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During the last part of the 20th century, American Evangelicalism experienced rapid changes in worship and ministerial styles in a desperate effort to reach an increasingly secularized culture. On the surface, the Emerging Church movement appears to be a new passing fad in youth ministry. Parallel to these seemingly superficial changes in ministerial style, however, the old liberal/conservative controversy was simmering across denominational lines, creating conflicts at ministerial and grassroots levels. The inerrancy of Scripture and the apologetic efforts of previous Evangelical generations were not enough to produce an Evangelical unity within denominations.

With the passing of time, an increasing number of Evangelical leaders began to realize “that this conflict was not your average, everyday schism, but a paradigm shift of seismic proportions.”¹ This conviction led Emergent leaders to re-examine critically their denominations’ “assumptions of what it means to be church. Some suggest that this ‘Great Emergence’ is part of a cyclical pattern of upheavals in the church, on a par with the ‘Great Schism’ or the ‘Great Reformation.’”²

For many observers, something epochal is underway. Phyllis Tickle has suggested that Brian McLaren is the new Luther and his book *A Generous Orthodoxy* is the equivalent to Luther’s 95 theses.³ According to Tickle’s socio-historical interpretation, a new form of Christianity is being born and will be added to the old forms.

This seems to suggest that the Emerging Church movement may be unleashing deep paradigmatic changes

not only in American Evangelicalism but also in Protestantism and Christianity as a whole. Something inside and outside Christianity must be at work, making such a change desirable and even necessary.

Dissatisfaction

Growing discontent seems to have been brewing within the broad Evangelical coalition for a long time. Causes of dissatisfaction are many and as varied as Evangelicalism. Some are dissatisfied with the way ministers and the churches conduct their everyday business. Others feel frustrated when they see churches playing an institutional game voided of spiritual meaning. Many, probably overstating their case, believe “modern” Evangelical churches are dead.

But dissatisfaction runs even deeper. Numerous believers experience a growing confusion about Christian doctrines as presented by the fragmented views of the Evangelical community. “On the front end of analysis one could argue that the ECM [Emerging Church Movement] is merely reacting to a perception of dead religiosity, hoping to breathe life into the body of Christ. But a closer analysis shows that its reaction to established ministry and typical church life (what some of them call the ‘modern church’) involve deep theological issues and metaphysical challenges. Its response entails systemic issues much more than mere aesthetic preferences.”⁴

According to Emerging Church leaders, this crisis can be traced to Evangelical responses to modern philosophy. Not without reason they blame the rise of the liberal/conservative controversy that divides Evangelicals on the Fundamentalist response to modernity. Liberals responded to modernity by constructing their theological project “upon the foundation of an unassailable religious experience while conservatives look to an error-free Bible as the incontrovertible foundation.”⁵

This suggests that both Evangelical and Emerging Church leaders fail to realize that at a deeper level, the crisis they confront stems from the underdevelopment and limitations of Protestant thought and the failure to produce an alternate synthesis of Christian theology and practice based on Scripture alone. The very existence of the “Evangelical coalition” flows from and witnesses to this fact. “American religion,” says Phyllis Tickle, “had never had a center before, primarily because it was basically Protestant in its Christianity; and Protestantism, with its hallmark characteristic of divisiveness, has never had a center.”⁶

What Protestant leadership was unable to produce, laity sought to find on their own around the so-called water-cooler conversations during the 1980s. Tickle argues that out of these informal conversations taking place in the context of cultural epochal change, a center was emerging. “But what was emerging was no longer Protestant. It was no longer any ‘thing,’ actually. It was simply itself, a *mélange* of ‘things’ cherry-picked from each quadrant and put together—some would say cobbled together—without any original intention and certainly with no design beyond that of conversation.”⁷ In the process, dissatisfaction with the *inherited church* grew strong. For many, the “inherited church was that from which they had come and to which they, literally, now had no means of returning, let alone any desire at all to do so.”⁸

Not surprisingly, by the end of the 20th century, the Evangelical coalition was no longer able to contain the deep theological, ecumenical, and cultural divisions present in both the leadership and laity of American Protestantism. “Evangelical leaders became highly concerned about the future of the evangelical movement. Evangelicals began to look for clarity and unity of focus in the midst of what appeared to be an unwieldy diversity. Questions such as ‘What is evangelicalism?’ ‘Where is its center?’ and ‘Where are we going?’ began to emerge.”⁹

The inner spiritual, theological, and hermeneutical crisis brewing in Evangelicalism during the past two centuries can explain the need and even possibility for epochal change yet, by itself, it cannot explain its generation. Something more was needed to generate an epochal mutation in Evangelical Christianity. Arguably the advent of postmodernity provided the trigger to the rise of the Emerging Church.

Postmodernity

Prior to the growing spiritual and theological dissatisfaction in the Evangelical movement in the last two

decades of the 20th century, Postmodernism was effecting epochal changes at the very core and foundations of Western civilization. Like the “Emerging Church” label, the “postmodern” label is also an umbrella designation, involving various issues and levels. For this reason, Emerging Church leaders share a growing sense that the world as we knew it is changing, and they also understand postmodernity in various ways.

Evaluation of the Emerging Church movement raises the need to “identify and understand the underlying ideas and assumptions of what has come to be called the ‘modern’ worldview, which has dominated Western culture for the past few hundred years.”¹⁰ It is also important to become familiar with “the postmodern ideas, which have become dominant in the early twenty-first century.”¹¹ And two main levels are involved in the epochal changes that Emerging Church leaders identify as postmodernity: cultural and philosophical.

Sociologically, postmodernity names the cultural mores of Western civilization at the turn of the 21st century. For instance, the term *postmodern*, according to Leonard Sweet, denotes “a 40-year transition from an Information Age to a Bionomic Age that will begin no later than 2020.”¹² Although he likens the force these cultural events unleash to a tsunami, like a tsunami, they are of short duration and will be replaced by others in the future.

Stanley Grenz identifies informatics (Computer Age), centerlessness, pluralism, multivalence, impurity, juxtaposition, eclecticism, the refusal to place “high” art above “pop” art, and, belief in the supernatural and extra-terrestrials as some of the characteristic traits of postmodern culture.¹³ These values are embraced, embodied, and disseminated through television, the Internet, and rock music. At the sociological level, then, Postmodernism describes Western society at the turn of the 21st century.

Philosophically, Postmodernism names changes in the area of epistemology. Epistemology is the philosophical discipline that studies the way human beings know what they know, especially in the field of scientific research. These changes that were a long time in the making involve the demise of Foundationalism and the impossibility that human beings could experience “objective” and “universal” knowledge. Thus, postmodernists think that “the world is not simply an objective given that is ‘out there,’ waiting to be discovered and known; reality is relative, indeterminate, and participatory.”¹⁴ Consequently, postmodernists “contend that the work of scientists, like that of any other human beings, is historically and culturally conditioned and that our knowledge is always incomplete.”¹⁵

Clearly, this conviction leaves Postmodernism without a foundation for universal knowledge, that is, a knowledge that is valid and true for all human beings. To avoid the total fragmentation of society, postmodernists resort to the “community” or “society” as the basis (foundation) for rational agreement and the definition of values. Of course, by definition, society changes, and so will reason and values. Consequently, to achieve some stability, communities need to stand on their own respective traditions. In this way, “regional” truth replaces “universal” truth. Philosophically, then, *Postmodernism* names the switch from objective and universal reason to a communitarian and traditional reason.

But postmodernity involves an even more radical change at the metaphysical level few Emerging Church leaders have considered. Metaphysics is the philosophical discipline that interprets the nature of reality as a whole. As such it includes general and regional interpretations on the nature of existence, the former dealing with the general characteristics of any and all things real, and the latter with the general characteristics of specific entities, notably, God, humans, and the world. Finally, metaphysics also includes the interpretation of the interrelation among all things real (the system of reality as a whole).

Metaphysics provides the necessary context for understanding anything and everything. As a matter of fact, philosophical, theological, and natural sciences always assume a general interpretation of the nature of the reality or realities they interpret. More specifically, metaphysics provides the ground for theological and biblical hermeneutics. A minor change in metaphysical concepts may generate broad hermeneutical changes that will reverberate across the sciences and the culture they generate.

The rethinking of metaphysics came to full expression and articulation in the work of Martin Heidegger, one of the leading postmodern philosophers. Heidegger confirmed and further articulated Nietzsche’s “overturning of Platonism,” which has been the ruling metaphysical view since the beginnings of Western civilization. Heidegger calls this the “destruction” and “overcoming” of metaphysics.¹⁶ The “destruction” of metaphysics means the criticism

and abandonment of the traditional approach to philosophy and theology, and the “overcoming” means a new interpretation of metaphysics that Heidegger advanced throughout his many works.

To put it briefly, the new metaphysics of postmodernity abandons the notion that real or ultimate reality is timeless and replaces it with the view that real or ultimate reality is temporal and historical. Heidegger understood the magnitude of the changes involved in his metaphysical investigation into the history and nature of metaphysics and expressed it in a series of poignant rhetorical questions. “Do we stand in the very twilight of the most monstrous transformation our planet has ever undergone, the twilight of that epoch in which earth itself hangs suspended? Do we confront the evening of a night which heralds another day? Are we ‘precursors of the day of an altogether different age’?”¹⁷

Even though postmodernity brought about epochal changes in the areas of culture, epistemology, and metaphysics, Emerging Church leaders and their Evangelical critics have been able so far to relate only to the cultural and epistemological levels, seemingly impervious to the deep metaphysical change postmodernity has brought about.

Embracing Postmodernity?

Christians have always experienced the gospel within their diverse and always changing cultural, philosophical, and scientific settings. Why, then, have Evangelicals changed their relation to culture from rejection to embrace? Why are Emerging Church leaders more positive about cultural trends, philosophical doctrines, and scientific views than their predecessors? Why do Emerging Church leaders embrace postmodern culture as part of their Christian experience?

At the practical level, Emerging Church leaders embrace postmodern culture to shape the forms of liturgy and attract believers to the worship services. An obvious internal motivation for the “turn to culture” is the low attendance at church services. According to Philip Clayton, “Mainline churches are simply not attracting significant proportions of the younger population in America and there are no signs that this pattern is about to change. If for some reason all the persons in mainline churches today who are over the age of sixty-five were to disappear, *two thirds* of current church attendees would be gone.”¹⁸ This indicates that the secularization of Western culture that emptied churches in Europe during the 20th century has finally arrived in America. The pragmatic motivation to fill the churches, however, may be the trigger but not the ground for the Emerging Church’s turn to culture.

The primary reason for the Emerging Church’s embrace of postmodern culture is the emergence of charismatic belief and practice in Protestantism during the second half of the 20th century. A term has been coined for this process: “Charismatization.” It is used to speak of the “Pentecostalization” of Christian worship during the second part of the 20th century. Pentecostalism adapted to culture with ease. Attracting large numbers to worship services, it became a model for Evangelicals and Catholics alike who eventually adopted and followed the Pentecostal liturgical model, producing a Charismatic renewal. Not surprisingly, Charismatism has led mainline churches to adopt “new and informal worship styles, an explosion in ‘worship songs,’ a new concern for the dynamics of worship, and an increasing dislike of the traditionalism of formal liturgical worship.”¹⁹

The central claim of Pentecostalism is that “it is possible to encounter God directly and personally through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is to be known immediately and directly, not indirectly through study of a text.”²⁰ The direct communication of the transcendent God facilitates cultural accommodation because at best it neglects and at worst rejects the principle of divine incarnation in the cultural forms of the words and the human body of Jesus Christ. When the cultural forms of divine revelation presented in Scripture are neglected or rejected, cultural accommodation not only ceases to be a problem and becomes an essential part of Christian experience.

Charismatism stands on the conviction that God relates to humans outside the realm of history and culture. Consequently, culture does not belong to the worship encounter with God but to the doxological and liturgical expressions it generates. This explains why the Emerging Church movement welcomes all cultural forms of liturgical expression as acceptable forms of Christian worship. Its openness to postmodern culture does not flow from the

specific characteristics of postmodern culture but from the Charismatic openness to human culture.

