final exodus. Whereas the woman rides the state and causes trouble for the saints (Rev 17:1-6), the saints are carried by Christ through this great time of trouble. That's worth singing about forever!

Endnotes

*Biblical citations are from the New International Version.

1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614; Id., *Day Star*, March 14, 1846, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 968.

2 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

3 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 250.

4 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

5 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 162-169. Although Satan comes before the close of probation, so that he can deceive if possible the very elect, he may also remain after the close of probation to goad on the wicked to destroy the saints in the death decree.

6 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 255.

7 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, *Ibid*.

8 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 626.

9 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

10 The division of Revelation is made at the end of chapter 14 by Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor, 1976), p. 52; and C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, (Boise, ID: Pacific Press), pp. 60-61. Both look at chapters 1-14 as history and 15-22 as last day events. I prefer to make the divide at Rev 11:19, as it looks into the most holy place, signifying a transfer from the historical section (first apartment) to last day events which take place during the second apartment ministry. Chapter 12 is the apex, joining both sections, as it gives an overview of the entire great controversy.

11 In her introduction to *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White says, "It is not so much the object of this book to present new truths concerning the struggles of former times, as to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events" (p. xii). The book is divided as follows: chapters 1-35 are history; 36-42 are final events.

12 Norman R. Gulley, "A Deeper Look at the Investigative Judgment," *Adventist Perspectives*, vol. 3, 1989, pp. 33-40; "Daniel's Pre-Advent Judgment in its Biblical Context," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 2 #2, Autumn 1991; pp. 35-66; "Focusing on Christ, Not Ourselves," *Ministry*, October 1994, pp. 28-30.

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- 13 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 269.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 629; cf. *Id.*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 256.
- 15 Ellen G. White, MS 173, 1902, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1161.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 266.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 148.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 266-267.
- 19 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 632-633.
- 20 Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 539-540.
- 21 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 615.
- 22 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.
- 23 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 649.
- 24 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 634.
- 25 See Exod 14:18, Ps 114:7, Isa 63, Acts 7:30-37, 1 Cor 10:1-4.

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What Is an Adventist? Someone Who Upholds Creation

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Introduction

A well-known Seventh-day Adventist wrote to me the following: “In the last several decades such a large amount of scientific evidence has accumulated as to make it virtually impossible to defend our two positions: 1) That life on earth has been here only around six to ten thousand years; and 2) that all life forms were created within a six day period.” Then, he proceeded to explain the lines of scientific evidence which caused such a shift in his personal convictions.

Are we as Seventh-day Adventists, entitled to believe whatever science offers concerning the origin of life on earth? What does our faith in God involve? The name “*Seventh-day Adventist*” is linked to the belief in a divine origin of life in our world. We not only accept as important to the truth that God created the world, but we accept that “How He did it,” and “How long ago,” and “How long it took Him” are also important facts. Theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists do not regard these latter matters as important. Furthermore, our name “*Seventh-day Adventist*” points to the future as well as the past. It implies the acceptance of an eschatological mission and destiny. In fact, our beliefs regarding the past and the

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future of our world go hand in hand, for our protology in great measure affects our eschatology.

Since the term “creation” nowadays is employed to indicate any beginning of matter and/or life in the cosmos, including the “big bang theory,” it is necessary to define my usage. In this article the term will refer to God’s action which originated the heavens and the earth (and all that is on it) as described in the opening chapters of Genesis.

The truths held by Seventh-day Adventists—being deeply connected with the creation account—are also central to the great controversy between God and Satan. Widespread belief in the evolution of life is one of the strongholds of the enemy. Looking to the past, we see God is denied His creatorship. Looking to the future, through prophecy, we see that Satan, through his agents, will contend for the supreme worship which only our Creator deserves.

As Seventh-day Adventists we need to examine more intently our beliefs within the framework of our mission to the world. We believe that the message we have been given to proclaim “constitutes the greatest bulwark against the progress of the theory of evolution.”¹

Non-negotiable Creation-Related Beliefs

Although virtually all our beliefs have a theological connection with the truth of creation, we summarize only a few of them, starting with those foundational to our name.

The Advent. The word “Adventist,” describes a believer who awaits the second advent of Christ. According to the Scriptures He for whose advent we are waiting (Titus 2:13) is none other than the Creator of the world, by whom “all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . .” (Col 1:16).²

Protology and eschatology are so linked that the latter is dependent on the former. Adventists would have no right, biblically speaking, to expect the Advent to end the world, unless He who is coming is the Creator of the world. Furthermore, the annihilation of the wicked at the close of history will be carried out by the authority

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which the Creator of life reserves for Himself: the authority to take life away from those He judges unworthy to retain it (Ps 102:25-27; John 17:2). In addition, the Second Advent initiates a new order of things in the universe only because He who comes is able to originate a “very good” creation (Gen 1:31; John 1:1-3, 10), even out of nothing (Heb 11:3).

It is precisely because of this biblical truth that Seventh-day Adventists believe the redemption of humanity will materialize not through the improvement of this present world but through the creation of a new one. That is why our hope is so embracing. We wait for the Advent of the Creator. The Redeemer is the Creator. Thus, He can promise, “the old order of things has passed away. . . I am making everything new!” And we, in turn, can trust that “these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev 21: 4, 5).

The Sabbath. Creation is the visible and tangible revelation of the Creator’s “eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:19-20). The seventh-day Sabbath, as a worship form, memorializes God’s creatorship and functions also as a sign of His redemptive grace (Ezek 20:12).

Seventh-day Adventists celebrate these two truths every week. In the first place, we celebrate the creation of ourselves, our fellow humans and all other forms of life, and the planet we inhabit. In the second place, we celebrate our redemption from sin and our liberation from every yoke, including our “freedom from bondage to other people.”³ The Sabbath is a proper symbol of both.

Observing the Sabbath is a powerful exaltation of God as the Lord of life. Ellen White has written: “Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater.”⁴ Just by keeping the Sabbath holy, without any additional proclamation, every Seventh-day Adventist believer is exalting God, testifying that He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Sabbath observance also testifies to God’s love for humankind in providing for His children each week a day for rest and

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special fellowship (Mark 2:27). By worshiping on the Sabbath, we Adventists demonstrate our personal convictions that God is responsible for the existence of the natural world and likewise deny the commonly held evolutionary hypothesis.

Jesus Christ. In our denominational name, the term “Adventist,” far from implying the exaltation of a doctrine, implies the exaltation of a person, Jesus Christ. We are waiting for Christ’s coming. It is the Person who gives relevance to both the event and the belief, not the other way around. An Adventist believes that Jesus Christ was the active Agent in God’s creation (John 1:1-2; Col 1:16; Heb 1:1-2), and that He is the Sustainer of His creation (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). He is both the Creator and the Redeemer. In the process of redemption, Jesus Christ exercises the same creating power evidenced in the creation of the world (Eph 4:20-24; Col 3:9-10). Every new born creature in the kingdom of God is renewed in the image of and by the power of his Creator.

And, as with the Second Advent, so it is for Adventists concerning Sabbath-keeping. The day is important because of the Person we adore and with whom we fellowship within its hours. Sunday does not hold the same significance as a day of worship for Seventh-day Adventists because it was established by created beings. The Sabbath on the other hand was set apart by the Creator. Its recurrence week after week bears witness to the constancy of the Creator’s sustaining power.

Sola Scriptura. “Seventh-day Adventists fully support the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible as its own interpreter and the Bible alone as the basis of all doctrines.”⁵ The Scriptures are the embodiment of God’s revelation to humanity in written form, and both the study of the original creation as well as of nature in its present state need to be interpreted by the revelation in Scriptures.

Creation and other origin-related issues fall beyond the scope of the scientific inquiry in that they are unique. They cannot be repeated

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in a controlled situation and tested as scientific methodology requires. Besides, there were no human witnesses present. The only witnesses were divine and celestial beings. That is why God's given revelation is indispensable if we are to comprehend creation. We cannot understand it from the insights gained by science without the aid of biblical history. Regarding this point, Ellen G. White writes:

I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history. It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. But when men leave the word of God in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for God's creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty.⁶

Faith. Adventists accept by faith the facts and history of creation as recorded in Scripture. We exercise faith in the biblical record, but not because there are no evidences on which to base our convictions. In fact, one of our convictions is that "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith."⁷ For us, nature's testimony about its supernatural origin is compelling (Rom 1:19-20) and appeals to our reason. At the same time, however, we Adventists understand that it is not possible for finite minds to comprehend fully the works of the infinite One, beginning with such a unique work as is creation.⁸

God's revelation, which accounts for the origin of all things, is understood and accepted by faith. It is by faith that "we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:3). Such faith has a firm foundation: God's word which is trustworthy because it is based on His character, and He is faithful (1 Pet 4:19). His faithfulness is made evident in the stability of the laws of His creation.

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Recent, Six-Day, *Ex nihilo* Creation

A Recent Creation. Adventists believe that all forms of life were created by God, but we do not stop there. We do not believe that as long as God is accepted as Creator, the “How” He created, the “How long ago,” and the “How long it took Him to create,” are not important. We perceive these are interrelated issues which speak to the character and power of a personal Creator.

Bible passages about creation indicate that it was an awesome miracle performed in a very short period of time (see Gen 1:3, cf. 2 Cor 4:6a; Gen 1:6-7, 9, 24, 26-27, etc.; Ps 33:8-9). Someone has suggested that if we inject a long time into any of God's miracles, we spoil it, and it is then no longer a miracle.⁹

But Scripture does not only indicate that the miracle of creation was performed in a short period of time. Through its genealogical listings and its naming of generations traced back to Adam, the first human being, it strongly indicates that the creation occurred not long ago, as compared to the claims of evolution. And so, we Adventists accept the account of a recent creation on the basis of the credibility of God's supreme revelation, Scripture. And we believe also on the basis of the credibility of God's recent revelation through the visions and writings of Ellen G. White,¹⁰ which likewise emphasize that creation took place approximately six thousand years ago.

In order to counterbalance the tremendous discrepancy between the Bible and science regarding the age of the earth, in recent years some Adventist scientists have suggested (the idea itself may not be new) that while life on the earth is very young, the planet itself is very old, as old as radiometric dating says it is. The suggestion leads to an interpretation of Genesis in which the basic, rocky planet is created in the very distant past, but the organization of the earth and the creation of life on it takes place only six to ten millennia ago. I want to stress that things could have happened that way. However, some questions (and they are only questions) arise:

First, Genesis 1:1-2 declares that when God created the earth it

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was “formless and empty,” while Isaiah 45:18 observes “he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited” (cf. 45:12). The question is, Why should the earth be left empty for 4.5 billion years (according to evolutionary dating for the earth’s rocks) and be inhabited only for around six thousand years, if God “did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited”?

Genesis 1, as traditionally read, implies that God created the earth, and quite soon thereafter (in harmony with His purpose for the planet to be inhabited) created humanity on it. This seems to be more consistent with His way of acting in the rest of the Bible than is the option of leaving His declared purpose unfulfilled for billions of years (See Isa 46:116).¹¹

Second, since evolutionary science usually dates the fossils by the rocks or strata in which they are found, the question is, How consistent and defensible is the basis upon which some Adventists accept evolutionary science’s age for the rocks while rejecting its age for the fossils (hence for life) contained therein?

Third, the suggestion under consideration implies a discontinuity between Genesis 1:1 and verse 2 similar to that proposed by Gap theorists. But are we aware of what the acceptance of such a gap (passive, granted) really entails? Is this not the result of a rather broad concordist endeavor to harmonize Scripture and Science?¹² The point is, we are being forced to accept the gap by science, not by Scripture.

“One thing is certain,” writes evangelical author Clark Pinnock about evangelical Christians. “They did not find out about an ancient earth from reading Genesis.”¹³ And, if we are willing to inject a long period of time between verses 1 and 2, why not accept the Gap Theory’s other suggestions as to what happened during that period?¹⁴

Fourth, what shall we do with verse 2? Shall we consider it a thought unit with verse 1 or with verse 3? In either combination we have a difficulty. In the first case, we face the theological problem of having the Spirit of God “hovering over the waters” for millions or billions of years to no effect. This is in no way a typical result of the

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Spirit's activity. When the Spirit intervenes something happens, a change of conditions, a renewal takes place. As the psalmist expresses it, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30).

In the second case, we face a grammatical problem. Verse 2 contains three substantival clauses whose fundamental function in Hebrew is to express something fixed, a state, and not to mark becoming, progression, or sequence in action.¹⁵ So the text would not allow us to conclude that the Spirit was not hovering over the waters for the eons elapsed since "the beginning" but entered into action only at the beginning of creation week initiated just a few thousand years ago.

Six Literal Days. Several Creation theories have been proposed in the past to harmonize the biblical account with the long periods of time all branches of evolution require.¹⁶ Even the improbable "vision theory" has been argued—that God took six days to reveal the creation account to Moses.¹⁷

A literal six-day creation is important to the framework of the great moral controversy between God and Satan. In the course of this contest Satan's greatest efforts center on inducing humanity to rebel against God and to disobey His law. To achieve his objective, he attacks God's right as Creator to govern the universe and to require obedience to His moral law. That explains why Satan's efforts are specially aimed at the fourth commandment. It is the precept which clearly points to the God of the Scriptures as the living Creator of heaven and earth¹⁸ and calls for the observance of the Sabbath on the basis that "in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day" (Exod 20:11).

Only a creation in six 24-hour days gives Seventh-day Adventists the basis for Sabbath keeping and for their denominational name. No astronomical rationale exists for the time cycle known as the week as it does for the day, the month, or the year; the seven-day week is,

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apparently, a capricious arrangement. But an original creation in six literal days gives Adventists a satisfactory explanation for the origin of the week. For God to order human beings to labor six literal days in memory of six vast and indefinite periods of time is entirely inconsistent with the method He uses to relate to His creatures.¹⁹

***Ex nihilo* Creation.** Adventists accept an *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) creation, for it is in harmony with both the power of God and the testimony of His written Word. For Adventists, “biblical creation is true creation”²⁰ in the strictest sense of the word. Even though some of the terms used denote no more than fashioning or making, the creation described in the OT, “is more than manufacture or artistic arrangement on the assumption of existing material,” and NT passages “leave no place for preexistent matter.”²¹ The Author of such a creation “is not just an architect or builder who works with what is at hand,”²² rather, “This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isa 44:6). God antedates any matter. He is the first Cause of all things.

Based on this belief, Adventists cannot accept alternative explanations of origins offered by even theistic views of evolution.²³ We see biblical creation and such views as being mutually exclusive from the perspective of a literal reading of the creation texts. Evolution means “modification,” while creation means absolute “origination.” In the ultimate sense of these terms, as Benjamin Warfield once put it, “You cannot ‘originate’ by ‘modifying;’ you cannot ‘modify’ by ‘originating.’”²⁴ Therefore, whatever comes by “evolution” cannot arise by “creation,” and whatever is “created” is ultimately not “evolved.”²⁵ This dictum is particularly true as it applies to the origin of life on our planet.²⁶

Adventists accept the Scriptural dictum that it is “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Heb 11:3). It is suggested in some Adventist circles that God did not create *ex-nihilo*

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in the strict sense of the term. Texts like Hebrews 11:3, it is argued, imply that what God did at creation was to convert energy (an invisible phenomenon) into matter. But, Why insist on reducing creation to transformation²⁷ in making God create only from preexistent elements? Is this not limiting God? In biblical terms only God is eternal. Not even energy is eternal, for God created *ta panta* (“all things. . . visible and invisible,” Col 1:16; cf. Eph 3:9; Rev 4:11; John 1:3). And it is He who gives life to everything (Neh 9:6).

