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# JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1990

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## Greetings!

### A Message from the ATS President

Jack J. Blanco

Dear Reader:

I sincerely hope you will enjoy this first issue of the JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY. It is a privilege to introduce it to you.

In it we share with you the actual presentations, or summaries of some of them, that were given at the first General Meeting of the Adventist Theological Society held in Lincoln, Nebraska, September 7-10, 1989.

The Adventist Theological Society (ATS) is a vehicle whereby men and women who hold to the divine inspiration of Scripture and who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour and committed their lives to upholding the Seventh-day Adventist church can associate together for focused fellowship, prayer, and Bible study.

At present the Society holds two meetings a year, the General Meeting in the summer and, in the fall, the Research Session, conducted in connection with the meetings of other biblical and religious societies. Except for business sessions, which are open only to Society members, ATS meetings are open to everyone. And the plan is that the papers and sermons given at the meetings will be published in our JOURNAL—which we expect to distribute at least twice yearly, or more often, as the number of presentations and the need for their distribution may suggest.

Membership in the Society is by invitation or application, followed by endorsement and committee action—a procedure customary in many societies. In addition to membership, we provide for "patronage," which carries with it all the privileges of membership, excepting only the right to vote at business meetings. Almost daily men and women are joining us, either as members or as patrons. We are immensely grateful to the Lord for the strength they provide—and for the warm response we have received from fellow believers in many countries who are concerned about the current

erosion of scriptural authority even in churches long known as bastions of biblical truth.

The literalness of the creation and flood narratives, the divine establishment of the seventh-day Sabbath, the need for a substitutionary atonement, the intercession of Christ as portrayed through the symbols of the sanctuary, and the concept of an end-time remnant church have all come under question, even among some Seventh-day Adventists.

It is the purpose of the Society to provide papers that speak specifically to basic Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. The Society hopes to set forth in clear lines the issues confronting Bible-believing Christians and the choices we must make.

The leaders of the Society are convinced that a biblical understanding of the issues involved in earth's final days will nourish faith—and that faith thus nourished will bring forth more honest lives, lives filled with reverence for what is sacred, committed deeply to the Lord Jesus, and devoted to His loving service in preparing others for His soon return.

May this JOURNAL be the help it is intended to be. May it beget a new beginning to your life by helping you put first things first as never before. Surely He who died for us and whom we love is coming soon. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

JACK

## New, Yet Historic

By Gordon Hyde, Editor

*Adventist Perspectives*

The first General Meeting of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) convened September 7-10, 1989, in Lincoln, Nebraska. By invitation of President Joel O. Tompkins, the Society met in the well-appointed headquarters building of the Mid-America Union Conference. Gracious accommodations, food service, and transportation were provided on the campus of nearby Union College.

These open sessions drew an international gathering of more than a hundred seminary and college theologians, college administrators, division and union presidents, active and retired General Conference officers, editors, and departmental directors, lawyers, physicians and dentists, doctoral candidates from the Seminary, active and retired pastors, Bible instructors, and business people.

On Thursday evening Elder Francis W. Wernick, former General Conference vice president, gave the keynote address. He reaffirmed the supreme authority of the Bible in the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist church—a faith that is not subordinated to human reason, science, history, philosophy, or any other source of human knowledge and wisdom.

Friday's program included presentations by four of the theologians present. Panel discussions followed each presentation. The morning was devoted to the biblical basis of our faith. Dr. Gerhard Hasel, of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University, traced the vicissitudes of the historical-critical method (higher criticism) in Seventh-day Adventist history, and Dr. Richard Davidson, also of the Seminary faculty, outlined his personal pilgrimage of faith into and out of the same critical approach to the Bible.

The Friday afternoon program dealt with another major topic of ATS emphasis, the atonement. Dr. Norman R. Gulley of Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists compared the many theories of atonement with

what the Bible says about it. Dr. Leslie Hardinge, retired but recently president of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary (Far East), drew upon the rich blood symbolism of the atonement in the sanctuary services.

On Friday evening Elder J. Robert Spangler, editor of *Ministry* magazine, appealed earnestly for the speedy fulfillment of the mission assigned the Adventist church. His hearers responded with testimonies, prayers, and renewed consecration.

Sabbath School the next morning was superintended by Elder D. A. Delafield, president of Adventist Retired Workers. Elder R. G. Peck, president of the Rwanda Union Mission, presented a well-illustrated mission report. Dr. Gordon Hyde, editor of *Adventist Perspectives* at Southern College, led out in the lesson study. During the worship service the speaker, Elder Joel Tompkins, expressed his concerns regarding the responsibility of educational boards, administrators, and teachers for the parents and youth of the church and for trends that are undermining faith today.

Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell, of the Seminary Church History faculty, discoursed in the afternoon upon the problem of identity within the Seventh-day Adventist church, stirring considerable appreciative discussion.

The agape supper that closed the Sabbath was chaired by Dr. Jack Blanco, chairman of the Religion Department at Southern College and president of ATS. Elder Cyril Miller, president of the Southwestern Union, then presented a telling analysis of trends that he has observed in the church.

The weekend closed with a Sunday morning business session. For the special benefit of overseas members and visitors, it was decided that the 1990 General Meeting would be coordinated with the General Conference Session in Indianapolis.

Many who attended the weekend in Lincoln commented on the spirit of united fellowship and spiritual concern that was fostered by the ministries of Dr. Raymond Holmes, director of Student Life at the Seminary, and by Dr. Derek Morris, religion teacher at Southern College. Singing, morning prayer seasons, and personal testimonies made the gathering a spiritual feast. As one college administrator said, "It was just like camp meeting."

## Why I'm Glad for the ATS

By Jacob J. Nortey, President  
Africa-Indian Ocean Division

Not long ago I had a taste of good "old-time religion."

In response to an invitation from a friend, I attended the first General Meeting of the Adventist Theological Society. I found a group made up of Seventh-day Adventists from all walks of life. They spent many hours, from Thursday night to Sunday morning, September 7-10, 1989, attending sessions in the chapel of the Mid-America Union headquarters. I heard hearty singing, the study of God's Word, discussions, prayer, and earnest testimonies.

The presentations, studies, and sermons directed attention to the Word of God and the assurance of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The atmosphere was pleasant and Spirit-filled. It reminded me of the time I had first attended a Seventh-day Adventist meeting, thirty years before.

The Baden-Powell Memorial Hall in Ghana, that night thirty years before, was packed. Every seat was taken and all the standing room was jammed. The choir sang beautifully. The smiling ushers were dressed in white.

Then as Evangelist Earl Cleveland presented his subject, "A Day When Money Will Be Thrown in the Streets of Accra and No One Will Care to Pick It Up," the crowded hall was hushed. We heard that God's prophecies had been fulfilled to the letter. We saw the evangelist, holding his open Bible in his left hand, point to it with his right hand and declare, "Brothers and Sisters, this is the Word of the living God. It is the Bible. The basis of Christian faith and doctrine is the Bible, the Bible alone."

That presentation thirty years ago was an answer to my prayers and search. It led me to study further and to become a member of this "Thus saith the Lord" denomination.

In harmony with that experience, this recent ATS weekend in Lincoln brought me new confidence in the Word of God and a new assurance in the salvation made possible through the blood of Jesus.

My joy in Lincoln was intensified by the fact that these days it's not uncommon to meet so-called Christians who measure their scholarship by the depth of their doubts about the plain teachings of the Bible. Many of our young people leave Africa to take "higher studies" in the West, only to return with their faith diminished. Some return doubting even if there is a heaven.

But I was pleasantly surprised in Lincoln to find top scholars and teachers from several Adventist institutions of higher learning expressing confidence in the Word of God and in the blood of Christ. I was delighted, too, to see the wide spectrum of people present, from North America and overseas. Although different nationalities and races were present, there was an impressive spirit of unity and love.

I was glad that in its quest to encourage sound conservative Bible scholarship and interpretation, the ATS does not limit membership to scholars. Too often, scholars isolate themselves as though they alone had the answers. What we need rather is harmonious interaction and involvement of every talent in order to carry out the global mission God has assigned this church.

We "older Adventists" sometimes miss the refreshing spirit of earlier years. In West Africa our people constantly remind us that this or that "is not what happened during the time of Gibson, Clemonds, or Hyde." In North America I have learned that some of our older brethren shed tears of joy after hearing a plain-truth message.

The "old-time religion," with its trust in the Bible as the Word of God and in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, is what God's people most need today. Let's have more of it.

God bless the ATS.

## THE POWER OF THE WORD

### The Keynote Message

By Francis Wernick

Former Vice President of the General Conference

"There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

I believe that this Adventist Theological Society is an idea whose time has come. If guided aright, it may become a powerful force and voice for good as it upholds our leaders and the great truths of Scripture that were instrumental in bringing this Seventh-day Adventist movement into being.

We have formed this society to support, to uphold, and to proclaim the truths of Scripture that are so essential to the world at this time in its history. The mission and message of the Seventh-day Adventist church are outlined in Revelation 14, and our reason for existence is based on the same prophetic passage.

More than 48 years ago, I heard Elder W. A. Spicer speak in the Union College chapel. He began his sermon this way: "It's true, it's true! This Adventist movement was born out of the prophecy of Revelation 14." Elder Spicer went on to describe how God had called Adventists to go into all the world with a special message to prepare a people for the soon appearing of Christ. His sermon had a profound effect upon us then, and this truth-filled message still moves God's people today. It is the foundation of our beliefs. And what we believe is critically important.

No organization can long exist or make an impact on the world unless it knows what it believes and is passionately committed to its beliefs. In a recent telecast, a specialist in philosophy was asked

why philosophy is important. He answered by saying that ideas underlie all that we do. Because ideas influence what we do, we Seventh-day Adventists need to be certain that what we believe is firmly founded in Scripture, and we need to hold to it with very deep commitment.

Ideas have power to guide nations as well as individuals. And what is true of individuals and nations is also true of churches. Churches live and move on their beliefs. Seventh-day Adventists are no exception. Any uncertainty about our basic beliefs and mission would soon halt our growth and result in loss of power. This is why pluralism of beliefs upon substantive issues would soon rob us of our purpose for existence and weaken the will of our people, as it has in other churches.

An Orthodox Catholic bishop, who prefers the title of chaplain, recently became a Seventh-day Adventist in New York City. Here is the definition of the Seventh-day Adventist church that he put in writing:

The Seventh-day Adventist church is the organized expression of the prophetic end-time remnant people, called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Its mission is to announce the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaim salvation through Christ, and herald the nearness of His second Advent, while being a living demonstration of His love.

Each of us might state the matter a little differently; but however we state it, we need to renew our clarity of vision as to who we are and why we are here. Remember that beliefs based upon the Scriptures so captured the hearts of people like William Miller that they were moved to give their lives to a cause that swept over the eastern half of the United States. That movement was founded on a firm belief in Bible truth. The same commitment to Bible truth brought the fledgling Adventist movement into existence, a movement that has now grown to worldwide proportions. However, the continuation of this movement depends upon a continuing commitment to Bible truth.

#### Finding Truth

But how do we find truth? Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy Word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

He also stated, "I have given them thy Word" (verse 14). Christ, the *Logos*, was the embodiment of the Word. He was the "expression of the thought of God." He was the God of power and truth come to life in humanity. "In Him was life" (Jn 1:4). His Word, which created the worlds, now gives life and power to those who receive Him. And to receive Christ involves the reception of His Word. Through its study, the life is changed as the Holy Spirit enables us to put its words into practice. "The Life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word" (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 25, 1902).

To neglect the study of the Bible is to neglect the only source of power that can change our lives for the better. Could this be the cause of lifelessness among so many Christians?

How the Bible is studied also is important. It should not be approached as we study a secular book, but as the Word of God. Even though it was written by human beings, it must be studied with an implicit faith that it comes from God and is the Word of life. It should be approached with awe and reverence. Of course, we need to bring to bear all of the discipline and skill of scholarship as we seek to understand its language, its backgrounds, and its writers, but we must do so always keeping in mind that it is the Word of life given us by God.

#### Beliefs Came First

By the earliest Adventists, the Bible was received as the Word of life given us by God! Our pioneers uncovered our fundamental beliefs through diligent Bible study. Especially during the foundational years, 1844-1850 or so, James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, and others, were granted the great privilege of discovering and establishing truths that have stood the test of years. These basic truths, rooted as they are in the Scriptures, have not been challenged successfully or altered fundamentally by the most intense scrutiny given them since that time. The doctrines of creation, the heavenly sanctuary, the Sabbath, the law of God, the nature of man, the three angels' messages, and the coming of Christ, among others, are eternal, changeless truths given us by Christ Himself. And they are centered in Him, the living Word.

These truths, and all of the other basic teachings of salvation found in the Bible, have made Seventh-day Adventists what we are.

It is worth noting that the beliefs came first, then came organizational structure and the mission of the church. The standards and practices of the early Adventists that set them apart from other Christians and often at variance with the world, grew out of biblical principles. A loss of faith in the Scriptures as the authority for all of life would weaken and change the Seventh-day Adventist church and its standards until it would become indistinguishable from the world in which it lives and works. John spoke to the point in his earnest appeal:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world [1 Jn 2:15, 16].

What will be the final end of the love of the world that threatens the church in our generation? "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jn 2:17). The only protection that the Adventist church has in its battle against the constant encroachments of a hostile and evil world is to make the Bible the sole authority for all of our beliefs and practices.

Quite a number of years ago, a church I was pastoring rented its facilities to another Protestant church. On one occasion, the pastor of that church asked me to explain to his congregation who Adventists were and what we believed. I did so to the best of my ability. After the service, the pastor made this significant observation: "I believe that I understand now the basic difference between you Adventists and our church. You take the Bible as your authority, while we give that authority to the church." I believe he summed it up quite well. It is true that Christ gave authority to the church, but not the supreme authority. The supreme authority has been reserved for the Scriptures as the Word of God. They are the test of every other authority.

Even the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy, which we fully believe and accept as given to the church through Ellen White, rests upon the Holy Scriptures. We test the validity of Ellen White's writings by the Bible.

But, someone asks, "Isn't the Holy Spirit the ultimate authority and guide for us today?" The question isn't a new one. It

is true that the Holy Scriptures came to us by the Holy Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:21), but the Holy Spirit will not speak to us today in contradiction to what He gave through the prophets. When Ellen White faced this issue she wrote, "It is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word" (*The Great Controversy*, p. vii).

In the same passage Ellen White wrote, "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." With this in mind, she could write,

Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support [ibid., p. 595].

If our teachings and practices are to express the will of God and the Holy Spirit, they must be undergirded by a plain "thus saith the Lord." The Apostle John was given a prophetic picture of a movement that would expand in power and influence through all the world, lighting the earth with the glory of the Lord (see Rev 18:1). The continued vitality of the church depends upon a commitment to the Word of the Lord, both in expression and in deed. Jesus, the Word, must be uplifted before the world as Saviour and Lord. For this to be done, His Word of life must reign supreme in the lives of His followers.

When this happens, great changes will be seen as sinners come to Christ in increased numbers and become transformed into sons and daughters of God. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (Jn 1:12). To receive Christ is to eat and drink the Words of life. For, as Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (Jn 6:63).

#### The Bread of Life Brings Power to the Church

One of the greatest needs we Christians have today is that of renewing our acquaintance with the Bible as God's Holy Word. Not only must we learn again the beauty of the truths it contains, but we must also study in such a way that we will hear God speaking to us as His children. Then life and power will come to us as we study.

When Jesus said, "I am that bread of life" (Jn 6:48), many turned away from Him because they realized that He was speaking of spiritual life, and not of their material, physical desires. They were so wrapped up in the demands of their daily toil and ambitions that they resented having Christ attempt to focus their attention on the spiritual life that was their greatest need.

When Jesus saw the crowd melting away, He asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" (Jn 6:67). Peter answered, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). Peter could have given many other answers to this questions, but he caught the most significant aspect of the ministry and mission of Christ, namely, to give the world the words of eternal life. What other mission could Jesus carry out that would lift human beings out of the mire of sin in which they have sunk so helplessly? Do we answer today as Peter did, "Thou hast the words of eternal life"? If this is our answer, we are well along the path of power for the church.

The power of the Holy Spirit, so vital to the renewal of energy in the church body, is accompanied by the Word of God. Jesus announced that the Spirit would be given to us to guide us. "Howbeit," He said, "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (Jn 16:13). Again, Jesus exalted the words of truth, which are to be found in the Holy Scriptures.

#### Adventists to Be Tested on the Question of Authority

In her comments on the closing scenes of the great controversy, Ellen White describes the efforts of Satan to confuse, deceive, and destroy the people of God.

In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition [*Great Controversy*, p. 582].

"But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms (ibid., p. 595).

While upholding the Bible as the standard of all that we believe, Ellen White issues this caution concerning its study:

Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not engage in the study of the Bible with that self-reliance with which so many enter the domain of science [ibid., p. 599].

A test of great magnitude is surely coming to the church and most certainly to each of us individually. This test will be focused on the issue of whether the Bible is to be the authority for all we believe and practice. Ellen White had something to say about this, too:

When the testing time shall come, those who have made God's Word their rule of life will be revealed [ibid., p. 602].

The last great delusion is soon to open before us. . . . So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony, every statement and every miracle must be tested [ibid., p. 593].

The authority of the Holy Scriptures will settle the issue for some but will prove to be a stumbling block for others. It has always been so. For those who accept the Bible as authority, this counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy has meaning:

The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God's Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts [Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 4, 1906, p. 416].

Those who have made the Scriptures their defense have seen the Bible through the eyes of Paul, who said, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13). He later added, "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37).

Jesus often appealed to the Scriptures to validate His teachings and His Messiahship. He would ask, "Have ye not read?" or,



“What saith the Scriptures?” On behalf of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He reviewed all the Scriptures concerning Himself. Some time before this He had explained, “They are they which testify of me” (Jn 5:39). Why this emphasis by Christ, the prophets, and Paul on the Holy Scriptures as their authority? Paul answers the question: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16).

### Our Source of Authority

The Scriptures come to us “God-breathed,” through the power of the Holy Spirit. No church council, no human authority can nullify or alter the authority of the Bible. It will stand fast until Jesus comes. It will guide us aright when we follow it; and it will judge us when we do not walk in its counsel. Isaiah points to its authority this way:

To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them [Isa. 8:20].

To assemble a mass of texts to support a preconceived human conclusion is not an adequate method of study. The Bible must be allowed to be its own expositor, speaking its own truth to us.

Perhaps the worst possible deception is brought about by a profession of adherence to the Scriptures when there is no intention to put that profession into practice. The danger was revealed to Israel in these words: “That he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (Deut 8:3). This truth was reinforced daily by the falling of the manna—a type of Christ as our daily spiritual food.

Today, Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to teach us the truths of the Bible. Jesus said, “He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Jn 16:15). “For whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (Jn 16:13).

Our source of authority for what we believe and practice is a sacred one. Zedekiah, King of Judah, once asked Jeremiah, “Is there any word from the Lord?” (Jer 37:17). No more important question has ever been asked. The king was torn between the princes, who encouraged him to believe he could defeat the Chaldeans, and Jeremiah, whose counsel from the Lord was that he could not defeat

them. Zedekiah wavered between the princes and the prophet and finally rejected the Word of the Lord—and paid a severe penalty for his choice of authority.

To God’s remnant people, King Zedekiah’s question is still being asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Our answer is, “Yes indeed, there is counsel in abundance. And those who walk in it will be victorious through Christ.”

Revelation 19 presents a spectacular prophetic view of Christ, the Word, in final conflict with Satan, the master deceiver. Christ is the embodiment of truth and righteousness, and He has placed about His people His perfect robe of righteousness and purity. So committed are His people to Him, that they have come to reflect His character in obedience to His Word. By His grace, they obey His commandments and are ready for the marriage feast. Christ goes forth to take possession of the kingdom He has purchased with His blood. And as He goes forth, He leads the armies of Heaven as well as the saints who follow Him on earth. He is called Faithful and True. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The saints who follow Him have asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” and, unlike Zedekiah, have chosen to be molded by the His Word of truth (see Rev 19:13). the Word that is victorious over all its enemies.

Soon Jesus will rise up to shake terribly the earth—and to bring victory to His faithful followers. Soon Christ will be vindicated in the lives of His people. Soon the Word of God will light up the earth with the glory of Christ and His righteous character.

But before these things can happen, the beauty and glory of Christ must be seen in us. His Word must become our sole authority for all we believe and appreciate. Then, we shall be able to march throughout the world carrying the truth everywhere. This, indeed, is our mission.

Our challenge today is to exalt the name of our Lord and Saviour through our biblical preaching and teaching, and through the way we put His blessed Word into daily practice.

## THE CRISIS OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

By Gerhard F. Hasel  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary  
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It is widely acknowledged that the most important crisis facing Christian churches today involves the authority of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> And what is true of Christian churches as a whole is true also in the microcosm of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Many knowledgeable Adventist leaders—administrators, pastors, educational leaders, scholars, teachers, and laity—are painfully aware that the major crisis of the later decades of the twentieth century, even in the Adventist movement, is the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Should the Bible give direction to all teachings, the full belief system, the entire life style and policies that Adventists stand for, or should the Bible be used only to some degree, or not be used at all when interpretations differ?

It is both amazing and disturbing that the chairperson of a major commission studying a divisive issue in the Adventist church recently concluded that, inasmuch as some of the papers of experts studying biblical aspects of the topic diverged in their conclusions, these papers canceled one another out and the Bible offers no "thus saith the Lord" on the matter as a basis for a denominational decision. The issue is one of biblical authority in determining doctrines for church life and practice.

But does it really follow when experts disagree on their interpretations of biblical evidence that the Bible cannot be used to decide a question? Is it not rather mandatory, when divergence of

interpretations exists, that we inquire as to the hermeneutical methods that the experts are using and what presuppositions are at work?

On the very same issue confronting the commission that we just mentioned, other Christian bodies have found biblical evidence to guide them.<sup>2</sup> Should Adventists lightly disregard the potential of further study of Scripture and of the methods of Scripture study? And should we not ask if we have contextualized the Bible. Have modern socio-cultural forces been allowed to influence what we permit the Bible to mean? Is pragmatism to reign in the Advent movement? Are we willing to surrender the foundation of our faith and make a very unfortunate statement about the authority of the Bible? Surely nothing should be allowed to override the abiding authority of the Bible as the Word of God to give direction to the community of believers in all places and at all times.

This recent illustration seems symptomatic of the broader crisis of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God today. As in other denominations that hold a high view of Scripture, historic biblical positions are under attack in the Adventist church and are either being rejected outright or modified almost beyond recognition in a process of symbiosis.

