

## **The Editor's Page**

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The Adventist Theological Society co-sponsored, with the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the Second International Bible Conference for Adventist theologians in Izmir, Turkey, July 7-17, 2006. Its theme was "The Adventist Theologian and the Nature, Mission, and Unity of the Church." More than eighty papers were presented by Adventist scholars, theologians, and church administrators from around the world. Only a small fraction of these appear in this issue of *JATS*. Some have been submitted to other publications, others will appear in subsequent issues of *JATS*, and many may never be published. The process of bringing papers to publication is a challenging one, but we are grateful to those who did submit their paper to *JATS* and survived the rigorous refereeing process in time to appear in this issue.

The Adventist Theological Society currently holds two regular annual meetings, one in the Spring and one in the Fall. Each meeting presents papers on a particular theme, and at the Fall meeting, held in conjunction with the meetings of other professional societies for the study of Religion, additional papers may be presented that are not related to the theme. Each issue of *JATS* will attempt to publish representative papers from these meetings, as well as other papers submitted directly to *JATS* unrelated to the meetings or their themes. We solicit from readers any papers that may meet the goals and standards of *JATS*. If writers are unfamiliar with these goals and standards, please contact the editor for guidelines for writing for *JATS*.

## **Leadership in the Early Church During Its First Hundred Years**

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Formal leadership roles in the Early Church can be broadly categorized into three types, two of which disappeared in the subapostolic period. Because the dynamics that influenced this development are still effective, a review of what happened in the first century of the history of Christianity can be instructive for the church in our own time.<sup>1</sup>

Though the threefold categorization of ministry types is convenient and defensible, it must be conceded at the outset that the distinction is not always a sharp one and that the same person could be the bearer of more than one type of ministry and thus come under more than one category. It should also be noted that development was not uniform and proceeded at different rates in different localities. The three types, listed in order of appearance, can be denominated (1) charismatic, (2) familial, and (3) appointive. I am using the term “charismatic” not with the modern connotation, but in the original sense based on Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The main distinction between the three types upon which I am focusing is the mode of reception and basis of authority. Charismatic leaders received a direct divine call. Familial leaders were blood relatives of Jesus. Appointive leaders were elected in some fashion by the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Some readers of this paper will recognize that much of it is a development of material that appeared earlier in my article “Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1988), 45-58. Biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) unless otherwise noted.

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**Charismatic Ministry**

The first type of ministry can be called charismatic because it was marked by the bestowal of a spiritual gift and is listed among the *charismata* (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Pet 4:10,11). For my purpose in this paper the most important feature of this type of ministry is that a person was called to it directly by Christ or his Spirit. It was not an office to which one was elected or humanly appointed. It was a function to which one was divinely called.<sup>2</sup> The church could extend its recognition of that calling, but its reception did not depend upon such recognition and normally preceded it.<sup>3</sup>

In the beginning Jesus chose, called, and appointed twelve men “to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14,15). The parallel in Matt 10:1 calls the Twelve “disciples,” while that in Luke 6:13 adds that Jesus named them “apostles.”<sup>4</sup> The term “disciples” reflects Mark’s remark that they were “to be with him,” while “apostles” was an appropriate title for those who were “to be sent out” (Gk *apostolos* < *apostellō*, “to send out”). Luke is apparently using the term technically as a title, for Jesus is said to have “named” them thus.<sup>5</sup> Both Matthew and Luke, immediately after their

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<sup>2</sup> This feature is similar to the calling of Old Testament prophets. The case of Elisha, who was anointed by Elijah to be his successor (1 Kgs 19:16), though chosen by the Lord, may be a possible exception, but if so it stands in striking contrast to the calling of Moses, Samuel, and the classical prophets, such as Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

<sup>3</sup> The confirmation or ratification of the divine gift by the laying on of hands somewhat blurs the distinction between the charismatic and the appointive ministries, but a person could apparently receive one without the other. It was normal, however, for the recognition by the community to follow the divine appointment. The Seven of Acts 6 were filled with the Spirit before being chosen and credentialed by the community. Paul and Barnabas were consecrated by the laying on of hands only after having been chosen by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2,3). The same association of divine call and official consecration was true also of Timothy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14).

<sup>4</sup> Important manuscripts insert into Mark 3:14 a second clause, “whom he also named apostles,” but this looks like a case of harmonization, influenced by Luke. It is also possible that the variant reading is authentic and the source of Luke’s statement, but the Marcan verse exhibits considerable textual confusion.