Readers familiar with modern theology cannot miss the basic coincidence between the Pentecostal conception of worship as encounter and Schleiermacher's theological interpretation of Christian experience. This coincidence is the reason that Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Emerging Christians share the same pluralistic/eclectic approach to biblical interpretation, liturgy, and spirituality; hence, the great resonance that the Emerging Church movement has achieved in a very short time.

A possible reason that Emerging Church leaders embrace postmodern relativism may be that this help to justify their rejection of modernity and dismissal of biblical inerrancy and doctrinal authority. Simultaneously, postmodern relativism helps Emergents to justify the existence of theological disagreements and doctrinal pluralism. In a way, the relativistic version of postmodernity helps to account for the fragmentation of Protestantism through the centuries. It also shows that Evangelical pluralism and eclecticism were unavoidable. Seen in this light, the Emerging Church may be the best expression of the Evangelical experience.

Yet Emerging Church leaders may be inclined to reject the postmodern view of the nature of existence because it challenges tradition. To accept this view implies not only that the metaphysical assumptions of Christian tradition are wrong but also that we should replace them with new ones. To do so unavoidably questions the reliability of tradition and the nature of the Charismatic experience of God as trustworthy foundations for Christian theology and worship.

Additionally, the limited capabilities of postmodern reason seem to indicate that a universal metaphysics might be unreachable. As Emerging Church leaders, together with their Roman Catholic and Evangelical colleagues, build on the "Grand Tradition," they implicitly assume the classical metaphysical framework embraced by the church fathers. This fact may help to understand their failure to accept the postmodern idea of the nature of existence.

Methodological Change

Changes in method produce modifications in the way we do things. Changes in the nature of knowledge alter the way in which we understand the origin and nature of the sources on which we base our beliefs. Changes in the nature of existence affect our understanding of the basic ideas we assume to understand the sources of our beliefs. Consequently, in Christian theology, changes in method affect ministry, mission, and liturgy. Changes in the nature of knowledge impact mainly the area of doctrines. Changes in the nature of existence touch mainly the area of understanding and meaning.

For Emerging Church leaders, change in ministerial and liturgical methodology centers on "recovering the gospel from the clutches of a consumer culture" by using postmodern deconstructionist methodologies.²¹ At this level, changes in the church take place in the areas of ministry, liturgy, and mission. In these activities, Emerging Church leaders want to distance themselves and overcome the practices of the traditional and pragmatic evangelicals of the 20th century. This level closely relates to the cultural level of postmodern change described above.

The equivalent rubrics "Vintage Christianity" and "Ancient-Future" capture the essence of the methodological level of change in the Emerging Church movement. These terms name the method by which Emerging leaders face the future with the resources of ancient church traditions. In this sense the Emerging Church movement is conservative even while embracing methodological change. Its application brings the past into the future by "drawing on the wisdom of the ages for the current work of the kingdom."²² Emerging church leaders and even some Evangelical leaders believe postmodern times require them to make deep changes in the method of ministry especially in relation to spirituality and discipleship.

Although one may assume that changes at the methodological level are disconnected with theology and doctrine, Robert Webber's summary of the main components involved in the Emerging Church movement reminds us that such disconnection is impossible. According to him, the main components of Emerging Church change at the methodological level are: (1) a missiological understanding of the church, (2) spiritual formation, (3) cultural awareness, and, (4) theological reflection. By explaining that these components are interdependent and mutually condition one another, Webber makes clear that any attempt to isolate the methodological level from theological

reflection naively ignores reality. He correctly links methodological change with theological change. On the one hand, then, the actual content that new methodological views on ministry and liturgy may bring into the church is directly conditioned by the theological ideas that pastors assume. On the other hand, to make methodological changes at the ministerial and liturgical levels without simultaneously making changes at the doctrinal-theological level is impossible.

Emerging Church writers assume theology to be “a communal reflection on God’s mission that arises out of God’s people as they seek to discern God’s work in history and his present actions in the life of the community.”²³ According to them, it is not the Bible but the deep past of Christian tradition that should open the future of Evangelical Christianity.

Additionally, because “the practice of ministry is already theology—theology in action,”²⁴ Emerging leaders are able to articulate the inner link between classical and modern theological traditions, on one side, and the experiential nature of Charismatic Christianity on the other. They see this combination to be pregnant with possibilities and ecumenical promise.

Theological Change

The theological and doctrinal level of change in the Emerging Church centers on the role of Scripture in the understanding of Christian belief and practice. At this level changes take place mainly as reinterpretation of the role of Scripture and the teachings of the church. In this area, Emerging Church leaders want to distance themselves from the theological approach of American Evangelicalism during the past two centuries based on the inerrancy of Scripture advanced by the Old Princetonian theologians. This level is deeper than the methodological one and consequently produces a more significant mutation in the Evangelical community.

A notable characteristic of the Emerging Church often missed by both their Evangelical detractors and emulators is the focus on theological reflection at the grassroots level. An increasingly educated and sophisticated society wants to know what they believe. They want to know the basis on which pastors teach them what is truth.

Emergent leaders are getting the message and responding to the challenge. Most of them, however, are working at great disadvantage because their Evangelical denominations have not prepared them for such a task, neither spiritually nor theologically. Besides, many have experienced Christianity as part of their own denominational culture rather than from serious theological and philosophical reflection on biblical teachings. Doctrines are part of their cultural and religious “inheritance” but not of their thinking and spiritual patterns.

As Emerging Church leaders attempt to explain their beliefs to others, they discover the obvious inconsistencies of their own biblical and doctrinal understandings, as well as the theological divisions existing within the Evangelical community. Moreover, they realize the need to link doctrines, biblical understanding, and experience into a unified net or system of meaning and experience. In their personal and ministerial search for theological meaning they are not prepared to accept without question or explanation dogmatic answers from their mentors or denominations. Instead, they are learning for the first time the exhilarating feeling theological discoveries bring to themselves and the community.

Not surprisingly, at times their theological writings resemble a diary of their theological pilgrimage. Brian McLaren’s writings give testimony to this “testimonial” or “conversational” method of doing theology. Such a procedure is more than a way to communicate truth. It is a path leading to the discovery of truths other Christians before them had embraced. Through this conversational methodology, Emerging Church leaders are reaching conclusions on doctrinal issues like the atonement, justification by faith, the kingdom of God, and hell that their Evangelical peers regard as heretical and therefore unacceptable.

Doctrinal change in the Emerging Church movement, however, goes deeper than mere doctrinal divergence. It involves a paradigmatic shift in the role Scripture plays in the construction of Christian teachings. Phyllis Tickle correctly estimates that at the center of all paradigmatic shifts lies the perennial question of authority. In the Protestant Reformation, authority shifted from the Pope to the *sola Scriptura* principle. But Scripture required interpretation that led to denominational and theological fragmentation. And theological fragmentation eventually generated theological and spiritual dissatisfaction.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, a number of interrelated factors contributed to a progressive questioning of the viability of the *sola Scriptura* principle among Evangelicals. They caused many of the most diehard Protestants to grow suspicious of the Scripture-and-Scripture-only principle. Besides, in an ecumenical age, Evangelicals are weary of the perennial theological fragmentation of Protestantism and are becoming convinced that Christianity cannot stand on Scripture alone.

An important factor accelerating the shift from the Protestant *sola Scriptura* as principle of authority to the Roman Catholic spiritual experience guided by tradition principle advanced by the Emerging Church movement is the rise of Pentecostalism. Remarkably, Evangelical responses to the Emerging Church ignore this factor. However, Phyllis Tickle explains that Pentecostalism directly contradicts the *sola Scriptura* principle of the Reformation, thereby providing Emerging Church leaders with a strong religious base to question and dismiss the *sola Scriptura* principle.

This experiential base fits well with the sheer frustration growing out of centuries of theological fragmentation in Protestant theology and practice. To Emerging Church leaders, this fact unavoidably indicates that a genuine theology from Scripture alone is impossible.

Consequently, to overcome theological and ministerial fragmentation, a new comprehensive way to do theology had to be found. To this end, Pentecostalism became instrumental because by fitting well with the Evangelical experience, modern and postmodern epistemologies, and Roman Catholic theological tradition, it naturally emerged as the efficient cause, bringing them together in a new synthesis for a new age.

In this context, postmodernity's criticism of reason and the non-foundationalist epistemology became scholarly tools for Emerging Church leaders to reject the Evangelical belief in an inerrant Scripture as authority. The same tools point them to the community and its tradition as the new locus of authority for the church.

By accepting tradition and community as the principle of authority, the Emerging Church is embracing the same as that on which the Roman Catholic Church stands. This seems to indicate that, at the theological level, the Emerging Church movement heralds the end of the Protestant Reformation.

Initial Evangelical reactions to the Emerging Church movement indicate its strongest opposition focuses precisely on the role of Scripture in theological construction. However, Tickle thinks history is on the side of the Emerging Church movement away from the *sola Scriptura* principle and predicts its eventual demise and the emergence of a new principle of authority. Yet, when we realize that the alternative to the *sola Scriptura* principle is tradition and community, it is difficult to envision them as "new." Instead, it seems that the "old" Roman Catholic principle from which the Reformation emerged is carrying the day after five centuries of controversy. But, even if the Emerging Church may come to define the new Evangelical center from tradition instead of from Scripture, thereby bringing the Protestant Reformation to an end, would a remnant of biblical Protestantism survive?

Hermeneutical Change

The hermeneutical level of change in the Emerging Church centers on the role that philosophy plays in the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of Christian beliefs and practices. At this level, changes take place mainly as reinterpretation that exegetes, theologians, and ministers assume when they engage in their respective trades. In this area, Emerging Church leaders seek for the interpretive perspective they need to construct their theological and ministerial views.

Robert Webber testifies to the existence of an anti-philosophical bias in American Fundamentalism, the "all you need is the Bible" appropriation of the *sola Scriptura* principle in Evangelical seminaries. Neo-Evangelical pragmatism did not do much to reverse this state of affairs. Emerging Church leaders, then, react against the Evangelical neglect of the philosophical foundations of their faith. By so doing they grant a positive role to philosophy that contradicts the *sola Scriptura* principle on which Evangelicalism stands.

In the hermeneutical analysis, a fateful inconsistency in Evangelicalism comes to view. On one side, a large number of Evangelicals appear to believe that their doctrines and hermeneutical principles stand on the basis of Scripture alone. Wayne Grudem, an often-quoted representative of this approach, maintains that "systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then

summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”²⁵ Within his methodological matrix, the role of philosophy in systematic theology is minimal. “Philosophical study helps us understand right and wrong thought forms common in our culture and others.”²⁶ On the other side, a large sector of leading Evangelical theologians believes that their understanding of Christian doctrines stand on a multiplicity of theological sources among which philosophy and science play important hermeneutical roles.

Interestingly, both Emerging Church and neo-Evangelicals leaders agree in their disapproval of Grudem’s approach. According to Bolt, “Evangelical theological method should not be restricted to summarizing biblical doctrine. Such an understanding of the theological task today fails as claim to *truth* about God, a universal claim desperately needed today.”²⁷

These confronted positions beg the question about whether neo-evangelicals embrace the *sola Scriptura* principle as the principle of authority in doctrinal and practical matters. If they do, then, we are facing the existence of different views of understanding the same principle. We cannot dismiss either position by using slogans and labels. They require careful reflection, especially for Evangelicals facing epochal change in this generation.

The agreement between neo-Evangelicals and Emerging Church leaders about the multiplicity of theological sources is momentous and has a long history. Arguably, the Evangelical theological synthesis articulated by Luther and Calvin never stood on the *sola Scriptura* principle but rather implicitly on the multiplicity-of-sources matrix. As they drew heavily on Augustine, their theological synthesis unintentionally assumed principles of Neo-Platonism, a reality neo-Evangelicals tend to deny strongly.

Perhaps the so-called Radical Reformation came closer to building on the *sola Scriptura* principle, yet, it never generated a philosophical and theological synthesis. However, the continuity of Protestant theology with medieval Roman Catholic Theology transpired soon after the reformation during the period of Protestant Orthodoxy (1560-1620). These simple historical facts cast suspicion over the neo-Evangelical claim that its doctrines spring from the *sola Scriptura* principle. Perhaps neo-Evangelicalism owes more to the Radical Reformation than to the Magisterial Reformers such as Luther and Calvin. Yet they are also dependent on the latter for their main doctrinal trusts.