But let us pause to reaffirm our confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist church as God's true end-time remnant. The crisis of biblical authority is so severe that we would be irresponsible not to address it, but we fully believe that Seventh-day Adventists constitute a unique prophetic movement, called into existence "for such a time as this" to proclaim to every nation, tongue, and people, with power and conviction the soon and visible return of Jesus Christ, a message based on the proclamation of the "three angels messages" of Revelation 14. What is stated in this paper is not at all to be understood as criticism. God forbid! We simply observe with eyes open and heads held high, certain trends and issues that seem to be eating away at the core of the message on which the Seventh-day Adventist church is based. God's special "messenger to the remnant" (and this is what Ellen G. White is and will remain), has stated profoundly, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in

our past history.”<sup>3</sup> She has also stated, profoundly, in the *Great Controversy* chapter, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” that

God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.<sup>4</sup>

I am convinced that the “people” she speaks of here, the people that maintain the Bible and the Bible only as the “standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reform,” is God’s remnant church. Thus what we are attempting to do in this presentation is not to criticize but to reassert the rightful place of the Bible in the remnant’s life and mission in the face of increasing challenges that have diminished and are undermining its biblical foundation.

At this point let us look at some aspects of modern scholarship outside the Seventh-day Adventist church, and by analyzing how they developed, learn how we can prevent their influence from having a negative impact on Adventist theology, thought, and life.

A few weeks ago, when the current issue of one of my professional journals arrived, my eye immediately fell on an article by Professor James Barr (formally of Oxford University and now of Vanderbilt), one of the best known and most seminal critical biblical scholars of our time. The article, I found, dealt with the reliability of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2—a topic which is currently being hotly debated in Adventist circles. Professor Barr mentioned what the modern, historical-critical scholar says about Genesis 1 and 2:

He [the historical-critical scholar] does not tell you “what happened,” he does not tell you anything factual about the origin of the universe, because he does not know anything about that; and not only does he not know, he knows that the biblical writers didn’t know either. . . . The question is not: what exactly happened; but what was in their [the Bible writers’] mind, what theology did they have, that led them to express their ideas about creation *in this way and not in some other*. . . . But it’s the theology, in the last resort, that explains

the story and makes sense out of it. That is how the [historical-critical] scholar works.<sup>5</sup>

Barr concluded, “The Hebrew theology of creation and the world expresses itself in a story which is allegorical.”<sup>6</sup>

Professor Barr’s description of the story of creation as “allegorical” in essence and non-factual in nature may be true for the type of liberal, historical-critical scholarship which he represents. So how would this branch of modern scholarship represent the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:14, “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is empty.” But when Barr asked in his article, “What ‘really happened’ in the resurrection of Jesus?”<sup>7</sup> he answered, on behalf of his fellow historical-critical scholars, “Look in the commentaries on the Gospels, and you will find that they can’t tell you that.”<sup>8</sup>

Barr made the same kind of statement about the temptation of Jesus. And turning to the ascension of Jesus Christ, we ask again, “What ‘actually happened’ in the ascension of Jesus to Heaven?” and find that Prof. Barr replied, “They [historical-critical scholars] don’t know that either; not only do they not know, they don’t even try to discuss it.”<sup>9</sup>

In passing we recall some of the many “explanations” that have been offered of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, such as the vision hypothesis (in which some followers of Jesus are said to have seen Jesus as risen Lord only in visions but not in reality), and the psychological hypothesis (according to which Jesus was raised only in the minds of the disciples but not bodily), etc.<sup>10</sup> If any of these explanations were correct, the question should not be “What happened to the body of Jesus?” but “What happened to the brains of the disciples?”<sup>11</sup>

From what we’ve shown already it must be clear that the authority of the Bible as the Word of God is severely limited, restricted, reinterpreted, and redefined in historical-critical scholarship on such basic points as creation,<sup>12</sup> miracles in both the Old Testament and New Testament, the temptation, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and Christ’s second coming.

These matters are but symptomatic of a host of others. There are historical-critical scholars who still question, or question anew,

the very existence of Abraham and the other patriarchs (and throw doubt on the narratives about them),<sup>13</sup> the existence of Moses,<sup>14</sup> and the factuality of the exodus as depicted in the Old Testament.<sup>15</sup>

Why is all of this important for our topic, the authority of the Bible as the Word of God? The historical-critical scholarship we are looking at is based on certain axioms, predetermined norms, and *a priori* assumptions, at work<sup>16</sup> openly or ever so subtly in such methodologies as source criticism,<sup>17</sup> form criticism,<sup>18</sup> tradition criticism,<sup>19</sup> and redaction criticism.<sup>20</sup> These constituent methodologies of the historical-critical method claim to be able to determine what the biblical text is and what its prehistory was, with various socio-cultural forces allegedly shaping the text in the supposedly long development from its earliest stages to its present form.

It helps to remind ourselves that the historical-critical method seems fairly new when one considers the nearly 2,000 years of the Christian Church. It is, in fact, only about 200 years old and has been in full swing for only 100 to 150 years. Its subsidiary methods, tradition criticism and redaction criticism, have flourished in full form for only 30 to 50 years. Just the same, the historical-critical method has had an immense impact and has influenced every church, ours included. Although not all scholars use the historical-critical method in the same way, no one who uses it at all can treat the Bible as the full Word of God.

Let us look further at the history of the method. For the sake of brevity, it has been suggested that "the divine authority of the Bible was not questioned until the rise of rationalism"<sup>21</sup> about 200 years ago.<sup>22</sup> The father of modern liberal theology, Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, wrote his influential book in 1799 entitled *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, in which he not only defined the essence of religion as "feeling" but also "rejected the absolute authority of Scripture."<sup>23</sup> To be sure, in doing so Schleiermacher reaped the influences of earlier developments. With the Copernican revolution and the development of the scientific method, the authority of the Bible became for some restricted as regards matters of natural science.<sup>24</sup> Even so, Christians generally continued to hold that the Bible was inspired by God in its entirety, as the revelation of God to inspired prophets, and that therefore it

is authoritative for all times and all situations in all it says. But in the later part of the 18th century (Schleiermacher's day) and on into the 19th century a significant change took place in the understanding of the Bible. Under the new appraisal, many scholars finally asserted that "we have to study the Bible the way we study all other pieces of literature."<sup>25</sup> The Bible, they said, is made up of documents of the past; it has no special nature, and no special method of interpretation is needed to explain it.

Under the impact of the new mode of thought, the *historical-grammatical* method of biblical interpretation, which had been used by the great reformers and their followers, was set aside, because it maintained and was built on the foundation that the Bible was inspired and fully authoritative. By contrast, the historical-critical method, insisted that the Bible is not the unique Word of God (written in normal human languages). The humanity of Scripture was emphasized as all important.

At the beginning of the 20th century neo-orthodoxy came along, reaffirming that the Bible is not the Word of God but teaching that it can *become* the Word of God in certain ways. Yet even in neo-orthodoxy, the Bible is a fully human book.

A related view of more recent origin is known as "canonical criticism," another form of the historical-critical method, developed by Professor James A. Sanders.<sup>26</sup> Sanders bluntly states that to do "canonical criticism" "one must insist that the Bible is not the Word of God."<sup>27</sup>

The major issue in all these approaches is "the nature of authority"<sup>28</sup> of the Bible—for, in the words of Professor B. W. Anderson, "Authority does not lie in Scripture but between the lines of Scripture in something which can be recovered only by the tools given us by the Enlightenment."<sup>29</sup> This redefinition of biblical authority as residing between the lines of Scripture and not in the Bible itself indicates that those who believe it perceive inspiration as having operated not on the biblical prophets who wrote the Bible but on the ancient religious communities and the socio-cultural forces which they assume to have shaped traditions over long periods of time until the traditions had evolved into the final text of the Bible.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to these views, the Christological analogy compares the union of the divine and the human in Scripture with the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. Ellen G. White long ago supported this Christological analogy:

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' John 1:14.<sup>31</sup>

It is vital that Seventh-day Adventists maintain this concept of the Bible's union of divinity and humanity.<sup>32</sup> This "union of the divine and the human" puts the Bible into a class by itself different from all uninspired literature past or present. To insist on the human nature of the Bible to the exclusion of the divine because the Bible participates in the limitation of human language, and on this basis to insist that the Bible is fallible and limited in authority, implies that the parallel with Christ is destroyed.<sup>33</sup>

I would like to return to the historical-critical view that the Bible is to be understood and thus to be interpreted in the same way as other ancient documents. This supposition demands a radical revision of the concept of revelation such as has been offered by Karl Barth,<sup>34</sup> the influential neo-orthodox theologian, and many others.<sup>35</sup> This view argues that (a) the Bible is everywhere historically conditioned or time-bound,<sup>36</sup> (b) there is no unity in Scripture,<sup>37</sup> (c) "God's purpose cannot be traced in a sequence of historical events (a 'history' in the ordinary sense) or in a reconstruction of historical events,"<sup>38</sup> (d) there is no salvation history from creation to consummation,<sup>39</sup> and (e) there is no "absoluteness."<sup>40</sup> The prolific author and biblical theologian Walter Brueggemann avers that in the historical-critical paradigm "absolute truth is not available to us."<sup>41</sup> This assumption that "absolute truth" is not available to us in the Bible gives the historical-critical scholar a sense of "greater freedom in interpreting the Bible,"<sup>42</sup> because its meaning or teaching can be adjusted on the basis of various modern cultural norms.

As long ago as 1974 Gerhard Maier announced the demise of the historical-critical method in his book, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*.<sup>43</sup> Even a year earlier than that, in 1973, a

scholar teaching then at the prestigious Union Theological Seminary in New York dared to state, "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."<sup>44</sup> However, the fact is that the historical-critical method is very much alive<sup>45</sup> and is being widely practiced today in a variety of ways, invariably based on Enlightenment and other presuppositions and tools.<sup>46</sup> To be sure, it is heavily criticized from both within<sup>47</sup> and without,<sup>48</sup> but it lives on. We hear voices calling for change, enlargement, and adaptation. Some historical-critical scholars themselves are saying that "only a change in direction of our basic hermeneutical approach to the [NT] texts will enable us to rescue the thought found in the New Testament from threats produced by increasingly sophisticated [historical-critical] research."<sup>49</sup> The problem of historical-critical research, according to Professor Robin Scroggs, for example, is that it so contextualizes the [biblical or] NT text "that the necessary bridge between then and now is thought to be impossible."<sup>50</sup>

In the approach known as "contextualism," the Bible is seen as a book of purely human origin, like any other book or document, which must be interpreted on the basis of its ancient Near Eastern context alone.<sup>51</sup> In place of the principle of "the Bible as its own interpreter," which is based on an understanding of the Bible as a "union of the divine and the human," contextualizing looks for meaning entirely within the cultures of the ancient world. The socio-cultural horizons of the past in which the Bible was born are the only contexts allowed to shape the interpretation of the Bible today. These contexts include "social stratification," "economic realities and dynamics," "family structures and social mores," "psychological dynamics" and "literary and rhetorical conventions."<sup>52</sup> Contextualizing the Bible in this way imprisons the meaning of the biblical text in the culture of the past.

Various scholars strongly object, and some modern literary critics call for a new "reader-oriented criticism."<sup>53</sup> This method claims that the biblical story is the vehicle for an idea that can be abstracted, extracted, or brought out, but that whatever the text, passage, story, or book means to today's reader, this is its true meaning! Accordingly the Bible has no meaning in itself. In this new approach meaning is sought in the modern reader but not in the Bible.

Let us take the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2 and see, as an example, how it has been contextualized in modern historical-critical scholarship. Under the influence of the evolutionary hypothesis and its world-view, historical-criticism has to find a way to deal with the creation as depicted in Genesis 1-2 other than a straightforward literal reading would demand. It insists at the outset that Genesis 1-2 cannot be taken literally, because (a) it does not fit into the modern world view, and (b) it is a product of the ancient world and its context. Notice this recent example of contextualization:

Genesis 1, which [historical-critical] scholars place in the sixth century before Christ, was created for exiled Jews who were far from home and who felt that the world was falling apart. Everywhere they looked they saw Babylonian flags and Babylonian tanks and they wondered how they could be faithful Jews. The priests wrote a liturgy through which those Jews were able to say, "The world does not belong to Babylon, because in the beginning God made heaven and earth. We don't have to kneel before the Babylonians."<sup>54</sup>

What type of literature is Genesis 1 in this view? Certainly not literal history! "Genesis 1 . . . is a liturgy,"<sup>55</sup> Professor Brueggemann asserts, and "liturgies aren't sketches of absolute truth."<sup>56</sup> On the basis of placing Genesis 1 in the Babylonian exile, we could engage, this writer insists, in conversation about *civil disobedience* but not about creation and evolution! Genesis 1 as liturgy makes the point that "the world is very good and it belongs to God."<sup>57</sup> And that is it.

From this current example of contextualization let us move back to the turn of the century when the influential Continental scholar Hermann Gunkel designated the book of Genesis as "saga [or 'legend' in the English translation]."<sup>58</sup> Genesis 1 is a primitive saga attempting to answer the question, "Whence came heaven and earth?" and also "Why is the Sabbath sacred?"<sup>59</sup> As "saga" it is not to be understood literally. Though written in prose,<sup>60</sup> it is to be taken as poetry in meaning.<sup>61</sup>

Other scholars have called Genesis 1-2 a collection of "myths" (Susan Niditch),<sup>62</sup> an "allegory" (James Barr),<sup>63</sup> "poetry" (Bruce Vawter),<sup>64</sup> a "hymn" (Gordon J. Wenham),<sup>65</sup> or simply "a story, with no foundation in the actual history of the ancient world" (Bernhard

W. Anderson).<sup>66</sup> But whatever these scholars designate Gen 1 (or Gen 1-2) to be, they all agree on the assertion that it is non-literal, non-historical, and non-factual.<sup>67</sup> They reduce it to nothing more than "a triumphant affirmation of the power and wisdom of God and the wonder of his creation."<sup>68</sup> In their view, the creation-science debate is sidetracked. Genesis 1-2 tells us that God is Creator and that is it! As to *who* created, *what* was created, *how* it was created, and *when* it was created only the first question is answered in Genesis 1-2: Who created? Answer: God created.

Yet the profound first sentence of the Bible, which has no parallel in the ancient world at all, answers all *four* questions and so does the remainder of Genesis 1-2: *When* did He do it? "In the beginning [in six days at that, as the remainder of the passage shows]." *Who* created? "God." *How* did He make heaven and earth? "God *created*." *What* did He create? "The heaven and the earth." To limit Genesis 1-2 to a theological assertion answering only one of these four questions, is gross reductionism based on modernism, evolutionism, and historical-criticism, and is entirely out of harmony with the biblical text and biblical realism.

As stated above, no denomination or educational system in our time is totally immune from the influences, subtle and not so subtle, of historical-critical methodologies. The battle in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, during which the entire faculty of its Concordia Seminary walked out in 1974 over the right to use historical criticism, is telling evidence of the conflict which the historical-critical method is capable of bringing about.<sup>69</sup> The current conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention and its huge seminaries shows that the battle is still being fought in rapidly changing conservative Christian seminaries.<sup>70</sup> The evolution of Fuller Theological Seminary in California over the past quarter of a century from being an evangelical to being a neo-evangelical and now towards becoming a post-neo-evangelical seminary<sup>71</sup> shows what can happen merely by changing faculty members and seminary leadership.

Has the Seventh-day Adventist church been confronted and, if so, how has it reacted? The story would fill a book. But if I am not mistaken and at the risk of over simplifying, I should say briefly

that there have been in the Adventist movement three main phases of involvement with the issues under discussion.

The first phase came during the Millerite awakening and early Sabbatarian Adventism. Millerite Adventists and the early Sabbath-keeping Adventists were directly confronted in the 1840s by opponents who reflected historical-critical trends<sup>72</sup> in regard to the prophetic interpretation of Daniel and Revelation—and the Adventists forcefully repulsed the attack. The historicist hermeneutic of the Millerites and early Sabbatarian Adventists had no room for historical criticism; it certainly had no room for Antiochus IV Epiphanes as the fulfillment of the little horn in the long-range prophecies of Daniel.

The second major Adventist battle with the historical-critical method took place during the first three decades of this century.<sup>73</sup> Between 1905 and 1930 some fifteen articles appeared in the *Review and Herald* alone denouncing what was then called “higher criticism,” a term not widely used today but identical with the liberal approach of the historical-critical method we’ve been talking about here.

For example, Charles M. Snow, associate editor of the *Review*, wrote an article in 1907 titled “The Higher Critic and God’s Word.” Its lead sentence said, “We see frequent evidence of the fact that the two chief aims of the Higher Criticism are to destroy faith in the Bible as the Word of God, and to destroy confidence in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of mankind.”<sup>74</sup> Referring to the virgin birth and other miracles, it observed that the “Higher Critic also declares that a belief in the miracles of the Bible is not essential, and he discards them.”<sup>75</sup> If the anti-supernaturalism of higher criticism is allowed to reign, Snow said, there is nothing left for the believer. “Admit the premise [of no miracles] of the Higher Critics concerning what constitutes the Word of God . . . , and it logically follows that there is nothing but the black goal of the unbeliever at the end of the race.”<sup>76</sup> In a second article, “The New Salvation,” Snow dwelt on the theme that growing acceptance of Higher Criticism was causing “the destruction of faith in the teachings of God’s Word and the destruction of faith in the plan of salvation which God instituted” and was thus “bound to result in a man-made salvation.”<sup>77</sup> Elder Snow’s perception was precise and is as correct today as it was in

1907. Where higher criticism is allowed to function, the authority of the Bible is diminished, and there can be no true salvation history.

An editorial in the *Review and Herald* in 1908 affirmed,

There are some things which are settled for all time. There are some fundamental positions in this advent movement which are not subject to revision. There are some doctrines which have made this people what they are; and having been wrought into history, they cannot be lightly questioned or flippantly insinuated against without impugning this whole movement.<sup>78</sup>

The editorial continued with a direct statement relating to people who wished to remain uninvolved: “There are times when it is both criminal and fatal to be neutral.”<sup>79</sup>

Brother L. A. Smith in 1905 had a brief article on “Modern Criticism of the decalogue,” in which he objected that “modern criticism” wanted to rewrite the decalogue.<sup>80</sup> We may wonder how Smith would have reacted if he had lived to see the form-critical and tradition-historical studies of the decalogue being produced in our day.<sup>81</sup> Whereas the Bible says God wrote the decalogue and that He did so at the time of Israel’s journey in the wilderness, the modern historical critic gives the “actual setting at the time of Josiah or the Exile.”<sup>82</sup> Most modern historical critics question whether anything in the decalogue could have come from the time of Moses—and refuse even to discuss whether any of it came from God. The verdict of the most extensive historical-critical study on the decalogue in recent years is negative.<sup>83</sup>

“Revelation and Speculation,”<sup>84</sup> an article published in the *Review and Herald* in 1905, referred to geology and “the opening chapters of the Bible [where] we have a brief and simple but comprehensive account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>85</sup> “It is time,” its author said, “for those who really believe the Bible to be the Word of God to take their stand squarely and uncompromisingly upon revealed truth and against those human speculations. . . .”<sup>86</sup> In another article in the *Review and Herald* L. A. Smith cited an anonymous writer who had observed that the “new theology” based on higher [historical-]criticism offered “infallible scholarship instead of an infallible Bible;” and ‘modern thought’ instead of a ‘Thus saith the Lord;’ ‘culture,’ instead of conversion; ‘the natural in all things, the supernatural in noth-

ing.”<sup>87</sup> Affirming the Bible as “the infallible Word of God,” Smith called for acceptance of “what the Bible says without calling any statement an error, or a human idea, or spiritualizing it until it has no definite meaning.”<sup>88</sup>

In yet another article, H. F. Phelps denied “the tenets of the Higher Critics” on the basis that “the Bible is the product of an infinite mind, thoughts of an infinite God.”<sup>89</sup> An unsigned article concluded, “We are opposed to the principle of higher criticism, whether advocated within or without the denomination.”<sup>90</sup> Earl A. Rowell titled an article: “Higher Criticism the Enemy of Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>91</sup>

It is evident that in the early decades of the twentieth century the *Review and Herald* opposed higher criticism. Its writers maintained that higher criticism undermines the faith,<sup>92</sup> dissects the Bible,<sup>93</sup> rejects the virgin birth, Christ’s miracles, and His bodily resurrection,<sup>94</sup> discredits the decalogue, changes the Sabbath commandment,<sup>95</sup> declares the story of Jonah a myth,<sup>96</sup> denies the literal creation,<sup>97</sup> declares that Job never lived,<sup>98</sup> removes belief in a personal God,<sup>99</sup> asserts that Daniel never existed,<sup>100</sup> denies “the infallibility of God’s Word,”<sup>101</sup> and in general undermines the authority of the Bible<sup>102</sup> and the historic view of inspiration.<sup>103</sup>

F. M. Wilcox observed that in his day, “the seeds of doubt and skepticism” being sown “by the higher critics and advocates of liberal theology” were “honeycombing the professed church of Christ.”<sup>104</sup> Is it conceivable that they were even then having an influence on the Adventist church?

For an answer we look to Ellen G. White and what she had to say about higher criticism. At a New Zealand camp meeting in 1893, attended by Ellen White, a Methodist minister’s printed sermon on higher criticism was handed to Elder G. B. Starr. The discussions on the inspiration of the Bible that this sermon brought about, Ellen White reported, “led to more lessons on this subject, and a sermon on ‘Higher Criticism’ that was well attended by the people of Napier.”<sup>105</sup> In telling about this, Ellen White made a revealing statement regarding the influence of higher criticism on some Adventists. “We were surprised,” she wrote, “to see the extent to which our own brethren had been affected by this infidelity [of Higher Criticism].”<sup>106</sup>

In 1894 Ellen White referred again to “higher critics,”<sup>107</sup> and in 1897 she wrote an article on “The Perils of the Last Days” in which she warned that a

night, dark and portentous, is enclosing the Christian world. . . . Systems that make the truth of God of none effect are cherished. Many are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men; and their assertions are taken as truth. The people have received man-made theories. So the gospel is perverted and the Scriptures misapplied. . . . Men’s theories and suppositions are honored before the Word of the Lord God of hosts. The truth is counteracted by error. The word of God is wrested, divided, and distorted by higher criticism.<sup>108</sup>

Later, in a paragraph subheaded “Higher Criticism” she said,

When men talk of higher criticism; when they pass their judgment upon the word of God, call their attention to the fact that they have forgotten who was the first and wisest critic [Satan]. He has had thousands of years of practical experience. He it is who teaches the so-called higher critics of the world today. God will punish all those who, as higher critics, exalt themselves, and criticize God’s Holy Word.<sup>109</sup>

It is evident that Ellen White opposed the higher critics, those who wrest, divide, and distort the Word of God. In 1903 she spoke against higher criticism again in the book *Education*.<sup>110</sup> In 1911, in *Acts of the Apostles*, she referred to the “pleasing sentiments of higher criticism, evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, . . .”<sup>111</sup> She added,

To many the Bible is a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.<sup>112</sup>

In an earlier book, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), Ellen White remarked on the condition of the world into which Jesus Christ sent his disciples, when “Satanic agencies took possession of men” and “God’s word had been set aside for tradition and human speculation.”<sup>113</sup> She then asked, “What is the condition in the world today? Is not faith in the Bible as effectually destroyed by the higher criticism and speculation of today as it was by tradition and rab-



binism in the days of Christ?"<sup>114</sup> Her analogy between the situation of "today," in which "higher criticism" is wresting, dividing, distorting, dissecting, conjecturing, and reconstructing the Bible, with that of Christ's day, when the Word of God had been set aside for tradition and human speculation, is revealing. In her view the same power is at work today as was at work then.