<sup>5</sup> Judaism also had functionaries called apostles (in Hebrew *shaliach*). These were sent out from Jerusalem on various missions and errands to the Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman empire and beyond. They also collected funds for the support of the temple, and generally kept the network of worldwide Judaism together (cf. Acts 28:21). Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was a Jewish apostle before he became a Christian apostle (cf. Acts 9:2). The term is used for Ezra as an emissary of the king of Persia in Ezra 7:14.

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report of the calling of the Twelve, describe their being sent out on a missionary journey. Mark reports this mission in his sixth chapter and there uses the title “apostle” in 6:30.

Apostles represent the one who sends them and come with the authority of the sender to the extent that they faithfully fulfill the mission that is committed to them. In John 13:16 Jesus says: “Truly, truly, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sends him.” The Twelve were sent out by Jesus as his representatives with the assurance, “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Matt 10:40).<sup>6</sup>

The Twelve chosen by Jesus were the apostles *par excellence*. The number twelve was significant, corresponding to the twelve Patriarchs and twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Rev 21:12-14). They were clearly not the only disciples Jesus had, but they occupied a special place in the scheme of things.

So important was the number twelve in the thinking of the infant church that they felt it necessary to fill the vacancy left among the twelve apostles by the defection of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). “The Twelve” was so firmly established as a synonym for the original group of apostles that Paul referred to them thus even when they had become only eleven (1 Cor 15:5)! Furthermore, it was important that the office not be seen as bestowed by human choice or appointment, so the vacancy was filled by casting lots after prayer (Acts 1:23-26). The words of the prayer are significant: “Show which one of these two men Thou hast chosen” (Acts 1:24). But Peter, who chaired the meeting at which this occurred, did lay down special qualifications that must be met even to be considered as a candidate: an apostle must have been an eyewitness to the resurrection of

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<sup>6</sup> Mishnah *Berakoth* 5:5 says, “A man’s *shaliach* is as himself.” We find later *apostoloi* of churches, as in 2 Cor 8:23 (where the RSV translates the term as “messengers”). When used in this sense, apostleship might have become something more like an appointive office than a charismatic one, but we do not know how such *apostoloi* may have been chosen. It may well be that a church merely ratified the Holy Spirit’s choice revealed through prophets, as in Acts 13:1-3 (cf. 1 Tim 4:14).

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Jesus (Acts 1:21, 22; cf. 2:32).<sup>7</sup> The lot fell on Matthias, about whom we read nothing more in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

It is understandable, then, that the earliest Christians in Palestine, all Jews for whom the Twelve were especially significant, were unwilling to concede that anyone other than the Twelve could be a legitimate apostle. But this limitation was shattered by the divine calling of Paul to the apostolate in a development that was vehemently resisted by many. Paul needed constantly to defend his apostleship. In 1 Cor 9:1,2 he did so by insisting on his qualifications: he was an eyewitness to the risen Lord (a claim supported in 15:8 and by Acts 9:3-5 and 22:6-11) and had done the work of an apostle. In Gal 1:11-19 he argued that by revelation he received his commission directly from the Lord, not from any human authority or body, so that his apostleship was in no way inferior to that of the Twelve.<sup>9</sup>

With Paul as the “point man,” as it were, for expanding the apostolate, the number soon increased. Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles in Acts 14:14, 4. The list that can be compiled from the New Testament also includes at least Apollos (1 Cor 4:6, 9), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; cf. 2:6), Titus (2 Cor 8:23, Greek), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25).<sup>10</sup> It must also include Andronicus and a woman, Junia (Rom

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<sup>7</sup> This clearly only meant being an eyewitness to the risen Lord, able to give personal testimony to seeing Jesus alive after he died, since none of the Twelve had actually seen the resurrection event itself occur. Only angels and perhaps some Roman soldiers saw that. The first witnesses afterward were two women, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.” See Matt 27:65–28:15.

<sup>8</sup> That nothing more is heard of Matthias in the New Testament is not unusual, for the same can be said of the majority of the Twelve. Nevertheless, it has often been claimed that the 120 brethren under the leadership of Peter who filled the vacancy with Matthias made a mistake and should have kept the place open for Paul (who, of course, had not been converted yet). A typical expression of this view is by G. Campbell Morgan: “Casting lots was wholly out of place, and was never resorted to after the coming of the Spirit. That the action was a mistake is revealed in that in His own time and way God found and fitted an apostle. It is to be noted how in consequence of this initial blunder, Paul had constantly to defend his right to the place of apostleship” (*An Exposition of the Whole Bible* [Westwood: Revell, 1979], 450.) Needless to say, this is baseless speculation, but the fact that Paul was not one of the Twelve did have consequences, as will be noted.