Adventists accept the truth of a creation out of nothing because the God we believe in is the Creator who is able to call “things that are not as though they were” (Rom 4:17; cf. 1 Cor 1:28). As Ellen White writes, “In the formation of our world God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. On the contrary, all things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. . . by the breath of His mouth.”²⁸

Denial of Bible Creation: Theological Implication

The denial of the Bible’s creation accounts in any degree has serious implications for Adventist theology. We review in this section of the article, by way of illustration, the impact such a denial would have on some selected Adventist beliefs:

The Character of God. It is true that our understanding of God will affect our understanding of creation; but the reverse is also true. Our understanding of creation will impact our view of God. That is why it is important for Adventist Christians to have correct views regarding creation. Those views have implications for our theology.²⁹ For example, a materialist who holds to the eternity of matter, God is a contingency but not a necessity. For the idealist’s conception of natural phenomena as the reflection of Mind (God), Mind is identical with the creation, the universe.

For believers in an evolutionary origin of life who want to retain their faith in God, “evolution is the manifestation of the work of God in nature.”³⁰ Usually, however, in such a belief, the creativity and

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dependability ascribed to natural mechanisms is such that the whole process of evolution could have worked without God, or that God had to be dependant on something outside of Himself. One problem in the view of evolution as God's method of working in the world is that it compels the consistent thinker to perceive God as being finite, "a God who takes steps."³¹

To dispense with the necessity for an infinite, all-powerful God, however, implies the denial of Bible truth, a serious doctrinal implication if we hold the theory of evolution.³² God's demand of adoration and reverence above pagan deities is based on the fact that He is the only creator God, and hence, the only true God, who cannot be compared to any other god (Isa 40:25-26; Jer 10:10-16).

God's divinity is made evident in His capacity to originate *ex nihilo*. This is a very important truth in connection with the controversy between God and Satan. The latter will never be able to create in the absolute sense of the term for he is not God (though he wanted to be); he is a creature. Satan can "create," beginning with what God has done, but not out of nothing. This remains an exclusive right of the Almighty. His great power is perceived through the works of His hands (Rom 1:20).

The question, even when in theistic-evolutionary thought God is consistently retained, is, Can the nature and character of a God who uses evolution (with its struggle for survival due to scarcity of resources) as His method of creation be reconciled with the biblical portrait of a God who is constantly concerned with and generously providing for His creation?³³

Redemption. Adventists understand that if creation is in any way denied, evolution is affirmed as the alternative for explaining the origin of life. And this is not new. Ever since Darwin, evolutionary theory has offered for numerous theologians the hope of a realistic redescription of the traditional doctrine,³⁴ including the Fall, sin, and the atonement. The redescription has sought to make Christian doctrine correspond with evolutionary theory. Nonetheless, the fact

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is that Darwin has “made the problem worse.”³⁵

This is particularly evident in theistic evolutionary theory, which transfers the responsibility for sin from man to God, and in so doing, alters the doctrinal basis for the need of the atonement. Thus, the question phrased in John Brooke’s words is, “If man had risen, not fallen, what would be left of the scheme of redemption?”³⁶

As someone who favors that worldview has said it, “in evolution there is no place for a first human being nor for an original sin.”³⁷ The “Fall” is either denied,³⁸ neutralized as of no significant import,³⁹ or reinterpreted as a rise⁴⁰ within the ever progressing continuum of the evolutionary process; in this context, imperfection and evil become “concomitant with a world that is ‘becoming.’”⁴¹ Thus the fall of man, by the first human sin, ceases to be the basis for the human need of salvation. Such a position wields a strong blow to the biblical teaching on the plan of redemption.⁴²

We repeat, if evolution is true, and not the biblical account of creation, then there was no Fall, and therefore, no causal linkage between sin and death, which implies no Redeemer for sin is needed⁴³ to save humanity from death.⁴⁴ Thus, humans are not fallen, but are simply the end result of their animal ancestry, meaning that the process of evolution can act as a savior, rendering Christ’s sacrifice unnecessary.

The Authority of Scriptures. For Seventh-day Adventists, life in all areas is ruled by the principle of *sola scriptura*. This is for us a very crucial area, because the validity of our beliefs depends on the reliability of the Bible. It is equally important because “the issue of biblical authority (not scientific methodology) provides the proper context for understanding the current creationism-evolution controversy.”⁴⁵

The conclusions reached by modern science (usually worked out under evolutionary premises) if adopted will deeply affect the Adventist approach to and understanding of the Bible. For example, accepting a connection between modern man and earlier hominids

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requires that the narrative in Genesis 2 concerning the creation of man from the dust of the ground be taken as metaphorical or symbolic⁴⁶ or, eventually, that confidence in the reliability of the Bible be totally given up.

Edward J. Carnell's reasoning illustrates this point. He writes that since orthodoxy has given up the literal-day interpretation of the creation story "out of respect for geology," it would forfeit no principle if it gave up the belief in a recent creation "out of respect for paleontology."⁴⁷ This is precisely what not only evangelicals,⁴⁸ but also some Adventists are doing, as illustrated in the introduction to this present article.

Seventh-day Adventists who hold to the authority of the Scriptures should be aware of the danger of measuring biblical data by scientific models, evidences, and facts, instead of evaluating these by the Bible. We should be conscious that this is, in Conrad Hyers' words, a downhill road, a process which once started is very difficult to stop short of conceding everything.⁴⁹ Accordingly, evangelical scholar Paul K. Jewett affirms that most Christians would not "suppose that the creation of the earth as we now know it consisted of a series of instantaneous events—creation by simple *fiat*."⁵⁰ Jewett also writes that today "few who confess the Christian doctrine of Creation would suppose that the world was fashioned in a week of time some six to ten thousand years ago."

By contrast, Adventists interpret the testimony of the Bible to be describing an almighty God (Gen 17:1; Luke 18:27; Rev 15:3) who "took six days to make our world when He could have spoken it into existence in one."⁵¹ On the other hand it is fortunate that claims of evolutionary philosophy as reflected in many areas of science, along with its claimed scientific character, have often been doubted and in more recent times eloquently challenged by scientific creationists⁵² and others,⁵³ as well as by Seventh-day Adventist scholars in the sciences.⁵⁴

The Doctrine of Man. The denial of the biblical teaching about

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the creation of humankind in favor of evolutionary theory carries serious implications for Adventist theology.

Emil Brunner recognizes—without rejecting evolution—that it is Darwin, not Copernicus, Galileo, or Newton, who really disturbs modern man about biblical claims, because of the impact evolution has upon biblical anthropology.⁵⁵ Brunner's evaluation is correct. If the Paradise story is dismissed as mythical and wrong, it is not difficult to accept animal ancestry as the true origin of humanity. But Adventists are convinced that the biblical account clearly indicates the bodies of Adam and Eve were the result of God's direct intervention and not the product of a long process of development from previously existing animals.⁵⁶

Literally, Genesis 2:7 declares that after God had formed the man from the dust of the ground He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” and then man became a living being (Heb. *Nepeš hayyāh*).⁵⁷ Long periods of time could not have elapsed between the formation of the man from the dust of the ground and the breathing of the breath of life into his nostrils. The context indicates that the phrase “man became a living soul” (KJV) does not allow for a prehuman form of life for Adam's body.⁵⁸ In other words, the fact that man became a “living being/creature” is a strong indication that Adam was not a living being until he became one by the creative breath of God.⁵⁹

For Adventists the words of Christ in regard to the creation of Adam and Eve are of crucial importance. He acknowledges the Genesis account as trustworthy by citing it to describing God's original purpose for the human race. “At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’” (Matt 19:4). If the special creation of humans is denied and an evolutionary development is accepted, we implicate Jesus as a false witness, hence, a liar. However, the testimony of the Creator and Savior is trustworthy and confirms the truth that there is something special about the creation of humankind.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the denial of the historical validity of the account

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of the creation of humans and of their Fall runs counter to the biblical teaching about humanity's moral responsibility (Gen 2:15-17) and accountability (Gen 3:8-13). The evolutionary belief denies that mankind morally fell historically. Rather, Adam emerged already in a "fallen" state from his prehuman ancestors. The attempts to combine these diverse views on the origin of humankind (which includes death before the Fall) shifts the responsibility for human sin to the Creator. This is a significant implication for Christian theology as well as for Adventist belief.⁶¹

Eschatology. Eschatology is very important for Adventists. They are a future oriented people. They are a people of hope. If the evolutionary explanation for the origin and development of humans with its constant striving for survival is accepted, what consequences are there for biblical eschatology and for our hope for eternal life? Could we have any assurance of a new earth where pain, struggle for existence, and death will be absent?⁶²

Eschatology is central to the great controversy between God and Satan. Because Satan has succeeded in convincing most of the inhabitants of this world that evolution is a fact, their hope for the beginning of a new world order is based on expectations other than the second advent of Christ. On the other hand, Adventists are ever willing to present God as the Creator (Rev 14:6-7) and to exalt Him as the Renewer of this planet's deplorable condition. In so doing, Adventists point to Christ's second advent as the concluding, turning point in the history of the earth.

Seventh-day Adventists base their hope in the Bible and perceive the future resurrection of believers as almost a "replay" of the scenario of the creation of Adam.⁶³ By contrast, Bernard Ramm notes that according to science there is no hope for the world on the horizon. Rather, the perspective is that soon life will not be possible for humanity on this earth, because "the enormous destructive factors in our current situation make any hope for progress bleak."⁶⁴ As if following Ramm's train of thought on the issue, Jewett remarks

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insightfully that, were the Christians to make the theological affirmation of creation rest on natural sciences, consistency would compel them to embrace a scientific view of the end of the world as well. This view would amount to an eschatology dismal beyond imagination and shrouded in nihilistic darkness.⁶⁵

Conversely, even though God reserves the right to terminate what He has made, genuine hope is found in the Bible's teaching on the literal return of the Lord and Creator subsequent to which He will bring about a new creation by "making everything new!" (Rev 21:5; cf. Isa 65:17).

Proclaiming God As Creator

Seventh-day Adventists are citizens of the world who are conscious of their high origin, created in God's own image and likeness (Gen 1:27). As such, we recognize we are managers of the good things God has created. We are mindful of being but co-workers with other fellow human beings. Even though God commanded humankind to rule "over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:28), they were not commanded to lord it over their fellow humans. Forgetfulness of this principle has brought about oppression and unhappiness throughout human history. Pharaoh, for instance, oppressed the Israelites because, among other things, he wished to ignore that the earth, and everything on it, is the Lord's (Exod 9:29).

Conscious of our mission as God's stewards, we Adventists proclaim to the world that the God of the Scriptures is the Originator and the Sustainer of His creation. We do this by example and by proclamation:

By Example. Because the creation is God's, as Adventists we may proclaim His glory (Isa 43:7, 20-21) by exercising care over the natural world which surrounds us by:

- a. thoughtful and diligent cultivation of the ground (Prov 28:19).
- b. taking proper care of such natural elements in the ecosystem

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as water, the air, the soil, etc. because the land is the Lord's (Ps 24:1).

c. selecting, preparing, and sowing only the best seeds possible (Matt 13:24).

d. learning and applying the best and most adequate farming methods (planting, pruning, grafting, etc.).

e. giving thought how to best restore and revitalize the land to obtain the best yield possible (cf. Lev 25:3-7).

f. taking proper measures in the disposal of waste materials and in the use of chemical products to avoid adding to the contamination of the planet.

g. Taking proper care of pets and animals (Prov 12:10).

h. Caring and exercising justice with employees, subordinates, and fellow workers, who also reflect the image of God. Malachi the prophet asks: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (Mal 2:10).

In Adventist understanding of the Bible, the state of the created order—which includes the nonhuman creation—is consistently linked with human activity and responsibility so that, as Sally Alsford has said, "the history of sin and salvation is the history of the created order as a whole, not only the history of humanity."⁶⁶ Alsford calls this the concept of "relationality."⁶⁷

While Adventist Christians should exercise care over the created order of things, that is, the natural world, we would avoid worshiping and serving the creation rather than the Creator—the only One to be forever praised (Rom 1:25).

By Proclamation. Seventh-day Adventists are world citizens who not only live by their own convictions, but also have a message to proclaim to others. The core of that message is the eternal gospel. We are convinced that we are an integral part of that special group of people the Bible calls the Remnant, called by God to make a swift and powerful final proclamation of the good news symbolized by three angels flying in midair proclaiming the eternal gospel to those who live

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on the earth at the endtime (Rev 14:6-12).

The eschatological importance of this proclamation, in the context of the great controversy, can perhaps be better perceived by noting some contrasting elements between the message of the three angels and the teachings of evolution.

First, while the Bible defines the gospel as eternal and matter as non-eternal (by saying it had a beginning), the evolutionary worldview considers matter as eternal and ascribes a beginning to the gospel by indicating that it was created by a given community within a process marked by a historical development of the biblical text.⁶⁸

Second, while the intent of the three angels' message is to guide the world to worship God as the Creator and to give Him glory (Rev 14:7), evolution has succeeded in guiding the world to deny Him His role and authority as Creator (Rom 1:21, 25).

Third, no Adventist would doubt that the teachings of evolutionary theory now form part of Babylon's maddening wine with which the world is drunk. The contrasting point (as far as the content of the messages is concerned) is that while, on the one hand, the three angels' gospel is being proclaimed "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6), Babylon is making "all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev 14:8).

Fourth, the timing. Precisely by the time the three angels' were to be given to the world, around 1844, evolution's *opum magnum*, Darwin's *Origins*, was under preparation to be given to that same world as the single most influential book in making evolution credible. And, exactly in 1844, Robert Chambers published anonymously in North-America his landmark work, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, as influential then as few other books in promoting theistic evolution.

If this is the biblical and historical situation, Adventists cannot afford to be neutral, we have to take sides. It is not possible to be passive on the issue. We must be active in proclaiming God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the world.

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In connection with this, it needs to be said that Adventists have a message of hope to give to the world. Ours is a tridimensional hope. First, in the past, as believers, we have been already saved in that hope (Rom 8:24a). Second, such hope bolsters us to face pain and suffering in the present (Rom 8:18). And third, it causes us as people of God, along with the whole creation, to wait in eager expectation for the glory to be revealed in the future (Rom 8:19, 22).

Belief in God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer is not an exclusive but a very “inclusive” message to be cherished and shared. It embraces the whole of creation. If creation provides less than a perfect world and is subject to frustration, it is “not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope” (see Rom 8:20). Therefore, by faith in God’s promises and faithfulness, we as Adventists look forward to the time when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). This is so, for, as theistic evolutionist George L. Murphy recognizes, “cosmic redemption does mean that all created natures, and not only the human, will share in the new creation.”⁶⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The greatest counterweight Adventists have to face in upholding biblical creation are the teachings of evolutionary theory. The influence of such teachings in today’s world is so pervasive that it seems as if Protagoras’ ancient dictum that “man is the measure of all things,” so positive in a world sunken in humanism, has now given way to a more modern one, “evolution is the measure of all things.”⁷⁰

Though citizens of this same world, Adventists are believers who live by an entirely different conviction: God himself, as revealed primarily in Christ, in Scriptures and in nature, is the measure of all things, for “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them,” and He “lives for ever and ever” (Exod 20:11; Rev 4:10).