The third phase of Adventist reaction to higher criticism (i.e., to the historical-critical method), after the reactions in our foundational years and in the early 1900s, began during World War II and continues into the present. It is characterized, broadly speaking, by a gradual and cautious acceptance of major tenets of the historical-critical method by some Adventist scholars, primarily in "first world" countries. In recent years some scholars have left denominational positions in consequence of their historical-critical views. Others have moved into various denominational leadership or administrative positions where their views do not need to be exposed. Some have become increasingly cautious in expressing their methodological foundations. Meanwhile, opposition is seen in various quarters of the church, but significant groups of students continue to be exposed to various forms of the historical-critical method, presented as an appropriate hermeneutic.

The General Conference and North American Division in 1974 organized Bible Conferences at Andrews University, Pacific Union College, and Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, under the leadership of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. The focus was on proper methods of biblical interpretation. Fifteen different presenters offered papers based on a high view of Scripture as fully inspired, and either opposed or steered away from the historical-critical method. In connection with these Bible Conferences, the Biblical Research Institute published a notebook<sup>115</sup> and a bound volume titled *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*.<sup>116</sup> This book surveyed the presuppositions and methodologies of modern historical-critical methodologies and their impact on the authority of the Bible in contrast to a biblical view of revelation-inspiration as the ground of biblical authority. It also emphasized principles of biblical hermeneutics based on the internal testimony of the Bible itself.

These Bible Conferences and publications were by and large well received by Adventist pastors and leaders around the world—but not by all.<sup>117</sup> As we enter the 1990s we face the challenge of the historical-critical method, and in some quarters also sociological and literary methods of interpretation of Scripture that call for careful analysis and scrutiny. At the same time, more and more Adventist thought leaders are affirming the true Adventist heritage that honors the Reformation principle that the Bible is its own interpreter,<sup>118</sup> the position strongly championed by Ellen White, "Scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages."<sup>119</sup>

It is appropriate that we close this article with a reaffirmation, as brief as it has to be, of the foundations of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

1. What role did God play in the origin of the Bible? 2 Tim 3:16 NASB replies, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, . . ." The Greek word for "inspiration" is *theopneustos*, meaning "God-breathed," or "produced by the creative breath of God."<sup>120</sup> Amos 3:7 assures us that "surely the Lord God does nothing, unless he reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."

The New Testament makes abundantly clear that the Old Testament, the Bible of Jesus and the apostles, is inspired and authoritative.<sup>121</sup> Romans 1:2 calls it "the Holy Scriptures"—or "the oracles of God" (NASB, RSV) or "the words of God" (NIV). Jesus Christ affirmed the unity and indivisibility of the Scriptures by saying, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35). Peter said emphatically, "No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:20-21 RSV). The "prophecy" originates from God and comes to the inspired human agent through the moving of the Holy Spirit. Matt 22:31, 43; Acts 1:16; 3:21; 28:25; 1 Pet 1:11; 2 Pet 1:21; Heb 3:7; 9:8; 10:15 all attest that the Bible was produced by the Holy Spirit.

What level of authority does the Bible accord to the New Testament? Jesus told the disciples, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). Various New Testament writings claim explicitly to have been inspired. John introduced the book of Revelation, by analogy with Deut 4:2 and Eccles 3:14, as "the revelation of Jesus

Church" sent by God Himself (Rev 1:1-3). The book of Revelation concludes with the affirmation that its contents are "the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev 22:18). At the end of his gospel John specifically asserted that what he had recorded was "true" (Jn 21:24).

Peter equated the letters of Paul with "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16), indicating that Paul's epistles are Scripture just like the rest of the Bible. Paul himself frequently pointed to the Holy Spirit as the source of his writings (see 1 Cor 7:40; 14:37; 2 Cor 3:5-6; 4:13). Ellen White accepted the testimony which the Bible makes about its divine origin, even though it was written by humans:

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men.<sup>122</sup>

Here we recognize again that in the Bible we find the divine-human unity typical also of Jesus Christ.

2. What do the unity and the divine inspiration<sup>123</sup> of the Bible tell us about the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and about how it should be interpreted? Inasmuch as the authority of the Bible resides in its origin in God, it must be regarded as unique, the only scripture which is authoritative for all people, everywhere, and at all times. Even though its universal authority is questioned, qualified, or rejected by historical criticism, its God-given authority remains. God revealed its content by means of the Holy Spirit. The prophets, i.e. the human agents, received this divinely revealed information and recorded it as the writings that constitute the Bible. God is the information giver, and man, the prophet, is the information receiver and information recorder. It goes without saying that the Holy Spirit superintended the recording (the writing down) of the information in such a way as to guarantee that it would be expressed trustworthily in the human language used by the prophet. Paul did not write, "All inspired men are inspired by God," but "All Scripture is inspired by God." The prophets were "men moved by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet 1:21 rsv); thus what they produced, i.e. "all Scripture," is also inspired. The Holy Spirit

superintended the Scriptural end product as an essential part of the inspiration process.

In view of what the Bible says about itself, the Bible cannot be interpreted just like "any other book or document of the ancient world"—or of the modern world for that matter. Christians of every century have recognized for these very reasons that the only true, adequate, and appropriate hermeneutic of the Bible as the Word of God in human form must be a hermeneutic of Scripture, a hermeneutic by Scripture, and a hermeneutic for Scripture, in short, a biblical hermeneutic. "The Bible is its own expositor."<sup>124</sup> While it is all too true that "man is fallible," it is equally true that "God's Word is infallible."<sup>125</sup> This Word, so interpreted, is the source of the life and mission of God's remnant church, giving it authority and power. It will guide the remnant church and its members to the promised glory.

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2 A recent study of the Bible in regard to the ordination of women to ministry has concluded that "despite disclaimers to the contrary, women's ordination in left-wing [Presbyterian] denominations has been promoted and enacted only because of the denial of the authority and normativity of Scripture. Sometimes this denial has been explicit, . . . Often it has been more subtle, as in articles which conveniently neglected to discuss biblical texts seemingly inimical to female ordination, and in committee reports which were more interested in public opinion, and the church's experience than in the teaching of the Word of God. In denominations where the Bible is regarded officially as inerrant [carrying final authority], there has been a general rejection of the induction of women into ruling and teaching office [which call for ordination]." (Frank J. Smith, "Petticoat

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4 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif., 1911) p. 595.

5 James Barr, "The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Scholarship," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (1989): 12.

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7 *Ibid.* p. 10.

8 *Ibid.*

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18 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-43, pp. 58-64.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 43-50.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-72.

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22 See note 1 above and R. M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. (rev. ed.; New York/London, 1966), pp. 145-152; W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems*, trans. S. M. Gilmore and H. C. Kee (Nashville, 1972); E. G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (New York, 1969).

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## THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

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I have not always held the view of Scriptural authority that I now maintain. My personal pilgrimage has, I believe, helped me understand at first hand the major viewpoints now held both outside and within the Seventh-day Adventist church. Having journeyed through a different perspective on the authority of Scripture and then returned to the position I now hold, I feel that my present convictions are not just a result of what my fathers and pastors and church leaders and the Adventist pioneers taught me. Instead, they are the result of my own wrestling with God and His Word.

I am now convinced that the issue of the authority of Scripture is basic to all other issues in the church. The destiny of our church depends on how its members regard the authority of the Bible.

Please let me share my experience. I was born in a conservative Adventist home and given a solid grounding in historic Adventist teachings and practice under godly parents and academy Bible teachers. But in college I found myself confronted with a crisis over the authority of Scripture. In a class entitled "Old Testament Prophets" the professor (who is no longer teaching Bible in our schools) systematically went through the traditional Messianic passages of the prophets and explained how they really did not

foretell the coming of the Messiah. He then went through the passages Adventists have regarded as referring to the end of time, arguing that they really applied only to local situations in the time of the prophets. Then he took the passages in the prophets that are quoted in the New Testament and insisted that the New Testament writers misinterpreted and twisted them.

By the end of that course, my faith in the authority of Scripture was greatly shaken. My teacher had not explained the method by which he had arrived at his conclusions or the presuppositions that underlay his method, and his conclusions were devastating to me. I was confused, and for some time I preached little on the Old Testament.

My seminary experience in the late 1960s served to confirm the conclusions of my college Bible teacher. In an Old Testament course (taught by someone who is no longer teaching in Seventh-day Adventist schools), I was given an assignment that amounted to half of my grade. The assignment consisted of reading a scholarly debate over the proper method of approaching the Bible, and writing a critique that had to reveal my decision as to which side in the debate was right.

This assignment was a watershed in my hermeneutical pilgrimage. I agonized over the two positions for weeks. I was not told in class which way to cast my vote, but the general tenor of the lectures, I now see, was designed to lead me in the direction of the historical-critical method. At last I decided. I cast my lot with what the article called the "descriptive approach," a veiled name for the historical-critical method.

The paper defending this position was written by the dean of the Harvard Divinity School. (How could I argue against Harvard?) It pointed out that the "descriptive method" was free from the subjective bias associated with a "confessional" approach to Scripture. I became convinced that if I sharpened my tools of exegesis enough, I could confidently and dispassionately decide on the correct meaning of any scripture. I could accurately describe what its author meant. I could dissect the biblical text, conjecture about its original form and intent, and reconstruct its life-setting and the process that gave rise to its final form. If I studied hard, learned appropriate languages, and mastered all critical tools, I would be in

charge. I could scientifically determine without any "faith bias" what was the most probable meaning, authenticity, and truthfulness of any given biblical passage.

For several years while I served as a pastor, I was an avid proponent of the historical-critical method. It was a heady experience for me. I felt good wielding the critical tools and making decisions on my own as to what I would accept as authoritative in Scripture and what was culturally conditioned and could be overlooked.

Then came the Bible Conference of 1974, sponsored by the biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. While attending that conference, I awoke as from a dream. I came to realize that my approach to the Scriptures had been much like Eve's approach to God's spoken word. She was exhilarated by the experience of exercising autonomy over the word of God, deciding what to believe and what to discard. She exalted her human reason over divine revelation. When she did so, she opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Like Eve, I had felt the heady ecstasy of setting myself up as the final norm, as one who could judge the divine Word by my rational criteria. Instead of the Word's judging me, I judged the Word.

As the basic presupposition from which I had been operating dawned on me, I was jolted to the core of my being. I became eager to understand more deeply the issues in hermeneutics and the proper approach to Scripture. That passion eventually drove me back to the Seminary for doctoral studies. This time at the Seminary I was delighted to find that most of the teachers were coming to the Scriptures from a different perspective from the one I had encountered in the 1960s. The first class I took in the Th.D. program was "Principles of Hermeneutics." Out of it came a settled conviction, one that blossomed into my doctoral dissertation in the field of hermeneutics with special implications for the authority of Scripture, a conviction that has grown more intense as I have myself been teaching the class "Principles of Hermeneutics" for several years.

I have become convinced that on the most fundamental level there are only two major approaches to the authority of the Scriptures in the discipline of Biblical studies and in the church. One is

the historical-critical method along with its daughter methods which employ similar critical presuppositions. This method arose during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and is still very much alive and well. The other is the grammatical-historical Biblical interpretation which rejects critical presuppositions. Revived by the Reformers after a period of eclipse during medieval times and continuing until the present among conservative Christians, this approach also is alive—but perhaps not so well, for many, even among Evangelical Christians, have recently been rejecting it in favor of a modified form of the historical-critical method.

### Conflict in the Adventist Church

In Adventism at the present moment, I believe I can say safely though very regretfully, these two approaches toward Scripture are locked in a life-and-death struggle.

I do not want to be an alarmist, and it is not in my nature to seek to stir up controversy or polarization. But I cannot pretend that the problem does not exist. There are many who feel that a discussion on this issue involves merely semantics, that there really is no clear-cut and radical distinction between the two approaches.

But my own experience, based on my own hermeneutical pilgrimage, has convinced me otherwise. I believe that there is a true division on this issue even within Adventism and that the ultimate authority of Scripture is at stake. The subtle but radical difference between the two approaches can perhaps most graphically be shown by placing their main features side by side, and by giving illustrations from real life as I have personally observed them.

The outline on the next three pages presents the basic differences between the historical-critical method and the traditional Protestant (and Adventist) approach, which we may call the “grammatical-historical” or “historical-Biblical” interpretation.<sup>1</sup> This chart is of course schematic and cannot represent fully every variation.

### Contrasting Definitions

Edgar Krentz, in his recent but classic treatment, *The Historical-Critical Method*, clearly indicates how the historical critical method is “based on a secular understanding of history”<sup>2</sup> which

## A COMPARISON OF TWO METHODS

### Historical-Critical Method

#### A. Definition

The attempt to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science.

#### B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is the human author's intention as understood by his contemporaries.

#### C. Basic Presuppositions

1. *Secular norm*: The principles and procedures of secular historical science constitute the external norm and proper method for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data.

2. Principle of *criticism* (methodological doubt): the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate on his own apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.

3. Principle of *analogy*: present experience is the criterion for evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred, since all events are in principle similar.

4. Principle of *correlation* (or causation): a closed system of cause and effect with no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.

5. *Disunity* of Scripture, since its production involved many human authors or redactors; Scripture therefore cannot be compared with Scripture (“proof-texts”) to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

### Historical-Biblical Approach

#### A. Definition

The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.

#### B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it was fully known by the human author or his contemporaries (1 Pet 1:10-12).

#### C. Basic Presuppositions

1. *Sola Scriptura*: The authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation (Isa 8:20).

2. The Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism. Biblical data are accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, intelligibility, etc. (Isa 66:2).

3. Suspension of the compelling principles of analogy to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture and in the process of the formation of Scripture (2 Pet 1:19-21).

4. Suspension of the principle of correlation (or natural cause and effect) to allow for the divine intervention in history as described in Scripture (Heb 1).

5. *Unity* of Scripture, since the many human authors are superintended by one divine author; therefore Scripture can be compared with Scripture to arrive at biblical doctrine (Lk 24:27; 1 Cor 2:13).

6. "Time-conditioned" or "culturally-conditioned" nature of Scripture; the historical context is *responsible* for the production of Scripture.

7. The human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated: the Bible *contains* but does not equal the Word of God.

#### D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures

1. *Historical context (Sitz im Leben)*: Attempt to understand the reconstructed hypothetical life setting which *produced* (gave rise to, shaped) the biblical text (often quite apart from the setting specifically stated by the text).

2. *Literary (source) criticism*: The attempt to hypothetically reconstruct and understand the process of literary development leading to the present form of the text, based on the assumption that sources are a product of the life setting of the community which produced them (often in opposition to specific Scriptural statements regarding the origin and nature of the sources.)

3. *Form criticism*: The attempt to provide a conjectured reconstruction of the process of pre-literary (oral) development behind the various literary forms, based upon the assumption that the biblical material has an oral pre-history like conventional folk-literature and like folk-literature arises on the basis of traditions which are formed according to the laws inherent in the development of folk traditions.

4. *Redaction criticism*: The attempt to discover and describe the life setting, sociological and theological motivations which deter-

6. *Timeless* nature of Scripture: God speaks through the prophet to a specific culture, yet the message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth (John 10:35).

7. The divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished or separated: the Bible *equals* the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

#### D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures

1. *Historical context (Sitz im Leben)*: Attempt to understand the contemporary historical background in which God revealed Himself (with Scripture as a whole the final context and norm for application of historical background to the text).

2. *Literary analysis*: Examination of the literary characteristics of the biblical materials in their canonical form.

3. *Form analysis*: An attempt to describe and classify the various types of literature found in (the canonical form of) Scripture.

4. *Theological analysis of Biblical books*: A study of the particular theological emphasis of each Bible writer (according to his own mind set

mined the basis upon which the redactor selected, modified, reconstructed, edited, altered or added to traditional materials in order to make them say what was appropriate within his new life setting according to new theological concerns; assumes that each redactor had a unique theology and life setting which differed from (and may have contradicted) his sources and other redactors.

5. *Tradition history*: The attempt to trace the precompositional history of traditions from stage to stage as passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation to the final written form; based upon the assumption that each generation interpretively reshaped the material.

and capacity to understand), seen within the larger context of the unity of the whole Scripture that allows the Bible to be its own interpreter and the various theological emphases to be in harmony with one another.

5. *Diachronic (thematic) analysis*: The attempt to trace the development of various themes and motives chronologically through the Bible in its canonical form; based on the Scriptural position that God gives added (progressive) revelation to later generations, which, however, is in full harmony with all previous revelation.

approaches Scripture "critically with the same methods used on all ancient literature."<sup>3</sup> "The methods are secular."<sup>4</sup>

We must ask, is secular historical science with its accompanying presuppositions, appropriate for the study of Scripture? Can we approach Scripture solely from "below," from the naturalistic level, in light of the Bible's own claim that it originated from "above," from divine revelation? Can the scientific method dictate how to approach Scripture, or should the method of studying Scripture arise from principles found in Scripture alone?

#### Contrasting Sets of Objectives

In the contrast between the two sets of objectives outlined in Section B of the chart, we see a radical divergence between historical-critical studies and historical-biblical ones. The objective of the historical-critical method in ascertaining the correct meaning of Scripture is to arrive at the human author's intent as it was understood by his contemporaries in relation to their local setting.



On the other hand, the objective of historical-biblical interpretation (the classical approach of Adventists and the Reformers) is to determine the correct meaning of Scripture as a message sent by God, whether or not it was fully understood by its human writer or his contemporaries. According to 1 Pet 1:10-11 NIV, "The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." The prophets did not always understand fully. They searched intently. They tried to understand the import and the fullness, but it was only as Jesus came and explained the Scriptures that the full light of what had been prophesied was understood. They, or rather, Christ is still unfolding their meaning today.

There is a growing tendency even within Adventism to go along with the stated objective of the historical-critical method. Recently I was discussing the appropriate objective of exegesis with an Adventist doctoral student at a secular university. He was quite candid with me. He argued vociferously that exegesis has as its goal an understanding of what the human author's intention was, as understood by his contemporaries.

I replied, "But what about 1 Peter 1:10-12?" My friend was quite aware of the passage but answered, "Well, that particular writing—and I don't believe it's Peter's—is culturally conditioned by the time when it was written; therefore, I can no longer go along with 'Peter's' particular understanding."

I'm not trying to say that every historical-critical scholar would use this student's evasive maneuvering. But I find a trend in our circles to see the meaning of the Scriptures only as they were interpreted and understood by the human authors' contemporaries in relation to their immediate setting.

At a recent meeting of Seventh-day Adventist scholars a lecture was presented on the book of Revelation. The major thrust of the lecture was that the book of Revelation can only be understood in the light of its first-century context, and that it refers only to a first-century situation. The book was intended to bring comfort to those being persecuted or oppressed at that time. Although we may

make some later reapplications, these are not the accurate and true meaning of the text.

At another session I heard Adventist scholars discuss the Messianic psalms. The thrust of the discussion was that there are no Messianic psalms. New Testament writers misinterpreted certain psalms as Messianic. But, I ask, how does this square with the specific declarations of New Testament writers concerning the original Messianic intent of their authors (as, e.g., in Acts 2:25-35)?

### The Role of Basic Presuppositions

Our chart lists seven presuppositions underlying each approach to Scripture. Number one is the basic orientation point; two, three, and four are crucial principles, and five, six, and seven are the outworking of these principles. Let's begin with the first and most basic presupposition underlying each approach.

In the historical-critical method the principles and procedures of secular science constitute the external norm for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data. We recognize at once that the ultimate issue here is: Who has the final word? What is the ultimate norm? Is Scripture to be judged by the principles of a secular historical method or is the method to be judged by Scripture? Do we still believe in *sola scriptura*?—in the Bible only? (I must say I have been shocked to find that this belief seems to be waning in the Seventh-day Adventist church.)

A few years ago, while on a sabbatical study leave, I was invited to a seminar at which Adventist professors discussed inspiration. They asked me what I thought. When I mentioned something about *sola scriptura*, a colleague sitting next to me, who had once been a classmate of mine at the Seminary and had since taken doctoral studies elsewhere, responded, "Do you still believe in *sola scriptura*? That's passé. We no longer take it as our norm." He added, "I believe in inspiration, of course. I believe that the Bible is inspired. So was Mahatma Gandhi. So was Martin Luther King. So is Mother Theresa. If they all were inspired, how can we determine what is true and what is not true among writings that claim to be inspired? We have to develop certain rational criteria which we can apply to each text to determine its truthfulness and authenticity."

Edgar McKnight clearly points out the rationalistic basis of the historical-critical method: "The basic postulate [of the historical-critical method] is that of human reason and the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion for truth."<sup>5</sup>

To me the response to this position is plain: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20). The Bible and the Bible only is the ultimate authority. Yes, we have other "authorities," but the Bible is the only supreme authority. In the historical-biblical approach the authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is its own final norm rather than secular science or human reason or experience.

#### The Principle of Criticism

The principle of criticism is the heart of the historical-critical method, even in its modified forms. Edgar Krentz acknowledges that "this principle [of criticism] is affirmed by all modern historical study."<sup>6</sup>

When critical scholars talk about biblical "criticism" and the historical-"critical" method, they do not mean critical in the sense of examining a thing rigorously, neither do they intend to connote the negative idea of fault-finding, nor do they mean "crucial," as in the expression "this is a critical issue." The technical meaning of "criticism" in the historical-critical method is that "historical sources are like witnesses in a court of law: they must be interrogated and their answers evaluated. The art of interrogation and evaluation is called criticism." In this process "the historian examines the credentials of a witness to determine the person's credibility (authenticity) and whether the evidence has come down unimpaired (integrity)."<sup>7</sup>

In its essence, such criticism is the Cartesian principle of methodological doubt.<sup>8</sup> Nothing is accepted at face value, but everything must be verified or corrected by reexamining evidence. In everything there is an "openness to correction" which "implies that historical research produces only probabilities."<sup>9</sup>

In effect, this principle makes "me" the final determiner of truth and exalts "my" reason as the final test of the authenticity of a passage. "I" judge Scripture; Scripture doesn't judge "me."

The heart of the matter as I see it is this: Criticism is appropriate for everything in the world except the Scriptures. God asks us to develop our critical powers so that we will not accept anything we hear, see, or experience unless it is in accordance with what He tells us in the Bible. I am not opposed to the critical spirit; I just refuse to use it on the Word of God, which is the critical authority by which I am to be judged. The proper approach, I believe, is found in the grammatical-historical biblical interpretation, which claims that the Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism. Biblical data are to be accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm that determines their truthfulness, adequacy, validity, or intelligibility.

Gerhard Maier, a noted European biblical scholar who broke with the historical-critical method, writes in his book *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, that "a critical method must fail, because it presents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpart to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text—not even on the basis of a partially recognized and applied revelation—but a let me be corrected."<sup>10</sup> The proper stance toward Scripture is captured by the prophet Isaiah: "This is the man to whom I will look: he that is humble and contrite in spirit and *trembles at my word*" (Isa 66:2).