<sup>9</sup> It may also be significant that when Herod Agrippa killed James the brother of John (Acts 12:2), there is no record of an attempt to replace him and thus maintain the number of the Twelve.

<sup>10</sup> In the case of Epaphroditus it can be argued that *apostolos* is not used in the same way as elsewhere, but only in the sense of one sent by a congregation and representing it.

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16:7).<sup>11</sup> In three of Paul's letters we find lists of spiritual gifts, and in three of these lists we find apostles, in each case heading the list (1 Cor 12:28; 12:29-30; Eph 4:11). By placing apostleship among the charismata, Paul completes its "democratization," making it available to anyone to whom the Holy Spirit should choose to distribute it.

Another gift associated with leadership is prophecy. Ephesians 2:20 declares that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." The sequence "apostles and prophets," rather than "prophets and apostles," suggests that it is the New Testament prophets that are in view, not those of the Old Testament. In our sources the two ministries are often lumped together or mentioned together with "teachers" (as in Acts 13:1 and Didache 15:1,2).

While apostleship occurs in only three of Paul's lists, prophecy appears in all of them. In Peter's Pentecost sermon he begins by quoting Joel's prediction that in the last days "your sons and your daughters will prophesy" and God will pour out His Spirit on His "menservants and maidservants" (Acts 2:17,18). The book of Acts is witness to the presence of prophets in the early church—often several in one congregation. Thus, in the church at Antioch there were five "prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1,2) who are named. They included Barnabas and Saul (Paul), who are elsewhere known as apostles. This shows that the reception of one gift did not preclude others, and indeed apostles at times had visions and delivered inspired speech. Philip the evangelist had "four unmarried daughters, who prophesied" (Acts 21:9), and in the next verse we read of Agabus, also mentioned in 11:27, whose prophesying was of a near-term predictive nature.

In the Corinthian church also there were multiple prophets, including women, who are told to do their public prophesying with their heads covered (1 Cor 11:3-10). Paul told the Corinthian Christians to desire especially the gift of prophecy (14:1), and apparently several members had it, for they are admonished to speak one at a time:

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<sup>11</sup> On this see my article, "Shapes of the Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church," 47-48; Richard S. Cervin, "A Note Regarding the Name 'Junia(s)' in Romans 16:7," *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 470; Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 93; Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). The progress in the understanding of this verse can be seen by comparing the entry for *Ioulias* (and *Iounia*, which entry does not appear in the first and second editions) in the third edition of the BDAG with earlier editions.

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Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh (*diakrinō*) what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first one be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (14:29-33.)

To us the idea may be startling, not only that one small house church may have several members who prophesy, but also that their utterances are to be evaluated. Furthermore, the prophets are to maintain enough control of themselves that they are capable of stopping and yielding the floor. Thus, Paul does not approve of some sort of ecstatic enthusiasm.

1 Peter 4:10,11 also suggests that the prophetic gift was common and expected. Such was not the case later, and we will examine the reasons for the change later in this paper.

**Familial Leadership**

The brothers of Jesus did not believe in him during his earthly ministry (Mark 3:21,31-35; John 7:5). Something apparently happened, however, to bring them to belief, and this was probably the special post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his brother James (1 Cor 15:7).

As a result, at least James and perhaps other brothers not only came to be counted among the early believers, but became leaders in the church. Two New Testament epistles (James and Jude) are traditionally ascribed to them. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church when Peter fled (Acts 12:12-17), and thereafter he was the respected leader of Jewish Christianity. When Paul visited the church leaders in Jerusalem after his conversion he conferred only with Peter and “James the Lord’s brother,” whom he seems to count among the apostles (Gal 1:18,19). This James presided at the council that deliberated about what to require of Gentile converts to the gospel (Acts 15). In a later fateful visit to Jerusalem, Paul called upon James, who counseled him to make a gesture to placate the Jewish Christians (Acts 21:17-21). The incident portrays James as a mediator between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, forestalling a schism that later did take place.

It is not our purpose here to recount the biography and importance of James the Lord’s brother, who was sufficiently well known to merit a notice by Josephus.<sup>12</sup> What is of interest here is that Jewish Christianity,

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<sup>12</sup> Josephus *Antiquities* 20.200. This passage is generally considered authentic, not a Christian interpolation.

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as was natural, continued to regard the blood relatives of Jesus with respect as leaders. Hegesippus (the second century Jewish Christian historian), cited by Eusebius, supplies the names of some. James was succeeded by his cousin Simon (Simeon) bar Clopas, under whose leadership the Christians of Jerusalem fled to Pella during the Jewish war. He was chosen by the surviving relatives of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> He was crucified in AD 107. The relatives of Jesus were known as the *desposynoi*,<sup>14</sup> which can perhaps be translated “the Master’s people.” The last in this line, counted by Eusebius as the last Jewish bishop of Jerusalem, was Judas surnamed Kuriakos, probably martyred in the time of the Bar Cochba rebellion.