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In harmony with this conviction, Adventists uphold as non-negotiable such creation-related beliefs as the reliability of the Scriptures, the creatorship of Jesus Christ, the present validity of Sabbath worship, and the second advent of our Lord and Savior. We accept a recent, literal and *ex nihilo* creation and grasp the theological implication that the denial of the Bible's testimony on such a creation has an adverse impact upon the character of God, the doctrines of man, redemption, and biblical eschatology, as well as other biblical teachings.

Both by example and proclamation Adventists believe we are to declare to the world that God is the Creator of all things, and we hope in the final consummation of the plan of salvation to join the celestial choir that will sing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev 4:11).

Endnotes

1 *Seventh-day Adventist Believe. . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), p. 165.

2 All Scripture citations in this essay are from the New International Version.

3 Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 370.

4 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 336.

5 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 227.

6 White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), vol. 3, p. 93.

7 White, *Steps to Christ* (Phoenix, AZ: Inspiration Books, 19778), p. 73.

8 *Ibid.*; *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:90-96.

9 Marvin L. Lubenow, "Does a Proper Interpretation of Scripture Require a Recent Creation?" in *Decade of Creation*, ed. Henry M. Morris and Donald H. Rohrer (San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers, 1981), pp. 90-104. See also,

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Clyde L. Webster, Jr., "Genesis and Time: What Radiometric Dating Tells Us," *Dialogue*, vol. 8, no. 2 [1993], pp. 5-8.

10 Henry M. Morris, scientific creationism's main leader, observes that "Adventists to some degree have remained solidly creationist because their main teacher/founder, Ellen G. White, taught literal creationism." Henry M. Morris, *History of Modern Creationism* (Santee, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 2d ed. 1993), p. 92

11 A statement made by E. G. White might have some application at this juncture. She wrote that "like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay." White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, paperback ed., 1970), p. 29.

12 Without ignoring the validity of science when checked by revelation, it is important, at this juncture, to keep in mind Langdon Gilkey's insightful observation as to what has been happening in recent history. It is his thesis that, "The most important change in the understanding of religious truth in the last centuries—a change that still dominates our thought today—has been caused more by the work of science than by any other factor, religious or cultural." Langdon Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science, and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 4. Gilkey's words imply that on the understanding of religious truth in modern history, science has had a greater influence than the Bible.

13 Clark Pinnock, "Climbing Out of a Swamp: the Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Interpretation* 43 (January 1989); p. 154.

14 The Gap Theory proposes, in summary, that millions of years elapsed between the events described in Gen 1:1 and those narrated in Gen 1:3, and that Creation took place in three stages: A pre-Adamic period when the earth was perfect and beautiful (Gen 1:1); an intermediate period in which it became empty and formless (Gen 1:2); and the "reconstitution" period described in Genesis 1:3ff.

15 See Richard M. Davidson, "In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1," *Dialogue* vol. 6, no. 3 [194], p. 11.

16 These include, in addition to the Gap Theory, the Geological Ages Theory which postulates that Creation days were not literal days but very long periods of time, the Abridged Genealogies Theory which claims that if biblical genealogies omit generations, as some do, such omissions could account for all the time necessary for evolution to occur, and the Artistic Theory, in which the Genesis record is viewed just as a literary and artistic account intended to convey religious truth but not scientific reality.

17 For a brief critique of this theory see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Los `Día_ de la Creación en Génesis 1: Son `Día_ Literales o `Período_ Figurados di Tiempo?"

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Ciencia de los Origenes 40-41 (Enero-Agosto 1995): p. 5.

18 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

19 Ibid., p. 111.

20 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Creator," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992 ed.), vol. 1, pp. 802-803.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Some authors see in theistic evolution an internal contradiction since evolution is naturalism and theism is supernaturalism. The two brought together in "theistic evolution" would then mean "supernatural naturalism." Randy L. Wysong, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Lansing, MI: Inquiry Press, 1976), p. 63.

24 Benjamin Warfield, "Review of God's Image in Man," by James Orr, *The Princeton Theological Review* 4 (1906): p. 557.

25 Ibid. Warfield's judgment is as valid here as when he goes on to assert that "evolution can never, under any circumstances, issue in a product which is specifically new: 'modification' is the utmost that it can achieve,—'origination' is beyond its tether" (ibid). See also John N. Moore, "Was Evolution Involved in the Process of Creation? 'No,'" in Ronald Youngblood, ed. *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 96.

26 See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Bible and Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (January-March 1967): p. 68 passim.

27 E. G. White affirms that matter does not possess vital power, "nor does it work anything through any inherent energy of its own," *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 14.

28 White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), vol. 8, pp. 258-259.

29 Take for instance the origin of man, about which even Karl Barth observed that by "the idea of man as an animal endowed with reason, we are not led . . . to God." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* iii/2 (London: T. & t. Clark, 1936), p. 77.

30 Richard Bube, "Biblical Evolutionism?" *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 23 (December 1971); p. 141.

31 Gordon Wilson, *Theistic Evolution* (Athens, AL: C. E. I. Publishing Co., 1972), p. 31.

32 Ibid., p. 33.

33 Fred Van Dyke, "Theological Problems in Theistic Evolution," *Journal*

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of the American Scientific Affiliation 38 (March 1986), p. 313.

34 John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 313.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Karl Schmitz-Moormann, "Evolution and Redemption: What is the Meaning of Christians Proclaiming Salvation in an Evolutionary World?" *Progress in Theology Newsletter of the John Templeton Foundation's center for Humility Theology* 1 (June 1993): p. 7.

38 Ibid. See also Norman P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), p. 9-10.

39 David A. Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 166; For more on this topic see Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1; *God, Authority and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

40 See, for instance, Calum M. Carmichael, "The Paradise Myth: Interpreting Without Jewish and Christian Spectacles," in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, eds. *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, JSOT Series (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 47-63; John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 99.

41 Carmichael, p. 7.

42 Pinnock remarks that redemption history begins with the sin of humankind, and evangelical soteriology is dependant on a literal Fall of man (Pinnock, p. 151).

43 John Rendle-Short, *Man: Ape or Image: The Christian Dilemma*, 2d ed. (San Diego: Master Book Publishers, 1984), p. 152.

44 On the theological implications of affirming death as a reality in the world before the Fall of man, see Marco T. Terreros, "Death Before the Sin of Adam: A Fundamental Concept in Theistic Evolution and Its Implications for Evangelical Theology," Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1994.

45 Waters, p. 150.

46 E. C. Lucas, "Some Scientific Issues Related to the Understanding of Genesis 1-3," *The-melios* 12 (January 1987): p. 50.

47 Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 95.

48 For example, Conrad Hyers in *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and*

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Modern Science (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), p. 86, states that “the weight of scientific evidence is too great, and scientific arguments too persuasive, for one to hold any longer to the literal six-day creationism.” And he goes on to show that not only he but Ramm, and “a number of other evangelical writers” have taken a similar approach to the Bible in an attempt to avoid the “fiat-only” literalism of the fundamentalists “and allow for the more established results of modern science” (*ibid.*, p. 87).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

50 Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 479-480.

51 White, Letter 7a, 1878, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

52 E.g., Henry M. Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism*. See also, *Idem*, *Studies in the Bible and Science, or Christ and Creation* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966); Henry M. Morris and Gary E. Parker, *What Is Creation Science?* (San Diego, CA: Master Book Publishers, 1982), Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*; For a listing of the more prominent creation scientists of the present generation, see John C. Whitcomb and D. B. DeYoung, *The Moon: Its Creation, Form, and Significance* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1978), pp. 166-169.

53 See, for instance, Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986); E. J. Ambrose, *The Mirror of Creation*, vol. 11 of Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge Series (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990); Wendell R. Bird, *The Origin of Species Revisited: The Theories of Evolution and of Abrupt Appearance*, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Regency, 1991); Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Richard Milton, *The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myth of Darwinism* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992). For additional sources, stemming from a broad variety of perspectives, see Tom McIver, *Anti-Evolution: A Reader's Guide to Writings Before and After Darwin* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, paperback ed., 1992).

54 See, for example, Robert H. Brown, “Radiometric Age and the Traditional Hebrew-Christian View of Time,” *Origins* 4 (1977): pp. 68-75; *Idem*, “Geo and Cosmic Chronology,” *Origins* 8 (1981): pp. 20-45; *Idem*, “How Solid Is a Radioisotope Age of a Rock?” *Origins* 10 (1983): pp. 93-95; Arthur V. Chadwick, “Precambrian Pollen in the Grand Canyon—A Reexamination,” *Origins* 8 (1981): pp. 7-12; Robert H. Brown and Harold G. Coffin, “Literature Reviews: Burgess Shale Reexamined,” *Origins* 17 (1990): pp. 33-37; Mart de Groot, “Cosmology and Genesis: The Road to Harmony and the Need for Cosmological

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Alternatives," *Origins* 19 (1992): pp. 8-32; George T. Javor, "A New Attempt to Understand the Origin of Life: The Theory of Surface-Metabolism" *Origins* 16 (1989): pp. 40-44; Ariel A. Roth, "Those Gaps in the Sedimentary Layers," *Origins* 15 (1988): pp. 75-92; Idem, "Life in the Deep Rocks and the Deep Fossil record," *Origins* 19 (1992): pp. 93-104; G. E. Snow and G. T. Javor, "Oxygen and Evolution," *Origins* 2 (1975): pp. 59-63; Clyde L. Webster, "The Implications of the Oklo Phenomenon on the Constancy of Radiometric Decay Rates," *Origins* 17 (1990): pp. 86-92; *Proceedings of the International Conferences on Creationism, 1986*, vol. 1, "Basic and Educational Sessions," vol. 2, "Technical Symposium Sessions and Additional Topics," ed. Robert E. Walsh (Pittsburg, PA: 362 Ashland Ave., 1986), and *Proceedings of the International Conferences on Creationism, 1990*, vol. 1, "General Sessions," vol. 2, "Technical Symposium Sessions and Additional topics," ed., Robert E. Walsh (Pittsburg, PA: 362 Ashland Ave., 1990); Harold Coffin, *Origin by Design* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983); see also Leo R. Van Dolson, ed., *Our Real Roots: Scientific Support for Creationism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979).

55 Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1952), p. 79.

56 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Early Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 103.

57 Nepeš hayyāh is better translated "living creature," or "living being" (as in the NIV).

58 Whitcomb, p. 105.

59 Ibid. Noting that, according to theistic evolution, the physical dimension of man, the pre-human form which God infused with a soul, must necessarily have been a living being, Erickson observes that "this tenet of theistic evolution contradicts the statement in Genesis 2:7 that man became a living being when God formed him and breathed into him the breath of life." Erickson, p. 483 (Erickson's emphasis).

60 Frances A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 33.

61 See Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1983), pp. 46-71.

62 For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb points to William H. White, a Christian believer who could no longer have faith in an immortality that would "perpetuate through all eternity the countless millions of barbaric, half bestial forms that must have inhabited the earth before the final evolution of man. White gave up immortality." Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian*

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Revolution (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1959), p. 369.

63 Lubenow, p. 95

64 Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 123.

65 Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation*, p. 477.

66 Sally E. Alsford, "Evil in the Non-Human World," *Science and Christian Belief* 3 (October 1991); p. 125. Alsford illustrates the point thus: "Just as a family will inevitably be affected by the actions of one member, because of the 'organic' nature of their inter-relatedness, so too creation is inevitably affected by our actions" (ibid.).

67 Alsford explains thus the state of the theological discussion based on relationality as a key to understanding creation-related issues: "It is not so much the possession of particular faculties or abilities which distinguishes us from the rest of creation, but it is the fact that it is an essential element of our humanity to be in relationship. Just as our triune Creator is eternally in relationship, within the being of God, so we too are seriously and unavoidably related to God, to our fellow human beings and also to our environment. These relationships may be broken or disrupted by sin, but they are still determinative of our being" (Ibid.). A similar argument, on the basis of the Noachic covenant, is advanced in James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 100-102.

68 As many serious Bible students probably know, this belief frames the basic thrust of the historical-critical method of the study of Scriptures.

69 George L. Murphy, "A Theological Argument for Evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 38 (March 1986), p. 21.

70 See Ramm, p. 172, n. 28.

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Ellen G. White: Side Issues or Central Message?

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Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists have written extensively about Ellen White during the approximate 150 years of their history. The majority of these writings were intended either to prove the genuine nature of her prophetic gift or to defend from a wide spectrum of criticisms,¹ such as charges of historical errors, plagiarism, psychological trances, and theological pitfalls.²

Discussions of these issues, on the positive side, have helped our people significantly to understand Ellen White's role and writings. The faith of many church members has been strengthened. On the negative side, the discussions have led many Seventh-day Adventist scholars and ministers into a more issue-focused approach to those writings.

The purpose of the present article is to consider briefly the need (1) to recognize the dangers of such an issue-focused approach, (2) to shift away from sidetracking issues to the core of Ellen White's message, (3) to understand the great themes of her message, and (4) to live in accordance to that message.

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Dangers of an Issue-Focused Approach

Seventh-day Adventist scholars and ministers need to be well-informed with regard to the main charges raised against Ellen White's prophetic gift so they can deal with the objections properly whenever necessary. But they should also be aware of the dangers involved in the task of responding to those charges.

One of the dangers is the temptation to spend so much time with the negative side of a specific issue that the beauty of the message related to it is lost. This may happen because some of the most complex and speculative issues require almost an endless solution process. There are also mysteries in the divinely inspired writings which may never be fully grasped by the human mind.³

Another danger is the strong tendency that an issue-focused approach to Ellen White's writings may develop an apologetic-legalistic emphasis. As the apologetic burdens of the pre-1888 era led many Seventh-day Adventists to a legalistic approach, so modern discussions about technicalities of Ellen White's writings might foster a lifeless investigation of those writings. Some may even end their study with the distorted impression that the main purpose of her writings is to criticize and straighten up the lives of others.

An issue-focused approach to Ellen White's writings may also distort the reader's understanding of the overall thematic balance of those writings. A serious problem is generated when sidetrack issues and peripheral subjects replace the study of the central themes of the writings. This generates a reader-deceived paradigm, which largely ignores the purpose of the original writer.

From Side Issues to the Core of the Message

Many persons are very interested in the details of Ellen White's personal life. Others are more concerned with the mechanics of her inspiration and with her literary style. Still others have specialize in finding answers in her writings to all sorts of issues. Such knowledge

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is useful, however, only to the extent it helps to strengthen personal faith in the broader scope of her message. How regrettable is the fact that there are persons more concerned with issues related to those writings than with the actual message proclaimed by the same writings.

There are also those whose main concern gravitates around certain specific topics. Such subjects as eschatology, health reform, perfection, and Christ's nature during the incarnation are mistakenly identified by them as the core of her work. As insightful as her teachings on these topics may be, an honest interpreter of Ellen White will never subscribe to the reductionism of the "hourglass principle,"⁴ by which the broadness of her message is reduced to a single theme. We should never allow side issues or single doctrines to absorb us in such a way that we lose sight of the major themes of her message.