Conclusion

The changes that American Evangelicalism is experiencing at the beginning of the 21st century are not superficial but deep and paradigmatic, touching its nature and destiny. These changes stem from deep grass-roots dissatisfaction with the spiritual, doctrinal, and ministerial status of Evangelical denominations. Because Evangelical theology and ministry are not reaching young generations of churchgoers, growing dissatisfaction goes far beyond aesthetic issues to include theological, metaphysical, and systemic topics. This situation uncovers a long crisis of theological and ministerial leadership that can be traced back at least to the failure to produce a theological synthesis of biblical philosophy and theology that could answer the questions and challenges presented by classical philosophies and modern science.

While the Evangelical experience is slowly but surely cracking under the pressure of inner spiritual, theological, and hermeneutical crises, the world around it is crumbling under the pressure of philosophical, scientific, and technological changes. Without inner or external anchors to guide its destiny and mission, rapid changes threaten to further fragment the never cohesive existence of the Evangelical movement.

To save Protestantism and advance its mission, Emerging Church leaders believe, unlike their predecessors, that Evangelicals should let go of the Bible and reason as their anchors and embrace postmodern social, epistemological changes. In their minds this amounts to the postmodern reformation of the church, even the next reformation. In this process, the Protestant Reformation based on Scripture appears to be vanishing before our eyes.

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Sergio Silva



Adventists have sought to base their faith at the intersection of Scripture and science.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged during a historical period of great theological turmoil, especially relating to the study of origins. After the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the search for a foundation of knowledge intensified, causing many to renounce their belief that Scripture is a reliable source and a foundation of knowledge. This debate over whether Scripture or science should be considered the ultimate source of knowledge caused doubt and debate during the mid-19th century.

Since the establishment of the denomination in 1863, Seventh-day Adventists have believed in the biblical representation of the origins of the world and humankind, but valued both the positive outcomes of the Enlightenment and scriptural authority. Since the inception of the church, Adventists have maintained their belief in biblical origins.

A Brief Historical Background

In the years following the 18th century, the works of some key Enlightenment thinkers led to skepticism that the Christian Church had the final word on which sources of knowledge were authoritative and should be embraced by society. First throughout Europe and subsequently in America, liberalism contributed to the spreading of rationalism and empiricism. Human reason and empirical data in a naturalistic framework became the norm to determine what should be considered true knowledge about origins.

In theology, Liberalism facilitated the rejection of theological foundationalism to promote these principles of the Enlightenment. Thus, while the proponents of theological foundationalism insisted that Scripture alone (*sola*

Scriptura) should be considered the moderator source to evaluate knowledge about origins, the proponents of Liberalism insisted that human reason should hold priority over Scripture as the source of true knowledge. Feeling the pressure that came from the proponents of Liberalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested that the only way to preserve the significance of theology in the nature of knowledge was to accommodate the interpretation of Scripture to the findings of modern science. The Christian theological world followed his lead.

According to Ronald Numbers, “By the late nineteenth century even [some of] the most conservative Christian apologists readily conceded that the Bible allowed for an ancient earth and pre-Edenic life.”¹ By the year 1870, after American scientists accepted “the broad outlines of organic evolution,” Christian thinkers in America diverged in relation to these issues.²

By the end of the 19th century, three groups of Christians emerged:

- The “liberal proponents of evolution” (LPE) chose to embrace evolutionary theory. These are individuals who choose to adopt “higher criticism” as part of their hermeneutical method to read and interpret the Bible, which implies that their theology is subjected to the propositions of science (as commonly understood). In this sense, the early chapters of Genesis, the biblical accounts of miracles, and the incarnation of Christ and His resurrection, were viewed as the product of Jewish culture instead of the product of inspired revelation.

- The “conservative opponents of evolution” (COE) chose to accept a simple, literal reading of the biblical account of Creation. In this sense, when the text says, “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth” (Ex. 20:11, KJV), a COE understands that the Creation week described in Genesis 1:3-2:4 occurred sometime 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, in a period of six literal, consecutive, 24-hour days. The conclusion of a short period of time since Creation (6,000 to 10,000 years) is based on the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.

- The “conservative proponents of evolution” (CPE) followed Charles Hodge’s advice to interpret Scripture in the light of modern science. This term refers to those who accept Darwinian evolutionary theory and claim to read the Bible in a literal fashion, but who choose to accommodate their views to whatever challenges that science may bring to the literal reading of the biblical text. Thus, when the text says “in six days,” if the letter of the text conflicts with geological assumptions, for example, a CPE understands the word “day” to render the meaning of a long age, accommodating the biblical text to geological assumptions.

With this context in mind, how did Adventists maintain their belief in biblical origins?

An Adventist Response

Adventism entered the scene of American religious life during a period of theological turmoil in the mid-19th century when foundational beliefs about Scripture were under heavy attack. In relation to origins, German higher criticism helped to accelerate the spreading of Darwinism among Protestants and non-Protestants, and the biblical worldview of origins fell out of favor.

Adventism, however, grew strong and sought to develop an understanding that embraced the acquisition of knowledge through reason while upholding scriptural authority. Instead of adopting a method of accommodating the interpretation of Scripture to the interpretation of nature, or simply dismissing mainstream science as incompatible with the biblical view of Creation, as fundamentalists did, Adventism sought to embrace mainstream science and theology as complementary enterprises. Adventists perceive both nature and Scripture as God’s revelations to humankind, and believe that since both issued from the same Author, they should agree.

How did Adventists seek to embrace mainstream science and theology as complementary enterprises? On the one hand, Adventists have insisted repeatedly on the need for theology to be built upon the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principles, emphasizing that Scripture should be the rule of the Christian faith. Expressing her views on this subject, Ellen G. White wrote, “I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice.”³

For mainline Adventists, it is through Scripture alone that knowledge about the relationship of the natural and the supernatural realms coalesces intelligibly. And when addressing the question of how Christians should interpret the biblical account of Creation, Ellen White said, “The infidel supposition, that the events of the first week required seven vast, indefinite periods for their accomplishment, strikes directly at the foundation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. It makes indefinite and obscure that which God has made very plain.”⁴ She believed that the biblical account of Creation should be read and interpreted literally.

On the other hand, this literal interpretation of biblical origins did not mean that Adventists were alienated from or unaware of the positive outcomes of the Enlightenment, or that mainstream science had not brought new challenges for the students of Scripture. As a matter of fact, Adventist theologians asserted the importance of showing that the correct interpretation of Scripture through theology and of nature through science would show that Scripture and nature were in harmony.

Ellen White wrote that “God is the foundation of everything. All true science is in harmony with His works; all true education leads to obedience to His government. Science opens new wonders to our view; she soars high, and explores new depths; but she brings nothing from her research that conflicts with divine revelation. Ignorance may seek to support false views of God by appeals to science, but the book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other.”⁵

Building on this premise, George McCready Price, considered the founder of a worldwide movement known as creation science, recognized the challenges of the scientific evidence coming from geology, and proposed a two-stage biblical Creation in an attempt to show how the biblical account of origin and the data collected from nature could be brought into harmony.⁶ In spite of rejecting the alleged sequence of the fossil record as proof for ancient life on earth and conclusive evidence for macroevolution, Price thought that the age of the rocks surrounding the fossils could be brought into harmony with a biblical concept of young life on Earth. Price suggested in his theory of two-stage biblical Creation that God had created the entire universe first (Gen. 1:1), and then after eons had returned to give shape to the Earth and to create life the planet.

Price explained: “It may be well to remember that the record in Genesis has not put the least direct limit upon our imaginations in accounting for the manner of our world’s formation. It only says: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.’ This, be it clearly understood, and as other writers have so clearly pointed out, was before the six days of our world’s Creation proper began. The six literal days of Creation, or peopling our world with life forms, begin with verse 3. . . . How long it had been formed before this we are not told, and whether by a slow or rapid process we have no information.”⁷

In essence, while most conservative Christians had accepted that the Bible allowed for ancient inorganic matter and pre-Edenic life on earth, Adventists like Price insisted on preserving the integrity of the biblical text, and accepted only ancient inorganic matter on Earth (not life).

After Price, many Adventist scientists gained prominence among the COE, including are Harold W. Clark, Frank L. Marsh, Harold G. Coffin, Ariel A. Roth, L. James Gibson, and Arthur V. Chadwick.

Harold W. Clark (1891-1986) was the first Seventh-day Adventist to earn a graduate degree in biology. After spending time “studying glaciation in the mountains of the West,” Clark became convinced that “ice had once covered large portions of North America, perhaps for as long as fifteen hundred years after the flood.”⁸

Then Clark introduced the theory of “ecological zonation,” arguing that this interpretation could work as “a substitute for the commonly accepted theory of geological ages. In other words, an ‘age’ of time would be replaced by a ‘stage’ of Flood action.”⁹ Ecological zonation proposes that whatever sequence there is in the fossil record “is due to the burial of ancient life zones or habitats that lived contemporaneously, and not to the succession of life throughout long ages of time.”¹⁰

Besides introducing glaciation to Adventist views, Clark also thought that microevolution was compatible with biblical origins. Clark said, “When one considers these problems in relation to science and religion, he faces a perplexing situation.” On the one hand, there is “a voluminous literature assuming that . . . all change means evolution. This attitude is so generally accepted that anyone who dares deny the validity of the conclusions is branded as ignorant and uncultured.” And, on the other hand, there are those who let their antievolutionary convictions blind them to a point where they unjustifiably ignore most—if not all—“scientific data that one almost wonders if the accusations of the evolutionists against Creationists might not be true.”¹¹

As a solution to the impasse, Clark pointed out how microevolution was a well-documented fact in hybridization, and that some were suggesting that “it is possibly the only way new species are ever formed.”¹² Clark asked, “Should we believe that they [i.e., different types of rabbits, sparrows, etc.] were all created just as they are now? No, it is rather easy to understand how variation within the Genesis ‘kind’ could have resulted in all these

different species.”¹³

Following in the footsteps of Clark, Frank Lewis Marsh (1899-1992) joined “in advocating post-Edenic speciation.”¹⁴ According to Numbers, Marsh “became the first Adventist to earn a doctoral degree in biology.”¹⁵ Throughout his career, Marsh wrote about post-Edenic speciation and pled with fellow fundamentalists to avoid the equation of limited variation with evolution. Reviewing Marsh’s *Evolution, Creation, and Science*, the geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky (1900-1975) wrote in the *American Naturalist* that “Marsh had written what he had previously thought to be impossible: a sensibly argued defense of special Creation.”¹⁶

Another Adventist, Harold G. Coffin, made a great contribution with studies that concluded in favoring a recent catastrophic event as the mechanism that shaped the Earth’s surface. A paleontologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California, Coffin uncovered evidence in different parts of North America, Europe, and Asia that supported the biblical account of a global flood (Genesis 6-8) a few thousand years ago.

For example, Coffin noticed that the average rate of erosion (about one foot every 5,000 to 10,000 years) used by conventional geologists to explain the current configuration of the Earth’s surface is insufficient to explain why tall mountains still exist in many locations around the globe. He explains that when applied conservatively—one foot every 5,000 years—the average rate of erosion should be responsible for eroding about one mile of sediment from the mountains every 25 million years.

The bottom line is this: If gradual erosion is the mechanism responsible for the formation of the Earth’s surface, a period of 10 to 20 million years should have turned tall mountains into low hills; since this is not the case, another mechanism—a global cataclysm—must have affected the surface of the globe in recent years. Coffin concluded: “Tall mountains, lakes not filled with sediments, and well-preserved fossils in their original burial sites indicate that the surface of the earth is not as old as frequently claimed.”¹⁷ These observations, among others, raise questions about whether the conventional geological time scale provides the best model to explain the formation of the Earth’s surface.

Besides participating in the science and theology dialogue by presenting scientific evidence favoring a recent creation of life on earth and the recent formation of the earth’s surface through a global catastrophe, Adventists also have looked seriously at the biblical and theological evidence of the Creation and Flood. Some of the theological scholars who participated in these efforts are Richard M. Davidson, John T. Baldwin, Jacques Doukhan, Gerhard Hasel, Randal Younker, and Jiří Moskala.