We hear no more about the *desposynoi* after AD 135. If any survived, they would have been associated with the increasingly isolated Ebionites.

**Appointive Leaders**

Acts 6 reports that administrative questions threatened to distract the Twelve from their ministry of preaching and teaching (6:1,2). The Hellenistic Jewish Christians were complaining that their widows were not receiving what they should in the daily distribution of supplies to the needy. The apostles directed that the believers select<sup>15</sup> seven men, “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” to perform this work (6:3). This was done, and judging from the Hellenistic names of the seven, they were chosen from among those who had complained; indeed, one was a proselyte (a Gentile who had become a Jew). They brought the Seven before the apostles, and having prayed they laid their hands upon them.<sup>16</sup> This was the beginning of the appointive ministry, leaders selected by the people and given authority by the laying on of hands.

This action was a far more momentous event than is commonly recognized because it inaugurated a completely new type of ministry and

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<sup>13</sup> Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11.1. See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, trans. Douglas R.A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 32. This is interesting because Jesus had denied the importance of family ties in Mark 3:33-35 and parallels. Some might see the Synoptic reference as a deliberate put-down of the *desposynoi*, but this is unnecessary.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.20.6. They preserved a genealogical table that traced their ancestry back to David.

<sup>15</sup> The term *episkeptomai* is used somewhat awkwardly here together with the preposition *ex*. The process of selection is not well described, but some kind of election is implied.

<sup>16</sup> From the Greek it is not clear whether “they” were the apostles or the whole church community, but it is easier to read them as the former.



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church leadership. It was this type that was destined to prevail over the other two kinds and replace them. It is therefore worth pausing to examine it. First it should be noted that the laying on of hands did not bestow a spiritual gift; the Seven were already “full of the Spirit,” and that was one of the reasons why they were chosen (6:3). But the recognition of the gift by the community by the laying on of hands, as in the cases of Paul and Barnabas and of Timothy (Acts 13:2,3; 1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14), was continued. Second, they were chosen by their peers, apparently elected in some fashion. Third, their office was created for pragmatic reasons, to fill a need (*chreia*, 6:3). Fourth, they received the laying on of hands—whether from the apostles or the whole community—and this ceremony gave them some authority that they lacked before. Giles’s understanding of the act has some plausibility:

The people set apart in this way are explicitly depicted as Spirit-filled leaders, who have already had a significant ministry. The laying on of hands by those assembled therefore does not signify the bestowal of a ministry, or of the Spirit, but rather that from now on their ministry is no longer an individual one: they are from this point on representatives of their community. What they do, they do not undertake in their own name, but in the name of the community that has set them apart as its representatives.<sup>17</sup>

What was the office assigned to the seven men of Acts? The office is not named. It has been traditionally assumed that they were deacons, perhaps because the words *diakonia* and *diakonein* are used in 6:1,2. But the use of this word and its cognates is hardly decisive, for in 6:4 and 1:25 the same word *diakonia* is used for the ministry of the apostles. It is necessary to lay aside conceptions and distinctions that developed later. The words *diakonein*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos* mean, respectively, to serve, service, and servant; or to minister, ministry, and minister. But the fact is that the word *diakonos*, deacon, is never used in the book of Acts.

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<sup>17</sup> Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 95. The laying on of hands in these situations has been traditionally designated “ordination,” but that term is not used in the New Testament in such a sense. Rather we find the expressions “laying on hands” and “appoint.” The problem with “ordination” is that it carries some medieval baggage that gets retrojected anachronistically into the New Testament. Giles’s understanding comes close to the meaning of “credentialing,” which is probably the right concept.

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On the other hand, *presbyteros*, meaning “elder,” is frequent and used as a title for a church officer.