To accept Ellen White's prophetic guidance means, indeed, much more than just to vindicate her from criticisms or to expose a few aspects of her message. It means to uphold the overall thrust of her message, allowing every theme to play its specific role within the whole thematic scope of the message.

Vern S. Poythress's concept of a multi-perspective "symphonic theology"⁵ may contribute to our better understanding of Ellen White's message. Instead of having many thematic solos, it would be far more insightful and enriching if those solos were merged into a thematic symphony that would preserve the beauty of the author's original intention. This may sound like a challenging task, but it would be the most appropriate way to understand Ellen White's message.

Such a comprehensive study of Ellen White's message does not necessarily coerce anybody away from the Bible. To allow those writings to carry out their basic function—(1) to direct "attention to the Bible," (2) to aid "in understanding the Bible," and (3) to help "in applying Bible principles in our lives,"⁶—will lead us, indeed, to a better appreciation of Bible truth.

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Understanding the Foundational Themes of the Message

Although Ellen White (as Martin Luther and John Wesley) never actually systematized her theological thoughts, several of her statements provide helpful glimpses for such a systematization.⁷ In the following presentation I will consider briefly her view of such foundational themes as God, the cosmic controversy, the everlasting covenant, the sanctuary, the three angels' messages, and the remnant.⁸ I strongly believe that her expositions of these themes are very helpful for the understanding of the Bible message.

God as the Unfolding Center. Ellen White speaks of God as “the great center” from Whom “all life proceeds” and to Whom “all service, homage, and allegiance belong” (cf. Acts 17:24-28).⁹ Her view of God as the center is a dynamic concept which unfolds itself from the three Persons of the Godhead¹⁰ to Their work of redemption. So, she qualifies as centers not only the Godhead but also Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

Speaking of Christ's status within the broad spectrum of the Seventh-day Adventist message, White asserts:

The truth for this time is broad in its outlines, far reaching, embracing many doctrines; but these doctrines are not detached items, which mean little; they are united by golden threads, forming a complete whole, with Christ as the living center.¹¹

In regard to Christ's atoning work, the same author states that “Christ, and Him crucified” is “the great central interest.”¹² The cross of Calvary is regarded as “the great center,”¹³ and the atonement, as “the great substance, the central truth.”¹⁴ She explains that “the cross must occupy the central place because it is the means of man's atonement and because of the influence it exerts on every part of the divine government.”¹⁵

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The Cosmic Controversy as the Framework. The entire drama of human existence is placed by Ellen White within the framework of the great controversy between God and Satan, and the corollary struggles between good and evil, truth and error, and those who serve God and those who follow Satan (cf. Rev 12). Advising the student of Scripture, she states that he

should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.¹⁶

The Everlasting Covenant of Grace as the Basis of Salvation. Ellen White explains that in the context of this great controversy, God saves human beings through His everlasting covenant of grace. She declares:

the salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. The covenant of mercy was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the everlasting covenant. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity.¹⁷

By viewing the biblical covenants as progressive stages in the development of God's everlasting covenant of grace, Ellen White maintains a very balanced typological relationship between the old and the new covenants.¹⁸ The covenant at Sinai, for instance, is regarded by her as intended to restore the principles of the everlasting covenant

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made previously with Abraham, allowing the Israelites to see “their sinfulness and their need of pardon” and “feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings.”¹⁹

God’s everlasting covenant of grace is portrayed by the same author as finding its *typical* expression in the earthly sanctuaries of the OT (cf. Exod 25:8) and its *antitypical* expression in the heavenly sanctuary of the NT (cf. Heb 8 and 9).²⁰

The Sanctuary as the Organizing Motif. Analyzing the writings of Ellen White, we can see that she perceives the biblical sanctuary as something broader and far more reaching than a single doctrine among others. She actually identifies the sanctuary as the organizing motif of Bible truth:

From the creation and fall of man to the present time, there has been a continual unfolding of the plan of God for the redemption through Christ, of the fallen race. The tabernacle and temple of God on earth were patterned after the original in heaven. Around the sanctuary and its solemn services mystically gathered the grand truths which were to be developed through succeeding generations.²¹

The ending of the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 in 1844 is recognized by White as the starting point of both the cleansing of the true sanctuary in heaven and the end-time restoration of the sanctuary-connected system of Bible truth on earth. She explains that the early Sabbatarian Adventist understanding of the sanctuary “opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand directed the great Advent Movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.”²²

She regards “the correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary” as “the foundation of our faith,”²³ because:

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The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time, and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin.²⁴

Upholding a close interrelationship between Christ and His sanctuary, White asserts truthfully that "Christ, his character and work, is the center and circumference of all truth, he is the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked. In him is found the complete system of truth."²⁵ Thus, the sanctuary is identified by her as the basic motif which organizes the Bible doctrines around "Christ as the living center."²⁶

The Three Angels' Messages as the Eschatological Proclamation. This Christ-centered, sanctuary-organized doctrinal system is seen by Ellen White as restored in its end-time eschatological setting through the proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. She speaks metaphorically of those messages as actual steps leading to the "solid, immovable platform" of present truth.²⁷

Recalling the early Sabbatarian Adventist experience, she explains:

Many saw the perfect chain of truth in the angels' messages, and gladly received them in their order, and followed Jesus by faith into the heavenly sanctuary. These messages were represented to me as an anchor to the people of God. Those who understand and receive them will be kept from being swept away by the many delusions of Satan.²⁸

That the three angels' messages comprise embryonically the major components of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal system is evident from the fact that she refers several times to that system in terms of those messages²⁹ and, more specifically, of the third angel's message.³⁰

The Remnant as the Missiological Result. The preaching of an

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integrated system of present truth by the three angels' messages is viewed by Ellen White as raising up and preparing a remnant people for Christ's Second Coming (cf. Rev 12:17; 14:12).³¹

She states "God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."³² "The third angel's message must do its work of separating from the churches a people who will take their stand on the platform of eternal truth."³³

Honest souls will see the straight chain of present truth. They will see its harmonious connections, link after link uniting into a great whole, and will lay hold upon it. The present truth is not difficult to be understood, and the people whom God is leading will be united upon this broad, firm platform.³⁴

Those who stand upon this platform are described by Ellen White as protected by Christ in the setting of the cosmic controversy (cf. Rev 12:17). She explains:

The adversary of souls is determined to oppose all who plant their feet on the platform of eternal truth, who would uplift the banner on which is inscribed, The commandment of God and the faith of Jesus. They are the objects of Satan's deadly hatred. But rest assured that Christ fights with His army. He himself leads His followers, and He will renew the strength of every faithful soldier.³⁵

And she adds: "Unless we stand on the elevated platform of eternal truth, we shall be swept away by the tide of delusive error that is sweeping over the world."³⁶

With these concepts in mind, we suggest that the broad theological setting provided by the interrelationship of the themes previously mentioned is the correct starting-point for the study of Ellen White's message.

Living in Accordance to the Message. Even with understanding and emphasizing the great themes of Ellen White's

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message, we face the risk of missing their main purpose: to lead us into a true *saving experience*. Doctrinal theory is very important, but it does not mean anything for us without the sanctifying influence of the truth on the whole personal life (cf. John 17:17).

Ellen White herself warns of this problem when she states that “many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed.”³⁷ “A man may hear and acknowledge the whole truth, and yet know nothing of personal piety and true experimental religion. He may explain the way of salvation to others, and yet himself be a castaway.”³⁸

Some may be satisfied with lifeless technicalities and side issues related to Ellen White’s writings, or even with a theoretical knowledge of her message. But we should go beyond the theoretical level into a true saving experience with Christ and His teachings. According to her own words:

As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven’s light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ.³⁹

Conclusion

Understanding Ellen White’s message will be worthless for us if we do not permit it to have a sanctifying influence on our lives. Beyond the theoretical level, we need to allow the message to lead us into a true saving experience with Christ and His teachings. If Christ becomes the actual center of our religious experience, we will be really delighted in knowing more and more of His will as it is presented in the writings of Ellen White.

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Endnotes

1 Several of those writings are referred to in Alberto R. Timm, "History of Inspiration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1944-1994)" (Unpublished paper, the original draft of which was read at the 1993 Scholars' Convention of the Adventist Theological Society in Silver Spring, Maryland, on November 19, 1993), pp. 10-21, 28-34, 41, 46-47, 50-54, 58-95, passim.

2 Some of the main criticisms against Ellen White appear in Dudley M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-eight Years by a Prominent Minister of that Faith*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1989); Idem, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati, [OH]: Standard Publishing Company, 1919); Ingemar Lindén, *Biblicism, apokalyptik, utopi, Adventismens historiska utforming: USA samt dess svenska utveckling till o. 1939* (Uppsala: [University of Uppsala], 1971); Idem, *The Last Trump: An Historico-Genetical Study of Some Important Chapters in the Making and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978); Idem, *Adventismen vid Skiljevägen* ([Sweden]: n.p., 1983); Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Idem, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform*, rev. and enl. ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980); Desmond Ford and Gillian Ford, *The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual Identity* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982); Walter Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982); Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983); and Thomas R. Steininger, *Konfession and Sozialisation: Adventistische Identität zwischen Fundamentalismus and Postmoderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

3 See E[llen] G. White, *Gospel Workers*, rev. and enl. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1948), p. 312; Idem, *Steps to Christ* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, n.d.), pp. 105-113.

4 I am indebted to Dr. George W. Reid, director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of SDAs, who first called my attention to the concept that most of the so-called "heresies" come into the church through the "hourglass principle." As the whole sand of the hourglass is required to pass through the small reduction hole, so some people reduce the whole Bible and/or Ellen White's messages to a single doctrine.

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5 See Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987).

6 T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1955), p. 371. See also *ibid.*, pp. 364-374; Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, American University Studies, series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 12 (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 140-184.

7 A helpful starting point for the study of Ellen White's view of basic themes of the Seventh-day Adventist message and the interrelationship between them can be found in her books *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), pp. 63, 250-261; *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974), pp. 168-278, *passim*; *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1946), pp. 28-32, 52-54.

8 For further study of these foundational themes, see Alberto R. Timm, "The Sanctuary and the Three Angels; Message, 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines" (Ph.D. Diss., Andrews University, 1995), pp. 397-420, 476-477.

9 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 6:236. See also *Ibid.*, p. 237; *Idem*, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 77; *idem*, *Gospel Workers*, p. 396.

10 Some of Ellen White's most significant statements on the Trinity are found in her book *Evangelism*, pp. 613-617. See also *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957), pp. 641-646.

11 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1986), 2:887. See also *Ibid.*, 1:158, 383-388.

12 *Idem*, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), p. 331.

13 *Idem*, in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 4:1173.

14 *Idem*, *Evangelism*, p. 223.

15 *Idem*, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:236.

16 *Idem*, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), p. 190.

17 *Idem*, "Spiritual Growth," *Signs of the Times*, June 12, 1901, p. 3

18 See e.g., *Idem*, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1958), pp. 363-373; *Idem*, "The Two Dispensations," *Review and Herald*, March 2, 1886, p. 129; *Idem*, "In the Wilderness with God," *Youth's Instructor*, July 18, 1901, p. 226.

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- 19 Idem, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371-372.
- 20 See Idem, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 23-26; Idem, *Education*, pp. 35-38; Idem, *Christ in His Sanctuary* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1969).
- 21 Idem, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 194.
- 22 Idem, *Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), p. 423.
- 23 Idem, *Evangelism*, p. 221.
- 24 Idem, *Great Controversy*, p. 488.
- 25 Idem, "Contemplate Christ's Perfection, Not Man's Imperfection," *Review and Herald*, August 15, 1893, p. 513.
- 26 Idem, *Selected Messages*, 2:87.
- 27 Idem, *Early Writings*, pp. 258-259.
- 28 Ibid., p. 256.
- 29 See e.g., Idem, *Great Controversy*, pp. 311-312, 355-356, 435-438, 594-595, 603-612; Idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:455-456.
- 30 See e.g., Idem, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), p. 199-202; idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:206-207; 6:241.
- 31 See e.g., Idem, *Selected Messages*, 2:384-385; idem, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 32-62.
- 32 Idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:446.
- 33 Ibid., 6:61.
- 34 Ibid., 1:326.
- 35 Idem, "Lessons from the Parable of the Unjust Judge," *Signs of the Times*, September 15, 1898, p. 3.
- 36 Idem, "Medical Missionary Training Schools," in MS 169, 1902; published in Idem, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate, 1993), 19:54.
- 37 Idem, *Steps to Christ*, p. 35.
- 38 Idem, *Evangelism*, p. 682.
- 39 Idem, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

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Man and Knowledge: The Search for Truth in a Pluralistic Age¹

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Introduction

One of my former students at the Theological Seminary, where I was teaching at the time, urged me to watch the movie, *Dead Poets Society*, a popular Hollywood production of a few years ago. Let me briefly recall what I saw:

A renowned college celebrates the beginning of a new school year. Everything is very solemn and breathes the air of veneration and fame. An old gothic style colonnade leads into the assembly hall where students, faculty and parents gather. The senior class members carry banners to the front with the mottos of the school, which later on everyone repeats aloud with one accord: Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence.

As can be expected, all men are wearing suit and tie for the occasion. The proud president announces that 50 percent of all graduates were again accepted into ivy league graduate schools and universities. Then follows a sequence with a stern father who, obviously with total lack of feeling, reprimands his son, demanding blind obedience, and thereby spoiling a special cause of happiness to which his son had been looking forward. A little later the film focuses

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on the students enduring boring classes with totally unimaginative professors.

Then he comes: the new hero in the person of the new English teacher, without suit and tie, whistling in class, in one word, unconventional. We see him easily win the hearts of receptive students who take to his wisdom like dry sponges absorbing water. He hammers his message into them with charming but relentless fervor: *Carpe diem*, "seize the day." Make your life something special, something out of the ordinary. And if it means to rip out certain pages from textbooks which contain nothing but stern rules, do it, because that's fine with the new professor. "From now on," he cheerfully proclaims, "you will learn to think for yourself." He promotes beauty, romantics, and love. His students fly for him and would do anything for him.

While watching I could not help but detect a philosophy which had been masterfully disguised, highlighted with unabashed usage of clichés, and yet loudly proclaimed, a philosophy which has permeated our society on a grand scale. It's message is preached from many political, ecclesiastical, and educational pulpits, amplified by the media, especially magazines, television, and the World Wide Web: "Think what you want, say what you want, do what you want." The limits may be the comfort or discomfort of my neighbor. But otherwise, there is no authority above me, no institution besides me, and no organization before or behind me.

Freedom! It is true we owe much to this current in our world's philosophy: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of having one's own opinion. But there is one catch. Mankind has always been quite thorough when shedding old beliefs and changing paradigms (as it is expressed in modern language). With authority falling into disgrace at large, the highest authority in the universe—God—is falling too.

This is the number one issue we confront today. It has so many ethical, moral, educational, and even political consequences, reaching

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the farthest corners of our everyday lives. How do we view God? How do we view ourselves? How do we view the Bible? How do we view Jesus Christ? How can we know God? And how should we then live?