Ellen White clearly rejects the principle of criticism in approaching Scripture:

In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God's Word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up *their judgment as superior to the word*; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their *own authority*. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. Thus the seeds of infidelity are sown broadcast; for the people become confused and know not what to believe. . . . Christ rebuked these practices in His day. He taught that the word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of *unquestionable authority*, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the *end of all controversy* and the foundation of all faith.<sup>11</sup>

The presence or absence of the fundamental principle of criticism is really the litmus test of whether or not the historical-

critical methodology is being employed. For this reason I rejoice that the Methods of Bible Study Committee Report rejects the classical historical-critical method and warns that "even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists."<sup>12</sup>

### The Principle of Analogy

In close relation to the principle of criticism is the principle of analogy. Edgar Krentz observes that "all historians also accept Troeltsch's principle of analogy."<sup>13</sup> The principle of analogy is simple: Present experience is the criterion for evaluating the probability that events mentioned in Scripture actually occurred, inasmuch as all events are in principle similar.

In other words, we are to judge what happened in biblical times by what is happening today; and if we do not see a given thing happening today, in all probability it could not have happened then. The implication has been felt in Adventist circles. Some Adventists say that because we do not see special creation taking place now, but only micro-evolution, we therefore have to adopt some theistic macro-evolution to explain the past. We do not see universal floods today, so there cannot have been a universal flood in the past. We do not see miracles, so we have to find natural explanations for the so-called miracles reported in the Bible. We do not see resurrections, so we have to explain away the resurrections recorded in the Bible.

The advocates of historical-biblical interpretation, on the other hand, suspend the principle of analogy in order to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture.

### The Principle of Correlation

The principle of correlation is somewhat similar to the principle of analogy. It states that there is a closed system of cause and effect with no room for supernatural intervention. Events are so correlated and interrelated that a change in any given phenomenon necessitates a change also in its cause and effect. Historical explanations rest on a chain of natural causes and effects. A recent article argued, "If the divine cause plays a role then it can't be explained or analyzed historically, and therefore we must assume that any divine cause has made use of only this worldly means."<sup>14</sup>

This is not to say that Seventh-day Adventists who employ the historical-critical method do not believe at all in the supernatural. Indeed the historical-critical method as such does not necessarily deny the supernatural. But it involves a willingness to use a *method* that has no room for the supernatural. Scholars using it are required to bracket out the supernatural and seek natural causes and effects. So they look for natural explanations for the Exodus, for the Red Sea, for Sinai, and for how the Scriptures came into being. They look at the way folk literature came into existence in Germanic and other cultures and decide that the Bible came into existence in the same way, through a natural process of oral development, editing, correction, manipulation, and redaction.

Some Adventist teachers currently teach the "JEDP hypothesis" of how the Pentateuch came into being. They show their students how to dissect the Pentateuch and describe the stories of Genesis as simply mythological and poetic rather than historical. Some parents have come to me weeping and have said, "We've set aside thousands of dollars for years to send our children to an Adventist institution and now, as a result of their Adventist education, they have become agnostic. They no longer believe in Christianity, let alone the Adventist church. They no longer accept the authority of the Bible. What can we do?"

What we can do is to suspend the principle of correlation and allow for divine intervention in history as described in the Scriptures. When the Bible speaks of a divine event, we will not bracket it out and try to seek for merely natural and human causes.

### Resultant Principles

There are several resultant presuppositions that follow as corollaries from the basic ones we have looked at so far. One result is the conclusion that Scripture is *not* basically a unity, because it is the product of different human authors. Consequently scripture cannot be compared with scripture to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

Of course there is an illegitimate proof-text method that takes texts from here and there, pulling them out of context and applying them to something the texts were never intended to support. But it also is true that if we believe that a divine Author superintended

the work of the human authors, there must be a basic unity to Scripture. Therefore, scripture *can* be compared with scripture in order to arrive at biblical doctrine. Jesus did this on the way to Emmaus. "Beginning with Moses and the prophets He expounded to them from all the Scriptures those things concerning Himself" (Lk 24:27). That was the proof text method at its best. Unfortunately, there is a trend within Adventism to pit Paul against Peter, Old Testament against New Testament, etc., positing major divergences and contradictions in theological positions. This historical-critical principle is opposed to the Bible's own claim to unity and harmony of teaching.

### Cultural Conditioning

This leads us to our next corollary, that Scripture is time-conditioned and culture-conditioned, and therefore many of its statements have no universal or timeless validity. Many, even within Adventism, argue that in the first chapters of Genesis we find simply a time-conditioned, cultural statement of mythological/poetic/theological understanding but not a detailed statement of how creation actually took place. The details of cosmology can be expunged as long as the basic truth, the *kerygma*, of the passage, is preserved, namely that God created. The rest is culture-conditioned.

Recently an Adventist professor talked with me about angels. He said that the very mention of angels in the Bible bothers him. "In fact," he stated, "I'm beginning to conclude that the mention of angels in Scripture is simply a time-conditioned way to get something across to people who believed in such beings in Bible times. Now we live in a secular world in which we no longer have a society that believes in such beings, so we can move away from those time-conditioned statements to the simple fact that God is present."

It is true that God does speak through the prophet to a specific culture. We must understand the prophet's times. Yet God's message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth. "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35).

### Can the Human and the Divine Be Separated?

A final corollary in the historical-critical method is that the human element can be separated and distinguished from the divine, inspired element.

I listened recently to a tape of a public lecture by an Adventist scholar who argued that the Bible picture of the wrath of God reflects the human element of the writer. Such a picture of God's wrath was not a part of divine revelation, but God *allowed* it to come into Scripture. The lecturer proposed that as we move from the Old to the New Testament, we see the teaching about the wrath of God counteracted by the picture of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

But, to the contrary, I find as we move to the New Testament that the understanding of the wrath of God deepens. The wrath of God is just as real as the love of God, if we understand fully what the Bible means by the wrath of God.

Can we pick and choose? Can we separate the human from the divine in the Bible? Ellen White spoke forcefully to this point:

There are some that may think they are fully capable with their finite judgment to take the Word of God, and to state what are the words of inspiration, and what are not the words of inspiration. I want to warn you off that ground, my brethren in the ministry. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His Word. . . . I would have both arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired.<sup>15</sup>

Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. . . . We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, "That is not inspired," simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. *Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark.* . . . When men begin to meddle with God's Word, I want to tell them to take their hands off, for they do not know what they are doing.<sup>16</sup>

### Hermeneutical Procedures

Our chart lists some of the hermeneutical procedures that are used in the historical-critical and in historical-biblical approaches.

We cannot comment in detail on each, but we observe that the same study *tools* are used in the latter as in the former: the same careful attention is given to historical, linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and literary details. There is no intention in the historical-grammatical approach of lowering the standard of excellence or de-emphasizing the diligent and accurate study of the Scriptures. But there is an intent in historical-biblical study to eliminate the *critical* element that stands as judge upon the Word.

As one examines various procedures of the historical-critical method—historical criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and tradition criticism—three basic steps in each procedure emerge. First, there is a *dissection* of the Word into various sources, oral traditions, and smaller units. Then there is a *conjecture* about the life setting and original source were. Finally, there is a *reconstruction* of what the scholar decides the original must have been like.

In light of these three common procedural steps in historical criticism, a statement by Ellen White is very much to the point. It seems Ellen White knew quite well what was involved in the historical-critical method. In her day it was called “higher criticism.” Note her pointed indictment:

As in the days of the apostles, men tried by tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Scriptures, so today by the pleasing sentiments of *higher criticism*, evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths.

She continues, focusing on higher criticism:

To many the Bible is a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that brings misunderstanding and confusion. The work of *higher criticism*, in *dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing*, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.<sup>17</sup>

Ellen White put her finger on the method, and upon the three basic steps in its application, and revealed the baleful results.

Providentially, a growing number of Bible students who were once convinced of the validity of the historical-critical method are awakening, as I did, as from a dream to learn what they have been

doing. Many have shared with me how Scripture had lost its vitality in their lives, how they no longer were able to preach with power from the whole Word. They always had to stop and think, “Is this portion of Scripture really authoritative?” With joy they have rediscovered the power of the Word as they have renewed their confidence in its full authority. I would like to see every Seventh-day Adventist, every Christian, possess absolute confidence in the Word!

### Conclusion

This critique and discussion of the two conflicting approaches to Scripture should not be regarded as an attempt to slander or impugn sinister motives to any of my colleagues inside or outside the Seventh-day Adventist church who practice the historical-critical method. Although I have considered it crucial to indicate by concrete examples the inextricable link between the historical-critical method and its methodological presuppositions, I have sought to preserve the integrity and the anonymity of those whose views I have used for illustration.

It must be recognized that virtually every non-Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning which teaches biblical studies (except for a few evangelical seminaries and the fundamentalist Bible colleges) is steeped in the historical-critical method. Exposure exclusively to this method on a day-in-day-out basis in every class and from every professor is likely to produce its effect, even if only subtly. I believe that some who have been trained solely in the historical-critical method and have not had an opportunity to hear a fair presentation of both sides, may be open to a clarification of the issues. This is why I have shared my personal pilgrimage toward a clearer understanding of the full authority of the Scriptures.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Conservative biblical scholars have usually called this approach the “grammatical-historical method,” more recently (and accurately) the “grammatical-historical-literary method” (see William Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988], p. 96). I prefer to avoid referring to this approach as a single unified “method”; instead, I refer more generally to basic “historical-biblical interpretation” that rejects critical presuppositions.

- 2 Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 1.
- 3 Ibid., p. 4.
- 4 Ibid., p. 48.
- 5 Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), p. 45.
- 6 Krentz, p. 56.
- 7 Ibid., p. 42.
- 8 See McKnight, p. 45.
- 9 Krentz, pp. 56, 57.
- 10 Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 23.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 39. Italics supplied.
- 12 "Methods of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A): Report," *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987, p. 18.
- 13 Krentz, p. 57.
- 14 Seth Erlandsson, "Is there Ever Biblical Research Without Presuppositions?" *Themelios*, 7 (1978): 24.
- 15 Ellen G. White comment, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:920. Italics supplied.
- 16 Ibid. Italics supplied.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 474.

## TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THE ATONEMENT

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Karl Runia once observed, "To write a book on the subject of the Atonement is a hazardous enterprise, to write an article is even more hazardous."<sup>1</sup> This is due to several reasons,<sup>2</sup> including the fact that the atonement is unfathomable in this life,<sup>3</sup> or in eternity. For, as Ellen G. White has noted,

The mysteries of redemption, embracing Christ's divine-human character, His incarnation, His atonement for sin, could employ the pens and the highest mental powers of the wisest men from now until Christ shall be revealed in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory. But though these men should seek with all their power to give a representation of Christ and His work, the representation would fall far short of the reality. . . . The theme of redemption will employ the minds and tongues of the redeemed through everlasting ages.<sup>4</sup>

Theories of the atonement abound. However, the Christian church has never taken an official stand on the atonement as it has on Christology<sup>5</sup> and the Trinity. There is an orthodox position on the person of Christ but not on the work of Christ. As Gerhard Forde notes, "The church in America is sorely split between the children of Anselm (the 'satisfaction theory') and the children of Abelard (the 'moral influence theory')."<sup>6</sup>

### Different Perspectives

Athanasius considered Christ's incarnation the key to the atonement, for, he said, what is "unassumed is unredeemed."<sup>7</sup> Some

theologians look to the incarnation as the beginning of the atonement, with the person and work of Jesus contributing to it as well as His death.<sup>8</sup> John Calvin considered Christ's one "office" from the Father to be prophet and king and also priest, His present intercession being vital.<sup>9</sup> Some consider the death and intercession as two aspects of the atonement,<sup>10</sup> and the sending of the Spirit as a vital component.<sup>11</sup> For some "salvation, resides in the total fact of Christ" rather than in being "made to hinge in an exclusive manner on one element, such as his birth or his death."<sup>12</sup> Early Christians focused on the "being" of Christ, the Reformers on the "work" of Christ, and Karl Barth on His being and work together as a double movement within the divine and human natures of Christ. For Barth, atonement included the going into the far country of the divine Son of God so that concurrently there could be a homecoming of humanity within Him.<sup>13</sup> Others have seen Calvary as central to the atonement.<sup>14</sup>

Is this open season? Can we choose at whim, or are there vital matters at stake? Leon Morris warns, "The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere."<sup>15</sup> Ellen White has observed, "The atonement of Christ" is "the grand, central theme for consideration."<sup>16</sup> In every educational institution, "the atonement of Christ should be the great substance, the central truth."<sup>17</sup>

Our understanding of the atonement impacts on the rest of our theology, for the atonement is the very heart of theology.<sup>18</sup> It is the center around which all other theological truths cohere. It has to do with the study of God, man, sin, Christ, and salvation. It involves the reason Christ became man and died: did He do so out of a necessity in God or in man? Theologians have battled for theoretical victories while too often losing out experientially. They have argued for a theory of atonement while the "at-one-ment between them" lay in shreds.

In fact, every leading atonement theory has been taken to an extreme. Proponents have been carried away by their own logic. But we must never lose the sense of majesty and mystery involved. God cannot be encapsulated in neat formulas, His actions reduced to mere human terms. Nor should we read our attitudes, purposes, and methods into God's.<sup>19</sup> As H. R. Mackintosh reminds us, "The

wise man will look with suspicion on theories of atonement which are only too complete. . . . If atonement be the act of God, it has in it the unfathomable quality of God Himself."<sup>20</sup>

With this introduction, we will now (1) consider some of the major theories, (2) ask why there are so many, (3) examine two of them, and (4) reflect on the contribution that the historic Adventist theory of the atonement makes to the debate.

### Major Theories

In this section we will take up some of the major atonement theories.<sup>21</sup> There are many classifications.<sup>22</sup> We will follow Erickson's arrangement and arguments.

**THE SOCINIAN THEORY: ATONEMENT AS EXAMPLE.** For Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) and his uncle, Laelius Socinus (1525-1562), Christ's death was merely an extension of His teaching—an example He presented to mankind. The Socinians minimized the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

**THE MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY: ATONEMENT AS DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE.** For Peter Abelard (1079-1142) the death of Christ provided a moral influence to do right. Christ did not come to die, but He died because He came. Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924) were later exponents of this view. Again, both the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man were minimized.

**THE GOVERNMENTAL THEORY: ATONEMENT AS DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S JUSTICE.** For Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), a lawyer, the law was vital, and hence sin, or law-breaking, was taken seriously. This was an advance over the two theories we've looked at so far. Whereas those two theories were relatively subjective in nature (aimed at producing a change in man), the governmental theory was both subjective and objective. Christ's death was seen as satisfying the justice of God (objective) and as a deterrent to prevent man from sinning (subjective). Both the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man were kept in view in this theory.

But because Grotius did not believe punishment could be transferred from one person to another, he said Christ did not suffer man's punishment as his Substitute. Rather, he said, Christ suffered to make punishment unnecessary, because the demonstration

he provided was supposed to turn man from sin—and thereby preserve God's government. Thus, Grotius's view was diametrically opposed to the view of Socinus.

**THE RANSOM THEORY: ATONEMENT AS VICTORY OVER FORCES OF EVIL.** Gustav Aulen (1879-1978) considered God's self-reconciliation<sup>23</sup> to be the classic view.<sup>24</sup> Before the appearance of Aulen's *Christus Victor*, studies on the atonement usually began with Anselm. Aulen's contribution was to focus on the thousand years before Anselm and to present Christ's victory as the theme running through the writings of such persons as Origen (185-254), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395), and Augustine (354-430).

After the fall of man, Satan was the usurper-ruler of this world. Origen believed that Satan, not God, demanded Christ's death as a ransom for man. Gregory of Nyssa added to Origen's view, stating that Christ's divinity was hidden behind His human flesh so that, in accepting Christ as a ransom, Satan would be like a fish that swallowed the hook with the bait. Gregory saw no problem in such a deception. Augustine could even liken the cross to a mousetrap with Christ's blood as the bait.

Unlike other theories, this one claimed no effect on God or man but only on Satan. As W. J. Wolf has observed, "Aulen has done a service by recovering one of four distinct patristic insights into the nature of salvation and atonement, but he has seriously distorted the case by stressing the *Christus Victor* theme as the 'dominant' one in both the fathers and the New Testament."<sup>25</sup>

**THE SATISFACTION THEORY: ATONEMENT AS COMPENSATION FOR THE FATHER.** Anselm (1033-1109), sometime archbishop of Canterbury, lived during the feudal period of British history, a time when the idea of satisfaction was popular. In his *Cur Deus Homo (Why Did God Become Man?)* Anselm denied that any ransom at all was paid to Satan. Both man and the devil belong to God, he said. Christ died to satisfy a principle in God Himself.

Anselm's theory was based on a view of sin as failure to render God His due. Man owed God a debt so great that only God could pay it. But man, not God, owed the debt, so man must pay. Why did God become man? So that as a man He could pay man's debt to God.

Summarizing now the major views we've glanced at so far, the ransom-to-the-devil theory was popular in the early church and for

a thousand years. Anselm brought in a change by stating that satisfaction was paid to God, not to the devil, by the human Jesus. Abelard challenged Anselm, saying that God made the payment on the cross and that He did so to change man. Finally, Aulen reconsidered the first thousand years, claiming that the cross was a victory over the devil rather than a ransom to him.

**OTHER THEORIES.** We will mention a few other theories in passing, just to give an idea of the variety of views propounded. McCleod Campbell's and R. C. Moberley's vicarious penitence, or vicarious repentance<sup>26</sup> theory has Jesus taking our place at Calvary as a penitent.<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* contains a chapter title reflecting this view:<sup>28</sup> "Representation instead of Substitution."<sup>29</sup>

F. W. Dilliston has conceived of Christ's prayer life as a central focus of the atonement.<sup>30</sup>

Henry Clark sees the atonement as restoring the original "life-movement," or Godward movement, of man. The local Christ became universal through death on the cross.<sup>31</sup>

Theories of divine Fatherhood abound,<sup>32</sup> and Robert K. Johnston has suggested the family-life image as particularly relevant for contemporary society.<sup>33</sup>

The acceptance theories of Duns Scotus, Hugh Grotius, and Limbarch regard God as accepting the death of Christ for man's sin even in the absence of an equivalency between His death and our sin.

### Why So Many Theories?

In Scripture atonement is looked at from a variety of perspectives. These are not contradictory but complementary. In the same way that the four Gospels witness to the same Jesus Christ but make their own statements, the Bible offers many ways of looking at the atonement, with different writers making their own contribution. Indeed, a single author can write about the atonement from numerous viewpoints.

The variety of human images used to express the divine truth of atonement give insight into the depths involved and should caution us against any simplistic conclusion. If Scripture uses many images, each one has a function to serve in expressing a dimension



of the atonement that would be lost if it were not included. Within space limitations we will now look at some of these images.

### Biblical Images for Atonement

We will consider four word images, propitiation, redemption, justification, and reconciliation. These four words come from four different vocabularies that can be summarized as in the chart below.

Word	Language Context	Meaning
Propitiation	Temple	Appeasement
Redemption	Commerce	Ransom
Justification	Law	Restored Status
Reconciliation	Home	Restored Relationship

1. PROPITIATION. Greek words that have been translated "propitiation" include *hilasmos*, a noun (1 Jn 2:2: 4:10), *hilasterion*, also a noun (Rom 3:25), and *hilaskomai*, a verb (Lk 8:13: Heb 2:17). As we look at Romans 3:23-26 NIV we note that even within one short passage several theories of the atonement are presented:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.

These three verses from the New International Version (the version used throughout this article) employ four images of atonement (note the emphasized words) and remind us that it is artificial to focus on one image to the exclusion of the others. All are equally inspired, relevant, and authentic.

Central to the debate over "propitiation" is the question, Who is the object of the propitiation, God or man? If Jesus died to appease the wrath of God, was His doing so any different from the pagan sacrifices made to mollify angry gods?

The major contenders in this debate have been C. H. Dodd and Leon Morris. In 1931 Dodd presented his classic study on the use of *hilasmos*, in which he concluded that the word should not be understood as "propitiation" but as "expiation," meaning that God

provided the atonement rather than was appeased by it.<sup>34</sup> But in 1951 Leon Morris called Dodd's findings in question, concluding that *hilasmos* does mean propitiation.<sup>35</sup> Scholars subsequently have sided with one or the other.<sup>36</sup> James Dunn believes that the debate constituted "an unnecessary polarizing of alternatives."<sup>37</sup> F. Büchsel has offered a mediating interpretation, namely, that "*hilasmos* . . . is the action in which God is propitiated and sin expiated."<sup>38</sup>

*Hilasterion* occurs 21 times in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX)—in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. *Kapporeth*, the Hebrew word sometimes translated with the Greek *hilasterion*, is used of the mercy seat as the place of propitiation. *Zara* is used of the rim around the altar of burnt offering (Ez 43:14, 17, 20). The important fact is that both the mercy seat and the altar were provided by God. Therefore, propitiation is not man's appeasement of God but God's provision for man to participate in God's self-propitiation. "God 'did set forth for himself' (middle voice) Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:25).<sup>39</sup> D. A. S. Ravens was right when he said that Christ's "death in no way changed the nature or the attitude of God, as some theories of the atonement seem to imply."<sup>40</sup> God's love was the cause, not the consequence, of the atonement.<sup>41</sup> "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (Rom 3:25). God offered the sacrifice rather than being merely its recipient (see Jn 3:16). Christ was priest as well as sacrifice.<sup>42</sup> His death was His self-offering.

2. REDEMPTION. Jesus said, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). The word *lutron*, here translated "ransom," is used, along with its cognates nearly 140 times in the Septuagint, "usually with the thought of deliverance from some sort of bondage in exchange for the payment of compensation or the offering of a substitute."<sup>43</sup>

3. JUSTIFICATION. All "are justified freely by his grace through redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). "We have now been justified by his blood" (Rom 5:9). In these verses the death of Christ is presented as having put man in a proper relationship to God's broken law.

4. RECONCILIATION. Sinners have been made one with the Saviour. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the

old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor 5:17, 18).

Jews and Gentiles have been made one in Christ, who has abolished "in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph 2:15, 16).

In these passages the cross is presented as restoring a proper relationship of man to God and of man to fellow man.

In Scripture, the various words used to describe the atonement are as inseparable from that which they attempt to describe as are the various colors of a rainbow from the rainbow itself. It would be just as sensible to describe the atonement exclusively by any one of the images as to paint a rainbow exclusively with a single color.

We now need to evaluate the two major atonement views in the Christian church today, the moral influence theory and the substitutionary theory.

#### The Moral Influence Theory Evaluated

Those theologians who stress the moral influence theory do so because it expresses an extremely important truth. The cross does have a moral influence on people. It changes lives. No other event affects mankind as does the cross. Calvary is God's incomparable self-revelation. Nothing moves me so much as a steady gaze at my dying Saviour hanging there for me! "God's kindness leads" me "to repentance" (Rom 2:4, cf. κν). As I look to Christ on the cross, by beholding Him I am becoming changed (2 Cor 3:18).

I heartily endorse all attempts to lift up the cross. Calvary will be forever the science and song of the redeemed.<sup>44</sup> As Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14). Christ Himself promised, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). Those who lift up the cross do what is needed. There is no more momentous focus. It is the supreme revelation of what God is like.