As far as the biblical evidence goes, Richard M. Davidson has recently dealt with the question of the meaning of “in the beginning” in Genesis 1:1 from an exegetical standpoint. Davidson explains that when dealing with the biblical account of Creation, questions have been raised in relation to the “when” of Creation. To put this in the context of the science and theology dialogue, mainline scientists have rejected the biblical account of Creation because conventional science requires deep time for the formation of inorganic matter on Earth, and this seems to be in conflict with the biblical time scale.

Davidson, however, shows exegetically the harmony that exists between Scripture and the book of nature. After a careful analysis of the Hebrew text, Davidson posits that the biblical evidence favoring the absolute beginning of the universe (including inorganic matter on Earth) sometime before the Creation week is very persuasive. The biblical evidence he presents rests on the grammatical structure of the word translated as “in the beginning,” which, Davidson concludes, is better understood as an independent clause in the absolute state. Davidson’s conclusion is remarkable, because it allows theologians and conventional scientists to agree that inorganic matter in the universe (including inorganic matter on Earth) is very old, perhaps billions of years old, without compromising the literal interpretation of the days of Creation in Genesis 1:3–2:4.

From the theological point of view, John T. Baldwin has responded to the claim that associating the biblical account of a recent, literal, seven-day Creation and a global flood with historical reality is a sacrifice of the intellect. Baldwin shows in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* that the literal interpretation of Genesis 1–11 is far from being a sacrifice of the intellect: in fact, it is essential to maintain the unequivocal nature of the biblical metanarrative. Baldwin, who won a John Templeton Foundation prize in 1994, explains that biblical eschatology is contingent to biblical origins. He insists that the language used to describe divine action in the latter (Gen. 7:11; Ex. 20:11) is implied in the former (Rev. 14:7), which suggests the need for interpreters to preserve Scripture as an unequivocal

document.¹⁸

In addition, Baldwin has shown how the use of evolutionary theory to interpret the fossil record in the geological column undermines the biblical doctrine of atonement. This is because evolution places “death for seeming millions of years prior to the first human sin.”¹⁹ If this were true, death would be no longer a consequence of sin (Rom. 5:12), but a necessary mechanism for progression. Consequently, the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross would be nothing more than a mere event in the history of Israel, without any theological meaning or value.

How can theology address this problem? Baldwin says: “The global deluge geologically establishes the needed causal connection between human sin and all death by burying animals into the geological column subsequent to Adam’s sin, thus confirming the truth of the biblical claim that all death is the wage of sin. In this fashion God’s global flood corroborates the fact that the death of Jesus constitutes the wage of sin, one that He bore salvifically for human beings.”²⁰

The theological turmoil of the 19th and 20th centuries is not over, and there is still much work to be done. Although mainstream science and theology have improved their understanding of their objects of study (i.e., nature and Scripture), the philosophical impasse between naturalism and supernaturalism continually insists that these two disciplines should not overlap. Yet Adventists have attempted to study nature and Scripture as inseparably related.

Throughout the history of Adventism, Adventists have tried to establish a productive dialogue between mainstream science and theology. Their approach has been one that engages mainstream science and theology as companions, not as enemies, in the search for true knowledge. For this reason, Adventists have refused to join Schleiermacher in claiming that science had proven wrong the biblical teaching of Creation.

Instead, Adventists have seen in this study opportunity for both mainstream scientists and theologians to seek greater knowledge about their fields, and to see how nature and Scripture complement one another. Leonard Brand explains the mainline Adventist approach well when he says, “We establish the most constructive relationship between science and religion when we allow findings in each of these fields of knowledge to challenge us to analyze the other more carefully.” Brand concludes: “I believe that this feedback process can improve our understanding of both fields. Conflicts between the two force us to dig deeper in both as we seek for genuine resolution that does not relegate either to a secondary role.”²¹

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Perspective Digest - a publication of the Adventist Theological Society

Wilson Paroschi



Scholarly opinion is reconsidering its conclusions about the author and historicity of the Fourth Gospel.

The Gospel of John is at once the most influential and the most controversial writing in the New Testament. On one hand, its unique and profound theology has been decisive in shaping the church's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. On the other, it has been accused more than any other Gospel of possessing no real value in the search for the historical Jesus.

A number of archaeological discoveries, however, have called such a negative assessment into question. Though archaeology will never be able to prove the historicity of the particular events recorded in this Gospel, and much less establish John's theological statements on the basis of verifiable data, some of its findings have shed considerable light on the historical and cultural setting of the Gospel and, as such, have caused many scholars to rethink the way John's message should be interpreted.

Modern Interpretation of John

All four Gospels in the New Testament tell the story of Jesus, but not in the same way. Each evangelist presents a different portrait of Jesus. The differences among the first three Gospels, however, which report a considerable amount of common traditions about Jesus, are not as significant as the differences between them and John.

Though sharing the basic outline of Jesus' ministry, as well as some sayings and incidents, John places Jesus' ministry mostly in Judea, not in Galilee; and omits several important episodes of Jesus' life, such as His birth, baptism, transfiguration, exorcism of demons, and agony in Gethsemane. The Last Supper and the prophetic

discourse are also missing. Another difference is the portrayal of Jesus Himself. Important emphases in John, such as Jesus' full divinity and pre-existence, are virtually absent from the Synoptics.

The Johannine Jesus does not use narrative parables—not even the word "parable" itself—or short sayings., but preferably long and thoughtful discourses. He is also constantly using words that are scarcely used in the other Gospels (e.g., *love, to love, truth, true, to know, to work, world, to abide, to judge, to send, to witness*) and prefers speaking of Himself metaphorically as the bread of heaven, the true vine, the good shepherd, the door, and the light of the world.

Most significant, however, are the miracles of Jesus, which in John seem to be more extraordinary than those reported by the other evangelists. New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann is correct when he says of the Fourth Gospel: "Judged by the modern concept of reality, our Gospel is more fantastic than any other writing of the New Testament."¹

Until the mid-18th century, such differences represented no problem for most Bible interpreters. Being the work of John, the beloved disciple and a leading figure in the apostolic church, it was generally thought that his account of Jesus was more personal and therefore more authoritative than those of the others. Mark and Luke were not eyewitnesses of the events they recorded, and Matthew, though being one of the Twelve, never achieved the prominence that John did. Taking John as the starting point, it was then possible to harmonize the Gospels and so to minimize their differences.

In 1776, however, J. J. Griesbach broke off from such an approach, contending that all four Gospels cannot be treated together. In his synopsis of the Gospels, he ignored the Gospel of John almost completely and simply placed together the parallel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke for the purpose of comparison.

The separation of John's Gospel from the others was not in itself hermeneutically wrong, but once separated, its differences and peculiarities came to the fore at a time when the Enlightenment was starting to impact biblical interpretation. For one thing, newer and more critical approaches to the Bible were felt necessary, particularly in relation to the use and handling of historical evidence, which were entirely distorted, to say the least, especially because of the old theory of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of every part of Scripture. For another thing, biblical interpretation was made hostage of a radical rationalism, that is, the rejection of any form of supernaturalism and the consequent abandonment of the very notion of inspiration itself, so that ultimately the Bible became nothing more than an ancient document to be studied as any other ancient document.

As a result, the authenticity of John's Gospel came under heavy fire. In the eyes of rationalist Bible scholars, stories like the marriage feast of Cana and the raising of Lazarus could not be true, implying that the fourth evangelist could not have been an eyewitness of the events he describes. One of the first attacks came in 1792 by Edward Evanson, who referred to the miracle in Cana as "incredible" and "unworthy of belief."²

If the Fourth Gospel was not history (biography) or an account historically reliable, what was it then? It did not take long for alternative theories to appear. In 1835, D. F. Strauss introduced the term *myth* to describe the content of John; other terms that were used in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th include *idea, philosophy, allegory, and theology*.

Whatever the term, the idea was the same: The Gospel of John was not the personal testimony of an eyewitness, the best loved of Jesus' disciples, and its account should not be taken historically. The modern mind could no longer accept at the mere historical level what was felt to be nothing else but the expression of a religious idea in concrete form by an ancient writer.

The notion that John's Gospel was not history but was written to convey a theological idea found a creative expression in F. C. Baur, in the mid-19th century. For Baur, John was not an apostolic document, but a post-Pauline Christian reflection whose purpose was to promote the concept of a unified (Catholic) church. As such, it could not have been written before the second half of the second century, and, of course, was not historically reliable. "The Johannine Gospel," he said, "from beginning to end . . . has no concern for a purely historical account, but for the presentation of an idea which has run its ideal course in the march of events of the Gospel story."³

Although Baur's positions were too artificial and exegetically indefensible, his influence on subsequent Johannine scholarship was remarkable. The so-called Tübingen School, of which he was the leading figure,

dominated the scene for an entire generation. At the turn of the 20th century, only a few conservative interpreters still held the traditional view that this Gospel was the testimony of John the son of Zebedee.

Another blow against the historicity of John was struck with the arrival of the religio-historical school, in the late 19th century. Attempting to tie the rise and growth of all religions to purely naturalistic and historical causations, this school affirmed that Christianity was nothing more than one phenomenon among the many religious phenomena of the Hellenistic world. As such, John's theology and concepts were explained in the light of other contemporary religions, like mystery religions and Gnosticism. Still using the basic scheme provided by Baur, Otto Pfleiderer, the founder of the religio-historical school, maintained that the Gospel of John did not belong "to the historical books of primitive Christianity, but to its Hellenistic doctrinal writings."⁴ The Johannine Logos, the light/darkness dualism, the descent/ascent motif, and the Greek term for "Lord" are only some examples of concepts that would have been assimilated when Christianity moved from Palestine and its Jewish environment to the broader Hellenistic world.

These ideas were taken even further by Rudolf Bultmann in the first half of the 20th century. Brilliant in his reasoning and consistent in the application of the historical-critical method, Bultmann's interpretation of John's Gospel was devastating: John's language, whenever it reflects supernatural categories, was entirely mythological; it is not to be taken on the historical level as a source of information on the life and teaching of Jesus; its conceptual world was not Jewish, but Gnostic; the Redeemer that came from heaven was inspired by the Gnostic myth; the Gospel is not original, but a conflation of several previous documents; it was not written by a single author, but was the result of a composition process in which several editors or redactors were involved; the text as we have it does not make sense, so it needs to be reorganized; and to be understood, it needs to be demythologized by means of an existential interpretation. In other words, almost nothing of the traditional understanding of John was left. Bultmann's radical criticism was so overwhelming that, for a while, it appeared the Gospel would never recover from it.

It is true that not all of Bultmann's ideas gained universal acceptance, even among more radical Johannine scholarship. It is also true that, despite all the challenges, several conservative scholars continued to maintain a more traditional view of John's authorship and date. But in the first half of the 20th century, there was widespread consensus on at least three points: (1) The fourth evangelist was not a direct eyewitness and therefore had to depend on sources; (2) his background was not Jewish; and (3) his Gospel was actually not about the historical Jesus but about the Christ of faith, that is, it is a theological expression of the church's faith late in the second century and read back into the life of Jesus.

But then things began to change, and archaeology played an important role in this change.

Archaeology and John's Gospel

The first archaeological discovery to impact the interpretation of John's Gospel was a small fragment of papyrus, known as Rylands Papyrus 457 and listed among the New Testament manuscripts as P52, measuring only 2½ by 3½ inches and containing a few verses from John 18: parts of verses 31 to 33 on the recto, and of verses 37 and 38 on the verso. Although it had been acquired in Egypt in 1920 by Bernard P. Grenfell for the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England, it was identified and published only in 1934, by C. H. Roberts. Using paleographical techniques, Roberts dated the fragment to the first half of the second century; most scholars argue for a date no later than A.D. 125.⁵

Despite its size, the significance of this papyrus for the interpretation of John cannot be overemphasized: It is a material evidence that this Gospel was circulating in Egypt already at the beginning of the second century and, as such, it contradicts those theories according to which John was not written until the second half of the second century. This shows, among other things, the inadequacy of Baur's description of earliest Christianity. In fact, not only John but all New Testament documents are now generally assigned to the first century. It is not altogether impossible, thus, that the Fourth Gospel was authored by an eyewitness to Jesus. In any case, it would not be necessarily removed from the world and setting it portrays.