Is it possible to know the truth? And how does man obtain knowledge? Is there absolute truth, or is everything relative? Is truth biographical, that is, shaped by the personal life history of the individual, “filtered through the prism of our individual experience”?² Is there a way to have a unified theology and corresponding practice, or do we just have to live with fragmentation? Is pluralism the acceptable trend of our time, and we better get used to it? Have we as a Church simply come too far in history to expect the same unified stand that our pioneers had on certain theological issues? Have we come of age in our theological understandings? Have we “lost our innocence”?³ Or do we have to relieve ourselves of a so-called “unity myth” and see our pioneers and our own history with new eyes, as some historians and theologians in our ranks want us to believe?

Generally, it seems in our day and age that members of any given church have a strained relationship to doctrine and theology. There are a number of reasons for this dilemma. Some persons fear to be caught up in theological controversy; others hold that a knowledge of doctrine is not relevant to the needs of everyday living. Jesus and His life and death very easily become the smallest common denominator when the unity of the church is at stake or the trenches between the diverging sides are getting deeper and need to be bridged.

However, “theology matters because it lies at the heart of Christian identity,”⁴ and “if we Christians have anything distinctive to say as Christians, it grows out of the content of our faith.”⁵ If what we believe, then, is just as important as what we live, it is neither right nor intellectually satisfying to live with the status quo of theological pluralism and simply resign ourselves to the philosophy of relative truth. Is the shunning of doctrine on the one hand and the diversity of theological interpretation on the other God’s intention? How can such

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a stance be harmonized with statements like “when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13, NKJV) or, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You” (John 17:21, NKJV)?

As important and pressing as these questions are, it will be impossible to answer all of them within the scope of this study. In order to understand the severity of the problem we are facing, however, it is inevitable first to take a closer look at “truth” as it is perceived today, and also at “theological pluralism” and its philosophical roots. Hopefully, it will become obvious that this is not a mere academic exercise but that it will increase the awareness of the issues with which we are dealing.⁶

The second part of this study will attempt to answer the question what truth really is. I will deal briefly with the issue how knowledge about God can be obtained by man. Along those lines I will also touch on the role of reason and the finite mind to comprehend infinite things.

The third part will “marry” two parties who actually were never separated but are still divorced in many minds. I firmly believe that Jesus and His truth can never be separated without losing both.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the unprecedented flourishing of pluralism among Adventists in some quarters is because the dichotomy between Jesus and doctrine has been with us too long. The result is a fragmented picture of our teachings rather than a united whole. Without the wholistic understanding of truth we tend to lose sight of its purpose and significance for our lives and easily discard any attempt for deeper theological comprehension. Wholistic truth is opposed to theological pluralism. Only Jesus, personally and theologically, can overcome the impasse of entrenching diversity. “The truth as it is in Jesus” (cf. Eph 4:21) is the most profound knowledge any human being can gain.

Truth in Society and Church

One author perceptively observes⁷ that the mere claim to be able

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to come to a knowledge of truth is met by today's intellectual with the same indignation and spitefulness as the Jews met Jesus' statement: "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free, (John 8:31, NKJV). The central dogma of today's western societies teaches that *human* reason and *human* conscience have the freedom and the ability to search for and to arrive at truth. Everyone who challenges that dogma has to be willing to bear the crunch of the hatred he or she will encounter. This Cartesian program, which builds on the premises of Descartes,⁸ contains an important but unproven presupposition, namely, that the cosmos and human nature are of such a condition that it is possible for human beings to know the truth without ever being dependent on one single word from the Creator.⁹

This humanist philosophy led to a dichotomy in the quest for truth. On the one hand the idea developed that there is a world of objective facts, accessible without any subjective effort; on the other hand the idea emerged that everything outside of the above category is merely individual and subjective opinion. The dichotomy, then, is between universal truths and individual opinion. In the first category one can say: "I know," whereas in the latter it would be: "I believe."

The first category, by its very definition and character, cannot and will not tolerate any kind of pluralism. For example, natural scientists, in their discussion of pertinent scientific matters, do not usually say to each other: "This may be true for you, but not for me." The physical laws of nature exclude pluralistic interpretations. On the other side, in the halls of the arts and human sciences, theology included, pluralism reigns supreme. Here it is inappropriate to speak of "right" and "wrong." Only personal experience can be presented as a kind of testimony. After all, "most of us are not conditioned to ask, 'Is this true?' but rather, 'How do I feel about this?'"¹⁰

This dichotomizing of knowledge ignores the fact that knowledge always consists of an objective and subjective side. It is subjective in the sense that a given subject's depth and scope will be

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dependent on personal factors of the researcher like earnestness, honesty, intellectual and imaginative capabilities, and also cultural traditions. But there is also the objective side, which the searching mind seeks to know, a goal to strive for in order to find that final satisfaction in being able to say: “Now I know.”

The dichotomy just described has resulted in a skepticism which concludes that knowledge outside the world of objective facts is nothing more than personal opinion. Since there are no facts in this area but only “values” (which are a matter of personal preference), they become the expression of what we want. Pluralistic society, therefore, has become the war arena of opposing wills.¹¹ There is no need to convince each other of the truth, because allegedly there is no truth that can be known.

Nature and Knowledge of Truth. While it is not within the scope of this study to elaborate fully on the nature of truth, the subject must be acknowledged to be rather complex, even complicated.¹² To define truth depends on one’s concept of its nature. Several theories have been developed, of which the two major opposing ones—correspondence and coherence—are the most well known.¹³

As Schmitt has shown, the basic issue is the question of realism versus idealism. With rare candor he convincingly argues for the supremacy of realism, which is to say, that there are real objects that really exist, and truth relates to those real objects.¹⁴ Idealism, or anti-realism, or surrealism on the other hand sees truth as something that coheres with other true ideas or statements, but never refers beyond itself.

As philosophical as these descriptions may seem, they are foundational. Accepting the viewpoint of realism, we may say that truth corresponds¹⁵ to an independent reality, which can be also a metaphysical one. Or, in other words, truth is the corresponding statement to something that exists.¹⁶ To establish thus the *nature* of truth is significant for the *knowledge* of truth. Ontology (= the study of being) comes before epistemology (= the study of the method of

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knowing), although the two are also interrelated.¹⁷

It was Augustine who connected ontology and epistemology in that he saw both unified in the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁸ He is the only One that can say of Himself: “I am the truth” (John 14:6), and He is also the One who proclaims truth and helps the human mind to grasp it. “For the knowledge of Christ as the Truth, one is dependent on the Holy Scriptures. This knowledge can be appropriated only if one repents and turns to God, who forgives sins, and if one lives as God wants.”¹⁹ The very fact that the divine Christ is the Truth should make us humble enough to realize that our finite reason is limited, that “spiritual realities elude the reach of human logic alone, that we must be dependent upon the revelation of God’s Word—not our twisted, fallen minds—to discern the truths of an infinite God.”²⁰

When Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 “You shall love the Lord our God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” (NKJV), He chose to add: “with all your mind” (Mark 12:30, NKJV). This would mean that our “whole educational enterprise. . . should be caught up in the desire to love God with all of the mind.”²¹ “In concrete terms it means that because of human sinfulness, which also affects the mind (Eph 4:18), “sinful reason stands in need of conversion just as the rest of man needs to be renewed. Human beings become truly ‘reasonable’ in the biblical sense when ‘we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor 10:5, NASB).”²²

Is it justified, however, to use the gap between the fallen human mind and God’s truth as an argument for relativizing that truth, as an excuse for theological pluralism? Is there no absolute truth because man is incapable of grasping it in its fullest divine reality? Or, as most postmodern scholars would put it, Is there only absolute truth in God, and all we can know here on earth is relative? Or, to drive it closer home, Is it justified to use this argument to make biblical and Adventist doctrines appear relative to the respective time and background of the individuals who formulate them?

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Pluralism. The philosophy of pluralism is well illustrated by the famous elephant parable of Buddhism. In it Buddha tells of a king who calls together all the blind men in Sāvattī and has them assembled around an elephant. Each of the men touch and feel different parts of the huge animal and report their discoveries. Those who felt the head of the elephant say to the king, “Your Majesty, the elephant is like a cauldron.” Those who touched its ear say, “Your Majesty, the elephant is like a shovel.” Those who felt its trunk say, “Your Majesty, it is like the shaft of a plough.” Finally, the story goes, they attack each other with their fists, crying, “An elephant is like this, not like that. . .”²³ The powerful message of this parable is that there is no universal and absolute truth, and each individual can only have a partial grasp of it.²⁴

This idea of truth and epistemology, the acquisition of knowledge, is one of the most prominent arguments used for embracing and defending what has come to be known as theological pluralism, defined as “a plurality of doctrinal interpretations *within* a denomination.”²⁵ Consequently, all theologies are of equal truth and value. “Toleration is the supreme virtue in matters of religion, and dogmatism is the most reprehensible attitude.”²⁶

It may be observed that “conscious *theological* pluralism is something relatively new to Protestantism.”²⁷ Before it came on the scene disagreements in theological matters led to divisions among Christians and the establishment of like-minded groups called denominations. Now pluralism means that “we seek to be churches in which . . . major factions or orientations can be present and reasonably happy.”²⁸

The opposite attitude is *particularity*, which had been one of the hallmarks of Christian missions ever since Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world and seek the lost.²⁹ In fact, it should be more than obvious that Christian missions would never have happened had the people involved taken a pluralistic stand. On the other hand, however, it is a sad fact of the history of the Christian church that the church

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made use of political powers to twist people's arms to convert them to the world view it was so particular about.³⁰

The transition from this politically and violently enforced particularity to pluralism was one of the liberating effects of the Reformation, which became apparent only much later when along with democratization came the realization that no group had the right to force its particular point of view on all the others. The very term *Protestantism*, its meaning drawn from the historical events in the 16th century, marks this new approach.

As secularization set in as a result of the new religious liberty, pluralism was part and parcel of the ensuing development.³¹ Considering this background, it becomes understandable why pluralism flourished even more in the religious climate of the New World where tolerance towards different beliefs became one of the core beliefs of the new community.

Relativism. Theological pluralism is identified as a fundamental principle of theological discussion, which in turn is justified on the basis of the nature of doctrine. Here doctrine is treated as "essentially expressive: doctrine is our 'response' or 'reaction' to God's mysterious work."³² This is nothing less than making truth dependent on individual experience. This loss of scriptural authority leaves room for diverging interpretations based on tradition, experience, and reason.³³ Relativism as the backbone of pluralism does not allow for absolute truth. It "insists that tolerance is mandated on the ground that no current in the sea of diversity has the right to take precedence over other currents."³⁴

Schmitt demonstrates convincingly that the so-called *regress objection* to relativism deals the death blow to this philosophy. It describes the unsolvable dilemma for the relativist in that his propositions on relativism can never be relative, but are always absolute. However, if the truth-values the relativist proposes in his theory of truth are absolute, and indeed there is no other way, the whole theory is condemned to collapse.³⁵ Thus "relativism is untenable

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and must be rejected.”³⁶ To quote Newbiggin’s apt critique of relativism; “The relativism which is not willing to speak about truth but only about ‘what is true for me’ is an evasion of the serious business of living. It is the mark of a tragic loss of nerve in our contemporary culture. It is a preliminary symptom of death.”³⁷

Nihilism. One other underlying philosophy of pluralism is nihilism, founded by Friedrich Nietzsche, who came to the conclusion that God indeed “is dead.” He contended that the God *as we perceive him* is dead. He turned against classical western epistemology, which can be called cognitivism, in advocating perspectivism. Because there are many viewpoints, shaped by a multiplicity of differences in culture, time, place, education and temperament, there are accordingly many truths.

The inevitable result is relativism, and the conclusion of relativism is nihilism. “For if there is no truth that is true universally and absolutely, there is likewise no settled meaning and no fixed value.”³⁸ Truth, according to Nietzsche, is an illusion metaphorically camouflaged,³⁹ and this can only lead to nihilism (no ontological reality and no epistemological possibility) and finally even deconstructionism and fascism.⁴⁰

Postmodernism. Another root of pluralism is postmodernism. Rationalism is giving way to *irrationalism*. “Modernists did not believe the Bible is true. Postmodernists have cast out the category of truth altogether.”⁴¹ Religion is not a set of beliefs about what is real and what is not. Rather, religion simply is a choice. We believe in what we like and what we want to believe. This, of course, makes aesthetic criteria more important than rational criteria. For example, people may decide their church affiliation according to what they like about the church. The same criteria are applied to biblical truths and doctrines, which should reflect the whole biblical teaching, but are molded instead to fit one’s preconceived liking.

However, while postmodern individuals experience a loss of moral criteria by which to evaluate what is good and what is bad, they

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tend to condemn everyone who suggests to know the truth. The greatest sin in this philosophical context is to know and proclaim something as the only truth.

Since postmodernism rejects objectivity, it shows more interest in the supernatural, but not on the basis of biblical revelation. There is a different paradigm of spirituality. “The old paradigm taught that if you have the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching.”⁴² Peter Wagner, still one of the stalwarts of the philosophy of church growth, recently coined a very similar statement: “Ministry is not dependent on theology but, vice versa, theology on ministry.”⁴³ This pragmatic and success-oriented approach demonstrates how much the Christian church has been influenced by current philosophies.

Historical Criticism. If the central issue in the dispute over doctrine, truth, and pluralism is indeed the validity and authority of the Bible with its claim of universal and absolute truth, it follows that the way we perceive and interpret the Bible is of utmost importance. It would be too simple to claim that the different views and interpretations of our beliefs, which exist among Adventists, are merely culturally determined. It can be a rather frustrating experience to try to discuss Adventist doctrine only to realize that the debating partners do not share the same hermeneutical presuppositions.

The inroads of pluralistic philosophy that I have tried to describe above have also affected the view of the Bible.⁴⁴ When “the concept of revelation as the disclosure of the infallible truth of God [was abandoned and] the corollary that Scripture is this revelation in written form and thus the authoritative norm and controlling canon in theological construction [was given up],” theology inevitably entered the labyrinth of pluralism and instituted the “cafeteria of options.”⁴⁵

Although Ernst Troeltsch laid the groundwork for biblical criticism with his three principles of correlation, analogy, and criticism,⁴⁶ numerous kinds of critical approaches have since

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developed on the basis of these premises.⁴⁷ The fundamental presupposition underlying all these developments is the “priority of human reason over Scripture.”⁴⁸

In marked opposition to this approach is this statement of Ellen White: “The more he [the student of the Bible] searches the Bible, the deeper is his conviction that it is the word of the living God, and *human reason bows before the majesty of divine revelation.*”⁴⁹

Revisionism. The section on historical criticism would not be complete without addressing one of the latest trends of applying this same method to history. The attempt to reanalyze and re-present historical data in light of subsequent knowledge has come to be known as *revisionism*. It has become almost fashionable to cite changes in Adventist theology in order to have an argument for the current pluralistic standpoint.

Some argue for a dynamic concept of *present truth*, assuming that even the Adventist pioneers did not think it was static.⁵⁰ However, when the references given for Ellen White's position is checked it becomes apparent she does not state, as is suggested, that what was present truth a hundred years ago might not be present truth today. Rather, she says: “The present truth, which is a test to the people of this generation, was not a test to the people of generations far back.”⁵¹ And she observes there was a present truth in Noah's day for his generation.⁵²

But the crucial point to be noted is that Ellen White clearly taught that the present truth God gave to the Advent movement was given to be proclaimed to the last generation before Jesus comes, and that this message will stand as truth forever.⁵³ The punch line of Ellen White's argument is this: “We had the truth; we were directed by the angels of God. It was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the presentation of the sanctuary question was given. It is eloquence for every one to keep silent in regard to the features of our faith in which they acted no part. *God never contradicts himself.*”⁵⁴

The decisive issue today pertains to Adventist self-

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understanding. Either it is a movement called by God and led by the Holy Spirit, or it is a movement merely conditioned by social and historical phenomena. Revisionists attempt to show that the latter is the case. They argue that not only Adventist history must be reinterpreted, but also its theology must be adapted to the changes which have taken place in modern society. This is applied to both life-style issues and to doctrinal questions.