However, my concern about the moral influence theory—considered in isolation as an exclusive theory of the atonement—is that those who hold it as an exclusive theory do not seem to see on

Calvary a Saviour dying for them, bearing their sins, shedding His blood to redeem them, paying the price without which they could never get to heaven. For the fact that Jesus proved His love for humanity by His death is only one part of the truth about God. Another truth is that Jesus loved humanity so much that He died for our sins. His shed blood paid the price for human salvation.

Think of it this way: If we say that God merely allowed Christ to die to change people, with no larger reference to paying our sin-debt, the perception sounds hollow in view of the biblical terms already noted, such as propitiation, redemption, justification, and reconciliation, in addition to revelation.

Leon Morris illustrates the weakness of focusing only on revelation without including the need of redemption. He speaks of

a man who jumps into a rushing stream to show his love for me. If I am in the water in danger of drowning, that is meaningful. But if I am quite safe, sitting on the pier and enjoying the sun, then I cannot but deplore his action and I fail to see how it in fact shows his love. If sinners were in no danger on account of their sin, then why should Jesus have died at all? In that case we need an act of revelation, but not an act of atonement. It seems that no understanding of the cross is going to be satisfactory that does not view the death of Christ as accomplishing something.<sup>45</sup>

If the cross were just a revelation, then why was not Christ's entire life of sacrificial service a sufficient revelation of God? If the cross is a necessary revelation to change people, and only that, then is this not "salvation by knowledge," a kind of Gnosticism?<sup>46</sup> And if the cross is only a revelation, "God would be saying more than He did," says Forsyth.

We are exposed [Forsyth continues] to the danger there always is when we make revelation a word rather than a deed, something said instead of something done, when we make it manifestation only and not redemption. The work of Christ would be only something educational, or at most impressive. And what happens then? If the work of Christ is only impressively educational, if the need and value of it ceases when we have recognized its meaning, when we have taken God's word for it in Christ that He does really love us, what happens then? Why, as soon as the lesson had been learnt, the work of Christ might be left behind.<sup>47</sup>

T. H. Hughes is right when he maintains that

God must work in the Atonement itself, as well as in the life that follows. There must, therefore, be an "objective" source of power, and not merely a subjective change in man, before the Atonement can become effective. The degenerations and losses wrought by sin have to be met and conquered, and for this more than knowledge is necessary.<sup>48</sup>

Moral influence proponents believe that the manifestation made at Calvary is sufficient to evoke repentance. But if this is true, why did those Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers around the cross not repent?<sup>49</sup> W. J. Wolf was right when he noted that revelation does not always result in gratitude.<sup>50</sup> If revelation alone were involved we might question its fairness, for it works in an inequitable way, some people being easily moved, others not. Would God work in such a way? he asks.<sup>51</sup> Although revelation was unquestionably involved at the cross, there must have been something much more profound about the cross than merely revelation.

This much more profound dimension has everything to do with (1) the holiness of God and (2) the sinfulness of man. Both depths are overlooked, to some degree, by the moral influence adherents. Consider the holiness of God:

When that holiness is wounded or defied, could God be content to take us back with a mere censure or other penance and the declaration that He was holy? . . . Sinners would despise a God who would take us back when we wept, and speak thus: "Let us say no more about it. You did very wrong, and you have suffered for it, and I; but let us forget it now that you have come back." We should not respect that. We should go on . . . to take more liberties still. He would be a God who only talked of His holiness and did not put it into force.<sup>52</sup>

Do moral influence proponents realize what love is? Love needs holiness to be love. "Love cannot be exhibited apart from holiness," contends H. O. Wiley.<sup>53</sup> "Holiness," says Mackintosh, "is the austere element in love, preserving it from wrong."<sup>54</sup> Morris agrees, for, he says, "Apart from law, how are we to distinguish love from caprice?"<sup>55</sup> Calvary is no neutral revelation of love. It reveals "the Father's holy love."<sup>56</sup>

This is a crucial insight. Moral influence theories that overlook the fact that there can be no fellowship between God and man except on the plane of holiness are inadequate. Moral influence theories, says J. S. Stewart, overlook "the New Testament's con-

centration upon the demonic nature of the evil from which the world has to be redeemed."<sup>57</sup> The New Testament presents Christ on Calvary as the sin-bearer, not just as the bearer of God's revelation (Acts 10:43; 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4; Heb 1:3; 2:17; 9:28; 10:12; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; Rev 1:5).

The moral influence theory, with its denial of a substitutionary atonement, feels comfortable in a world view that denies the authority of Scripture and where historical criticism is acceptable.<sup>58</sup> This is a serious indictment, but Vernon Grounds has laid the matter on the line. "'Back to the Bible!' must be no empty shibboleth," he demands, "but rather an all-controlling principle in our thinking about the atonement."<sup>59</sup> And the Bible reveals that Christ did indeed do more than die for us—He died for our sins (Jn 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:26).

Denial of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man go hand in hand. As Forde has affirmed, "The cross is not in the first instance a revelation of the love or mercy of God. It is rather the climactic manifestation of God's wrath against sin."<sup>60</sup> It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God. A revelation of holy love must expose sin, and with such an exposure of sin must come power to do something about it. Holy love can change a person. Mere revelation of love is not enough to meet human need. "For no other reason than that example without the power to follow it, knowledge without the power to put it into practice, revelation without the power to turn it into life, can bring nothing but bitter frustration."<sup>61</sup> There is no revelation in Scripture apart from redemption.<sup>62</sup>

It comes down to one thing. "If we feel that Christ has really put our sins out of the way, effectively and finally, our view of the faith will be very different from what would be the case if we felt that He had simply given us an example, or had won a spectacular victory which has little regard for the rights of the case."<sup>63</sup>

Given that God is holy love and that man is a needy sinner, then the cross is far more than a revelation. It is evidence of a forgiveness that man can depend upon.<sup>64</sup>

### Does Forgiveness Require Christ's Death?

Those who believe exclusively in the moral influence theory point to the prodigal son in Luke 15 and say that in the story "atonement" was accomplished between father and son without any reference to Christ's death on Calvary. However, does not logic demand an admission that the parable makes no mention at all of *Christ*? Are we to infer that we can be reconciled without Jesus?

On the other hand, as Henry Alford once discerned, the sacrifice of Christ "is presupposed in the whole parable."<sup>65</sup> N. Geldenhuys agrees,<sup>66</sup> and W. L. Liefeld notes that "it must . . . be kept in mind that this is a parable and thus is intended to portray only one aspect of the gospel—God's willingness to receive 'sinners' and his joy over their return. Elsewhere in Luke's presentation of Christ as Savior, the Cross has its place."<sup>67</sup>

It is those who do not adequately comprehend human sin and divine holiness against sin, who can believe that forgiveness is all that the Father needs to give to prodigals. But humans need far more than forgiveness.<sup>68</sup> If the entire Gospel is in this parable, then why, asks Forsyth, did not the apostles use it in their preaching? Indeed, why didn't Christ conclude His mission and return to heaven right after giving this parable, if it contains the whole Gospel?<sup>69</sup> Christ's mission was more than to give a parable. He went to the cross to become our Substitute (see 2 Cor 5:21).

### The Substitutionary Theory Evaluated

Rightly used, the word "substitutionary" in no way connotes that Christ took our place in living a perfect life so that we do not need to be fitted for heaven! It need not connote this anymore than it connotes that He ascended to heaven in our place. The word "substitutionary," properly employed, applies solely to Christ's taking our place at the cross, doing for us what we could never do for ourselves, that is, perish in the second death (Rev 20:6) and still live for eternity. In paying the price for our sins He alone could be our substitute. This is the most glorious good news—the wondrous exchange.

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no

share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed."<sup>70</sup>

If Calvary defeated Satan's scheme to take the entire human race down with him, then we would expect Satan to hate the truth about the cross. And this is precisely what we find in occult literature. We find sheer hatred for the substitutionary theory. We find this hatred in Spiritualism,<sup>71</sup> in the Theosophical Society,<sup>72</sup> and in the New Age Movement<sup>73</sup> and its "bible," the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*.<sup>74</sup> Look at the rendering of John 3:16 in the *Aquarian Gospel*: "For God so loved the world that he sent forth his only son to be raised up that men may see the love of God." Calvary, at best, is reduced to only a moral influence.

But even some good Christians dislike the substitutionary theory. J. R. W. Stott put the problem frankly when he said, "No two words in the theological vocabulary of the cross arouse more criticism than 'satisfaction' and 'substitution.'"<sup>75</sup>

Many thoughtful questions fuel the antipathy to this view. We subsume these under the headings (1) questions about forgiveness and (2) questions about God's attributes.

QUESTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS. In the same way that moral influence advocates can be said to have too shallow a view of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, they can also be described as having too shallow a view of God's responsibility for governance of the universe. There is a distinct difference between forgiving if one is an ordinary citizen, and forgiving if one leads a nation, a world, or the universe. The responsibility of maintaining law and order for the sake of others is involved.<sup>76</sup> "God could not let sin go as if a mere slip. God demanded the atonement and provided it."<sup>77</sup> Restoration of the original plan for mankind takes more than a word of forgiveness. Changing the heart and lifestyle of man is involved, and change can only come when man realizes the horror of sin, what sin has cost God, and how expensive forgiveness really is. When this does happen, a person won't want to sin anymore—and thus God's original plan can be realized.<sup>78</sup>

No deep experience can come from a shallow concept. As John Stott puts it, "We can cry 'Hallelujah' with authenticity only after we have first cried 'Woe is me, for I am lost.'"<sup>79</sup>

QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S ATTRIBUTES. Often one-sided atonement theories issue out of a focus on one attribute of God to the exclusion of the others. The Socinians stressed God's will, Luther and Calvin His justice, Anselm His honor, Abelard His benevolence, and Strong his holiness. We have noted that balance requires us to accept all the biblical images for atonement. Likewise, we must accept all biblical insights into the attributes of God. It is conventional wisdom to accept God's attributes of love and mercy and to jettison His attributes of justice and wrath. Such selectivity inevitably results in a distortion of one's view of the atonement. As H. O. Wiley rightly notes, "The tendency to exalt one attribute above another, has been the source of much error in theology."<sup>80</sup>

If moral influence proponents have too shallow a view of human sinfulness and divine holiness, they also have too superficial a view of the profundity of God's attributes. For what God ought to do because He is righteous needs to be understood with what He cannot do because He is love, and vice versa.<sup>81</sup> God as Love (see 1 Jn 4:16) is defined by the sum total of His attributes and not merely by one or a few of them. Consider some of the couplets found in Scripture that indicate this breadth among the attributes of God:

Compassionate and punishing	Ex 34:6, 7
Love and faithfulness	Ps 85:10
Righteousness and peace	Ps 85:10
Righteousness and a Saviour	Isa 45:21
Anger and mercy	Mic. 7:18
Wrath and mercy	Hab 3:2
Grace and truth	Jn 1:14
Justice and forbearance	Rom 3:26
Kindness and sternness	Rom 11:22
Faithfulness and justice	1 Jn 1:9

Wherever God's attributes seem to be opposites, never should they be considered as operating "either-or" but as both together. Forsyth speaks about holy love.<sup>82</sup> Brunner talks about "Divine Holiness."<sup>83</sup> "God is not simply love," he says. "The Nature of God cannot be exhaustively stated in one single word."<sup>84</sup> In the cross

"God makes known His holiness and His love simultaneously, in one event, in an absolute manner."<sup>85</sup> For God

was unwilling to act in love at the expense of his holiness or in holiness at the expense of his love. So we may say that he satisfied his holy love by himself dying the death and so bearing the judgment which sinners deserved. He both exacted and accepted the penalty for human sin.<sup>86</sup>

Justice and love were both operative at the cross. Justice demanded punishment for sin, love demanded forgiveness for sin. God's love is strong, not sentimental; He paradoxically reveals His love through justice and His compassion through wrath. God's wrath must be seen as an expression of His love (see endnote 87).

God cannot be dissected as if schizophrenic. All of God is present in the use of any one of His attributes. He is fully present in His wrath as He is in His love, and without contradiction.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, God's action on the cross was not abstract, only reacting to a broken law or accomplishing some forensic bookkeeping. Far more was involved. Humanity was God's loved one, His bride.<sup>89</sup> Sin had taken His bride hostage. She had divorced Him. She needed far more than just a revelation of God. She needed restoration by God. He still loved her and hated that which took her from Him. On the cross He plunged down to release His hostage bride by dealing a death blow to the hostage taker.<sup>90</sup> He died in love to save while at the same time unleashing His wrath against the criminal. The one act of liberation demonstrates the two sides of love and justice. Our rescue took place at the depths where sin slew God and at the heights where the man Jesus accepted that slaying as substitute for His lover, that He might thereby win her back through revelation of His love and through redemption. Therefore, that act defeated the devil, was a victory for God, and brought reconciliation and redemption to man. All the major theories of the atonement issue out of that one event on Calvary. As Ellen White says,

God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God's law is an enemy to peace. But Christ shows that in God's plan they are indissolubly joined together; the one cannot exist without the other. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have

kissed each other." Ps 85:10. By His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love.<sup>91</sup>

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38, 39). John Murray comments: "That is the security which a perfect atonement secures and it is the perfection of the atonement that secures it."<sup>92</sup>

#### Calvary and Passover

Evidence that the substitutionary atonement is not man appealing God but God's own self-sacrifice is seen in the morning and evening sacrifices, the Day of Atonement ministry on behalf of the entire camp or nation, and the annual Passover celebration. In celebrating the Passover, Jesus kept the first Lord's Supper with His disciples (see Mk 14:12-25). As Carey notes, "Jesus himself was the first to unite his death with the Passover in the Words of the Institution at the Last Supper."<sup>93</sup> Paul connected them too, referring to "Christ, our Passover lamb" (1 Cor 5:7).

God provided the offering, the means of escape from death, on that first Passover night back in Egypt. All homes with the blood applied to lintel and doorpost were protected. In such homes the firstborn would live (Ex 12:13, 23). But this was not true for those who neglected the substitutionary sacrifice of the slain lamb (Ex 12:12). The firstborn's escape from death was just as much a gift of God as the whole nation's escape from Egypt. Substitution and Exodus were forever welded in Israel's memory as interrelated acts of God's grace. In fact, as Dillistone mentions, the New Testament passages concerning Christ's blood and redemption point back to the Passover escape from Egypt.<sup>94</sup> For, as Reid put it, "at the heart of the Passover stands the idea of atonement through believing sacrifice."<sup>95</sup> In fact, "there is no propitiatory power of blood known to Scripture unless the blood be that of sacrifice."<sup>96</sup>

It should be noted that the blood was shed to redeem the firstborn from death and not to put life within him. Some today

view Christ's death as a blood transfusion, designed to place life within, making His death sacramental rather than substitutionary.<sup>97</sup> It is true that "the 'blood' of Christ is mentioned in the writings of the New Testament nearly three times as often as 'the Cross' of Christ and five times as frequently as the 'death' of Christ,"<sup>98</sup> but it is never equated with "life-transfusion." Christ's blood always symbolizes His substitutionary death in place of the redeemed, as in the Passover. We have redemption through Christ's blood (see Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18; Rev 5:9).<sup>99</sup> As Lyon and Toon remind us, "Elsewhere blood may be a symbol of life, but in the sacrificial motif it symbolized death."<sup>100</sup>

#### A Deeper Look at the Cross

If the cross of Christ will be the study of the redeemed and the unfallen beings throughout eternity,<sup>101</sup> it must be an exhaustless theme.<sup>102</sup> All the atonement theories relate to the cross in one way or other. Some attempt to describe what took place there—why Christ had to die—and others detract from the reality of what happened there. The key fact is that no single theory yet invented can do justice to what took place on the cross, nor can the sum of all known theories exhaust the meaning of what happened there.

It is also true that the cross must be understood within the context of the eternal plan of the Trinity to save mankind. Many theories of the atonement are Binitarian rather than Trinitarian. They speak of the Father and of Christ, leaving out the place and function of the Holy Spirit. But any balanced understanding of the atonement must include all three members of the Godhead.<sup>103</sup> It must grasp the fact that "God could be atoned by no outside party. . . . The Father suffered in His Son even more than the Son did."<sup>104</sup> And so, we must believe, did the Holy Spirit also.

A balanced atonement theory must include three other crucial factors as well: (1) our involvement in crucifying Christ. The cross was not merely a payment offered to God (Anselm), a revelation by God (Abelard), or a victory by God (Aulen); (2) the great controversy context which considers the cross as having cosmic significance rather than as being limited to God's doing something for humans (Abelard) or as a human Christ's doing something just for God (Anselm); and (3) a careful study of the dereliction cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

### We Crucified Christ

Many theories of the atonement look from above, but the real culprit can only be seen from below. "Indeed, the fatal flaw in most thinking about the atoning work of Christ is the tendency to look away from the actual events, translate them into 'eternal truths,' and thus to ignore or obscure what actually happened and our part in it. We interpret Christ's death as though it were an idea, a necessary part of a logical scheme of some sort, as though God were tied to a scheme of honor or justice making *him* the obstacle to our reconciliation. We exonerate ourselves, so to speak, by blaming the necessity for the cross on God."<sup>105</sup>

An element missing or inadequately treated in the three major views of the atonement (Anselm's, Abelard's, and Aulen's) is the fact that *we* crucified Christ. Abelard at most touched on it when he asked Anselm, If Adam's sin had to be "satisfied" (as Anselm insisted), how much more satisfaction was needed for those who crucified Christ?<sup>106</sup> Without detracting from our involvement in Christ's crucifixion, the answer to how much more satisfaction was needed is found in the truth that Calvary is God's self-sacrifice made with a cosmic scope and an eternal depth measurable only in the great controversy world view and the dereliction cry.

### The Great Controversy World View

Many theories of the atonement concern only man and God. Anselm focused on what man in Christ can do to restore God's honor, whereas Abelard focused on what God can do to restore man. Grotius looked beyond to God's government, and Aulen to His victory over the devil. In broadening their focus, Grotius and Aulen began to open up the issues involved in the great controversy. This broader world view is essential in order to understand what happened at the cross, because the cross had to do with more than human salvation. It had to do with divine vindication, something that involves the universe. Satan had charged God with being unjust.<sup>107</sup> It was necessary that the justice of God be clearly manifested. Because Satan charged that no created being could keep the law, Christ had to come and live the law, showing that obedience to God would take Him even to death—actually the second death. Calvary was the ultimate demonstration of an obedient, law-keeping human life, a revelation of perfect man.

Calvary also revealed a perfect God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor 5:19 κϱν). This is crucial to our understanding. God's self-sacrifice revealed the depth of His love for the lost. Calvary also utterly exposed Satan. "Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds."<sup>108</sup> "By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings."<sup>109</sup>

Calvary was a revelation of "the law of self-renouncing love."<sup>110</sup> This law was broken when Satan originated self-seeking. Satan "misrepresented God, attributing to Him the desire for self-exaltation. With his own evil characteristics he sought to invest the loving Creator. Thus he deceived angels. Thus he deceived men. . . . Because God is a God of justice and terrible majesty, Satan caused them to look upon Him as severe and unforgiving."<sup>111</sup>

For Ellen White, the great controversy concept of the atonement included Christ's life as well as His death.

By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken.<sup>112</sup>

Atonement even includes the present ministry of Christ in heaven. Whereas the atonement sacrifice was completed on Calvary, the atoning ministry has unfolded the benefits of that sacrifice ever since in a Godward intercession<sup>113</sup> and a manward outpouring of the Spirit.<sup>114</sup> (We'll return to these aspects later.)

If Calvary was the completed atonement sacrifice that exposed Satan and revealed God to a depth never comprehended before, why was it not the final moment of human history? Why did the second advent not take place right away? One answer is that

the angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.<sup>115</sup>

The cross is like a mountain. Up close one cannot take in the entire mountain or view its full context. But from a vantage point at a distance one can readily see it for what it is. The passing of time has no more added to the cross than walking to a distant vantage point adds anything to a mountain. But the passing of time has brought into clearer focus what really took place at the cross. All eternity will serve to continue its clarification. Neither one atonement theory nor the sum of all atonement theories can match its profound depths.

### The Dereliction Cry

If Calvary is in general inexhaustibly profound, Christ's cry of dereliction (Matt 27:46) is doubly so. God suffered at the cross. The Father and the Spirit endured the agonies of Calvary with Christ. Calvary was the self-giving of the entire Godhead.

In a church in Italy (George Buttrick tells us) hangs a painting which, at first glance, seems like any other painting of the crucifixion. But look more closely and you'll see "a vast and shadowy Figure behind the figure of Jesus. The nail that pierces the hand of Jesus goes through to the hand of God. The spear thrust into the side of Jesus goes through into God's."<sup>116</sup> The Holy Spirit needs also to be included.

Balthasar notes that on Calvary "the Son had placed himself at the disposal of the Father so as to guarantee the goodness of the world by his unconditional sacrifice unto the cross . . . that such willingness on the part of the Son must have affected the Father to the depths of his heart? That it must have required from the Father as great and as selfless a love to accept this offer without mitigation as from the Son who consummated it and from the Holy Spirit who sustained this mutual abandonment of Father and Son and had to endure it himself."<sup>117</sup>

What we have here is more than the Son's dying to satisfy God, His law, and His honor or to reveal His love. We have the entire Godhead plunging into the depths of self-abnegation. Each goes to the limit to reveal "the law of self-renouncing love"—which is the "law of life for earth and heaven,"<sup>118</sup> for the entire Trinity is like this. Christ came to reveal what God is like (Jn 14:9), and He did so in an unequalled way at the cross.

We see clearly, then, that there is no dualism in the Godhead anymore than there is a division among the attributes of God. The entire Godhead is involved in self-sacrifice and self-satisfaction, in which their holiness and love, their justice and mercy are all active. All members of the Godhead, in the plurality of their attributes, remain true to themselves in the act of saving man and defeating that which caused him to become lost. Revelation and restoration, self-abnegation and judgment, reconciliation and victory all were present in Christ's death.

There is a decisive difference between the death of Christ and that of a martyr. For example, Huss and Jerome "both bore themselves with constant mind when their last hour approached. They prepared for the fire as if they were going to a marriage feast. They uttered no cry of pain. When the flames rose, they began to sing hymns; and scarce could the vehemency of the fire stop their singing."<sup>119</sup> Huss and Jerome experienced the promise that not even death can separate a follower from His Lord (see Rom 8:38, 39). But death separated Christ from His Father (see Matt 27:46). Socrates faced death with joy compared to Christ's utter terror.<sup>120</sup> If Christ's death was merely to reveal God's love, why did He plunge into abject horror, consternation, loathing, and agony?<sup>121</sup> Becoming sin for us was infinitely more than revelation. It was redemption.

In a very real sense Jesus died for *us*, not for God. In becoming "sin for us," Forsyth has suggested, Jesus was "treated as sin (though not as a sinner)." He "experienced sin as God does, while he experienced its effects as man does. He felt sin with God, and sin's judgment with men. He realized, as God, how real sin was, how radical, how malignant, how deadly to the Holy One's very being." He died "at sin's hands," for holiness and sin cannot co-exist.<sup>122</sup> Christ allowed Himself to be put to death by the sins of the planet (see Jn 10:15, 18; 15:13).