The first occurrence of *presbyteros* with the latter meaning is in Acts 11:30, where we are told that the famine relief for the Judean believers that Barnabas and Paul brought was delivered over to the elders. In other words, the kind of work for which the seven were appointed in Acts 6 is said to be done by the elders in Acts 11:30.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the way elders were appointed in the churches as reported in Acts 14:23 resembles the way the Seven were chosen. The word used in this verse is *cheirotoneō*, which literally means to raise one’s hand in voting.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in Acts 15 we hear of only two offices in Jerusalem, those of apostle and elder. We must conclude that the church at this early stage knew of only one appointive ministry, which Luke designated “elder.”<sup>20</sup>

But what of the traditional designation of the Seven as deacons? The Gordian knot can be cut if we recognize that to begin with there was only one appointive ministry. The book of Acts records no other. Since there was only one, we could call the officer either *diakonos* (suggested by *diakonein* in Acts 6:2), a word describing function, or *presbyteros*, a word describing dignity. Only later did this one appointive ministry bifurcate into two levels or ranks, and the two terms came to be used to designate the two levels of ministry.<sup>21</sup> A similar branching into two ranks

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<sup>18</sup> In considering the role and function of the Seven, it is also necessary to remember that Acts goes to some length in reporting the activities of two of them—Stephen and Philip—and their ministry in chapters 6-8 is the preaching of the word, the very work that the apostles assigned to themselves while shifting the administration of relief to the Seven!

<sup>19</sup> It has also been argued that the word is a synonym for the laying on of hands by the apostles. See the BDAG *ad loc.*

<sup>20</sup> There was a somewhat analogous office and term in Judaism. The New Testament reports elders of local synagogues and elders who were dignitaries of national stature (e.g., Acts 4:5).

<sup>21</sup> Gordon Fee approaches my conclusion when he says, “It is altogether likely that both ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons’ come under the larger category *presbyteroi* (‘elders’)” (G.D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Bible Commentary [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988], 22). Schreiner argues against this that “the New Testament nowhere identifies ‘elders’ and ‘deacons’ so that the latter could be construed as a subcategory of the former” (Thomas R. Schreiner, in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1991], 505, n. 15). Here Schreiner at best makes an overstatement, for we have shown that the book of Acts makes such an identification when the only title it uses for those who did the work of the Seven was elder (Acts 11:30) and never uses the term “deacon.”

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took place still later, making a distinction between bishop<sup>22</sup> and elder, terms that earlier had been interchangeable. The final result, in the time of Ignatius, was a three-tiered ministry of bishops, elders, and deacons. When the appointive ministry was first begun, when it was only one without any ranks in it, we would not go far wrong to refer to the office by a hyphenated term, “elder-deacon.”

The first indication of a distinction between elder and deacon is in the salutation of Phil 1:1, mentioning “bishops and deacons.”<sup>23</sup> This is now a two-tiered ministry, indicating that “bishop” was still synonymous with “elder.” That “elder” and “bishop” were synonymous terms can be demonstrated from several New Testament passages. In Acts 20 the same people are called elders (*presbyteroi*) in verse 17 and *episkopoi* in verse 28. See also Titus 1:5-7, where Paul speaks of appointing elders and then immediately lists the qualifications of “bishops,” and 1 Tim 3:1; 4:14; 5:17,19.<sup>24</sup> The distinction between deacon and elder/bishop is hardened in the pastoral epistles, especially in 1 Tim 3:1-13.<sup>25</sup>

As in many young religious movements, the shape of the leadership was fluid and evolving. We should not be surprised to see local variations, as well as change over time. While Paul is able to address a church in Philippi that has a twofold formal leadership, at Corinth it is another matter. We find there no mention of any officers. No elder presides at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:21), and no treasurer receives the contribution for the saints (2 Cor 16:2). Apparently Paul finds no one there trustworthy to lead. Rather Paul himself is their pastor, by remote control. He

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<sup>22</sup> “Bishop” comes from the Greek *episkopos*, which means literally overseer or supervisor. Thus originally “bishop” described function and “elder” described dignity. In secular usage *episkopos* meant a financial officer. Some have seen a precedent for the Christian bishop in the office of the *mebaqqer* at Qumran. See Bo Reicke, “The Constitution of the Primitive Church in the Light of Jewish Documents,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl with James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 150.

<sup>23</sup> It has been pointed out that there is no definite article in the Greek of this verse, so that while two classes of people are referred to, they are not exactly clear-cut groups.

<sup>24</sup> The term “elder” (*presbyteros*) probably came from the synagogue, while “bishop” (*episkopos*) was borrowed from secular Greek usage. Hermann Beyer notes, “There is no closely defined office bearing the title *episkopos* in the LXX,” and the term was not used technically in Judaism (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2:608-622). The Christian usage of *episkopos*, at first as a synonym for elder or pastor, was apparently unique.

<sup>25</sup> The qualifications of a deacon here are quite different from the qualifications of the ministers in Acts 6. Cf. Giles, 263, n. 51.

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sends representatives to check up on them, and he sends letters to guide them.