Still, in the first half of the 20th century, several other archaeological discoveries in Palestine seemed to challenge some of the assumptions held at that time by most Johannine scholars. Attention to this was called by

archaeologist W. F. Albright in a number of publications between 1924 and 1956. Among other things, Albright argued that the several topographical references in the Gospel could hardly have been made without some degree of familiarity with the Palestinian and particularly the Judean situation before the First Revolt (A.D. 66-70).

In fact, the number of John's topographical references is rather unique within the New Testament. There are 13 such references, and if details not mentioned in the Synoptics are included, the number increases to 20. In a time when most interpreters believed John was fictional, these references were treated as symbolic rather than historical recollections. According to Albright, however, considering the degree of the devastation created in Palestine and especially in Jerusalem by the Roman armies and also the almost complete break in the continuity of Christian presence in those areas after the war, any correct data that could be validated archaeologically or topographically must have been carried into the Diaspora in oral form by Christian refugees. Indeed, later Christian tradition does tell of the escape of some Christians from Jerusalem to Pella in Transjordan.

In a 1956 article, Albright discussed only three examples of locations considered to have been positively identified by archaeology: the place where Pilate brought Jesus (John 19:13); "Aenon near Salim," where John the Baptist was conducting his baptismal work, "because there was much water there" (3:23); and Jacob's well at Sychar, "a Samaritan city" (4:3-6), which he identified with Shechem. Interestingly, the first two of these identifications, as well as the exact location of Sychar, would be contradicted by later archaeological discoveries.

In an updated, comprehensive survey of the archaeological status of all topographical references in John, Urban C. von Wahlde indicates that of the 20 Johannine sites, 16 have been identified with certainty: Bethsaida (1:44); Cana (2:1, 11; 4:46-54; 21:2); Capernaum (2:12; 4:46; 6:17, 24); the harbor (6:24, 25); the synagogue (v. 59); Jacob's well (4:4-6); Mount Gerizim (4:20); the location of Sychar (4:5); the Sheep Gate (5:2); the pool(s) of Bethesda (5:2); Tiberias (6:1, 23; 21:2); the pool of Siloam (9:1-9); Bethany, near Jerusalem (11:1-17; 12:1-11); Ephraim (11:54); the Kidron Valley (18:1); the Praetorium (18:28, 33; 19:9); Golgotha (19:17, 18, 20, 41); and the tomb of Jesus (19:41, 42). Of the remaining four, two can be narrowed to within a relatively restricted area: the place in the temple precincts for the keeping of animals (2:13-16) and the place where Pilate brought Jesus (19:13); the other two are still highly controversial: Aenon near Salim (3:23) and Bethany beyond the Jordan (1:28; 10:40).⁶

In his concluding observations, von Wahlde makes two important statements. The first is that archaeology has confirmed the remarkable accuracy of the topographical information in John, with a great number of details provided in some instances. As a matter of fact, he says, "It is precisely those places described in the greatest detail," as in the case of the pools of Bethesda, the place of crucifixion, and the location of Jesus' tomb, "that can be identified with the greatest certitude." The second statement is that there is "no credible evidence to suggest that any of the twenty sites is simply fictitious or symbolic." Though acknowledging the possibility of some sites having a secondary symbolic meaning, von Wahlde concludes that "the intrinsic historicity and accuracy of the references should be beyond doubt."⁷

Despite the premature identifications endorsed by Albright, his main contention remains valid: John's early Palestinian and Judean topographical references must derive from Diaspora Christians in the Greco-Roman world, probably by means of orally conveyed tradition. This means that instead of a second-century creation completely detached from the time and places of the events it describes, the Gospel of John does contain good, ancient reminiscences, which necessarily favors the authenticity of its content. As Paul N. Anderson declares, "Albright's archaeological contribution forced biblical scholars to consider again significant aspects of Johannine historicity, having been sidestepped by the previous century or more of critical scholarship."⁸

The 1940s witnessed two other important archaeological discoveries bearing on the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. The first occurred in late 1945, when 13 fourth-century leather-bound codices written in Coptic and containing no fewer than 49 treatises were discovered in a storage jar beneath a large boulder in Nag Hammadi, a site near the Egyptian village of al-Qacr. Since the codices probably reflect second-century traditions and combine Gnostic and early Christian elements, the whole question of the impact of Gnosticism upon the New Testament, particularly John, was reopened. It was claimed that indisputable evidence of Gnostic influence on the Fourth Gospel had finally been found.

Careful investigation, however, has led most scholars to reject this hypothesis. Simply put, the Nag Hammadi

documents do not furnish any evidence at all of a pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer, as described by Bultmann and several others, that might have influenced the theology and literature of the Gentile churches, of which John's Gospel would be the finest example. If these documents allowed, for the first time, Bible scholars to encounter the Gnostics in their own words, they also witness to the distance that exists between Gnostic ideas and those of the New Testament. Arthur D. Nock says that the Nag Hammadi writings confirm what is already implicit in the church fathers, namely, that Gnosticism was indeed a second-century "Christian heresy with roots in speculative thought."⁹

The final discovery to help rescue the reputation of John's Gospel for historical reliability was the Dead Sea Scrolls. Discovered in 1947 near Khirbet Qumran, close to the ruins of an ancient Jewish settlement, the scrolls consist of a large number of biblical manuscripts, mostly fragmentary, and of other documents as well. Since they have been shown on the basis of paleography and carbon-14 tests to date from the period of Christian origins (200 B.C.–A.D. 70), these documents are of great interest not only to Old Testament research and the history of Judaism, but also to New Testament scholarship, particularly in relation to John's background. The scrolls have made it plain that even before the Christian era there already existed in Palestine a literary setting in which Jewish, Greek, and even pre-Gnostic religious ideas were combined in a way that once was thought to be unique to John and of the second century onward.

There are several examples in the Dead Sea Scrolls of the dualistic theological vocabulary found in Johannine and later Gnostic literature. These are mainly evident in the Manual of Discipline or Community Rule. In cols. 3 and 4, for instance, are found words such as *world, truth, falsehood, light, darkness, peace, joy, and eternal*. These are typical of early Christian literature, particularly the Gospel of John. Also, expressions such as "practicing the truth," "the Spirit of Truth," "Prince of Light," "sons of light," "sons of darkness," "the light of life," "walk in the darkness," "the wrath of God," and "the works of God" are used in ways that are clearly reminiscent of John.¹⁰

Parallels and points of contact between the scrolls of Qumran and John are numerous, and this has been decisive in establishing the fundamental Jewishness of the Fourth Gospel. It is no longer necessary, nor correct, to appeal to an eventual second-century Hellenistic or Gnostic milieu to explain the distinctiveness of this Gospel. Though the conceptual and theological differences between John and Qumran should not be overlooked, the similarities in vocabulary and images are of great importance in determining the nature of Johannine tradition: It is now possible to demonstrate that this tradition is much closer to that of Christianity itself than it had previously been thought possible.

Recent Johannine Scholarship

The Dead Sea Scrolls prompted what became known as "the new look on the Fourth Gospel." This is precisely the title of an article published originally in 1959 by John A. T. Robinson, in which he questioned five old presuppositions related to the reliability of Johannine tradition that had mostly underlain the Fourth Gospel research in the preceding 50 years. The presuppositions were so widely accepted, the consensus so strong that Robinson could even speak of what he termed "critical orthodoxy."¹¹

By explicitly referring to the Dead Sea Scrolls and other archaeological findings that vindicated John's knowledge of the topography and institutions of Palestine prior to the Jewish war, Robinson spoke of what appeared to him to be straws in the wind, but which he was inclined to take seriously, because all of the straws were blowing in the same direction. Then, at the end of the article he expressed his conviction that Johannine tradition is not the result of a later development, but goes back to the earliest days of Christianity.¹² So the question whether John's material is historically reliable or theologically conditioned, that is, whether the author should be regarded as a witness to the Jesus of history or to the Christ of faith only, Robinson's answer was clear: "Because he [John] is the New Testament writer who, theologically speaking, takes history more seriously than any other, he has at least the right to be heard—on the history as well as on the theology."¹³

So the stage was set for more concrete actions concerning the issue of history in John. The first practical results, though rather imperfect, came in 1968, when J. Louis Martyn published his acclaimed little book on the redaction of the Fourth Gospel. The Nag Hammadi documents and the Dead Sea Scrolls helped to restore the

essential Jewishness of this Gospel and, by means of redaction analysis, Martyn tried to locate the proper historical life-setting that could best explain John's most striking literary feature, the Jewish leaders' fierce hostility to Jesus. For Martyn, the reason for that is because the evangelist and his community were engaged in a serious and even violent exchange with a local synagogue, from which they separated.¹⁴ The separation would have occurred near the end of the first century when the Jewish religious leaders excluded the Christians from public worship by adding a curse against them, the *Birkat ha-Minim* ("Benediction Concerning Heretics"), to the synagogue liturgy.

Though few have accepted Martyn's thesis in all of its details, virtually all Johannine interpreters became persuaded that despite being profoundly theological, John's theology is not floating in the air, so to speak, totally isolated from or unaffected by history. This was indeed a huge advance in relation to previous research, and this is Martyn's main contribution to Johannine studies, though he remained rather skeptical about the historicity of the Gospel story as a whole. It is true that he suggested that the Gospel preserves two historical levels, that of Jesus and that of the evangelist, but, in line with classical redaction criticism which was still under the influence of a strong anti-supernaturalistic view of reality, he actually believed that the traditions about Jesus have been so thoroughly reshaped and rewritten in face of the prevailing circumstances at the evangelist's time that the historical figure of that early first-century Galilean can hardly be glimpsed through the Johannine lens.

After Martyn, and still within the atmosphere of excitement created by redaction criticism, a relatively new issue started receiving a disproportional amount of attention within Johannine scholarship—the community that supposedly was responsible for the Gospel's origin. There was, therefore, a complete shift of focus away from the person and identity of the evangelist to his community. The attempts to reconstruct the historical and theological developments of that community, however, were so diverse and speculative that the whole enterprise soon began to crumble. Martyn himself compared the avalanche of reconstructions, including his own, to a genie which had been let out of a bottle and which was "not proving easy to control."¹⁵

After two or so decades, dissatisfaction over the value of historical-critical approaches caused Johannine scholarship to follow two opposite directions. On one hand, several new interpretive methodologies were adopted, such as sociological and literary criticisms. The latter, for example, is essentially a postmodern and reader-oriented approach that attempts to interpret the text without appealing to anything that lies outside or beyond it (e.g., its historical setting) and assuming its unity against all forms of source and redaction-critical techniques. This means that the old questions of authorship and historicity lose their relevance altogether. On the other hand, and in part because of the same archaeological findings reported above, the issue of history in John was reopened and started to be tackled again in a much more straight and objective way than ever before.

Even with redaction criticism still on the rise, Robinson's "new look" was already increasingly impacting contemporary Johannine scholarship on several fronts. In 1966-1970, Raymond E. Brown published his influential two-volume commentary on the Fourth Gospel, in which he took a relatively conservative approach on questions such as authorship and historicity. Much of the same can be said about several other important commentaries which were published around the 1970s. Other scholars assumed what can be described as an intermediate position between widespread skepticism and complete historicity. They rejected, for example, the idea that the Beloved Disciple was the author or even a person who could have supplied firsthand historical information, but were willing to accept that whoever was responsible for this Gospel had at his disposal at least some reliable traditions.

Two twin areas of research in which long-standing positions also soon began to change had to do with the genre of the Fourth Gospel and its relation with the Synoptics. Different as it is, John is not a theological treatise per se, but a Gospel, that is, a narrative of Jesus' ministry, and as such it stands together with Mark, Matthew, and Luke. This is what it claims for itself (20:30, 31), and this is what it is.

Like the Synoptics, the Gospel of John begins with the appearance of John the Baptist and ends with the passion narrative, and everything is within a chronological framework that seems much more complete and accurate than theirs. Already in 1969, Käsemann was impressed by the fact that "John felt himself under constraint to compose a Gospel rather than letters or a collection of sayings" and found this to be detrimental to some of Bultmann's arguments. "For it seems to me," he said, "that if one has no interest in the historical Jesus, then one does not write a Gospel, but, on the contrary, finds the Gospel form inadequate."¹⁶ Moreover, John's author claims to

be a direct eyewitness of at least some of the events he records (21:24; 19:34-35; cf. 1:14), which strongly emphasizes the importance for him of Jesus as a historical figure. In 1 John, he is even more explicit on this (cf. 1:1-3; 2:18-25; 4:1-3; 5:6-9), and the Epistle would make little or no sense at all without the Gospel.