Within this context we are now ready to consider the dereliction cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). These words are dismissed by some as if they were merely put into the mouth of Jesus by the church (one explanation of why they were written in two languages).<sup>123</sup> Some even suggest that this was a normal cry after suffering and loss of blood.<sup>124</sup> Such observations miss the depths involved.



"It is better to take the words at face value," says D. A. Carson. "Jesus is conscious of being abandoned by his Father. For one who knew the intimacy of Matthew 11:27, such abandonment must have been agony; and for the same reason it is inadequate to hypothesize that Jesus felt abandoned but was not truly abandoned. . . . In this cry of dereliction, the horror of the world's sin and the cost of our salvation are revealed."<sup>125</sup>

It is crucial to try to understand the overwhelming agony Jesus endured. The sins of a world caused an agony of bloody sweat, the abandonment of hell, and the crushing out of His life. No wonder He cried out to God. The Greek word for "cried" is *anaboao* (Matt 27:46), used only here in the New Testament. This "is a strong verb indicating powerful emotion or appeal to God." This is "the only time in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus addresses God without calling him Father."<sup>126</sup>

The man Jesus had come to the brink—where He needed God the most. Yet precisely at this time when He needed God the most, He felt utterly abandoned. It is impossible to comprehend the utter horror of that dark period. The entire Godhead suffered through that self-sacrifice of Jesus.

W. Barclay appropriately calls this cry "the most staggering sentence in the gospel record. . . . That is a saying before which we must bow in reverence, and yet at the same time we must try to understand."<sup>127</sup>

Ellen White gazes into the depths of Christ's trauma:

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.<sup>128</sup>

Where was God when that terrible cry rent the air?

God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him.<sup>129</sup>

Although Christ had previously spoken of His resurrection (Matt 16:21) and even of his return at the second advent (Matt 16:27), during the darkest hour on the cross He could not see through the darkness to His resurrection and second advent. When He became our sin-bearing Substitute, He saw no way out. He felt abandoned by God, just as the lost will feel after the millennium. He faced hell itself—eternal separation from His Father. It was as if He said, "My God, my God, if it means eternal separation from You, the One I love so much, that these human children can be with You in My place, then I'll plunge into that abyss."

"Ah," says one, "didn't Moses ask God to blot out his name if Israel could not be forgiven (Ex 32:32)? Was not Moses, thus, as willing to give up heaven as was Christ?"

"Not so," comes the reply. "The matter is much deeper than that. Moses did not know what he was giving up, but Jesus did. Christ had lived in heaven with the Father and the Spirit for eternity. He knew very well what He was giving up. He was giving up that eternal past as well as the eternal future. He was willing to give up being with those who are the dearest to Him in order that rebellious mankind could be taken to be with the Father and Spirit in His place. This is substitution at its deepest depth."

### The Adventist Atonement View—A Broader Perspective<sup>130</sup>

We have already noted that Aulen and Grotius broadened the focus beyond that offered by Anselm and Abelard. Yet it must be acknowledged that all four of their atonement theories were confined to the cross. Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the atonement, though cross-centered, involves much more than the cross. Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). It is the *risen* Christ who "ever lives to intercede" for the race (Heb 7:25). "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved *through his life!*" (Rom 5:10).

Ellen White cogently observes, "It was not alone His betrayal in the garden or His agony upon the cross that constituted the atonement. The humiliation of which His poverty formed a part was included in His great sacrifice. The whole series of sorrows which compassed humanity Christ bore upon His divine soul."<sup>131</sup> And concerning Christ's present ministry, she said, "All need to become more intelligent in regard to the work of atonement, which is going on in the sanctuary above."<sup>132</sup> Obviously atonement embraces Christ's work before and after Calvary too.

"Completion" and "continuance" are two sides of the atonement process that must be held together. Completion involves the fact that "the gulf that was made by sin has been spanned by the cross."<sup>133</sup> "The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient."<sup>134</sup> "He has given us the advantage of his victory."<sup>135</sup> Because of this completion, the atonement process can continue in the subsequent sanctuary ministration, both Godwards and manwards.

So, although the cross is central and crucial, atonement is far broader than one event. Properly understood, *Christ Himself* (rather than the cross or anything else) is the atonement provided by God for man.<sup>136</sup> This is true all along the journey from His departure from heaven, His incarnation, His human life, His death, resurrection, high priestly ministry, preadvent judgment, return, millennial and postmillennial judgments—until sin and sinners are no more, and man is finally in a relationship of at-one-ment with God. The ancient day of atonement proleptically celebrated Calvary, the most holy place ministry, and the ultimate sending of the

scapegoat into the wilderness (Lev 16). So atonement embraced events from Christ's sacrifice to Satan's demise. Therefore, atonement is a comprehensive term that includes everything Christ has done, is doing, and will do, to remedy the separation of man from God caused by sin.

Within this broad salvific context, Christ as "sacrifice" and "priest" must be held together as two important aspects of atonement. Along the "atonement continuum," the cross is the completed payment but not the finished atonement. The sacrifice is sufficient as sacrifice. But now this sacrifice is being mediated. And the work of atonement will not be completed until God and man are together on the new earth. The Old Testament types, taken in their totality, prefigured both Christ's sacrifice and His sanctuary/temple ministry. The sacrifices were ministered within the sanctuary/temple. To focus on one to the exclusion of the other is to fail to grasp the breadth of the atonement. "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross."<sup>137</sup>

"What He did on the cross was for *all men* (1 Jn 2:2). What He does in the sanctuary is for those only who *accept* His great salvation."<sup>138</sup> Redemption's sacrifice was given on the cross, but representation takes place in heaven.<sup>139</sup> Properly understood, "redemption-representation" are two preadvent (i.e., pre-second-advent) stages of atonement for Christians. Christ's sacrifice gives Him the right to minister as our priest, for none can minister without a sacrifice (Heb 8:3). But the ministry adds nothing to the cross, as if to say that the cross was insufficient or incomplete in and of itself (Heb 9:24-28). Rather, the sanctuary ministry makes the cross effective for us by bringing the benefits of Calvary to us.<sup>140</sup> Ellen White put it well, "The cross must occupy the central place because it is the means of man's atonement."<sup>141</sup> So though atonement involves a process, the cross occupies the central place in that process.

Christ entered the "sanctuary ministry" with the blood of His own sacrifice. He is today engaged in a Godward and manward ministry. (1) Only in and through Christ can man approach God, for Christ is man's representative. (2) Only through Christ can man receive God's blessings, for Christ is God's representative. Thus

Christ's high priestly ministry is a two-way mediation between God and man. Calvary is the fulcrum upon which this priestly ministry turns. Both the Godward and the manward ministry function because of Calvary.

At His ascension, Christ began his priestly ministry and "entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking . . . his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12 RSV). There He "has entered on our behalf" (Heb 6:20). Through Him in His status as the second Adam (Rom 5:12-21), we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16). Without Him, even the praise and prayers of true worshipers are unacceptable, because they pass through "the corrupt channels of humanity."<sup>142</sup> This is a part of the Godward part of the present atonement ministry.

Scripture describes the setting. "Behind the second curtain," in "a room called the most holy place," is the ark. There, between the cherubim, is "the place of atonement" (Heb 9:3-5). Christ's "second apartment" ministry began in 1844 (Dan 8:14), when "the hour of his judgment" arrived (Rev 14:6, 7). The "first apartment" ministry continues to run with it. The judgment aspect of His second apartment ministry was prefigured in the annual Day of Atonement (Lev 16), when "only the high priest entered the inner room . . . and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance" (Heb 9:7). We are today in the antitypical Day of Atonement.

In His present Day-of-Atonement ministry,<sup>143</sup> Christ may be described as making the "final atonement."<sup>144</sup> The manward part of this present work of atonement has at least two aspects: (1) cleansing from sin (Lev 16) and (2) deliverance from the little horn (Dan 8:14; 7:8-10, 20-22, 24-27). The preadvent judgment provides for the deliverance of God's people and the destruction of their enemies. A climax will be reached when Satan is confined to the wilderness of this earth during the millennium—prefigured on the annual Day of Atonement when the scapegoat was "presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert" (Lev 16:10).

When the saints are delivered at the second coming, and when sinners are destroyed and the earth is made new at the end of the millennium, the cross will have reached its goal. Christ's death will

be seen to have meant deliverance for man, and death for Satan and all the rest of God's enemies. And although the entire contribution of Christ, from incarnation to the postmillennial executive judgment, are included in the scope of the atonement, Calvary will always be viewed as the foundational self-sacrifice of the Godhead which assured the atonement's ultimate realization.

### Conclusion

We must hold onto a balanced understanding of the atonement, one that is seen to involve (1) each member of the Trinity, (2) every attribute of God, (3) both divine vindication and human salvation, (4) Christ's being both Sacrifice and Priest, and (5) the entire contribution of Christ from His incarnation to His recreation of the earth. All these elements met at the cross, the central, culminating self-sacrifice and self-revelation of the Trinity. The cross exposed Satan, rescued man, and defeated our enemy. The life and work of Christ either lead up to or issue from Calvary. Of the cross Ellen White said, "The great contest that had been so long in progress in this world was now decided, and Christ was conqueror. His death had answered the question whether the Father and the Son had sufficient love for man to exercise self-denial and a spirit of sacrifice."<sup>145</sup>

The cross answered the question, "Why did Christ have to die?"

Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father's face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. . . . "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!"

The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. In the light that streams from Calvary the attributes of God which had filled us with fear and awe appear beautiful and attractive. Mercy, tenderness, and parental love are seen to blend with holiness, justice, and power.

While we behold the majesty of His throne, high and lifted up, we see His character in its gracious manifestations, and comprehend, as never before, the significance of that endearing title, "Our Father."<sup>146</sup>

It will take the whole of eternity for man to understand the plan of redemption [atonement]. It will open to him line upon line; here a little there a little.<sup>147</sup>

How awesome!

Hallelujah!

### Endnotes

- 1 Karl Runia, "The Doctrine of the Atonement: Are We Heading Towards a Consensus?" *Reformation Theology Review*, 21/1 (1962): 45.
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- 5 The Councils of Nicea (AD 321) and Chalcedon (AD 451).
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- 7 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (London: D. Nutt, 1893), 1,3; 8,3; 9,1; 9,3; 20,4; 44,2,4.
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- 14 Leon Morris, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 97; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 17; cf. F. W. Dillistone, *Jesus Christ and His Cross: Studies on the Saving Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: The Westminster

Press, 1953), p. 11; Vernon C. Grounds, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 71.

- 15 Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 5.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 8: 77.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1946), p. 223.
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- 19 cf. H. A. Hodges, *The Pattern of Atonement* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 12.
- 20 H. R. Mackintosh, *The Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1944), p. 195.
- 21 See Douglas Bennett, "A Review of the Doctrine of Atonement," *Adventist Perspectives*, 2/1 (1988): 35-48.
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- 29 See Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown*, p. 122; R. Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (Illinois: Crossway, 1981), p. 116.
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- 109 Ibid., p. 761.
- 110 Ibid., p. 20.
- 111 Ibid., pp. 21, 22.
- 112 Ibid., p. 25.
- 113 See White, *Great Controversy*, pp. 421, 489.
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- 117 Olsen, *ibid.*
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- 138 *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions*, pp. 353, 354.
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## BLOOD IS A SYMBOL

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The sanctuary is the most pervasive illustration of the plan of salvation found in Scripture. Its intriguing architecture and exotic materials, its formal plan and intricately designed furnishings, its elaborate rituals and well organized three-tier ministry along with its calendar of daily services and prophetic annual festivals spanning millennia, make it the most complex enacted parable ever devised. The space devoted to it by the Spirit at the dawn of the revealed writings as well as the hundreds of allusions to it found spread throughout the Bible alert the reader to its importance.

However, the sanctuary, with all its symbolism and typology, raises a problem among those Bible scholars who feel that they must have unambiguous sentences with which to formulate concepts. In the tabernacle they encounter over two hundred symbols and types which do not fit into a merely verbal category. As exegetes and linguists they find little satisfaction for their skills and give up in frustration.

Conditioned by fanciful and bizarre meanings ascribed to biblical types and symbols by some ancient and modern commentators, many Bible students denigrate symbology and typology as allegorical and as therefore unworthy of serious biblical scholarship.

But because the sanctuary is replete with symbols and types it requires a special approach. Its pictures, like those in the apocalyptic writings of both Testaments and in Christ's parables, need creative visualization or they remain meaningless. But when the prospector reverently approaches the minutiae of God's Word with the conviction that nothing there is unimportant, his

predisposition prepares the way for the Spirit to direct his imagination to veins of rich ore never before perceived.

### "Measure" the Sanctuary

On two occasions the Lord directed that the sanctuary should be studied by "measuring" its details. On the first of these two occasions, the Spirit guided Ezekiel through the closing scenes of the great controversy and then granted him a vision of a temple. The celestial Architect led him from chamber to chamber, noting windows and doors and pillars and porticoes, meticulously measuring every detail. With this experience fresh in mind the prophet was commanded: "Son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them *measure* the pattern" (Eze 43:10, where the KJV is more faithful to the Hebrew than some modern versions).

"The house of Israel" constituted God's covenant people. Earthly covenants were ratified by blood. Paul reminds Christians that Christ's blood ratified the new covenant for all believers in every age. At each Passover, and now at each communion service, God's people were and are reminded of the precious "blood of the covenant."

The details of Ezekiel's temple vision were to be displayed before God's covenant people to help them "measure the pattern." This recommendation is applicable today. The full scope of the ministry of our Saviour, the true Pattern, can be understood only with this kind of investigation. Then the sacrificial love of the Victim-Priest, symbolized by His resurrected living blood, awakens appreciation in the heart of the observer, as well as guilt and shame. These latter, the guilt and the shame, the intricate provisions of the tabernacle stand ready to cleanse. In Ezekiel's oracle the personal application of the details of the sanctuary to life's needs is emphasized. The mediatorial blood is vital.

In vision the Revelator experienced the emotions of the Advent Awakening from the euphoria of 1843 (the "blessing" promised to those who should live at the termination of the 1335 days) to the sweet hope and bitter disappointment of 1844. As representative of the survivors of the Millerite movement, John was instructed to "prophesy again" to an international audience. The Spirit then

directed him to "rise, and *measure* the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (Rev 11:1, 2). By this activity he would discover the topic for his proclamation.

Here is the second occasion when the Spirit bade a prophet measure the sanctuary.

During the years immediately following 1844 the task of the Advent believers was first to "measure" the various parts of the tabernacle, as well as the vicarious blood splashed on its altar in which a raging fire consumed the substitute victim, and also the character of its worshipers. Then they were to preach the fruit of their study. In this oracle the world-wide application of the sanctuary to the needs of humanity at the end of history was emphasized.

These two visions, the one given to Ezekiel and the one to John, refer to the same time and event.

To make a measured drawing for a building or a piece of furniture the draftsman first assembles the dimensions of every element in its relationship to every other part and to the whole. He then considers the materials of which each is to be made and the quantities needed. Similarly, in our study of the sanctuary, every particular symbol must be "measured" and its proportions, materials, location, and relationships carefully considered. Jesus, of course, is the true Pattern we are studying as we do this.

### Jesus Is the Representative Lamb

Some sanctuary symbols have been understood so long that they are taken for granted. For example, the Baptist twice announced Jesus as "the Lamb of God." His phrase, "the Lamb of God," evokes meaning without our seeing, except subliminally, an animal with four legs, a woolly coat and tail, two little horns and pointed ears, and that cries, Baa! What we perceive when we hear the phrase, what we feel, is our Saviour, gentle and kind, given by His Father to die for the world. By age-long use the symbol has become automatically identified with its real meaning. This kind of habitual application of the sanctified imagination must be directed toward every type and symbol in the tabernacle.

Jesus "took on Himself the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16). His life-blood represents the life-blood of "Abraham's seed," the "heirs

according to the promise," who are His redeemed people. When Jesus died, humanity died in Him. When He arose, humanity again lived in Him. As Jesus ascended to His Father, humanity ascended in Him. Christ's blood is representative of the human race.

Moses, Isaiah, and our Saviour call attention to a great many details regarding the sacrificial lamb. It had to be innocent, young, flawless, and freely provided by its owner. It must be presented at the altar by a willing penitent, who bound it with cords and then confessed his sins while laying his hands, that is, his full weight, upon its head, thereby transferred the responsibility for his guilt to his helpless substitute, which he immediately slaughtered. Our imaginations empathize with the victim, sensing the flash of sun on the killing blade, watching the shuddering death agony and the blood streaming from the throat. Our hearts throb with horror—and especially so because we have come to believe that these symbols and types represent a reality far bigger than themselves.

But our mental pictures are not painted by the actual brush strokes of biblical writers, nor are our emotions evoked by their words. They are evoked by the Spirit's stimulation of our imaginations through representations far more powerful and eloquent than letters on a page.

Questions confront us: Which of the details of these symbols and types shall we consider meaningful enough to be measured, and which shall we dismiss as merely incidental? It is my opinion that there is nothing given by inspiration that is without significance, when all the available facts are brought to bear upon it.

Disciplined by the curbs of divine revelation, trained by lexicon and grammar and context, aided by the insights of history, geography and the established facts of science, our powers of visualization should be exerted upon each detail to push comprehension beyond the obvious meaning of words.

### The Blood Shed or Spilled

For example, think of the role of "the blood of the lamb." As blood is the river of life for an animal, the blood of Christ represents the life essence of the Lamb of God. As blood is purified by air, Christ kept His blood pure by breathing continually the rare atmosphere of heaven. As blood removes waste products and builds and rebuilds



every organ of the body, Christ's blood rejuvenates the church and keeps every member healthy and vital. Blood touched every part and person in the ancient sanctuary and lay at the basis of every rite. Thus we are taught that Christ's blood is the life-blood of redemption.

Remembering that types and symbols testify of our Saviour in His ministry in heaven, we must mentally recreate all their particulars: the troubled penitent with bloodied clothing and crimsoned hands clutching the reeking knife, experiencing the drama in which he was both participator and observer; the lamb at last lying still in death, its blood caught in a golden bowl by the mediator and staining the earth with carmine; the priest proceeding with his duties with white robes streaked with scarlet, while spectators looked on in silence. The sacrificial blood embodied all these concepts, but in and of itself it was not enough to save.

#### The Blood Sprinkled or Applied

As we imagine the earthly ministrant carrying the "spilled blood" into the holy place glowing with quiet light and redolent of the breath of prayer, or to the brazen altar flaming with justice in the court, and see him splatter the blood in elaborate rituals, converting it into omnipotent "sprinkled blood," we must see Jesus ministering His own precious blood.

Through these happenings we perceive the theological truth that the spilling of the lamb's blood was not sufficient. It had to be precisely *applied* in specific places and at different times by two consecrated officers before it could become effective in making atonement. Jesus is Himself the Victim, Himself the Priest, Himself the High Priest. Through typology we learn that neither His death (represented by His spilled blood) nor the life which He laid down to produce the spilled blood was sufficient to procure our redemption. His blood had to be ministered; it had to be applied.

To apply His blood, the Saviour had to live again and take the essence of His triumphant life and death, now His living or resurrected blood, to the next stage of His ministry. And with it, He must dedicate His place of service and be Himself inaugurated as Priest and High Priest.

These concepts are not spelled out in the Bible, but they are clearly pictured by the details of symbols and types. Not until every particular has been etched in the mind by the inspired Word and the illuminating Spirit are we able to understand what actually is transpiring in the celestial tabernacle.

Some believe that the Old Testament sanctuary should be scrutinized solely through the eyes of the New Testament. But the meaning of many aspects of the tabernacle had been grasped by perceptive readers centuries before there was a New Testament. In my view, New Testament statements should be understood in the light of the Old. When Jesus fulfilled the predictions of typology by His life, death, and resurrection, the light from these sanctuary symbols shone clearly, but their glow had been there from the beginning.

Paul did not approach the Saviour's death and triumphant ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in a vacuum. He was saturated with its ancient illustrations. His statements regarding Christ's implementation of these types become clear only because the light from the Old Testament is streaming upon them. Today, when ideas from both Testaments are assembled, the significance of the plan of salvation as taught in the tabernacle emerges brightly.

#### Several Kinds of Substitute Sacrifice

We have been thinking of the submissive lamb as representative of Christ, but what of the other symbols—the powerful bull and the sturdy ram, the playful goat and the frolicsome kid, the plaintive dove and the gentle pigeon, as well as the gregarious sparrow twittering in joy, and the lonely red heifer? These also are prescribed symbols of the Victim. The characteristics of each of these creatures must be added to the picture of Jesus as a lamb, a quest that obviously would take us far beyond the limits of the present study. Only in the cumulated light streaming from every Spirit-selected symbol shall we be able to visualize the fullness of our great Substitute's character in life and death and grasp the quality of His "spilled blood."

#### Blood Establishes the Right of Jesus to Serve

The first act of Jesus as the *resurrected* Lamb (and the representative of humanity) was to ascend to His Father to present His

blood. He entered eternal Light, the first Man to do so and survive, and heard from His Father's lips that His sacrifice was acceptable. By surviving the divine effulgence He demonstrated before the universe that no taint of sin rested upon Him. Jesus received from His Father the added assurance that His followers would one day share the bliss of heaven with Him. But even at this juncture, His representative blood still was only "spilled blood."

Let us "measure" other scenes in sanctuary typology by asking two questions: When was the Mosaic tabernacle dedicated for service? and, When was its priesthood set apart to sacred office?

The apothecaries who prepared the holy unguent (see Ex 30:22-33) were informed that it would be used to anoint the entire tabernacle, including "the ark of the testimony" (verse 25). When Moses led Aaron and his sons in a rehearsal of its opening rites, he reminded them to anoint "all the vessels thereof" (Ex 40:9-11). After the tent had been erected and the priests had been prepared, "Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them" (Lev 8:10, 11). These types required that the most holy place be entered prior to the commencement of the services of the sanctuary, and, incidentally, long before those of the Day of Atonement were to be carried out.

The Spirit used two verbs for these acts: Moses "*anointed*" all the parts with oil, "and *sanctified* them" with "sprinkled blood." (See Lev 8:30, where oil and blood are specifically mentioned, and Heb 9:20- 22.) Heb 9:21 observes that "the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry" were *purified* with blood. Paul was well aware that this sanctifying and purifying blood represented the victorious life of Jesus.

Moses noted that oil was used but only hinted at the use of blood. Paul stated clearly that blood hallowed the tabernacle but only hinted at the role of the Spirit, symbolized by oil (see Heb 9:14). Not until all the symbolic and typical statements from both Testaments are combined do we get a true picture of what transpired on earth, and thus also in heaven.

Let me summarize: Moses, representative of God, and Aaron the high priest, typical of Christ, together took oil (symbol of one function of the Holy Spirit) and blood (the reality of the power of Christ's endless and triumphant life available only after Calvary)

and chrismated the ancient tabernacle, with all its contents, to sanctify and dedicate it. Their persons and actions were types, and what they used were symbols. Together these types and symbols portrayed what would transpire at the inauguration of the celestial sanctuary, and who would carry it out.