There can be no doubt that a crossroads has been reached. It may be expected that some will argue for a balanced mixture of these two viewpoints, not leaving out God's guidance in Adventist history nor being afraid to acknowledge society's influence on the development. However, upon closer investigation, it will become clear that there are indeed two opposing philosophies battling for primacy. What will be the outcome? To stay with the analogy: the crossroads will not become a two lane road going in the same direction just because some people declare it will.

Issue of Identity and Missions. Time and space do not allow me to deal with the issues of *contextualization* and *ecumenism*, other powerful ideas influencing theology and practice, which come under our rubric of pluralism. For example, the problem of the lack of identity comes to mind. A common and fair question to ask is: What gives us as a denomination the right to be a separate entity?

It is impossible to know what role Adventists are supposed to play in this world if we do really do not know why Adventists exist in the first place. It is not satisfactory to cite sociological and historical factors. These arguments do nothing less than call the biblical foundation into question on which Adventists claim to stand. The immediate consequence of a lack of identity is that at its best the missionary and evangelistic thrust of the church becomes less vigorous, and at its worst its voice to the world is muted.

Truth in Biblical Faith

While it is important to take a critical look at the philosophical

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foundations of theology and its current pluralistic perception, it is of even greater significance to reflect on what truth is. The various, interrelated philosophical trends described above contribute to the force and well-being of pluralism in our day. The answer to these trends lies in the concept of wholistic truth to which we now turn.

Wholistic Truth. In recent years doctrines have come into disrepute. We live in an age where doctrine *per se* is viewed as dry, boring, irrelevant, and divisive. People dichotomize Jesus and theology, love and doctrine. “*Love* is understandable—warm and fuzzy. *Doctrine*, on the other hand, sounds cold, difficult, and demanding.”⁵⁵

Theology’s bad reputation has caused widespread illiteracy on many basic beliefs among evangelical Christians and Adventists. This ignorance and demise of doctrine has also led to an impoverished spiritual life, since “a person who does not know what is available to him or her does not know enough to seek it out and receive it.”⁵⁶ “Spirituality needs a sound theological foundation, lest it become a shallow and merely mystical experience.

This deplorable situation has come about because “we have taught it [doctrine] as a cognitive system of facts about God and have separated it from the most vital issues of life.”⁵⁷ An even more significant reason lies in the dichotomy some have made between doctrine and the person of Jesus Christ. This, in turn, is caused by today’s deterioration of the authority of Scripture with the resultant haphazard use of the Bible in Christian circles. It is little wonder if something is ripped apart, which actually is inseparable, that the parts will be deficient if they are looked at just by themselves and not in relation to the other part. But this is exactly what has happened with Jesus and His doctrines, which in fact are nothing less than the expression of what He really is.⁵⁸

Since such a Jesus, who has been reduced by leaving out the importance of doctrine, is a “tame Jesus of love,” an unbiblical notion, the trend to a relativistic and pluralistic theology is encouraged. After all, doctrine does not really matter anymore. Likewise, if doctrine is

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severed from the person of Jesus Christ, it tends to become a legalistic sledgehammer or the mere plaything for the theologians, ultimately killing the genuine search for truth, thereby preparing for the inroads of pluralism. The only solution to this dilemma is a return to the biblical understanding of truth, which does not divide between the person of the Creator and Savior and His teachings. The only solution is a return to *wholistic* theology.

Biblical Terminology. Since Adventists have made the Bible their only standard of faith and practice, and since it has even been recognized by those outside our ranks that the Adventist Church belongs to the so-called “Bible-based denominations,”⁵⁹ we should live up to our claims and our reputation and base our knowledge of truth on the Bible.

In the OT the concept of truth is expressed by using terms related to the root *ʾmn*: *ʾaman*, *ʾemûnah*, *ʾamen*, *ʾemet*. Cognate terms in other semitic languages point to the basic meaning of the root as “permanent” (Aramaic), “security,” “peace,” “reliability,” “faithfulness” (Arabic).⁶⁰

The use of this root in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates a meaning along the same lines. A “guardian,” who takes care of those who have been entrusted to him or her, conveys the idea of “trustworthiness” (Num 11:12; Esth 2:7). Whenever the terms of this root are used in connection with human beings, the idea of “reliability” is stressed. In this sense a person is “true” (Neh 9:8; 1 Sam 2:35). This also applies to God, when he is called the “true and faithful witness” (Jer 42:5). Truth in the Bible, then, has always to do with the content of a personal relationship, pointing to reliability, faithfulness, and permanence.⁶¹

The causative Hiphil form of the same root could be translated “to make someone true” or “to rely on someone,” which actually means “to believe in someone.” Therefore Gerhard von Rad says: “In Hebrew ‘to have faith’ is literally ‘to make oneself secure in Yahweh’.”⁶²

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According to Proverbs 3:3 “truth” belongs to the innermost parts of the human mind, and the immediate context shows that it is seen as parallel to the “law” (*tôrāh*) (v. 1) and to “mercy” or “love” (*hesed*). The same association we find in Hosea 4:1 “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land,” (NKJV). The term for “knowledge” used here is from the root *yd*^c, which elsewhere is used for conjugal and intimate relationships.⁶³ We may conclude, then, that the terms used for truth in the OT convey notions that belong to the characteristics of a personal relationship.

It may be noted that almost half of the occurrences of the Hebrew term *’emûnah* are translated in the LXX (Greek Septuagint) by the term *pistis* (faith). Here the idea of faithfulness and trustworthiness is being conveyed.⁶⁴ In this light, we are not surprised that Karl Barth translates Romans 1:17, the cardinal text of Luther’s Reformation, “The righteous shall live from faithfulness! (Hab. ii. 4).”⁶⁵ Barth purposefully gives the OT reference in Habakkuk, where indeed the term *’emûnah* has been used. He even sees a kind of ambiguity here in the idea that the righteous person lives both “of the faithfulness of God” and of his own faith. Barth holds that “the form in which the prophet’s words have been handed down already points in both directions,” and he concludes, “where the faithfulness of God encounters the fidelity of men, there is manifested His righteousness.”⁶⁶

The Embodiment of Truth. This biblical understanding of truth provides the background for what we find in the concept of Jesus Christ *being* the truth (John 14:6). He is the One who by His very nature is trustworthy and always remains the same (Heb 13:8). His will for humankind, expressed in the teachings of the Bible, is the outflow of His nature and is just as reliable as He is.

It should not be overlooked that without these true statements *about* Jesus, no human being would be able to know *Him*. Even if we concede that a personal encounter with Jesus Christ is a very important element of Christian faith, we likewise have to remember

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that any such encounter has to be verified in its validity and *truth* by the authoritative Word of Jesus in the Scriptures. Otherwise, our encounter has to be suspected as a mere self-deception. Pfeiffer correctly asserts:

... even clearer is the unity of person and thing which is often overlooked. .. Neither of the two notions must be isolated. Christ as the lifegiving truth is a concrete person, thus not something abstract, but neither something vague, elusive. Certainly encounter with a person does not take place without knowledge, at least not without the knowledge that there is a person there, namely this very person. The appreciation of the personal element and the certainly rightful emphasis of the specific character of an I-Thou relationship over the relation to objects must not lead to the neglect of the objective reference which is inseparably connected with the personal.⁶⁷

Paul could in all confidence say: “I determined *not to know anything* among you *except Jesus Christ* and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2, NKJV, emphasis added). In this respect the “sola Christus” (Christ alone) of the Reformation stands side by side with the “sola scriptura” (Scripture alone), since it concerns the One Person who is responsible for our very life—here and there, now and then—that is, who created and saved us. “Jesus Christ alone, the One crucified” is the “mystery of God” (1 Cor 2:1, 2, 7)⁶⁸ who depicts the whole plan of salvation for mankind.

In John 14:6 Jesus Christ squarely claims to *be* the truth. God Himself *is* the truth. Helmut Thielicke explains:

This exceptional character of Christ, as the New Testament sees it, lies in the fact that he does not only represent a *relation* to the purpose (we could say here: to the *logos*) but that he *is* the *logos*, that the truth has been incarnated in him and is identical with him. Truth is what he is, because in him appears the final purposeful reality, namely the *pistis*-faithfulness of God, which, according to Rom 3:3 is the truth of God, and which is something of permanence, something which one can “rely” on. Christ does not only *proclaim* this truth of God’s faithfulness, which

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carries our life and gives it permanence and purpose, but in him it is there and among us in person.⁶⁹

When we also consider Jesus' statement in John 17:17 that the word of God is truth, which is in complete harmony with the OT equation of truth and *torah*, it follows that everything God has revealed—from and about Himself—is truth. Then it follows that truth is a person as well as the contents of the relationship to that person, which is absolute reliability and faithfulness.

Therefore “person” cannot be separated from “contents.” A person reveals his or her truthfulness and fidelity in the quality of the relationship to other persons. It should be self-understood that a relationship cannot be called such unless it is governed by certain truthful and reliable propositions. Consequently, any dichotomy between Christ and his doctrines is false. John 17:3 summarizes this wholistic view of truth by stating, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,” (NKJV).

This also helps us to understand why Paul writes about the “love of the truth,” which he sets in parallel to “believe the truth” (2 Thess 2:10, 12, NKJV). The important notion here is that Paul says that the “love of the truth” has to be received in order to be saved. Three things stand out in Paul's statement: (1) Truth is essential to salvation, it is juxtaposed to “unrighteousness” (vss. 10, 12), (2) the expression “love of the truth” suggests more than a mere intellectual acknowledgment of propositions of truth, namely, a personal relationship to the truth,⁷⁰ and (3) this love of the truth has to be *received* as a gift. Here is something that man receives or rejects. If he receives it, he is saved. This need of receiving shows very clearly that it is not something he has within himself. Rather, it has to be given to him from outside. The love for the truth is a gift of God.⁷¹

*The Role of Reason.*⁷² Western philosophy has been heavily influenced by the Greek concept of reason. In Greek thought the mind

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alone is considered capable of grasping the eternal truths, which only exist in the spirit world. A typical example can be found in gnosticism, a religious belief that developed in early Christianity, in which (among other things) people believed that by turning inwardly into themselves, they could attain to a higher knowledge about God. This concept also shaped to a large extent the ideas proposed in the age of the Enlightenment, or the “Age of Reason” as it has been called. Since then, and increasingly so today, the autonomy of the mind has been proclaimed. The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804),

defined Enlightenment as the spirit’s determination to exercise its intellectual faculties in unfettered integrity. Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage, that is, his inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Enlightenment is man’s rise from the immaturity which caused him to rely on such external authorities as the Bible, the church, tradition, etc., to tell him what to think and do. The motto of the enlightenment, therefore, was: Have courage to use your own thinking. In its self-sufficient autonomy reason assumed that authority which truly belongs to God and His revelation alone.⁷³

It is interesting, and not without some irony, to note that Kant himself acknowledged “that reason only perceives that which it produces after its own design. . . .”⁷⁴ Indeed, autonomous reason can never grasp the transcendent, it will always be limited to its own immanent devisings. On its own, the human mind cannot come to a true knowledge of God. God must reveal Himself; man can accept or reject that revelation.

It is not surprising that the idea of autonomous reason led to dire consequences for the Christian faith: namely, the rejection of the supernatural, and as a consequence the loss of truth on the whole. The “freedom” that man proclaimed in assumed wisdom came back to haunt him in the form of a nihilistic outlook, something that is practiced today more than it is taught.

In the meantime even secular philosophers have had to

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acknowledge that the rule of reason has led to the slavery of immanence. Post-modern man has come a long way since the Enlightenment ideas were propagated. He now lives between the Scylla and Charybdis of scientific reason and the search for ultimate truth, so often expressed by very unreasonable practices like witchcraft and New Age activities.

The only viable alternative for man would be to turn to His Creator who gave him the gift of reason to attain higher and higher knowledge about the ultimate truth by submitting it to the control of God's reason. Man, created in the image of God, can never act like the "original," like God Himself. If he attempts to do so, he will end up like the father of autonomous reason, who was the first one to ask that fateful question: "Has God indeed said. . . ?" (Gen 3:1).

Even before the fall Adam and Eve were totally dependent in their reasoning on the sure Word of God. Of course, they had the liberty to think for themselves and make their minds independent of God, which they eventually did. But all of us still suffer the terrible consequences. The biblical concept of reason is 'faithful reason,' that is, it is full of faith, because it trusts God and obediently follows His revealed Word.

Moreover, the wholistic view of man in Scripture demands that the mind be never separated from the heart and soul, perceived as the center of decision-making. The biblical mandate for total surrender, then, includes the mind. When man is truly born again by the Holy Spirit and becomes a new creature in Christ, how can one part of him or her not respond in the wake of this revolutionary procedure! "Too often we have emphasized only the spiritual and physical aspects and have cut off the intellectual aspects in our theology. We often emphasize 'mental excellence,' but rarely talk about 'mental obedience' to the Word of God."⁷⁵

The biblical understanding of truth and knowledge, as briefly outlined above, should prevent us from thinking that it is only the human mind that enables man to gain knowledge. "Knowing does not

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consist in observing and analyzing the object; it is the result of experience, a walk with someone (Ps 95:10), and implies a personal commitment to the object or the person to be known.”⁷⁶ Thus, wholistic truth can only be gained by the whole person in the conversion process, and because of the new person’s submission to all of the revelation of God in its entirety, the whole man meets the whole Jesus and discovers what can be termed “absolute truth.”

Absolute Truth. The relativistic philosophy, which is so pervasive in today’s society, either denies the existence of absolute truth (that is, truth that surpasses time and space and is therefore universally valid) or seriously questions man’s capability of grasping it. For many the former is dependent on the latter, that is to say, if the human mind cannot know absolute truth, it is essentially nonexistent. Others would still allow for absolute truth somewhere “out there,” but reject the idea that humans are able to know what it is. Increasingly, the plurality of lifestyles, the overwhelming scope of cultural diversity, and the prevalent skepticism towards all truth claims in today’s world are having a significant impact on the theoretical understanding of what truth is, which in turn influences the choices made in practical life.

The biblical view of truth sees it both as a person, namely Jesus Christ (God) Himself (John 14:6), and as the word of God (John 17:17), and it is not surprising that the term *logos*, “word,” is employed as a designation for both of them (see John 1:1-3, 14). “This exceptional characteristic of Christ as the New Testament views it is to be seen in the fact that he does not only have a *relationship* to . . . the *logos* but that he *is* the *logos*, that the truth is incarnated in him and is identical with him.”⁷⁷

God Himself, then, is the embodiment of the truth which is absolutely true and valid for all times and for the whole universe. To deny the existence of that truth would logically amount to atheism or at best to some sort of deism where God is viewed as a remote being without much significance to any creature in the universe. The biblical

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view of God necessarily includes truth as belonging to the divine being, and if God is seen as absolute His truth is absolute, too.