For better or for worse, further development occurred. Soon after New Testament times the office of elder/bishop bifurcates into elder and bishop, just as elder/deacon had bifurcated earlier. Ignatius of Antioch, writing about AD 108, promoted the threefold ministry of deacon, elder, and bishop with such vehemence that we must infer that it was a relatively recent innovation. Typical statements from his seven authentic epistles are *Smyrnians* 8:1, “See that you all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery [board of elders] as if it were the apostles. And reverence the deacons as the command of God”; *Trallians* 3:1, “Likewise let all respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as the bishop is also a type of the Father, and the elders as the council of God and the college of the Apostles”; and *Magnesians* 6:1, “Be zealous to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the elders in the place of the Council of the Apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.”

The twofold ministry was still the pattern when Clement of Rome wrote to the church of Corinth about AD 95 (1 Clement 42:4), as it was for the communities represented by the early church manual called the *Didache* (15:1, 2), which in its present form I would date about AD 135. But hardly had another generation passed before the threefold hierarchical ministry with the supremacy of the bishop had prevailed and become the norm. Not only that, but the other types of leadership had disappeared or were disappearing, at least in the mainstream church that became catholic orthodoxy. The *desposynoi* apparently had simply become extinct. The apostles and prophets had been replaced by the bishops, the gifts of the Spirit by elected officers.<sup>26</sup> We must now investigate why that happened.

### **The Disappearance of Apostles and Prophets**

In 1936, Elder A. G. Daniells, past president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and colleague of Ellen White, published a book in which he sought to show that the gift of prophecy “was to

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<sup>26</sup> Eusebius mentions a few persons whom he regarded as having the genuine gift of prophecy, especially one Quadratus, whom he mentions together with Philip’s daughters. If this Quadratus is to be identified with Quadratus the early apologist, we would have to date him about AD 124, but this identification is doubtful. See Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.38.1.

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abide with the church from Adam to the second advent of our Lord . . . . It did not cease with the apostles, but is traceable through the centuries to the last days of human history, just before the return of our Lord.”<sup>27</sup> We must look for the gift, however, in minority, dissident, “remnant” movements. The book’s burden was to recount, through Scripture and history, instances to prove this, including such examples as the Montanist movement in the second century and the Camisards among the Huguenots, and culminating with the ministry of Ellen White, whom Daniells had known personally. One senses that Daniells would have been deeply distressed had he foreseen that Adventist history would continue more than ninety years without an acknowledged living prophet. But it is a situation with ample precedent.

Pharisaic Judaism and its successor, Rabbinic Judaism, believed that the prophetic gift had died out after Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi, and hence closed the canon. Already in Psalm 94:9 we find the lament, “There is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.” First Maccabees 9:27 says, “Thus there was great distress in all Israel, such as had not been since the time that the prophets ceased to appear among them” (cf. 4:46; 14:41).<sup>28</sup> The apocryphal Prayer of Azariah declares, “At this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader. . .” (verse 15). Second Baruch (“Syriac Baruch”) 85:3, written in the first century AD, laments, “But now the righteous have been gathered to their fathers, and the prophets have fallen asleep.” The Rabbis declared, “When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the last of the prophets died, the Holy Spirit disappeared from Israel.”<sup>29</sup>

What this meant to the Rabbis was that the prophets are replaced by the scribes, and instead of new revelation there is exegesis of old revelation. There is no more torah left in heaven to be revealed, for it is all given into the hands of the Sages to interpret and apply it.

Indeed, they may have seen this development as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Zech 13:2b-6,

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur Grosvenor Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1936), 6.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Macc 4:46 also suggests that in the intertestamental period a hope was still entertained that prophets would again arise: After the defiled altar was torn down, they “stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.”

<sup>29</sup> Tosefta *Sotah* 13:2. For all these references I am indebted to Werner Foerster, *From the Exile to Christ: A Historical Introduction to Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 4.

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I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. And if any one again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, "You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord"; and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; he will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, but he will say, "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth." And if one asks him, "What are these wounds on your back?" he will say, "The wounds I received in the house of my friends."

These words reveal the reason for the disappearance of prophecy in Israel: false prophets had brought the claim of having the prophetic gift into disrepute. Though this belief was not universal, for among common people there remained a lively willingness to accept prophetic manifestations,<sup>30</sup> it was well enough established to influence attitudes toward John the Baptist and Jesus. For the need of leaders was to maintain control, and the possibility that some charismatically inspired popular enthusiasm might get out of control was a danger ever to be feared.

This feeling also explains the phenomenon of pseudepigrapha, especially popular in the Qumran community. Since new prophets were out of the question, the composition of prophetic writings, whether true or false, had to be done in the name of dead prophets.