#### Christ's Blood Used to Inaugurate His Ministry in Heaven

The timing of these events is important. In Israel's tabernacle, anointing (or sprinkling) with "spilled blood" obviously required a victim's death. Because the inauguration of the heavenly tabernacle needed Christ's sanctifying (or purifying) blood (Heb 9:21-24), it could not take place until after He had "spilled" His blood through His death on the cross—nor until after His resurrection, by which its vitality was displayed. Then He had to ascend with His human body, carrying to the celestial sanctuary His "spilled blood" (now resurrected), the symbol of His triumphant life.

"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:17-21).

Once Jesus arrived in heaven carrying his spilled-but-living blood, the Father and the Spirit joined Him in carrying out the services of dedication in the heavenly sanctuary. They accomplished this by changing the status of "spilled blood" to "sprinkled blood." This rite necessitated Christ's entrance into the most holy place.

#### Blood Marks Christ's Priestly Garments

Immediately following the dedication of the heavenly sanctuary Jesus Himself was consecrated as Priest and High Priest. For this important occasion the sanctuary was ready as the place of service, the Priest was ready as Mediator, and so was the Victim's living blood.

The blood of consecration, representing the quality of the victim's life, crimsoned the garments of Israel's priests (Lev 8:30). When we focus this picture on our Saviour, we perceive His white robe, His sinless character, marked with crimson to display His sufferings. This sign language points to Gethsemane, where He trod the winepress alone (Isa 63:1-3), His bloody sweat splashing

His garments and the sin-cursed earth. In Gethsemane he demonstrated that He had indeed "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb 5:8).

After Gethsemane, Calvary, *and* the resurrection, the Saviour could carry out His mediatorial duties and apply His "spilled blood" as "sprinkled blood" for the benefit of the lost world. All this was prefigured in the ancient diorama of salvation, the Old Testament tabernacle. During the daily morning and evening services the victim's sprinkled blood was used to consecrate the Jewish nation. Today, Jesus, as Priest, performs these "daily" services in the celestial tabernacle. John viewed this thrilling fact in vision: "I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain [in the very act of pouring out His blood], having seven horns and seven eyes" (Rev 5:6)—perfect might and perfect sight.

#### Invincible Blood

Look once more at the wide panorama we are considering, typified in the tabernacle diorama. As we have just seen, the inauguration of the Old Testament tabernacle reveals that the building was first "made" and subsequently anointed with blood and oil (Lev 8:13, ff.) immediately before the priests were consecrated, also with blood and oil. This sequence of events enables us to visualize that before Jesus could serve as the Priest and High Priest of our salvation, the heavenly sanctuary had first to be "made" by God and afterwards dedicated by the blood of Calvary and the oil of the Spirit (see Heb 4:14-16; 5:5-10; 7:24-28; 8:1-6). To signal that Jesus had been consecrated as Priest and High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the Oil of the Spirit—seen by John under the symbol of "seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Rev 5:6)—was poured on His head and flowed down His beard (Ps 133:1-3, where Aaron is the type), cascading to earth in flaming Pentecostal cataracts, deluging the praying disciples, and illuminating the world (Acts 2:1-4.)

This inspired scenario, long foreshadowed by the symbols and types of the earthly tabernacle, has Jesus entering the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary in company with the Father and the Spirit immediately after His ascension and before Pentecost to carry out vital tasks. It is possible that Paul had these entries of our Forerunner or Advocate "within the veil" in mind when encourag-

ing the faith of Hebrew Christians in Heb 6:19, 20. Is it because these types are ignored that there is so much debate over whether Christ's entry "within the veil" should be limited to the antitypical Day of Atonement?

#### Christ's Blood Represents His Perfect Life

When Jesus came into the world, He testified that death, typified by the four major rituals of the sacrificial system, was not the ultimate goal which His Father desired. The purpose of the incarnation was obedience to God's will, testified to by His death (Heb 10:5-14) on Calvary. Only because He *yielded Himself* to this penal death is our High Priest able to sanctify all who come to Him with His blood.

#### Records Written in Blood Are Removed by Blood

In the daily ritual in behalf of Israelite sinners, blood was sprinkled or splashed on the veil between the holy and most holy chambers of the sanctuary as well as smeared on the horns of the golden altar. In "some cases" the blood was sprinkled on the horns of the brazen altar alone; but then a sacramental portion of the victim, traditionally at least as large as an olive, was eaten by the priest. The residue of the blood from both ceremonies was poured at the base of the brazen altar.

The prophet Jeremiah reminded God's people of the reality which these rites signified: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of your hearts, and upon the horns of your altars" (Jer 17:1). The rebellion of human beings is also etched on the palms and feet of the Victim Priest.

Both of these ancient rituals signified that the confessed and forever forgiven sins were transferred to the tabernacle and there recorded in a carmine script that registered the victories of the penitents in resisting sin in the shadow of God's glory.

The tabernacle itself, ordered by God, Who designed its building, furnishings, and arrangements; the victims which He provided and then required, and every detail of the Saviour's character they evoked; the Spirit-influenced sinner and his actions and intentions; the consecrated priest and his functions; and finally, the blood, representing the life of the innocent substitute and recording the

entire transaction on the “veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb 10:20) and on the horns of both altars—all spoke of aspects of the omnipotent Saviour’s life, death, and ministry.

The joyous worshipers remembered without fear or foreboding that at strategic sites in God’s house their sins were safely recorded in blood as having been confessed and overcome. They knew that the bloody records were unalterable, entirely safe from interference by the “accuser of the brethren,” and only awaiting the validating transactions of the triumphant Day of Atonement. They knew that on the Day of Atonement these records would be obliterated by the High Priest, who would then set them forever free from all of Satan’s charges.

These types and symbols shadowed forth the truth that on the antitypical Day of Atonement in the celestial tabernacle the record of every forgiven sin would be erased by the precious blood of the Lord’s Goat applied by the divine-human High Priest. Only after these details of the Old Testament tabernacle have been carefully “measured” can the student of the story of salvation grasp the separate roles played by Christ’s “spilled” and “sprinkled blood” and rejoice in full assurance.

#### Blood Is Life

The Spirit explained that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” and added, “I have given it to you upon your altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11 כַּו).

In the clause “for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul,” the word “soul” (*nephesh*) is rendered “life” in various versions, bringing out the true significance of the passage: “. . . by reason of the life.” The New American Standard has, “. . . it is the blood *by reason of the life* that makes atonement”; “. . . *through the life*,” says The New Berkeley Version; “. . . *as the seat of life*,” offers The New American Bible. Thus the text might be appropriately translated, “Because the life of the flesh is in the blood, I have given it to you on the altar to cover your lives, because the blood atones *on account of the life* of the victim.” It is the quality of the victim’s life that is represented by the atoning or covering blood. The hymn writer clearly caught this: “Cover with His *life*, sinless is He.”

Let me reiterate. Because “blood is the life” (Deut 12:23) “of the flesh” (Gen 9:4, 5), blood is used as the symbol of the quintessence of the Victim’s character laid down in death in the penitent’s place. It represents not so much His death, per se, as His total energy and experience. This was emphasized by a sacrifice without blemish of any kind (Lev 1:3; Ex 12:5; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19), with no lacking or additional parts. And because blood could be used only subsequent to a victim’s death, the rituals in which it was employed testify to the post-resurrection ministry of our immaculate Saviour.

Christ’s life, “original and unborrowed,” is the vast spring from which every river of living beings has had its source and continues to gush. Humanity is such a river. When Adam sinned, the human river was defiled and subject some day to drying up.

In considering how to purify the race, we might begin at Adam, the point at which sin and death entered. Our first parent certainly should have died to pay the penalty for his sin. But had he done so, his potential posterity would have perished. Neither could an angel or other unfallen being purge the human stream by a vicarious sacrifice, because, although he might be able to lay down his life, he could not take it up again. It becomes obvious that no finite being is able to cleanse the race. Thus Deity went one stage further back, to the immediate Source from which Adam sprang, that is, to Christ the Creator, since all humanity was in Him.

Jesus agreed to take responsibility and to give Himself for the race. When He died, humanity would die in Him. Thus the penalty for every sin would be paid once for all. And when He should arise, all humanity would potentially be resurrected in Him and given a second chance. Thus it is true that there is salvation in no “other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Because of this Paul could affirm: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). In the resurrected Saviour God now sees the human race as conditionally redeemed, with every debt discharged, waiting only for each individual personally to accept Jesus in order to make the plan of redemption a reality for that person.

### Cleansing and Mediating Blood

The inspired writers are unanimous on this point: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7), for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Heb 9:22), and in Him "we have redemption through His blood" (Eph 1:7). These symbolic statements point to the transcendent reality that "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10). Paul here combines the results of the death and of the life of the Saviour. It is because He is alive that He has the authority to save sinners. His power to do so is symbolized by His eternally living human blood.

The Saviour's blood not only purchased the human race; it also ratified the new covenant through which redemption is possible. It is on the basis of His victorious life that Jesus approaches His Father and ours and is able to demand that Deity give eternal life to every repentant sinner, crying in triumph, "My blood, Father, My blood!" (see *Early Writings*, p. 38). By His blood He is able to justify the penitent and sanctify the saint who remains submissive to His will.

The salvific effects of His dwelling in our hearts by faith through grace can be illustrated by the blood circulating through our bodies. "Christ must dwell in your hearts, as the blood is in the body, and circulate there as a vitalizing power. On this subject we cannot be too urgent. While truth must be our panoply, our convictions need to be strengthened by the living sympathies that characterized the life of Christ" (*Testimonies to the Church*, 7: 189).

The never ceasing ministration of Christ's omnipotent blood in the heavenly sanctuary is needed by every penitent and will continue as long as there is one sinner ready to accept the proffered salvation. Contemplating Christ's ministry of His blood in the blazing light of the symbology and typology of the earthly sanctuary, we exclaim in joy and adoration, "Lord, how we love Thee for Thy love!"

## TEN WAYS TO PICK REAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS OUT OF A BUSHEL OF CHRISTIANS

A Sermon by C. Mervyn Maxwell

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If I showed you a bushel basket full of Red Delicious apples, Golden Delicious, and Granny Smiths and asked you to pick out the Red Delicious, you would have no trouble separating the bright red apples from the green and yellow ones. But if I gave you a bushel with many different kinds of apples and asked you to pick out the Ashmead's Kernels or the Cox's Orange Pippins, you'd probably want someone to tell you in advance what they looked like.

Let's try picking real Seventh-day Adventists out of a bushel of many kinds of Christians. But first let's review what the Bible says real Seventh-day Adventists look like.

### 1. They're Born Again.

According to the Bible, real Seventh-day Adventists, like real Christians of any variety, are born-again two-table Christians. (What "two-table" means I'll explore in a moment.) Real Adventists—like real Christians of all kinds—don't describe themselves as second- or third-generation Christians, or even as second- or third-generation Adventists. They certainly don't claim special rights on such a basis.

I heard Billy Graham say on the radio once that being born in the church doesn't make a person a Christian any more than being

born in a garage makes a person a car. Apparently he was right. To be Christians, people have to be born of the Spirit, individually “born again,” or more correctly, “born from above, *another*” (Jn 3:1-5).

Nicodemus was a *forty-second generation* Jew (basing our calculations on Matthew 1), yet Jesus said even to him, “You absolutely must be born again”—“from above” and “of the Spirit.”

When Jewish leaders prided themselves that they were “sons of Abraham,” John the Baptist told them that God could make sons of Abraham out of stones (see Matt 3:9). What was needed was sons of God.

“You must be born of the Spirit,” Jesus told Nicodemus. “You have been born anew,” observed Peter, “not of perishable seed [that is, not by human procreation] but of imperishable seed, through the living and abiding *word* of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

Being blood relative even to the most effective Adventist missionary or to the best organized Adventist administrator doesn’t make a real Seventh-day Adventist. Lowering our standards to keep second- and third-generation Adventists in the church is an exercise in futility. Sad to say, “second-generation Adventists” aren’t in the church; only first-generation Adventists are.

And what we’re saying is just as true of ATS members as of any other Christians. We too must be born again, born from above, of the Spirit, through the Word.

## 2. They’re “Two-table” Christians.

To be real Seventh-day Adventists, people must not only be born again but must also be “two-table” Christians. I promised to explore this.

As we all know, Jesus summarized the ten commandments under two headings representing the two tables of the law—supreme love to God and heartfelt practical love to man (see Matt 22:36-40). Many Christians (perhaps all of us) have a tendency to emphasize one table of the law at the expense of the other. Some of us take our obligations to God so seriously that we neglect our fellow humans or become irritable with them. Others of us treat people kindly enough but take our obligations to God rather lightly.

The enemy doesn’t mind which table we emphasize, just so we neglect the other one. Some of the most “liberal” people are the nicest; and some who emphasize the Word of God and its instructions for godly living aren’t so nice.

Here’s a warning to people like us who emphasize the importance of theology and the Bible.

Peter Marshall became famous for asking God, in the Senate, to make all the bad people good and all the good people kind.

## 3. They Live in Consciousness of the Second Coming, Based on 1844.

Our bushel of Christians will contain many who glow with love for Jesus and who feel committed to both tables of the law, but who aren’t members of the Seventh-day Adventist church. To know for sure whether you are on to real Seventh-day Adventists, you can listen carefully for any suggestions they may make about their long-range plans. Do they instinctively add, “If time lasts” or “If the Lord doesn’t come first.”

“You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills,’” counsels James 4:15; and Ellen White adds, “You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years” (*Selected Messages*, 1:189).

Perhaps because of the way I was brought up, it seems unthinkable to me that people for whom the near return of Christ is a genuine reality could omit referring to it when exploring their future options.

But beware! In our bushel of Christians there probably are numerous people who believe that Jesus may be coming sooner than even we do.

Whereas Adventists know that Christ cannot return until the gospel is preached in all the world, the image to the beast has been set up, and the plagues have fallen, many Dispensationalists believe that Christ could come at any minute. If believing that Christ is coming soon makes one an Adventist, many Dispensationalists are better Adventists than we are; yet they are not known as Adventists.

So how can you tell if second-coming Christians are really Adventists?

Ask them for the reason why they add, "If time lasts" or "If the Lord doesn't come first."

Real Seventh-day Adventists will be prepared to explain that they believe Christ is coming soon *because* the 2300 days ended in 1844.

The principal evidence that we are living in the last days is the prophetic fulfillment of the 1260-day and 2300-day prophecies, is it not?

Historically, the name "Adventists" is an abbreviation of "Second Adventists," the name applied to the followers of William Miller, who emphasized the nearness of the second advent of Christ on the basis of the fulfillment of the 2300 days in 1844. When our principal periodical was launched in 1850, its first name was *The Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald*.

Most Christians say that the final judgment will mark the very end of time. We Seventh-day Adventists are commissioned under the first angel's message to tell people that the final judgment, the judgment that marks the end of time, *has begun already*.

In her Manuscript No. 2 for 1906, Ellen White observed that "the sanctuary is the foundation of our faith." That is, she said that the new ministry which Christ commenced in 1844 in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our special kind of Christian faith. Nowhere is the sanctuary more surely the foundation of our faith than in respect to our very Adventism itself.

Any weakening in our theological presentation of the 2300 days cannot but undermine the essence of our existence as Adventists. Here is a responsibility for the ATS: to *strengthen* our theological presentation of the 2300 days.

So if our Christians in the bushel are born again and committed to both tables, and if they also use a phrase like, "If Christ hasn't returned by then" and can explain their use of it by referring to the 2300 days, you can be almost certain you are on to real Seventh-day Adventists.

#### 4. They Love to Keep the Sabbath Spiritually, Also Because of 1844.

But what if the persons (or apples) you've picked out as possible Adventists don't happen to say anything about the second coming or their future plans? Then prick up your ears if they talk about what they're going to do next Sabbath.

However, even if they do talk about the Sabbath, they could turn out to be among the millions of devout Christians who keep Sabbath on Sunday. Many Sunday keepers who observe the Sabbath on the wrong day nonetheless keep it more or less in the right way.

Likewise, if your people keep Saturday as the Sabbath, you could find on examination that they observe the right day but do so in the wrong way. You would want to find out whether they keep the seventh-day sundown-to-sundown Sabbath in a spiritual manner. You would listen to see if they speak spiritually about Jesus, revealing a kind of Sabbath keeping that finds spiritual fellowship with our Lord.

When we read in Genesis 2 that God sanctified or hallowed the Sabbath, we know that He set the Sabbath apart for a holy purpose. So when Ezekiel 20 says that God gave the Sabbath to show us that He is the one who sanctifies *us*, the meaning is that when He set the Sabbath apart for a holy purpose, part of that holy purpose was to set *us* apart for a holy purpose.

"When the command was given to Israel, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,' the Lord said also to them, 'Ye shall be holy men unto Me.' Ex 20:8; 22:31. Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God." But "in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 283).

Will not real Seventh-day Adventists, then, when we find them in our bushel of Christians, be emphasizing the holiness as well as the joy, the joy as well as the holiness, of the Sabbath?

"The sanctuary is the foundation of our faith." It is a matter of history that our pioneers saw the importance of the Sabbath when they realized that it was immortalized in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus had recently entered to

commence the final judgment and the final removal of sin from His people. The words of Psalm 119:89 imparted new excitement: "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 434.)

It is no coincidence that the Sabbath truth dawned on our pioneers in 1844, the same year that Jesus entered the most holy place.

Anyone who undermines the heavenly significance of 1844 inevitably undermines the Sabbath and Sabbath holiness.

Discovery of the relationship between the Sabbath and the 1844 event in heaven was paralleled by the consciousness that both the Sabbath and Christ's new sanctuary ministry involved "a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people" that was to take place in preparation for the second coming (*ibid.*, p. 425).

In many countries sad to say Seventh-day Adventist young people attend school on Sabbath and take examinations on that day. In the American armed forces thousands of Seventh-day Adventist youth in recent years have made little if any attempt to avoid Sabbath duty during boot camp. Church leaders often leave our youth to their individual choices. There is danger of making Adventism so spineless it becomes boring.

The ATS must encourage our leaders to encourage our youth to take a courageous stand for the Sabbath for Christ's sake and by His power. The ATS must also reaffirm the heavenly significance of 1844 in relation to Sabbath holiness.

If your candidates in the Christian bushel speak of keeping the Sabbath holy from sundown to sundown and relate the spirituality of the day to the new ministry of our loving Saviour in heaven, you will have pretty good proof that you have indeed landed some Seventh-day Adventists.

#### 5. They Know What They Believe.

The real, ripe Adventists in our bushel will know what they believe. It was said in the sixteenth century that the ordinary citizens of Geneva knew the Bible as well as the doctors (the theology professors) at the Sorbonne. End-time ripe Seventh-day Adventists will know the Bible even better. "Prepared to make a

defense to any one . . . for the hope" that is in them (1 Pet 3:15), they will have qualified for the seal of God and become settled "into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved" (Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 4: 1161).

They will know the Christ of the cross and His forgiveness. They will cherish the promises of His second coming. And they will be well informed about His current ministry. "All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 488).

#### 6. They Love and Are Nurtured by the Spirit of Prophecy

Your Adventist apples seem devout and well informed. How you hope they share your love for the Spirit of Prophecy!

You express a word of appreciation for the writings that mean so much to you. Do your candidates reflect your warmth, or are they instantly irritated? Do they remark caustically, "Another string of quotations!" or, "You can prove anything from Ellen White!" or, "All we ever hear these days is Mrs. White, Mrs. White!"?

You probably caught an editorial in a recent *Adventist Review* written by Eugene Durand. It takes up several "myths" about Adventists and comments on them constructively. The fifth in the list is the "myth" that we Adventists "quote Ellen White too much." Durand responds: "Not anymore we don't [quote Ellen White too much], if we ever did. Of course, it is possible to emphasize the modern prophet at the expense of the Bible, and sometimes we may have been guilty of this. If we have gotten away from an unbalanced use of these two inspired sources, that is all to the good.

"But how much is too much? Surely the Lord didn't grant us this precious gift of the Spirit of Prophecy only to have us ignore it. These inspired writings for these last days are meant to be read and heeded. But I fear that new members and our youth have not been taught to appreciate them as our older members were" (*Adventist Review*, Aug. 17, 1989, p. 5).

I am more delighted than you may realize at Affirmation 4 in the ATS Constitution and By-laws. It says: "We believe that the writings of Ellen G. White possess more than pastoral authority, and



that in them God has spoken *as He did through the prophets and apostles of old*, to instruct His people concerning His will and the course He would have His people pursue.”

We believe that the writings of Ellen White are a true manifestation of the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev 19:10). They come from the One who lived and died for us and now “ever lives” for us (Heb 7:25). We cling to the testimony because we cling to Jesus.

I like to think that the formation of the ATS marks the threshold of a new era in Ellen White studies and that this organization is going to promote careful well-documented well-disciplined studies of her vast corpus. Among the many benefits the church can realize from the formation of this organization should be the production of a great many real, ripe Seventh-day Adventists who, with us, will agree—and know why they agree—that the writings of Ellen White do “possess more than pastoral authority, and that in them God has spoken as He did through the prophets and apostles of old, to instruct His people concerning His will and the course He would have His people pursue.”

#### 7. They're Grateful to Be Part of a Special End-time People.

Another mark of real Seventh-day Adventists is that they are grateful to belong to a very special, end-time people.

I am delighted with our ATS Affirmation 6: “We affirm . . . the identification of the Seventh-day Adventist church as the remnant movement called by God to proclaim the three angel’s messages . . . which prepare the world for the soon return of Christ.”

In this statement we recognize that the Seventh-day Adventist church is “the” remnant movement, not “a” remnant movement.

Seventh-day Adventists early taught that this movement into which God in His inscrutable grace has called us constitutes, in spite of its imperfections, the “remnant” of Revelation 12:17 *KJV*.

Even *Questions on Doctrine* so teaches. But *QOD* in 1957 said something about the remnant that we must now regret. On p. 188, *QOD* said that we “firmly believe that God has a precious remnant, a multitude of earnest, sincere believers, in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who are living up to all the light God has given them.”

We do hold that God has earnest, sincere believers in the other churches. His invitation in Rev 18:1-4 to “come out of her [Babylon], my people” proves as much. But the Bible *does not* identify those earnest, sincere believers as the end-time remnant. The Bible says the end-time remnant “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17).

In the early 1960s I began hearing complaints that referring to ourselves as the remnant was boastful and inappropriate.

I have often reflected on the boastful part, and have decided that calling the Seventh-day Adventist movement exclusively God’s “remnant” is God’s choice, not ours. If any of us are members of this movement, it is because He called us into it. God gave us the third angel’s message; we didn’t invent it. He thrust it into our hands and bade us run with it. And God hasn’t limited membership in the remnant church as if it were an exclusive country club. Far from being an exclusive club, the remnant is commissioned to persuade—even to urge—everyone in the entire world, literally, to join it and become part of the remnant with us.

There is no place in true Adventism for a drift back to Babylon. “Come out,” should be our cry, “that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

The churches of Babylon stumbled seriously in 1844 precisely because they rejected the fulfillment of the 2300 days with its lifestyle implications. The message of 1844 meant they should emphasize the nearness of the second advent, enter into true Sabbath keeping, and heed the messages of the true Witness, our High Priest, delivered through His chosen messenger.