The greater difficulty comes with the issue of epistemology, that is, the possibility for human beings to know this truth of God. In harmony with the relativistic trend in current thinking the idea of “personalistic truth” has been advanced, which holds that “Christianity [e.g.] . . . is not true absolutely, impersonally, statically; rather it can *become* true, if and as you or I appropriate it to ourselves and interiorize it, insofar as we live it out from day to day. It becomes true as we take it off the shelf and personalize it, in actual existence.”⁷⁸ In this sense truth is not truth in and of itself, but it becomes truth when it is “appropriated” in someone’s personal existence. This proposal, which has gained widespread acceptance even in the church, overlooks the fact that a person will only appropriate a truth if he or she accepts that truth as true in a non-personalistic, or propositional, sense. “The key point in all of this is simply that the coherent articulation and affirmation of any belief or view whatsoever presupposes the notion of propositional truth.”⁷⁹

Although belief is and should be more than mere mental assent to propositions, it will always be based on propositional truth.⁸⁰ If that is so, we cannot follow the relativistic notion of personalistic truth. Propositions can be either true or false which necessitates a standard that functions as the measuring rod for all truth claims. Those who cannot accept the Bible as that standard have to resort to other controls for determining what truth is, such as religious experience, proposed by W. Cantwell Smith and also by John Hick, who has become a prominent voice in favor of religious pluralism.⁸¹

The Christian claim to exclusive and absolute truth rests on the claim of divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and in the holy Scriptures, the inspired Word of God. The concept of divine inspiration “commits the believer to the view that these texts are the word of God, they are normative for religious belief, and that what the texts tell us is *true*.”⁸² It has to be acknowledged, of course, that in

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order to arrive at some reasonable and consistent knowledge of the truth on the basis of Scripture, sound hermeneutical guidelines for its interpretation have to be adopted. These should be in harmony with the basic self-claim of the Scriptures as being God's Word. Therefore, theories of interpretation that are based on the principle of doubt and other critical assumptions fall short in this endeavor.⁸³

It should be noted that in Jesus Christ and Scripture, which testifies of Him (John 5:39), man has received a divine revelation that enables him to know truth as it is. Since man is trapped in sinful finality, he will never be able on this earth to come to an exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge of truth. Neither is there any room for an arrogant triumphalism that forgets to recognize humbly that sinful beings are saved by grace.

However, these facts should not lead to the presumption that truth cannot be known at all, or that no absolute and universal truth exists. Through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and His Word it is possible to know the truth and embrace the genuine freedom that it brings, in contrast to the idea of the autonomous freedom of the mind. The immediate context of Jesus' words in John 5 describe this epistemological process:

And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (John 5:37-39, NKJV).

For a knowledge of the truth both the following are essential: (1) a personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ by accepting Him as the incarnated Word of God and as a personal Savior, and (2) a submission to the authority of the inscripturated Word of God in the Bible. Both testify to the absolute truth. Only if, according to Jesus, "His word abides in you" can His truth be known. This wholistic truth

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(Jesus and Scripture) has to be received by wholistic man (body, mind and soul).

However, in humble recognition of his creaturely and sinful limitations man should admit that unless he is willing to be initiated into the truth by the One who is the truth, he cannot grasp it. As Thielicke has aptly put it: “The One who is the truth remains understandably unavailable to those who are not in the truth. I will only be able to understand the One who is the truth if He will first bring me into the truth, or, in epistemological language, if he creates the analogy with Himself. In this respect I am the object of a calling.”⁸⁴ Jesus confirms this when he says to Pilate: “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37, NKJV). Pilate’s famous answer—“What is truth?”—demonstrates Jesus’ point.

The Truth As It Is in Jesus

Ellen G. White has written numerous statements about “Jesus” and about “truth.” In fact, a CD-ROM search reveals that she has used “truth” 53,144 times, and “Jesus” 47,114 times in her writings. In addition, there is her peculiar and highly interesting phrase which constitutes a combination of the two and is employed 793 times: “The truth as it is in Jesus.”⁸⁵ This phrase she especially used to refer to the close ties between faith in Jesus as savior and the process of sanctification. For example, she says: “The truth as it is in Jesus is obedience to every precept of Jehovah. It is heart work. Bible sanctification is not the spurious sanctification which will not search the Scriptures, but will trust to good feeling and impulses rather than to the seeking for truth as for hidden treasure.”⁸⁶

Reconciliation between God and man by the God-man, Jesus Christ, is the key element of our faith. It is crucial, however, that we are aware of the following facts:

1. Atonement takes place outside of us.
2. God is the One who provides it.
3. The salvation process involves:

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86 Ibid.

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a. justification: at conversion, and reaffirmed every time forgiveness through the atoning blood of Christ is granted.

b. sanctification: a new lifestyle, necessarily involving doctrines, for a lifetime.

c. glorification: at the second coming.

4. Jesus Christ is—

a. Savior: He atoned for sin by His sacrifice on Calvary.

b. High priest: He atones by mediating the merits of His own blood.

c. Judge: He brings eternal justice to the restoration of all things.

Only one concept in Scripture contains all these aspects of God's plan of salvation and restoration: the concept of the sanctuary. The sanctuary reveals the "complete" Jesus. Adhering to and proclaiming the truth about the sanctuary, Seventh-day Adventists have a truly "wholistic" theology (apparently they are still the only ones). It is not surprising, then, that Ellen G. White and the pioneers saw the sanctuary parable as presenting the central core of a system of truth.⁸⁷ A brief overview of its main points may suffice.

A Sanctuary in Heaven. The sanctuary was an institution created by God to reveal by means of typical rituals Heaven's steps to solve the sin problem. Moses was instructed to build the earthly sanctuary according to a heavenly reality (Exod 25:9, 40). There are a number of reasons which support an earthly/heavenly sanctuary correspondence. First, there is the term *tabnît* ("pattern"). The semantic range of this word "allows for, or even leans toward, a heavenly original and/or miniature model of a heavenly original."⁸⁸ According to recently discovered Near Eastern thought patterns it is well imaginable that Moses was shown some kind of material structure as a model.⁸⁹

Secondly, there is the causative form of the verbal root *rā'āh*, to see, which suggests that Moses was taken into a state of vision. This is also supported by Numbers 8:4, where the same form, *mar'eh*, is mostly translated by "pattern."⁹⁰ We should also refer to the

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“immediate theophanic, visionary context of this passage,” which “appears to suggest heavenly sanctuary connotations.”⁹¹ Deuteronomy 26:15 confirms this view, where Israel is told to pray: “Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel” (NKJV). When we read Hebrews 8:5, where the writer quotes from Exodus 25:40, we get the clear impression that he saw in the *tabnit* model, the reflection of a heavenly reality (cf. Heb 9:23, 24).

There are a number of insights that the Israelite could have gained from the sanctuary. First, it revealed the loving character of a sovereign, universal God, who condescended to make His dwelling among men. Secondly, it pointed to God’s justice and the nature of sin, which are both defined by the Decalogue that rested in the ark in the Most Holy Place. Thirdly, it showed the terrible nature of sin. It was not possible to have direct access to God, although He was dwelling among man; a priesthood was instituted to mediate between God and man. Finally, the sanctuary rituals demonstrated the divine solution for the restoration of the broken relationship between God and man through sacrifice and mediation.

The Altar and the Cross. In pre-Israelite times (the patriarchal age) we find the “sanctuary principle” in the sacrifices that man brought before God. After the Fall, we see the sacrificial system functioning (Gen 4). The reference to Noah’s flood sacrifice to God subsequent to the Flood contains the first mention of an altar (Gen 8:20). The concept was and is always the same: “Without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22, NKJV). Both, the propitiatory sacrifice and reconciliation, as it was typically administered in the sanctuary service, is essential for salvation.⁹² The cross of Christ, then, has the same function as the altar in the OT, the latter being the type of the former (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).

The “Sympathizing High Priest.” Jesus offers the merits of His own blood in the sanctuary as a means of reconciling repentant sinners to God. According to Hebrews 2:17 the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His being made “like His brethren (NKJV)” was accomplished for

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the purpose of becoming a High Priest and making “propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17, NKJV). He “offered one sacrifice for sins forever” and now sits “at the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12; see also 9:23-28).

Jesus Christ was not only the “lamb” who was slain on Calvary, but He rose and ascended to heaven to become the High Priest, who “sympathize[s] with our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15, NKJV). He has entered the heavenly sanctuary to administer His own blood as an expiation for sinners. Again the sanctuary truth encompasses the complete Jesus.

Atonement and Consummation. The sanctuary also demonstrates how Christ’s priestly ministry is not to be a perpetual event (in a cyclical sense) but is directed towards a definite and final goal in history. The rite that reveals this truth most clearly is the Day of Atonement. On this day the high priest went into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle sacrificial blood upon the mercy seat of the ark above the tables of the law. On coming out he symbolically transferred the confessed sins and accountability of the people upon the head of the goat “for Azazel” which was led away into the wilderness. It is clear that this Day of Atonement was understood as a time of judgment. This is supported by biblical data, such as Leviticus 23:26-32 and Daniel 7 and 8, and also by Jewish tradition.⁹³

It is interesting to note that the fasting and soul-searching, prescribed only on *Yom Kippur*, points to a holy lifestyle. There are also indications that the day was pointing back to creation as well.⁹⁴ At the same time *Yom Kippur* stresses the end of the past and introduces a new future.

All of this is just as true for the antitypical, eschatological Day of Atonement, which according to Daniel 8:14 began in 1844 and is still going on. It reveals Jesus Christ in His fullness: He is the bloody sacrifice, offered on the altar of the cross. He is the High Priest, who applies the merits of His own blood for the expiation of our sins and also acts as the judge who officiates in the cleansing of the sanctuary

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from our sins (Dan 7:22—judgment in favor of the saints). He is the sovereign Creator who has the right to judge the world, but who will also recreate it after the executive phase of the judgment. And while the saints await the outcome of the preadvent phase of this same judgment, they seek to bring their lives into harmony with God's will.

Conclusion

The True Jesus of Scripture. As Christians we are concerned to give Jesus Christ His rightful place in the very center of our faith and teaching. But at times we have been so preoccupied with holding on to the “right doctrine,” we have failed to present Jesus Christ, Who is the author and finisher of our faith. We are not always aware that in our feeble attempts to remedy the situation, we actually “empty” the Jesus of the Scriptures and strip Him of vital aspects of His person and ministry. Especially in the area of modern scholarship Jesus has been “emptied” of His historical authenticity and, thereby, also of His full theological significance, a further result of the former reduction of Jesus.

The true Jesus of the biblical revelation can best be seen—in all the aspects of His person and ministry—in the sanctuary concept. Here the statement that He is the truth Himself becomes a tangible reality in that everything pertaining to truth, as the Bible reveals it to us, is included in the sanctuary service. Jesus Christ as sacrifice, High Priest, and Judge, who is concerned about the fact that our relationship is governed by His immutable law, is the one “complete” Christ.

The Christ of the sanctuary can never be separated from His teachings, and if all the teachings of the Bible find their focal point in the sanctuary as the center of the mystery of God, then the doctrines will inevitably be closely bound up with Jesus Christ and would lose their meaning without him. When we preach Jesus Christ, we have to preach the sanctuary; when we preach the sanctuary, we cannot miss Jesus. Facing the cross we face the sanctuary, and looking at the

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sanctuary we are looking at the cross.

The true Jesus of Scripture is never separated from His doctrine. Both are portrayed as forming together a harmonious whole. Neither legalism (doctrine without Jesus) nor cheap grace (Jesus without doctrine) are viable options available to the believer who grounds his faith in Scripture. Moreover, the unity of Jesus and Scripture is the foundation of the knowledge of truth. Being known by Jesus leads the seeker to search the Word of God for more knowledge, and anyone who is open to the Spirit-led illumination of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures—with the inscripturated Word being the normative standard—will be able to love the truth (2 Thess 2:10) and receive it.

Wholistic Truth vs. Theological Pluralism. Having examined the most potent roots of theological pluralism, and having reflected on what the Bible teaches about truth, we may now draw some conclusions about theological pluralism. It cannot be a viable road for the Christian to travel for several reasons:

1. Its relativistic and nihilistic underpinnings set it in diametrical opposition to the biblical understanding of truth, which is presented as absolute and universal in time and space.

2. Theological pluralism neglects to a large extent the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, Who indeed can lead into all truth, and Who can unite human minds in one understanding of truth.

There will always be differences of opinion on certain matters of faith and practice. It takes the community of faith and a humble spirit to work on these differences, and to be enriched by the process. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to rate these differences as theological pluralism, unless (a) they are of a crucial nature, that is, they question basic doctrines of the Bible and interpretations the church has arrived at after careful and Spirit-led study, and (b) they are held as equally valid views.

3. Theological pluralism does not honor the authority of Scripture as the final arbiter of all doctrine. By adherence to methods that are based on secular philosophies, such as the sociology of

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religion, historical criticism, and revisionism, it discourages the use of the principles of the clarity of Scripture and of *Scriptura Sui Ipsius Interpres* (Scripture interprets itself). Pluralism “argues” that any interpretation, and, consequently, any doctrine, is to a large extent the product of the human mind which is shaped by temporal influences. Neither the incarnational model of inspiration nor the overruling guidance of the Holy Spirit in the discovery of doctrine is accounted for.

4. Theological pluralism deprives any given community of faith the ability or willingness to differentiate between orthodoxy and heresy. A pluralistic philosophy forbids categorization into right and wrong and is flexible concerning any truth claims. This way Schisms may be averted for some time, but only at the higher price of diminished identity and slackened mission efforts.

In a recent article in *Christianity Today* an author aptly summarizes the biblical understanding of truth: “He [Jesus] came saying: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ The truth is a Person, personal. This truth is not sheer subjectivity, either, for the truth of Jesus is utterly inseparable from Him—His life, death, and resurrection. We Christians really would have no idea what spiritual truth is if it were not for our being met and called by Jesus.”⁹⁵ Sometimes we are so busy trying to explain what truth is, trying to define and defend it, that we miss the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should heed the following advice:

There is a sense in which we cannot know the truth without first being made truthful. Our problem with the gospel is moral before it is intellectual. We will use anything—even intellectual discussions about the truth—in a last-ditch attempt to keep Christ from us. So knowing the truth is a matter of being transformed, forgiven, born again before we can acknowledge the lies upon which our lives are based, before we can entrust our lives to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. As Jesus says . . . ‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth’ (John 16:13). He will guide us. Truth, Christian truth, is not an achievement of clear thinking. It is a gift. Grace.⁹⁶

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Endnotes

1 This study is an abridged and edited version of an earlier paper entitled "Wholistic Truth vs. Theological Pluralism" which was presented to the Midwest Chapter of the Adventist Theological Society on the campus of Andrews University, January 20, 1996. The full version is forthcoming in a separate publication.

2 William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), p. 95.

3 Jonathan M. Butler, "Introduction: The Historian as Heretic," in *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the origins of Seventh-day Adventist health reform* by Ronald L. Numbers (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), lv.