Now we move from Judaism to Christianity. Already in the Apocalypse, itself written by a prophet, there is a concern about the false: the church in Ephesus is commended because they "have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false" (Rev 2:2).<sup>31</sup> In the little church manual known as the Didache, which I date about AD 135, a major concern is false apostles and prophets—the two are lumped together. Chapter 11 lists some six tests to apply to them, for example: "When an Apostle goes forth let him accept nothing but bread till he reach his night's lodging; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet" (verse 6). Clearly the worry is about false apostles/prophets, who were bringing the gift of prophecy into disrepute by "making traffic of Christ" (12:5). True prophets, however, were still to be welcomed (13:1). We see in 15:1,2 an intimation of another reason for uneasiness about prophets: "Appoint therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons

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<sup>30</sup> Note, for example, Luke 1:67; 2:25,26,36, and especially Matt 21:26.

<sup>31</sup> Jesus's warning in the Olivet discourse against false christ and false prophets (Mark 13:22 and parallels) probably has primary reference to a phenomenon in Judaism preceding the catastrophe of AD 70, well reported by Josephus, but Christians would have had no difficulty in reapplying it to Christian claimants.

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worthy of the Lord, meek men, and not lovers of money, and truthful and approved, for they also minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Therefore do not despise them, for they are your honorable men together with the prophets and teachers.” Why would the bishops and deacons be despised? Because the charismatic prophets and teachers were more exciting and constituted an uncontrollable locus of power in the church.

One reason why the bishops were able to take over from the apostles and prophets was that some of them claimed divine inspiration. Thus Clement of Rome (in the name of the Roman congregation) writes: “You will give us joy and gladness, if you are obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit” (1 Clement 63:2). Ignatius wrote:

For even if some desired to deceive me after the flesh, the spirit is not deceived, for it is from God. For it “knoweth whence it comes and whether it goes” and tests secret things. I cried out while I was with you, I spoke with a great voice,—with God’s own voice,—“Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons.” But some suspected me of saying this because I had previous knowledge of the division of some persons: but He in whom I am bound is my witness that I had no knowledge of this from any human being, but the Spirit was preaching, and saying this, “Do nothing without the bishop, keep your flesh as the temple of God, love unity, flee from divisions, be imitators of Jesus Christ, as was He also of his Father.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus the transition from apostles/prophets to bishops could be a relatively smooth one. As the Didache said, “they also minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers.”

So the prophetic gift faded out because it fell into disrepute. It happened in Israel and in the early church. But about the year AD 156 there was an attempt to revive it by a man named Montanus, who also reinvigorated the expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Associated with him were also two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla. Eventually the “new prophecy” failed.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps it deserved to, but our

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<sup>32</sup> Ignatius *Philadelphians* 7.1,2.

<sup>33</sup> The story of Montanism is succinctly and disturbingly told by Kurt Aland, *Saints and Sinners: Men and Ideas in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 62-66. The following paragraph is poignant:

“Montanism had come into being as a reaction against the historical development of the church. Yet the same thing took place within Montanism as had taken place in the

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only sources of knowledge about it may be biased, being from those who opposed it.

The gift of prophecy disappears because it is not wanted. It is not wanted for two reasons. First, there is very real danger of false prophets, who are legion and wreak great damage upon the church. Second, true prophets are even more dangerous. They constitute another center of power that is independent from and potentially rival to the officially constituted authority. A prophet is not elected by anyone or accountable to anyone except God. Prophets may rebuke a king, an apostle, a bishop, or a General Conference president. They provide a check and balance to all these and even to officially chosen councils. They are by definition inconvenient persons, and we try to get them out of the way by whatever method is available and appropriate: kill them, reject them, ignore them, marginalize them, co-opt them, or dispatch them to Australia.

So repeatedly in history prophets have been suppressed and replaced by scholars and administrators. The writings of dead prophets can be dealt with and domesticated—they hold no more surprises. But a living prophet is a loose cannon that cannot be controlled. Jesus said: “Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs” (Luke 11:47, 48). We honor dead prophets but fear live ones. There have always been well-meaning leaders who want to restrict the exercise of the gift, such as Joshua, to whom Moses said, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Num 11:29). All this is probably inevitable and to be expected, but nonetheless to be lamented.

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church on a greater scale. At the beginning of the movement the prophetic element had been most prominent, but it eventually died out, and the sayings of the prophets were collected in holy books which became a substitute for new oracles. In its first period Montanism claimed that it was led by the Spirit himself, who guided true believers through Montanus and his associates; later, definite offices were established in the movement. At first the belief was that the end of the world was imminent; gradually the idea of the Lord’s return was pushed into the more general future. The same thing had happened within the church earlier, as, as a parallel development took place in Montanism, the church’s opposition to Montanism was justified all the more” [65-66].