This led to a complete re-evaluation of the traditional consensus that John was dependent on the Synoptics. As early as 1938, P. Gardner-Smith had already argued that John was written independently from the Synoptics, a thesis that was taken even further by C. H. Dodd, a couple of decades later, and which was congenial with the historical value of John. After an exhaustive analysis of the Gospel, Dodd concluded it was highly probable that the fourth evangelist employed an ancient (oral) tradition independent of the other Gospels and deserving serious consideration as a contribution to the knowledge of the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ. Independence, however, is not in itself equivalent to historicity, as dependence does not necessarily make a composition fictional. So, even if it can be demonstrated that John did know and used one (usually Mark) or more of the other Gospels, in view of the cumulative evidence this can no longer detract from John as containing genuine tradition.

The fact is that, in recent years and as an integral part of the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus, Johannine scholarship has reached a point at which the historiographical character of the Beloved Disciple's testimony is argued for as powerfully as never before. Though scholars don't come to the point of identifying the Beloved Disciple as the Apostle John, their works signal an important trend in the Fourth Gospel's contemporary research, namely, the rehabilitation of John as a source for the historical-Jesus quest.

This trend culminated with the establishment, in 2002, of the John, Jesus, and History Project at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings. The project, which is now in its third triennium and has raised considerable attention within Johannine and Jesus scholarship, is intended to examine foundational questions about both the nature of the Fourth Gospel and its historicity. The voices are still not speaking in unison—they probably never will—but is significant convergence among the various discussions, such as more attention to John's particular type of historiographical memory and the way he understands history, continuous interest on the issue of John's relationship with the Synoptics, a fresh approach to the history-theology debate, a call for interdisciplinary investigations, as well as for a more nuanced approach to Jesus studies. Even though the study still does not provide too many clear answers, there is a definite effort to put John's Gospel in its rightful place concerning the quest for the historical Jesus

It is puzzling that though having more archaeological and topographical material than all three Synoptics combined, there are still those who consider John to be entirely non-historical. In this case, how to account for that material? Where did it come from and why was it included? Was it only for rhetorical effect or to lend a sense of realism to the narrative? One thing that needs to be said out loud is that the attitude that takes that material as a positive sign of the character and origin of the Johannine tradition should not be so quickly dismissed as a misuse of critical sensibility.

Johannine research is deeply indebted to archaeology. The theological and philosophical approach of post-Enlightenment scholars, who seldom applied historical analysis to the Fourth Gospel, was severely crippled by a number of artifactual and topographical findings. Such findings called for a complete reassessment of the problem of history in this Gospel and gave rise to more objective discussions of several related issues. Though the archaeologist's shovel will never be able to demonstrate the veracity of statements such as "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14),¹⁷ "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (3:16), and "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31), or episodes such as the miracle at Cana (2:1-11), the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15), and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:17-44), it has helped more than anything else to put John's Jewishness, antiquity, and even historical likeliness on a firm foundation.

That this Gospel was not written later than the turn of the first century can hardly be disputed. With regard to its conceptual background, scholars who still operate within the constraints of the religio-historical school, thus arguing for Hellenism rather than Judaism as the main source of John's ideas, are few. In relation to authorship, it is true that many interpreters still resist identifying the beloved disciple as John the son of Zebedee, but it is at least frankly acknowledged today that "there is always the chance that the apostle John may have been in some way 'author' of the Gospel we traditionally call 'of John,'" as Francis J. Moloney says. He adds: "It is arrogant to rule any possibility

out of court.”¹⁸

As for the historical reliability, though practically all scholars now agree that behind John’s material lie some good traditions, most of them continue to hold that a larger amount of that material still proves more suspicious than not. This, however, appears to be more the result of a presupposition that rejects supernaturalism than the conclusion of sustained argument. And this is where the discussion ends, for in the final account one’s reaction to this Gospel will always be bound to an individual decision, not so much to the weight of evidence (12:37; 20:29).

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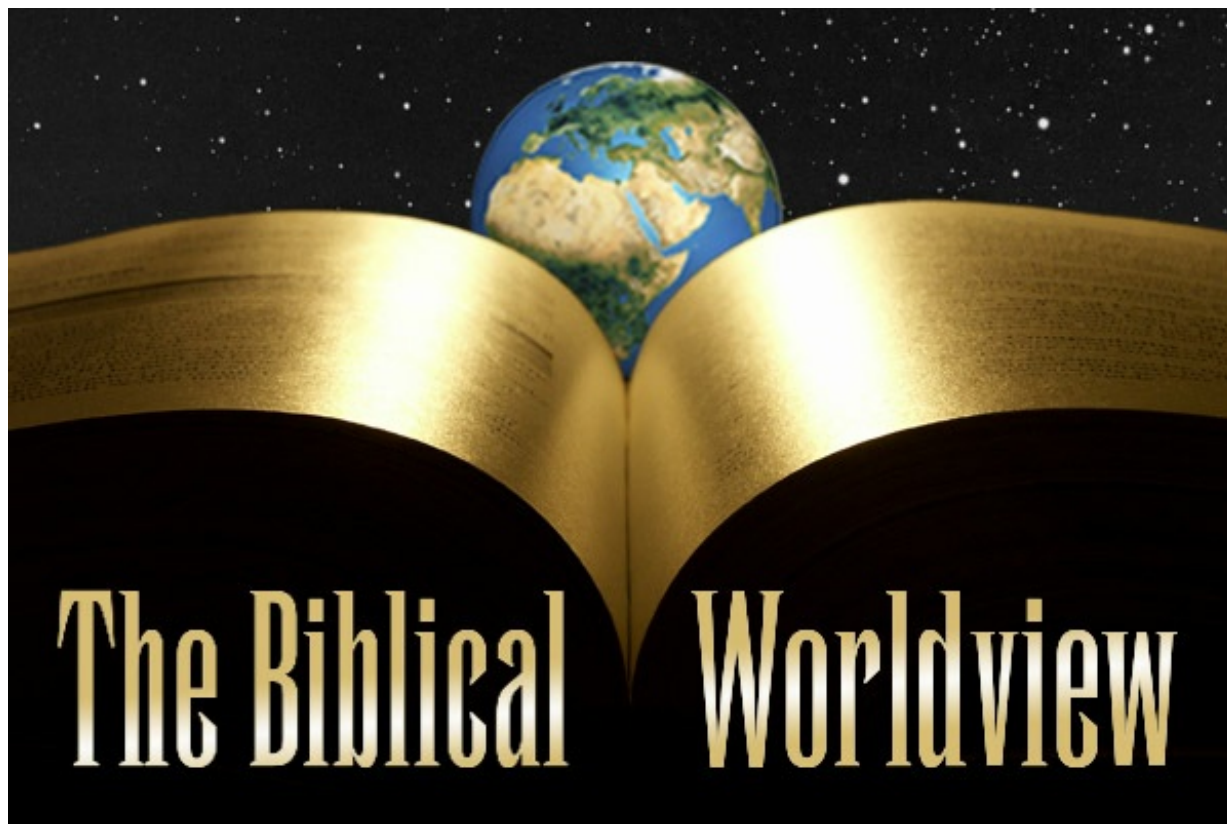
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Perspective Digest - a publication of the Adventist Theological Society

E. Edward
Zinke



Our worldview matters, for it is the path we choose to determine our final destination.

Understanding our worldview is key for understanding our concept of God, of ourselves, of other people, of knowledge, of freedom, of history, of origins, of our basic purpose in life, and of our future. A worldview is the paradigm—the filter or template—through which we view our existence. Our worldview impacts every aspect of our lives.

Every culture, explicitly or implicitly, has a worldview. The problem, however, is that many of these are contrary to the one presented in Scripture.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have something unique to offer. Adventism is not simply a set of doctrines or a lifestyle. It is a worldview that acknowledges the Bible as the authority of all of our lives, the template from which we come to understand every aspect of human existence: our origins, our concept of self, and our eternal destiny.

What does the biblical worldview teach about these crucial issues, and how does it protect us from misguided concepts of reality?

God in the Biblical Worldview

The biblical teaching about God allows for no other gods *of any kind*. Yet, so often, we build a “designer god,” a deity created in the likeness of our cultural worldviews, a god that is modeled after our morals and who fits our notions of truth, goodness, and justice. In short, we create a god who embodies our cultural worldviews, a god made in our own image.

Instead, in Scripture, God is the “I AM,” the One who is from eternity to eternity. It does not matter whether we can understand His external existence, whether our experience allows it, or whether our concept of truth accommodates such a Being. God has revealed Himself to us in Scripture; we, as believers, submit to the reality of God even in our inevitably limited understanding of Him.

The God revealed in Scripture is not defined by, compromised by, measured by, or justified by anything else. He is the standard by which everything else is measured. He is the source, the foundation of everything else. Without Him, there would be no “everything else.”

No philosophy or science predicts Him. Neither His existence nor His characteristics are explained by science, reason, or transcendental concepts within the human mind or experience. We must seek to understand and define ourselves in relationship to Him and who He is, not vice versa. We do not define Him; He defines us. He is His own definition.

Contrary to popular opinion, God is not the epitome, or the highest expression of love, justice, beauty, and truth. He *is* love, justice, beauty, and truth; these concepts exist only because of Him. He defines them, not they Him.

God’s existence is simply assumed in the Bible. There is no attempt to prove it. Genesis 1:1 begins with Him, and that’s because nothing existed before Him. He is before all things. He is a God of action, too, and He is seen in action when first revealed in the Scriptures.

Imagine Adam and Eve, at their creation, suddenly aware of their existence, and wondering how they got there. They had no way of knowing apart from God’s manifestation to them as their Creator. God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve; this is how they came to know Him rather than spotting Him in the telescope or discovering Him at the end of philosophical argumentation.

God and History in the Biblical Worldview

In many humanistic worldviews, God is Himself caught in the flow of history, somewhat as we humans. Many reject the idea of God’s actions in history because, in their worldview, they *a priori* limit the natural world to a closed continuum of cause and effect. Nothing happens apart from the laws of nature and history. In such a view, there is no place for God as the Creator or for miracles.

In contrast, the biblical worldview posits God as both the Creator of history and its controller. Creation was His event, not that of the mechanistic forces of the universe. He guided history when Adam and Eve fell. He caused a global flood, and guided events through the era of the patriarchs and prophets. He brought Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea into the promised land. He became one with us in the person of Jesus Christ. The life, death, and bodily resurrection of Christ were under God’s supervision. God assures us that He is ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary. He is also a personal God who is involved in our everyday lives. God promises to return and create a New Earth. The creation is not a human act. It is God’s act, as is the final destruction of sin and evil.

Thus, in the biblical worldview, history has meaning because God initiated it and He is guiding it to its culmination.

What a contrast to the humanistic view of history, which understands it as random and purposeless. The world exists as a closed system of cause and effect with no divine intervention. We are just left to our own devices, with no hope of anything transcendent to us.

God’s Self-Revelation in the Biblical Worldview

God’s self-revelation through Jesus Christ and His prophetic Word, the Bible, took place in history. God operated in history to reveal Himself to the prophets and to guide them in the transmission of His message. Revelation takes place in real time. Christ is the revelation of God in human flesh. Christ is known through His Word, the Bible.

Because God guides and foresees the future, He also foretells the future in prophecy for our benefit, so that we may understand what will take place and how to relate to it. Worldviews that deny God’s foreknowledge do so because they *a priori* assert that the future cannot be known. They limit God because of their own limited and narrow worldview. This “designer god” is not the one portrayed in the Bible.

Another crucial aspect of God, as seen in His self-revelation, is His personal nature. This idea is reflected in the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead Itself. God created us for fellowship with Him. He gave the Sabbath as a means of

perpetuating that fellowship. He saved His people from Egypt and established the covenant relationship with Israel. His promise is: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Lev. 26:12, NKJV).¹ The new covenant continues this relationship. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

In many secular worldviews, God does not exist, or those who do acknowledge the possibility of His existence see Him as a distant being that does not interact with us. Life then is as meaningless as many secular authors claim.