4 William C. Placher, "Why Bother with Theology?," *Christian Century* 111/4 (1994): 104.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

6 I recommend the assessment of Philip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), p. 112: "When I describe postmodernism or deconstruction or radical feminism to nonuniversity groups, many listeners are tempted to make the mistake of disregarding the whole business as harmless academic claptrap. Ways of thinking that seem very strange at first, however, may have their roots in more fundamental ideas that are widely accepted in the general culture. People often do not understand the full implications of what they have been taught to believe. Claptrap or not, *ideas have consequences*. What is fashionable in the secular academic culture soon becomes fashionable in the media, and even in Christian colleges and seminaries, which tend to follow trends in the mainstream academic world" (emphasis mine).

7 Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission in einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft," in *Ökumenische Theologie in den Herausforderungen der Gegenwart: Lukas Vischer zum*, p. 65. *Geburtstag*, ed. Karin Bredull Gerschwiler et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), p. 67. For most of the thoughts in the next few paragraphs I am indebted to Newbigin's excellent assessment of the situation on pp. 67-71, which I try to summarize here, although I do not necessarily agree with all of his conclusions towards the end of his article.

8 The great rationalist French philosopher in the 17th century, whose famous axiom: *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') on the basis of the principle of doubt led him to set up the individual consciousness as the final criterion of truth.

9 Newbigin, p. 68: "Free research without restrictions by any dogma, this is

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the usual way to find truth. If there is any divine revelation at all, it must first introduce the evidence of its own validity and present it before the judgment seat of free scientific research" (translation mine).

10 William H. Willimon, "Jesus' Peculiar Truth: Modern Apologists for Objective Truth Are Making a Tactical Error," *Christianity Today*, March 4, 1996, p. 21.

11 This perfectly explains the otherwise inexplicable fierce reaction of persons with a pluralistic mindset when they are confronted with the notion of absolute truth. What it really boils down to is the old struggle of the human ego for supremacy.

12 See Hendrik M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives*, trans. J. W. Rebel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989; Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1989), p. 23.

13 For helpful discussions of the various theories see Peter Vardy, *The Puzzle of God* (London: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 15-23; Vroom, pp. 30-42. More comprehensive treatments can be found in Helmut Pfeiffer, *Offenbarung und Offenbarungswahrheit: Eine Untersuchung zur Verhältnisbestimmung von personal-dialogischer Offenbarung Gottes und objektiver Satzwahrheit* (Trier: Paulinus, 1982), pp. 21-84; Frederick F. Schmitt, *Truth: A Primer* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 77-199.

14 See note 12.

15 With Schmitt, Vardy, and others I opt for the correspondence theory as the most viable one.

16 David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 59. See also Carsten Johnsen, *The Mystic "Omega" of End-Time Crisis* (Sisteron, France: Untold Story Publishers, n.d.) for a forceful argument in favor of realism.

17 Partially against Wolfe, p. 59.

18 Vroom, pp. 238-240. It should be kept in mind, however, that Augustine tended to give Platonic philosophy a Christian baptism, which should make one wary of the way he reaches his conclusions. But he was right that in Christ are combined the nature of truth and the way to come to a knowledge of it.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

20 Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), p. 140.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145. He adds: "The whole process of curiosity, questioning, and discovery can be a journey, full of wonder and praise, into the mind of God, who created everything. Whatever can be studied, whether human nature or the physical universe, is what it is because God willed it and made it. To uncover the

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hidden laws that govern matter, to disclose the patterns of subatomic particles, to discover how human beings grow and interact, to discern an underlying pattern in history or in astronomy—all of these amount to nothing less than discovering God's will. Just as God is inexhaustible, knowledge is inexhaustible. Our curiosity and understanding can never be fully satisfied in our earthly lives. As thirst is evidence for water, our yearning for knowledge points to Heaven, in which all desires will be fully satisfied. . . (1 Corinthians 13:12)"(145).

22 Frank M. Hasel, "Theology and the Role of Reason," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (1993):184.

23 Taken from Gustav Mensching, *Tolerance and Truth in Religion*, trans. H.-J. Klimkeit (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1971), p. 19.

24 Mensching, pp. 19-20, has this insightful comment: "Every one of the blind men really does have contact with a part of the true elephant. Transposed into religious terms, the implication is that different religious views are all based on true contact with the sacred. The concrete expressions referring to the object of contact are figurative statements, in the sense of the blind men's claim when they say the elephant is *like* this or that worldly phenomenon. The error and the reason for engaging in strife is the fact that every one of these blind men holds his partial insight to be universally valid. Yet, in fact, none of their perceptions does full justice to the complete nature of the real object. *The same applies to the realm of religion: no one statement can fully encompass and express the whole truth,*"(emphasis of last sentence supplied).

25 Katherine Ching, "The Practice of Theological Pluralism," *Adventist Perspectives* 5/1 (1991): 6.

26 Bernard Ramm, "The Fortunes of Theology from Schleiermacher to Barth and Bultmann," in *Tensions in Contemporary Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), p. 17.

27 Richard G. Hutchinson, Jr., *Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals: A Challenging Crisis?* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981), p. 21.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

29 George W. Forell writes in his book *The Proclamation of the Gospel in a Pluralistic World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), p. 131: "The concept of particularity is fundamental to the self-understanding of the Christian community. From the very beginning Christians saw themselves as significantly different in their faith from those who were not Christians."

30 *Ibid.*, p. 134: "The Christian faith was not only unique, definable, and true but should if at all possible be enforced everywhere."

31 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 134.

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32 Mark Horst, "The Problem with Theological Pluralism." *The Christian Century* 103 (1986): 971. He goes on: "Presumably, there would be no doctrine unless you and I had been strangely warmed by an epiphany of the numinous. Doctrines are like poetry for the lover in the aftermath of passion: pleasant, but essentially derivative. . . . It follows that each individual theological expression should be respected and even affirmed by the church."

33 Ching, p. 8.

34 D. A. Carson, "Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism," in *God and Culture: essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 33.

35 Schmitt, pp. 68-71.

36 Ibid., p. 71.

37 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Geneva: Eerdmans/WCC Publications, 1989), p. 22.

38 Vernon Grounds, "The Truth about Truth," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38/2 (1995): 223.

39 One of Nietzsche's famous statements was: "There are many eyes. Thus there are many truths. Hence there is no truth." Quoted in Peter C. Moore, *Disarming the Secular Gods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), p. 98.

40 Grounds, pp. 224-227; p. 224: "And one of Nietzsche's aphorisms says it all: 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted'." On p. 225 he also quotes Roger Lundin, describing his experience at a summer seminar. It is well worth reproducing: "Metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics were declared dead topics, and philosophy and literature were seen to be nothing more nor less than conversations to be carried on within the rotting corpse of Western belief. Many of my colleagues in the seminar and almost all the books I was reading were urging me to abandon the ideal of truth, to laugh at the dream of hope, and to cease any search for meaning. To paraphrase a few of my summer colleagues: the bad news is that there is no good news, and the good news is, surprisingly, that there never has been any good news. So we are liberated by knowing that we have no right to lament the loss of something we never had. We need not be saved, because we are not lost" (R. Lundin, "Deconstructive Therapy," *Reformed Journal* 36/1 [January 1986], p. 15).

41 Grounds, p. 192.

42 Leith Anderson, *A Church for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), 20, quoted in Veith, p. 211.

43 As heard and noted by the author in a course taught by Peter Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary in July of 1993.

44 See Frank M. Hasel, p. 195, n. 44, where he rightly warns: ". . . if

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Adventist hermeneutic starts out pluralistic, as some are suggesting it should, the church cannot arrive at a unified understanding of truth.”

45 Bernard Ramm, “The Labyrinth of Contemporary Theology,” *Christianity Today* 16 July 1965:6, 7.

46 See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), pp. 73-78. For an informative explanation and evaluation of Troeltsch’s principles by a critical scholar see Van Austin Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 14-19.

47 The scope of this study does not allow for a detailed treatment of these methods. The reader is referred to the relevant literature, e.g. Hasel, *ibid.*; Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

48 Gerhard F. Hasel, p. 77. For an informative study of and convincing argument for the proper role of reason in theology and the priority and authority of Scripture see Frank M. Hasel, pp. 172-198.

49 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 5:700 (emphasis supplied).

50 See, e.g., George R. Knight, “Adventists and Change,” *Ministry* (October 1993), p. 14.

51 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 2:693.

52 Ellen G. White, “Labors in the Piedmont Valleys,” *Review and Herald*, June 29, 1886, p. 9.

In this article the author is deploring the barriers to new knowledge that the descendants of the Waldenses had built up against the Advent message, and she uses the illustration of Noah’s day to express hope that people who hear the present truth given to the last generation will not suffer the same fate as those who closed their ears and hearts to Noah’s message. By no means is she indicating that there should be openness to another present truth which will succeed the one that was preached in her day.

53 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1986) 1:161: “When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time God has given us as a foundation for our faith. One will arise, and still another, with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit.” She then affirms so as to leave not even a shadow of a doubt as to what her position is: “We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. . . . And while the Scriptures are God’s word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God

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has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake. He who makes such an application knows not the wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit that gave power and force to the past messages that have come to the people of God.”

54 Ibid., pp. 161-162 (emphasis supplied); see also idem, *Testimonies*, 4:445: “There is no fault with the theory of the truth; it is perfectly clear and harmonious. But young ministers may speak the truth fluently, and yet have no real sense of the words they utter. They do not appreciate the value of the truth they present, and little realize what it has cost those, who, with prayers and tears, through trial and opposition, have sought for it as for hid treasures. Every new link in the chain of truth was to them as precious as tried gold.”

55 J. Stephen Lang, “Is Ignorance Bliss?” *Moody*, January/February 1996, 13 (emphasis his). Placher, 104, concurs: “Theology has a bad reputation in most Christian churches these days—it’s regarded as obscure, hard to understand, irrelevant, a bit of a joke. Congregations want pastors or priests who are good counselors, good administrators, good preachers. . .”

56 Kenneth Taylor as quoted in Lang, p. 15.

57 Joseph M. Stowell, “Dealing With the ‘D-Word,’” *Moody*, January/February 1996, p. 6.

58 For persuasive arguments for the crucial importance of doctrine see Alister McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine: What It Is—and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), esp. chapter 8: “Is Christianity Possible Without Doctrine?”

59 H.-D. Reimer, a Protestant scholar in Germany, who for many years headed the *Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* (Protestant center for questions on worldviews), best comparable to what Walter Martin was for Protestantism in North America, stated a number of years ago: “A large number of denominations, especially in the Protestant field, are Bible-based: They emphasize in a trustworthy manner that they have no other foundation for their beliefs, no other additional sacred writings, no official entities with final authority other than scripture alone. In our area the Adventists belong to this category in a classical fashion.” (“Die Frage nach den Glaubensgrundlagen,” *Materialdienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* 5 (1991): 154-155, translation mine.)

60 See A. Jepsen, “*aman*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, transl. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) I:292-323.

61 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, ed. Rudolf Meyer and Herbert Donner, 18th edition, vol. 1 (Berlin: Springer, 1987), p. 78, translates *emet* with “permanence” (*Beständigkeit*), “assurance” and “certainty” (*Sicherheit, Gewißheit*)

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before “truth,” which receives third place. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 68-69, translates the same term with 1. firmness, trustworthiness, 2. constancy, duration, 3. faithfulness, and 4. truth. See also Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Truth Will Make You Free*, trans. Rodelinde Albrecht (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 13.

62 Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, transl. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962-65) I:171, as quoted in Jepsen, p. 298.

63 See, for example, Gen 4:1: “Now Adam knew [y^d] Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain . . .” See also Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), p. 193.

64 Although Pfeiffer’s *caveat*, on pp. 97-98, against a rash and too simple equation of *’emet* and *’emunah* in all cases needs to be considered, it should not distract from the fact that the two terms are derived from the same root and are obviously strongly interrelated. James Barr’s warning against the oversimplified use of etymological analysis should be heeded but not overrated.

65 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 35, 41.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

67 Pfeiffer, p. 110 (translation mine).

68 Some manuscripts have the Greek word “testimony” instead of “mystery.” No consensus has been found among scholars as to which reading should be preferred, although “mystery” finds “acceptance by an increasing number of scholars” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 91, who himself argues for the opposite.) See also Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zurich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), I:226-227.

69 Helmut Thielicke, “Wahrheit und Verstehen,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 62 (1965): 120 (emphasis his; translation mine).

70 See I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 203, 205.

71 See Carsten Johnsen, *The Mystic “Omega” of End-Time Crisis* (Sisteron, France: The Untold Story Publishers, n.d.), pp. 41-44; C. FitzSimmons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994), p. 164, comments insightfully: “A heart without rectitude will betray orthodoxy by tone and spirit

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even if it is correct teaching. The heart's temptation to escape the ambiguities and problems of life and to establish its own self as center always contributes to any distortion of the gospel. The heart itself must bow in continual worship before God, whose name is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be saved from its escape into death and from its prison of self-centeredness."

72 For this section I am indebted to Frank Hasel's helpful treatment of the subject in his aforementioned article "Theology and the Role of Reason."

73 Frank Hasel, p. 175, summarizing Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" transl. and ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1959).

74 As quoted by Frank Hasel, p. 176.

75 Frank Hasel, p. 190.

76 Doukhan, pp. 193-194.

77 Thielicke, p. 120.

78 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth* (London: V. Gallanz, 1967), p. 68, as quoted in Harold Netland, "Religious Pluralism and Truth," *Trinity Journal* 6 NS (1985): 77.

79 Netland, p. 81.

80 Ibid, p. 78: "Truth is held to be a property of propositions such that a proposition is true if and only if the state of affairs to which it refers obtains; otherwise it is false."

81 See, e.g., John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); idem, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); idem, "Religious Faith as Experiencing-As," in *Talk of God*, ed. G. N. A. Vesey (New York: Macmillan, 1969); M. Goulder and J. Hick, *Why Believe in God?* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

82 Terry O'Keeffe, "Religion and Pluralism," in *Philosophy and Pluralism*, ed. David Archard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 65.

83 For a detailed treatment of proper hermeneutical guidelines see Richard M. Davidson's presentation on hermeneutics in this publication.

84 Thielicke, p. 121.

85 See, for example, E. G. White, "The Truth Revealed in Jesus," *Review and Herald*, February 8, 1898, pp. 85-86.

86 Ibid.

87 See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publ. Assoc., 1950), 423; Paul A. Gordon, *The Sanctuary, 1844, and the Pioneers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publ. Assoc., 1983), pp. 20-22; James White, "The Sanctuary and 2300 Days," *Review and Herald*, March 17, 1853, p. 172; R. F. Cottrell, "The Sanctuary," *Review and Herald*, December 15, 1863, p.

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21; J. N. Andrews, "The Sanctuary," *Review and Herald*, June 18, 1867, p. 12; U. Smith, "The Great Central Subject," *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1881, p. 328.

88 Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 4: 163.

89 See the statements of A. Goppelt and Frank Cross, Jr., as quoted in Frank B. Holbrook, "The Israelite Sanctuary," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and Richard W. Leshar (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 5. See also Davidson, "Typology . . .," pp. 164-165.

90 Holbrook, p. 4.

91 Davidson, "Typology . . .," p. 163.

92 For an excellent discussion of the various terms used for the process of atonement in the Bible see John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 169-203.

93 See Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), pp. 60-64.

94 Ibid.

95 William H. Willimon, p. 22.

96 Ibid.