The 1844 event didn’t just tack interesting data onto old Protestant theology. Nor does it today make us Seventh-day Lutherans or Seventh-day Calvinists or Seventh-day Methodists. 1844 called for a correction of all that the Reformation hadn’t yet corrected, even a reinterpretation of so basic a concept as justification by faith.

Early Adventists didn’t perceive all of this at once. Not until the 1880s, for instance, did God lead Elder E. J. Waggoner to call attention to the “righteousness of Christ” “*placed where it should be in the third angel’s message*” (Ellen G. White, MS 24, 1888; *1888 Materials*, 1: 211). In Minneapolis Christ’s righteousness was

presented not only in the setting of the cross as Luther knew it, but also in relation to the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and sanctification.

Our message on justification owes much to Luther, but Luther spoke to people whose minds, like his, bore the scars and many of the limitations and confusions of Rome. The principal issue when the Reformation began was legalism versus grace. Today the issue is much broader. Antinomianism is a terrible peril as well as legalism. And we have the blazing light emanating from our High Priest, ministering beside the ten commandments—where a halo of glory encircles the very fourth commandment that Luther inconsistently rejected as no longer binding.

We have a special message designed to produce a special people, those who separate from Babylon and keep God's commandments and cherish the Spirit of Prophecy. We must make sure we're out of Babylon. We must study the Spirit of Prophecy as never before and let the Lord develop in us remnant qualities of which He can be eternally proud.

Meanwhile, let us beware of diluting the difference, of making being an Adventist so easy that our youth see no reason to be one. Real Seventh-day Adventists are grateful to belong to something special, God's true end-time remnant.

#### 8. They're Deeply Involved in Soul Winning.

Our real Adventists have chosen to be separate from Babylon—and they want every other Christian in the bushel to be separate too. They give time, money, talent, and their prayers generously and gladly that others might come out of Babylon and into the remnant. A "Seventh-day Adventist" who isn't deeply concerned for the salvation of others isn't a real Seventh-day Adventist.

As Ellen White said to church leaders gathered in Copenhagen on July 22, 1886, "The very work that is essential for every one who receives the present truth, is to aim at perfection of character, and thoroughness in winning souls to Christ." "We have the greatest truth and hope that were ever given to our world, and the greatest faith." "If you once would get the understanding that you are the light of the world, you would feel that a great responsibility rested upon you" (*The Review and Herald*, July 26, 1887).

Our sanctuary message shows that we are living in the end time, in the era when people who are our contemporaries may be the very ones to receive the mark of the beast and suffer the plagues. People *in our lifetime*; people alive today, may one day say to us, "Why didn't you warn us?"

I'm hoping that the articles published by the ATS will not be confined to theological abstractions. If Adventist theology doesn't lead to soul-winning, it isn't good enough for our time and place. Real Seventh-day Adventists, whether in the bushel or in the classroom, are constantly concerned with soul winning.

#### 9. Their Lifestyle Is Based on the Bible, Not Merely on Culture and the Majority.

Being separated from Babylon, real Seventh-day Adventists don't want their lifestyles to be influenced negatively by what other Christians think and do.

Many Christians, tragically, seem content to set their lifestyle standards by what others do. In the August 17 *Review* editorial we referred to a moment ago, Eugene Durand listed as Adventist Myth No. 3: "Seventh-day Adventists worry too much about what members eat, drink, wear, and do."

Durand responded: "I find myself wishing there were more truth to this myth. But in reality, the facts appear to reveal quite the opposite. In too many cases we don't seem to care much anymore whether we live up to our historical standards. It has become increasingly difficult to distinguish an Adventist from a non-member in areas of dress, adornment, diet, and recreation. Many of us have joined our adversaries in viewing carefulness in these matters as old-fashioned legalism.

"I believe we had good reasons for our standards in those areas, and that those reasons are still valid."

I hope that the ATS will be a real Seventh-day Adventist society in the bushel of Christian societies—and that we will apply our theological insights to practical concerns. I hope that the ATS will matter, that it will make a difference in the way people live.

I hope that the ATS will help wean people from the fatal philosophy that lifestyle is to be determined by opinion polls and majority votes rather than by inspired divine revelation.

The *Adventist Review* tells us (see June 1, 1989) that 62 percent of our members drink caffeinated beverages regularly. Does this make caffeine healthful? It tells us that 98 percent of our youth watch commercial movies and videos. Does this make such movies helpful? The *Review* also tells us that 20 percent of our North American churches have women elders, and that 12.4 percent of our North American members drink wine. What do these figures prove?

Observation leads to the statistic that about 50 percent of our white members in North America are absent from church on a typical Sabbath. Does this mean that absence half the time is all right?

“God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the *voice of the majority*—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support (*The Great Controversy*, p. 595, italics supplied).

Our real Seventh-day Adventists, when arranging their lifestyles, will search to know, first last and always, “What saith the Lord?”

#### 10. They Long for the Beauty of a Christ-like Character.

In the talk we referred to a moment ago, delivered to church leaders in Copenhagen in 1886, Ellen White stated: “The very work [singular] that is essential for every one who receives the present truth, is [two intimately related things, namely] to aim at perfection of character, and thoroughness in winning souls to Christ.”

Ellen White spoke of character perfection hundreds of times. In Copenhagen she linked it to thoroughness in soul winning. I think she linked it to soul winning for at least two reasons. For one, character perfection is being like Jesus, and Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk 19:10). No one can *have* a truly Christ-like character who isn’t involved in saving souls.

Second, no one can *develop* a Christ-like character without working for souls. Only as we work for others can we develop that

sacrificial love that clings to God for the sake of others in the way that Christ intercedes with the Father for us.

Ellen White linked Christlikeness to soul winning in the familiar passage in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 69: “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come and claim them as His own.”

The character of Christ! Ah, suppose we found *Jesus* in our bushel of Christians! How brightly colored, blemish free, sweet, and juicy He would be!

And isn’t this what He wants us all to be? And isn’t this what every true Christian and every true Seventh-day Adventist, longs to be?

You remember how the quotation continues on p. 69 of *Christ’s Object Lessons*: “It is the privilege of every Christian, not only to look for, but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”

God has given us the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). Thus we play a part in the atonement—persuading people to be reconciled to (to be “at one with”) God through the witness of our lips and lives. God wants the world to decide for or against Himself partly on the basis of what sinners can learn about Him by seeing His goodness lived out in us. He knows that most people “would rather see a sermon than hear one any day” (Edgar Guest). How important that our lives reflect the beauty of Jesus.

Thank God that Matthew 5:33 is a promise!

“God’s ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ *This command is a promise*. . . . He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. . . . There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 311).

It’s in the Bible. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts [yours and mine] by faith,” so that “ye [you and I] might be *filled with all*

*the fulness of God*" (Eph 3:17, 20 KJV). By God's grace, we can become like Jesus, attractive "sweet and juicy" Christ-like apples.

Long ago I memorized an encouraging passage located at the end of the first chapter in *The Desire of Ages* on Christ's temptations: "There was in Him [in Jesus] nothing that responded to Satan's sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. *So it may be with us.* Christ's humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character."

I often hear people say that in the time of trouble the true Christian "would rather die than commit a known sin." The suggestion seems from one standpoint inadequate; after all, being like Jesus isn't only refusing to sin. "The completeness of Christian character is attained"—not when a person merely refuses to do wrong but—"when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384).

Nonetheless the concept that in the time of trouble the true Christian "would rather die than commit a known sin" is helpful in its own way. It reveals something encouraging about the earnestness of real end-time saints.

Hopefully, the saints' prayer will not be, "O God, we want to be bad, but we know the plagues will fall on us if we sin, so please help us not to be bad."

Much better, it seems to me, will be the prayer of real Seventh-day Adventists, who will have become habitually concerned about what their lives tell others about the goodness of God. In the time of trouble such Adventists' prayer will be, "O Lord, Your enemies demand that we let You down. Please, in mighty power enable us to witness to Your goodness and faithfulness, even if the pain is excruciating and our lives are lost. What are our lives, O Lord, in contrast to Your infinite love and sacrifice?"

Real Adventists, preparing for the time of trouble don't whine about high standards and calls to sacrifice. They ask not how little they need do for the Lord and others; they ask how much God can

help them do for others while probation lingers and there are still souls in Babylon who might come out if they saw real Seventh-day Adventists reflecting the Lord's loveliness.

### Conclusion

Real Seventh-day Adventists can be picked out of a bushel of Christians, if we remember that the Bible indicates that they are born-again two-table Christians who because of 1844 live in consciousness of the second coming and love to keep the Sabbath spiritually. They know what they believe, love the Spirit of Prophecy, are humbly grateful to belong to the end-time "remnant," are deeply involved in soul winning, and base their life-style on Scripture rather than merely on culture. Loving Jesus with all their hearts in view of His goodness and His redeeming self-sacrifice for us, they long to reflect the beauty of His sweet character to the world around them.

We have been using apples as a figure of speech, so let me close with an illustration about Alar, the spray so commonly used on Red Delicious apples until its recent condemnation.

Alar has suffered a lot from a lurid press—even though its possible harmfulness to humans hasn't been fully established yet. But whatever its harmfulness to people may turn out to be, Alar is of *undoubted value to apples*.

Alar, or Daminozide as it's known more technically, is a hormone, not a pesticide. When sprayed on Red Delicious apples and absorbed through their skins, Alar (1) makes the apples both redder and better shaped, (2) helps them ripen uniformly for better harvesting, and (3) helps them resist spoilage, greatly increasing their shelf life.

Thus, from its good side, Alar is a splendid illustration of the Holy Spirit. Accepted into the hearts and minds of end-time Seventh-day Adventists, the Holy Spirit, which by means of the holy Word brings people to the new birth, can also, by means of the holy Word, ripen them sweet, juicy, and beautiful in time for the final harvest and keep them immune from spoilage during the seven last plagues.

God help us ATS members take full advantage of our spiritual opportunities to be real ripe Seventh-day Adventists.

## KEEPERS OF THE SPRINGS

### Summary of a Sermon

by Cyril Miller

President, Southwestern Union Conference

Peter Marshall tells the story of a hermit who was the "keeper of the springs" for a little mountain village nestled in a peaceful valley below the towering heights. When mud and muck got into these mountain springs, sickness and sorrow developed in the small village below. But when the hermit cleansed the springs of silt and slime, then clean, clear water gushed from the rocks, flowing downward in crystal cascades to refresh and gladden the people in the village and keep them in health.

So it is with those of us who serve as "keepers of the springs" for the Seventh-day Adventist church.

I believe we should be optimistic about the future of our church. Both history and prophecy affirm that there will be ups and downs, victories and defeats; yet, in the end, Christ's church will prevail.

In view of this, I have two questions: (1) Is there anything to be concerned about? And conversely, (2) Is there anything to be optimistic about? The answer to both questions is "Yes!"

I am optimistic about the occasion of this meeting. I feel good about the formation of the Adventist Theological Society. You, among all the educators and editors, pastors and presidents, are our foremost "keepers of the springs." The ecological environment surrounding the sources of Christ's living water must be kept from contamination. Yours is a never-ending responsibility. The church

is counting on you to meticulously maintain our theological springs so that we all may drink safely.

Your task as "keepers of the springs" is to protect the townspeople of our villages from those who would sabotage our Scriptural springs, thus keeping us from completing our mission.

### Our Theology is Positive and Pragmatic

Seventh-day Adventist theology is both positive and pragmatic. Do we cover up or abandon old springs when we find new ones? No! Instead we unite the waters from both past and present to form a surging stream that is logistically linked to Revelation's River of Life that flows from the throne of God.

Are there new springs to discover? Obviously, there are!

Truth is like an underground stream waiting to surface as a spring of joy and life for all who desire to drink. So "keepers of the springs" will search carefully for new crystal clear currents cascading from God's great white throne.

### A Church at Odds with Itself

Today the Seventh-day Adventist church faces a dilemma. It is at odds with itself. The church is constantly being challenged by attacks against its appointed leadership, governance structure, doctrinal positions, prophetic guidance, evangelistic mission, and system of finance. It is under attack from both the liberal left and the radical right.

Unfortunately, the "middle of the road" mainstream majority of the church stands directly in the path of the cross fire coming from both directions. And casualties are mounting. Today our conferences and educational institutions suffer from a loss of confidence and constituency support, much of which derives from this theological tug of war.

It appears that the extremists on the right want to reform the church (and it needs some reformation) while the extremists on the left seek to liberate the church (and it needs some liberation).

Unfortunately, the liberals on the left look at the extremists on the right and judge the main body of the church to be legalistic, tradition-bound, and lacking in progressive faith. On the other hand, the radicals on the right, observing the extremists on the far

left, judge the main body to be compromising, worldly, and departing from the faith.

"Keepers of the springs" must clarify these, as well as other, distorted and divisive situations.

True, you can be a Seventh-day Adventist and still lean a little to the left or recline a little to the right. Perhaps most of us do so in one way or another. However, when you go too far in either direction, you cross a line where you cease to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Many who do this, end up in total opposition to the church and wonder why.

#### Will We Splinter as Other Churches Have?

In times past, we as Bible-believing Christians united to fight the "good fight of faith" against all evil. We fought together against everything from alcohol to Sunday laws, from slavery to evolution. But now we are disappointingly divided over everything from gay ministries to women's ordination, from consolidation of campuses to righteousness by faith. Today we are even separated over the interpretation of the Bible itself. As a consequence, our "keepers of the springs" face a formidable challenge.

In past times we observed theological disruption in mainline Protestant denominations and thought it could never happen to us. Now it is happening to us! But will we splinter and separate as other churches have? I think not. I am optimistic about the future of the Seventh-day Adventist church. And one reason I am is that we have a growing group of conservative Adventist scholars who are uniting in a common cause in the Adventist Theological Society.

I believe God will use this growing community of Bible and science scholars to help preserve the unity of our belief and purpose. Why do I speak with such confidence? I believe we are in the early stages of the shaking and sifting time which we have long expected. And it is not all bad. Although painful, it is for our good. Those with untoward attitudes are mistakenly moving away from the church. We knew it would happen, but we were unprepared for the upheaval.

Somehow, we always thought the shaking involved only worldly attractions or sensual pursuits that, like a giant magnet, would pull some of our weaker members away from the church. But we

were unprepared for and are surprised at the vigor of some of the challenges that have developed against our doctrinal beliefs and church structure. And most of these attacks are superficially supported by theological assumptions.

Today the church faces more than theological confrontation. We also are being challenged by controversial social issues that have tangential roots in theology. Ellen White indicates that there is reason for concern when the prevailing mood of the world becomes the prevailing mood of the church. I believe that this warning includes an obsessive interest in ordinary social issues.

Presently, our church seems to be more issue oriented than mission oriented. This is a subtle symptom of contamination seeping into the cultural springs of the church. Secularism is invading our Adventist culture. That which we thought was unchangeable is now changing.

A decade after the advent of television we witnessed Adventist families beginning to deviate from church standards. Our cohesive Adventist culture began to experience a sobering change.

Many are hiding behind liberal theology as a justification for their worldly attitudes and conduct. As a denomination we appear to be experiencing a secularizing metamorphosis. Is there no turning back? I believe there is, and will be.

I admire and applaud the Nazarene General Assembly that met recently in Indianapolis. It reaffirmed Christian standards of social conduct. It agreed that no member who participates in stated social activities may hold office in the Nazarene Church.

Today we tend to tolerate double standards. Why? Most of the Left-Right extremists are second- and third-generation Seventh-day Adventists—our children! They are not new converts to the church. They can be identified as cultural Christians. They tend to look upon the church more as a social organization or a business corporation and less as a divinely-directed body of believers standing immovable on the Rock Jesus Christ.

This is one reason why they become absorbed in secular social issues and the budget/business affairs of the church but not in the church's main mission of soul-winning.

### Where Are We Going?

In spite of the problems, I repeat that I am very optimistic about the Seventh-day Adventist church. Whereas other denominations may shrink in consequence of their schisms, we will experience expansion. The church will go forth "conquering and to conquer." While others divide, we *will* unite.

Although many of our youth and young adults do not seem to know what Adventists believe and appear uninterested in our evangelistic mission, I am still optimistic. I believe that most of them really do believe and care. They will return to the Lord and to His church. I believe that they will rally with us and with the many, many others whom God will call, and will unite for a finished work in all the world.

"Keepers of the springs, arise!"

Still let the Spirit cry,

Till Christ the Lord

Who reigns on high,

Shall take His conquerors home.

—Adapted from Charles Wesley's "Soldiers of Christ, Arise."

## HIS WORKMANSHIP

### Summary of a Sermon

By Joel Tompkins

President, Mid-America Union

In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul describes the "course of this world." In the passage he shows that sin is not only self-destructive but also something reaches out to destroy everything within its influence.

In verse 3 Paul says we all walked according to the course of the world B.C. (that is, before Christ).

Verse 4, however, begins with the words, "*But God.*" God, it says, who is rich in mercy, has intervened in our behalf in a marvelous, miraculous way.

Then verses 6 to 10 describe the way things ought to be for God's people A.C. (after Christ). Verse 10 tells us that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." It reminds us that God's plan has always been that we should *do* good works.

But notice that the good works are A.C., not B.C. They are the fruitage, the results. Paul puts them in the right place. Just the same, they are there, and in abundance.

Good works come as the result of *His workmanship*. What we do does not contribute to His workmanship. We become what He makes us. But what He makes us is revealed in good works. We should never disparage good works.

Many of our laymen are asking, "Where are the standards of the church?" It seems to them that many of our standards have been abandoned. And they don't have much trouble documenting the evidence. Isn't it ironic that nowadays, when so many Evan-

gelicals are publishing books about holy living, some Seventh-day Adventists seem to be downgrading holy living?

I am one church leader who is not willing to sell out to Baal. Our people need to be called to good works today. Indeed, we need to focus on the tremendous potential of every Christian.

What strikes me most about Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 5:20 is that He expects our works of righteousness to *exceed* those of the Pharisees. He goes on in Matthew 5 to give several examples of what the Pharisees' righteousness was like. The Pharisees were trying to get away with the minimum that God requires. But Jesus points out in His Sermon on the Mount that, by His grace, we can go far beyond the minimum. There is tremendous potential for growth in human relationships beyond the minimum standards of not murdering and not committing adultery. When we are His workmanship, we can come to the place where we do not even *think* evil.

By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity; we live His life [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312].

What potential! Seventh-day Adventist Christians dare not settle for the bare minimum, when God makes so much possible.

#### A Challenge for the ATS

The Adventist Theological Society can do something tremendous for this church, if it will work to bring back standards. But this does not mean that we should attempt the impossible, as in the past, and try to police our standards. For example, we have learned from the age of television that you cannot police what people watch in the privacy of their homes. What we need to do is teach our people principles, then motivate them to apply these principles to their lives. The Pharisees proved that you cannot come up with enough rules to cover all possible circumstances. Neither can we be judges or consciences for one another. But the ATS must help our people find and apply the principles that *do* cover all the

circumstances. Not only must we teach these principles, we must teach them frequently.

As reformers, we need to learn to treat people with love and respect, rather than with censure and criticism. We need to leave room for the Holy Spirit to convert people in the specific details of Christian growth—while at the same time keeping before them their great potential for Christian growth.

#### A Tragic, Crucial, and Challenging Time

Our church today faces the most tragic and crucial era in its history. We live in a time when we need to pay close attention to the greatest righteousness by faith message ever entrusted to this church—the message found in *Steps to Christ*. One of the points brought out in that message is the warning that Satan is doing his best to get church members to fall into one of two errors:

There are two errors against which the children of God . . . especially need to guard. The first . . . is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do to bring themselves into harmony with God. He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. . . .

The warning continues:

The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption [ibid., pp. 59, 60].

We must sadly acknowledge that in spite of the warning these errors exist as two "sides" in our Seventh-day Adventist church today. One side concentrates on people's faults—responding tragically to "Satan's constant effort" to divert us into dwelling constantly on "the faults of others" (ibid., p. 71). Of course there *are* faults in the church, but by concentrating on them, we let Satan divert us from looking unto Jesus. It is a law of life that we become like that on which we concentrate.

The other side in our church is being used by Satan to tear down faith in our grand teachings and standards. You don't know how much it hurts me to find young people who have lost their faith because of what they have been taught in science and theology classes in Seventh-day Adventist schools. I can't take it! Not when



we work so hard to win people to our church. If some of our teachers do not believe what the church teaches, the honorable thing for them to do is to get out—not to stay in and undermine the faith of others.

Now it is not our business to decide who is on which side. What we need to do is to teach our people to study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for themselves rather than, for example, depending so much on tapes for their understanding of what is right and wrong. We need to concentrate on the tremendous potential God has granted each one of us. Not only does He forgive our sins, He also cleanses us from sin *and* makes it possible for us to live pure and holy lives.

The ATS must challenge the members of the Seventh-day Adventist church to measure up to the potential God makes possible. We are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus for good works.

## Biblical Theology Without Apology

A Final Word from the Editor,  
Leo Van Dolson

With this first issue of the JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY we have accepted the challenge of bringing into focus a biblical theology without apology. "Biblical theology" I am sure you understand. But "without apology" may take a word or two of explanation.

First of all, we say "without apology," because some persons in recent years, convinced that our unique Adventist understandings of the Bible are not well accepted by theologians of other faiths, have become somewhat apologetic about our message. But rather than being apologetic, we believe we should thank God for the unique message he has given us, based as it is in the three angel's messages of Revelation 14:6-12 and directed to a truly global mission—a mission that includes the education of scholars rather than intimidation by them! As humbly, and yet as clearly as possible, we need to let others (including other scholars) know that we believe we are not merely another evangelical denomination. Our reason for existence is our belief that God has given us insights into Bible truths that set us apart as distinct, truths that other Christians have not yet acknowledged, but which they need to acknowledge.

Second, we say "without apology" because we recognize that the message which we believe God has entrusted to us is vital to the practical, everyday needs of people living in the last moments of earth's history. Unfortunately, all Adventists do not seem to appreciate this fact. The world about us has adopted a set of values corresponding to those "in the days of Noah." Many even in the church, influenced by these immoral values, are challenging those aspects of our theology that condemn the lifestyle they are adopting. Part of our challenge in the Adventist Theological Society, as some of the writers in this issue of our JOURNAL point out, is to take our unique,

God-given understandings of truth and make them as plain and as meaningful as possible to our fellow believers, without in any way seeming to apologize for doing so.

Third, we say "without apology," because we have attempted to do a thorough job in applying correct methods of interpretation (hermeneutics) to the scriptures we discuss. We do not expect that everyone will agree with all the viewpoints expressed in our articles, nor do we want our readers to conclude that the articles represent "official" positions of the Society. But we offer the articles believing they represent thorough-going Bible study, worthy of serious consideration.

And we'd like to add that it is our sincere desire to maintain a positive attitude, free from attacks against any individual or segment in our church.

These are our ideals. If we do not quite measure up, please be patient with us. Like all new organizations, we'll have our growing pains. But we do pray that God will use us to present our Adventist biblical theology without any apology.