Some claim that life on this Earth exists by chance and evolved over long periods of time. In such a view, we exist only by chance, random mutations; we are not the purposeful work of a Creator God. By contrast, in the biblical worldview, life has meaning because God created our world and life on it in six literal days. This view gives meaning and purpose to everything else we believe.

Nothing in the biblical worldview makes sense apart from the reality of God as our Creator. Weaken that teaching, denude it, mutate it with modern Darwinian myths, and all that flows out of them—the nature of humankind, the nature of sin, the nature of salvation—all become distorted beyond recognition. Instead of the powerful Creator revealed in Scripture, who spoke our world into existence in six literal days, we have a weakened “designer god” dependent upon billions of years of “random mutation” and “natural selection” until He finally managed to etch out a being in His “own image.”

Humanity in the Biblical Worldview

Directly linked to the doctrine of creation is the doctrine of humanity. Our lives have meaning because we were created in the image of God. We are sons and daughters of God. We were given minds enabling us to understand God’s Word and to commune with Him. Thus, we were created for relationship with God and with one another. Many worldviews understand our relation with God as without content. There is an attempt to empty the mind in order to attain intimate relationship with God. However, God gave us our minds as a means of communicating with Him.

If we exist by chance, as many worldviews assert, then we have no value or purpose except as we might determine it ourselves. There is no given manual by which we will live in harmony with our Creator, His Creation, or with one another. Morals become as subjective as preferences for food, as cultural as clothing design. Our bodies are also our own, to do with as we like, regardless of the consequences. It’s hard to find a more stark contrast to the biblical teaching of Creation, and the biblical teaching of God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments, than is found in the Darwinian model of origins and human existence.

Misconceived worldviews lead to misunderstandings in so many other things as well.

Of course, central to the biblical worldview of humanity is the reality of sin, another concept that other worldviews often reject. In the biblical view, sin is transgression of God’s eternal moral law, the Ten Commandments. This law is a transcript of His character. This means that to sin is to go against the character of God, to interrupt our relationship with Him, and to exist out of harmony with Him. Sin can also be manifested as the desire to elevate oneself to the status of a god or even to become equal with God.

The violence, the suffering, the pain we see in the world is not just the natural result of a chance creation, as the Darwinian worldview teaches. On the contrary, evil, suffering, and death are the most *unnatural* acts in the universe. They were certainly not part of the means by which God created our world. They are the demonic results of violating the moral law by which God governs the world that He had created.

In the secular worldview, human beings have no spiritual connection to a higher power; they are purely mechanical beings who, when dead, stay dead forever. Sin (whatever that is supposed to be) is the result of brain disorder, a biological malfunction, or the lack of sufficient evolutionary progress. There’s no transcendent component to it.

Salvation in the Biblical Worldview

Directly tied to the issue of sin is salvation. Here, wrong worldviews can lead to deadly delusions. Many contemporary worldviews look to humankind to solve the problem of evil in the world. Injustices will be solved by correct political structures, by continued evolutionary progress in culture. Human salvation takes place by the right use of psychology, sociology, education, and other human sciences. The goal is to bring about heaven upon earth

through human genius.

By contrast, the biblical worldview is that salvation comes only by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is in God rather than in human genius, effort, will, or scientific and technological innovation and progress. In the biblical worldview, salvation is as supernatural an act as was the Creation. God is Creator and Redeemer because only the Creator could redeem us. Humans are not the sole solution to the problem; they are, instead, the problem to be solved. In the biblical worldview—in contrast to humanist worldviews—only in the supernatural act of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus can the world be saved.

Truth in the Biblical Worldview

Contemporary worldviews assume that humanity is autonomous—absolutely free to determine its own truth and morality. In that sense, we become like God ourselves. That desire, to be like God, was the original sin (Isa. 14:14). Contemporary worldviews assume that we no longer need God to tell us what is moral and true. We have come of age; we can do it ourselves.

What a contrast to the biblical worldview, in which truth is found only in God Himself. After all, if He created all things, and all things exist in Him and through Him and by Him, where else could truth be but in Him? Hence, no wonder that Jesus, who “is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Col. 1:17), could also say: “I am . . . the truth” (John 14:6).

In the biblical worldview, truth is not some cold principle of the universe, like the law of gravity, nor is it a disembodied rational logoi. Jesus Christ is The Truth, and He is known through His Word, the Bible.²

In the secular worldview, truth is an independent principle in the universe by which all things, including God, are measured. Or, in the postmodern worldview, “truth” (itself deemed a problematic term) becomes cultural, contingent, and uncertain.

Bible in the Biblical Worldview

How, then, amid so many conflicting worldviews, can we maintain the one revealed in the Bible? The biblical worldview is maintained only when the Bible is its own interpreter. Method for the study of the Bible does not come from contemporary philosophies or cultures. It comes from the Bible itself. The *sola scriptura* principle states that the Bible must be its own interpreter and that it provides the sole foundation for our understanding of truth.

Just as it is possible for us to have a wrong view of God by encapsulating Him within in the wisdom of philosophy, science, history, social studies, etc., it is also possible to view the Bible in a way that strips it in our minds of its revelatory and explanatory power. This problem is pandemic, not just in the world but in the Christian church as a whole.

In such a view, Scripture is not the divinely inspired Word through which God spoke. It is, instead, simply a human document that must be construed and reconstructed based upon the methods of sociology, science, history, and other studies derived from the light of naturalistic development. In this view, the Bible is the result of the history of various cultures as they passed their traditions from generation to generation. It is a piece of literature just like that of any other ancient piece of literature, such as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* or Herodotus’ *Histories*. Thus Scripture is the expression of spiritual genius passed on and reformulated from generation to generation. The study of religion becomes the study of spiritual texts, not the study of the divinely revealed Word of God. The Bible is robbed of its transforming power to change hearts and minds.

The Great Controversy in the Biblical Worldview

The Great Controversy theme is central to Scripture. The controversy is not between two principles, per say, good and evil; rather, it is between two persons, Christ and Satan.

The issue in the controversy is our relationship to the Word of God. In heaven, Satan sinned by challenging the authority of God when he, Satan, attempted to make himself equal to God. Satan brought sin to this planet by tempting Eve to doubt the Word of God and eat from the one tree that she was forbidden to eat from. When God’s Word is brought into question, we question the God who gave us His Word and we are led, inevitably, to a disruption in our relationship with Him and a misunderstanding of His world.

Scripture, among other things, is a revelation, both historically and eschatologically, of the reality of the great

controversy between Christ and Satan. We see it in the account of the entrance of sin; in Cain and Abel; in the account of the Flood; in Kadesh-Barnea; in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt; in the sanctuary service; in the Babylonian captivity and deliverance; in Christ in the wilderness and on the cross; in the heavenly sanctuary; in the Second Coming, in the end of sin and sinners; and in the creation of the new earth.

In the biblical worldview of the Great Controversy, each of us is called to decide for or against Christ and the truth about Him as revealed in His Word in contrast to every other worldview. “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, . . . the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith.”³

The world gives power to science, history, psychology, politics, sociology, and many other human disciplines. It relies upon the wisdom of philosophy and the dictates of empiricism. By contrast, Scripture affirms the power of the Word of God to bring us to knowledge of God and, under the Holy Spirit, to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

Yes, our worldview matters, for it is the path we choose. The path determines our final destination. This isn't just academic, intellectual hairsplitting. It is the working out of the Great Controversy theme in our individual lives. As Jesus said: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matt. 7:13).

And many are the worldviews that can get you there, too.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this column are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

2. God's revelation in the natural world is partial and misread. Sin marred both God's self-revelation in the natural world and our ability to understand it. It is possible to understand the marvelous revelation of God in nature, however, only when nature is read from the perspective of Scripture.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

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Work Station

TWO

Gary B. Swanson

God's Artistic Impulse

As the Old Testament book of Zephaniah draws to a close, it concludes the prophet's message with seven verses that express joy in God's faithfulness to His people (3:14-20). And included in these verses is a an image that may be startling to some: "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, *He will rejoice over you with singing*" (vs. 17, italics supplied).¹

The idea that God actually sings—performs music of any form—may suggest a pause for reflection!

There are, of course, numerous instances in the Old Testament in which God's people are encouraged to sing of God's glory: "Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises" (Ps. 98:4); "Sing to the Lord, for He has done excellent things" (Isa. 12:5). "Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers" (Jer. 20:13).

And Christians in the New Testament conveyed their worship through music. "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25). Paul exhorted the members of the Ephesian church to "be filled with the Spirit, . . . singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18, 19). He encouraged those of the Colossian church to be "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

Thus, throughout the history of God's people in Scripture, the aesthetic impulse has played an integral part in the human response of worship to God. But could it also be that God expresses His joy in song as well? How literally should the passage in Zephaniah be taken? Does God truly sing? If so, is it a still, small humming or a *basso profundo* of universal proportions? Or, somehow, both? This may bring a whole new dimension to the concept of "special music"!

Or is this idea of God breaking into spontaneous song nothing more than an anthropomorphic trope, employed to articulate an otherwise ineffable characteristic of the nature of God?

For centuries, God's people have worshiped Him for His power, love, compassion, and justice. But to these attributes should also be added a sense of the artistic—a sense of beauty. "The overwhelming impression gained from Scripture, the sole document on which the Christian faith is established," writes JoAnn Davidson, "is that of the aesthetic nature of God flooding His revealed Word and created world."²

God's sense of the aesthetic—His unfathomable creativity—can certainly be observed in nature. Even to the casual observer, it takes little effort to notice the warming radiance of a sunrise, the taste and texture of an apple, the graceful spiral of a snail shell, the fragrance of a freshening rain, the trilling of a meadowlark's song. Often is heard an exclamation from someone admiring "God's handiwork" or "the Creator's palette" or "the music of the Divine." This is usually a way of showing appreciation for the beauty of nature but seldom a true recognition of God's aesthetic nature. But truly, God is quite literally an artist.

“When the world was created,” writes poet Luci Shaw, “it might have seemed to be enough to have it *work*. To include beauty seems unnecessary for a mechanistic universe. We have been given a sense of the beautiful which can be regarded as gratuitous. Which it is—a gift of pure grace.”³

So if God places such value on artistic, multi-sensory expression in nature, then it should not be surprising to learn of His exultant song in Zephaniah.

Leo Van Dolson writes: “Zephaniah pictures [God] singing a happy song about the results [of judgment]. . . . If faithful, we will be there to hear the greatest solo ever sung. Imagine, if you can, what a spectacular and impressive singing voice the Creator of Lucifer must have. Lucifer’s voice was so wonderful that he ‘Led the heavenly choir.’ He was the one who ‘raised the first note’ (*The Story of Redemption*, p. 25). His voice must have had the range and tone of the greatest pipe organs. But how much sweeter and melodious must be the voice of God!”⁴

This fondness of God for celebration through His own participation in the creation of music is at least implied in other places in Scripture. In Jesus’ heartwarming story of the prodigal son, the father is overjoyed to see his younger son return home. Many have pointed out that it is the father—not the son—who is the central figure in this parable. Jesus, who knows His heavenly Father more intimately than any other being in the universe could, tells this parable to illustrate the father’s love.

And the father’s reaction to the prodigal’s return is a spontaneous impulse to celebrate. In responding to the elder brother’s complaint that no such effort has been made on his own behalf, even though he had avoided his younger brother’s failure and dissipation, the father says, “It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found” (Luke 15:32, italics supplied). This suggests that the father—the symbol for the heavenly Father—does not passively sit by and merely observe the celebration of others. He plays an active role in it.

And to the extent that art plays a role in celebratory worship, it is an effort to relate in a personal and significant way with God. Some have observed that the artistic impulse in the human experience is, in fact, a search for the divine. In her book-length poem, *Aurora Leigh*, 19th-century English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning addresses this idea elegantly:

“What is art
But life upon the larger scale, the higher.
When, graduating up in a spiral line
Of still expanding and ascending gyres,
It pushes toward the intense significance
Of all things, hungry for the infinite?”⁵

In a marginal note, the *Andrews Study Bible* offers a possible alternative interpretation of Zephaniah 3:17. Rather than singing, it says, “We could also read the phrase as ‘He will be quiet in His love.’ Though it is a stunning thought to consider, the text likely portrays a God so thrilled with the people that He has saved that He is in quiet contemplation as He savors His love for them.”⁶

This verse shows God experiencing a singular “moment” of joy, which conveys itself either in music—or in profound reflection. In either case, it is clear in Zephaniah’s description of God—as it is in the sublime story of the prodigal son—that the heavenly Father has feelings, too. And through His immeasurable love, He expresses the “intense significance of all things.”

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this editorial are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

2. [Http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/106/archives/18-3/toward-a-theology-of-beauty?search=Davidson](http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/106/archives/18-3/toward-a-theology-of-beauty?search=Davidson). Accessed May 17, 2014.

3. Luci Shaw, “Beauty and the Creative Impulse,” in Leland Ryken, ed., *The Christian Imagination* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Shaw Books, 2002) p. 89.

4. Leo R. Van Dolson, *Joel, Micah, and Zephaniah: A Call to Revival* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1991), p. 118.

5. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 144, 145.

6. *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2010), p. 1207.

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Choosing a Bible Translation (2)

In my previous “President’s Page,” I described three types of Bible translations that people often read and ask questions about. The three types are word-for-word translations, dynamic-equivalence translations, and paraphrase translations. We noted the characteristics and uses of all three types for different situations.

But such a discussion raises a question that many have heard discussed, sometimes with quite some vigor. This is the idea that the only version we should use and read in our churches is the King James Version or the New King James Version. What are the issues in this discussion?

The King-James-Version-Only (KJVO) Position

This position teaches that the only Bible we should use is the King James Version. A number of arguments are presented to support this view. One is the idea that God has preserved His Word through the centuries. Psalm 12:6, 7 is often cited: “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever” (KJV). The argument goes that all the changes from the KJV that we see in modern translations would be a denial of the truth of these verses, and thus the modern versions must be wrong.

Another argument is somewhat of a corollary to the above. It indicates that preservation of the Bible by God through the centuries would be seen in the vast majority of manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments passed on to later generations. Otherwise, so the argument goes, how could it be said that the Lord had preserved His Word for them? Since the majority of New Testament manuscripts, known in their most common textual form as the Received Text (*Textus Receptus*) were the basis for the KJV New Testament, then the later versions that rely on older and much fewer manuscripts that differ from the Received Text must be wrong.

Other arguments are presented that disparage the manuscripts on which modern translations are based. These oldest manuscripts come from Egypt, where, it is maintained, heresies abounded. Furthermore, these manuscripts come to us well preserved. Therefore, they must not have been used much, probably, so it is argued, because they were full of errors. Further disparaging remarks are made about scholars involved in textual criticism, who are claimed to be heretics or unbelievers.

Responses to Arguments

It is not possible to respond to all of these arguments in detail in this short article, but several points should be made. To begin, I applaud the confidence in God’s Word and trust in His power to preserve it that the KVJO

advocates display. I agree with them that God's Word is reliable and that He has watched over it through the centuries.

But I find their argumentation lacking regarding how God has accomplished this preservation. KVJO advocates begin with a theological premise based on a particular understanding of Psalm 12:6, 7 and use this thesis as the lens through which they view manuscript evidence and translations. Such argumentation will always arrive at the desired end, because it begins with the premise it wishes to prove.

Instead, we should look at the evidence first and seek to describe what we see and then ponder how this fits with understanding such passages as Psalm 12:6, 7. It may surprise many, but actually the stories of manuscript preservation that come to us and the evidence that textual criticism presents about the preservation of the Word of God are highly encouraging.

First, the manuscripts we have, particularly of the New Testament, are very numerous (more than 5,700 with all or part of the New Testament, with some dating from as early as the second century A.D.).¹ Amazing findings of manuscripts such as the Chester Beatty and Bodimer Papyri for the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls for the Old Testament actually broke down destructive theories of scholars who felt the text of the Bible was hopelessly riddled with modifications and errors.

Second, because there are so many manuscripts, we can assert that the original text of the New Testament is recoverable through careful study of the manuscript evidence. This wealth of evidence is the real amazing way that God preserved His Word. In comparison with the New Testament, most other books from the ancient world come to us in few manuscripts. In some cases we have only the names of books that ancient authors wrote or translations in other languages. Nothing compares with the wealth of manuscript evidence we have for the New Testament, and much can be said in the same manner for the Old Testament.

Third, we do not have to fear the evidence. While the number of variations in manuscripts of the New Testament alone number in the hundreds of thousands (remember, there are a lot of manuscripts), the vast majority of these variations are simple things like word spellings, a matter of the copyist skipping a line, word transposition and the like. With careful analysis, it is possible to wend our way through the evidence to arrive at the logical case for the original reading.

Fourth, Ellen G. White and the original translators of the KJV give us good guidance in how to approach questions of manuscript evidence and translation.

Ellen White said the following: "Some look to us gravely and say, 'Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?' This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God."²

And the original translators of the KJV expressed belief in the preservation of God's Word in whatever translation it is given. In the preface to the KJV, they used the following analogy: "We affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession, (for we have seen none of theirs of the whole Bible as yet) containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God. As the King's speech, which he uttereth in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin, is still the King's speech, though it be not interpreted by every Translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, everywhere."³

Have errors crept into Bible manuscripts over the centuries? Yes, without a doubt. But we are able to recognize these as errors because of the vast number of manuscripts available for our study. Praise God, these manuscripts have been preserved through a long history of copying the precious Word of God, sometimes at risk of life.

Should we use only one version of the Bible in our study? To do so would be to limit ourselves to one understanding, one set of manuscript evidence, one phraseology. No! I want all I can get. I want the Word of God in all its hues with all the intimacy with His Word that this brings. I am thankful that scholars continue to study and work on bringing before us the precious Word of God. God has preserved His Word and it continues to illumine our lives. Let us open it daily in whatever translation and allow its rich truths to transform our lives into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. It is still the "King's Speech" today!

1. I am a New Testament scholar and so mention the New Testament evidence here more. But wonderful finds in Old Testament manuscripts have also been made.

2. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 16.

3. [Http://www.ccel.org/bible/kjv/preface/pref9.htm](http://www.ccel.org/bible/kjv/preface/pref9.htm).

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The Associate Editor's

DESK

Gerhard Pfandl

The Reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary

In speaking of the heavenly sanctuary we need to avoid two pitfalls: (1) We must avoid putting the earthly sanctuary into heaven and see a tent or a temple of stone in heaven, and (2) we must avoid spiritualizing heavenly things to the point of meaninglessness, or equate the sanctuary with heaven. God reveals heavenly things through visions and dreams (Num. 12:6), which contain an abundance of imagery and symbols. A literal interpretation of these symbols would reduce these prophecies to absurdity.

Prophets describe in symbolic language what they have seen, without explaining that they are utilizing imagery. Ellen White, for example, describes Satan trying to carry on the work of God in the presence of God in heaven.¹ Because she was criticized for this, she later wrote: "I will give another sentence from the same page: 'I turned to look at the company who were still bowed before the throne.' Now this praying company was in this mortal state, on the earth, yet represented to me as bowed before the throne. I never had the idea that these individuals were actually in the New Jerusalem. Neither did I ever think that any mortal could suppose that I believed that Satan was actually in the New Jerusalem. But did not John see the great red dragon in heaven? Certainly. 'And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns.' Revelation 12:3. What a monster to be in heaven! Here seems to be as good a chance for ridicule as in the interpretation which some have placed upon my statements."²

In visions prophets frequently see representations of the actual but not the actual itself. Concerning the earthly sanctuary, the biblical record tells us that Moses was told four times to make the sanctuary according to the pattern that was shown to him on the mountain (Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). What Moses saw was a tent with two apartments with all its furnishings, and this is what he built—the Old Testament sanctuary. But this does not mean that there is a tent in heaven.

The temple of Solomon was built according to the instructions David received from God. "David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things; . . . 'All this,' said David, 'the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans'" (1 Chron. 28:11, 12, 19).³

Does this mean that there is a temple of stone in heaven? I don't believe so. There is a sanctuary in heaven, but it is made of heavenly material, not earthly stones. The heavenly sanctuary is much greater, grander, and more beautiful than any earthly tent or temple ever could be. What was shown to Moses and David were earthly models of

the heavenly sanctuary—not miniature editions of the heavenly sanctuary but earthly representations that Moses and David could build at the time and place in which they lived.

God adapted what He showed them to the circumstances in which they lived. Therefore, there is not a tent or a temple of stone in heaven, but a heavenly sanctuary made of heavenly material and in heavenly dimensions.

Ellen G. White described the heavenly sanctuary in these words: “The abiding place of the King of kings, . . . that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory. Yet important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work there carried forward for man’s redemption were taught by the earthly sanctuary and its services.”⁴

The earthly sanctuary was but a “faint reflection of its vastness and glory.” The heavenly throne room, the seat of God’s government in the universe, where millions of angels stand before God, could never be adequately represented by an earthly structure. Literal language is sometimes utterly inadequate to express the supernatural realities of heaven. Nevertheless, we must never spiritualize the heavenly sanctuary or equate it with heaven itself.

There are many texts in the Old and New Testament that indicate that heaven is not the sanctuary, but that there is a sanctuary in heaven:

“The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4).

“We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2).

The evidence of the Old and New Testament shows that the biblical authors firmly believed in the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. And nowhere do they equate heaven with the sanctuary. Particularly the Book of Revelation makes a clear distinction between heaven and the sanctuary in heaven. Revelation 5:11 provides a perspective as to its size: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” Ellen White aptly said, “That temple filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration—no earthly structure could represent its vastness and its glory.”⁵

Does the heavenly sanctuary have two apartments as did the earthly? Marvin Moore, the editor of the magazine *Signs of the Times*, doesn’t think so: “Without the veil in the earthly sanctuary, there would have been only one apartment. Why the veil? Its purpose was to shield the priest from entering directly into God’s presence on a daily basis (see Lev. 16:3). But there is no need for Jesus, our High Priest, to be shielded from exposure to God’s presence, and, thus, there is no need of a veil The heavenly sanctuary Jesus entered following His ascension consists of one ‘room,’ not two.”⁶

Moore correctly says that the dividing curtain is not necessary in the heavenly temple. Christ has been in the presence of the Father since His ascension (Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34). If there is a veil or curtain in the heavenly sanctuary, it is not to separate Jesus from the Father. Why then did Ellen White speak about two apartments in the heavenly sanctuary? Because in vision she was shown two apartments, just as Moses was shown a tent with two apartments and David a temple with two apartments.

The importance of the two apartments, however, was not just their geography, but also their symbolic function. The two apartments in the sanctuary represented two phases in Christ’s service. Ellen White explains: “As Christ’s ministration was to consist of two great divisions, each occupying a period of time and having a distinctive place in the heavenly sanctuary, so the typical ministration consisted of two divisions, the daily and the yearly service, and to each a department of the tabernacle was devoted.”⁷

The New Testament church believed that after Jesus’ ascension, He ministered for His followers in the very presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary (Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 9:24). In the epistle to the Hebrews, in particular, the writer is trying to turn the eyes of the Jewish Christians away from the ministry in the earthly sanctuary/temple to the heavenly sanctuary with a more perfect ministry by their own resurrected and ascended Lord and Savior. Gradually, however, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary became obscured. The eyes and attention of Christian believers were largely directed toward the confessional, the sacrifice of the mass, saints, and the Virgin Mary in place of the continuous or daily mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Christ’s continuous ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of humanity was diminished, lost sight of, and

largely forgotten.

Even if we do not know exactly what the heavenly sanctuary looks like, we can nevertheless speak and proclaim what goes on there. We know that Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary and that by faith we can come to the throne of God and receive mercy and forgiveness—and this is the important thing.

In our proclamation, therefore, let us focus on the ministry of Christ in two phases in the heavenly sanctuary, rather than lose sleep over its architecture or geography.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Early Writings*, p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 93.

3. All Scripture references in this column are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357.

6. Marvin Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2010), p. 277.

7. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, op. cit.

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