Aland adds: “Finally all that remained of original Montanism were the rigorous moral demands, far stricter than those of the church as a whole. . . . All that remained was a moral reform movement whose original presuppositions had faded away” [66].



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**Epilogue**

Adventism has classically listed the gift of prophecy as one of the marks of the Remnant Church. But we have not had an acknowledged living prophet for more than ninety years, and we suffer because of it. (1) We search Ellen White's writings, published and unpublished, and even the Adventist *hadith*, for answers to many pressing questions of our time, but we search in vain. Either the answers are not to be found, or they are equivocal. We have issues that were unknown and, as far as we can tell, unforeseen in her time. (2) The mere possession of inspired writings is not a distinguishing mark, for any denomination that has the Bible can claim that it has such a mark. So there is no substitute for a living prophetic voice or voices.

We are faced, then, with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, false prophets are a very great danger. On the other hand, having no prophet is an equally great danger. (It is like driving down the highway with eyes blindfolded.) Can we flee from one danger without falling into the arms of the other?

The solution to this problem awaits another paper.

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## **The True and the False in the Ecclesiology of Revelation**

Edwin Reynolds  
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The book of Revelation reveals two differing worldviews, each of which is represented by a segment of earth's population. One worldview is associated with the truth from God held dear by His followers, while the other is associated with the deceptions of the ancient Serpent, or Dragon, and those on earth who identify themselves with him. Thus there are two groups of people represented in Revelation: the majority of earth who side with the Dragon and his false teachings and the small remnant of those who are faithful to God and His truth, even to death.

But these two groups are not always as distinct as one might expect. There is a lot of crossover and confusion in the ranks before the final judgment is issued. For example, the final appeal of God before judgment is carried out on Babylon is, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (Rev 18:4).<sup>1</sup> This call makes evident that God has His own people who until the last moments are still within the corrupt system represented as Babylon. Conversely, the message of Jesus to the church at Laodicea reveals that there are those within the church who believe that all is well with them, yet Jesus has to tell them that they do not know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (3:17), that because they are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, He is about to spit them out of His mouth (3:16), and that they are in serious need of repentance (3:19). In other words, the church has people in it who do not fit the model for God's people, while there are others whom God considers to

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NIV unless otherwise specified.

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be His people even while they are found within a corrupt system that is opposed to God and His truth.

The purpose of this paper is to study the true and the false in the ecclesiology of Revelation in order to determine what portrait of the Church emerges. What constitutes the Church in Revelation? Does Revelation envision more than one Christian Church?

Can there be a true Church and a false Church? If so, how can one distinguish the true from the false? Is there such a thing as a visible Church and an invisible Church? What would characterize each?

We begin with an attempt to catalog the language of ecclesiology<sup>2</sup> in the book. This will help identify the portions of text that should reveal the answers to our questions. We then summarize the results of a study of these passages in terms of what they reveal about the nature of the Church and the extent to which it may incorporate aspects of the true and

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<sup>2</sup> When I speak of the language of ecclesiology or the Church in a general way, I mean to include all references or allusions to the people of God, whether in the Old Testament period, the Christian era, or the eschatological age, whether formal and organized (“visible”) or unidentified with any organized group (“invisible”), even whether faithful and true in belief and practice or spiritually lapsed and apostate but still considered a part of the corporate, visible people of God. I do not refer, however, to individuals, but only to collective groups or “corporate” representations. Subgroups may also qualify for this identification, as in the concept of a faithful “remnant.” My goals and methods in this endeavor are different from those of Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, Society for New Testament Studies Monographs Series, no. 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). He utilizes Relevance Theory to classify references to “the people of God” by discourse analysis into three different ways in which they are represented: namely, as addressees, as audience, and as actors. His interest is in the third category, which he further subdivides into actors that are off stage, in the chorus, or center stage (64-67). His purpose is to examine the actors that are on center stage in 6:9-11; 7:1-8; and 14:1-5, as they point ahead to a culmination in chapters 21-22, to determine how John’s audience would have identified with the portrayals made and would have responded to the call to keep the words of the book (3-4, 64, 67, 197, 213). His classifications according to discourse analysis and his purposes with respect to using Relevance Theory as a hermeneutical method lead him in another direction from that pursued in this paper. Nonetheless, we take note of his work and what he has learned from that study.

I also acknowledge the work of Ekkehardt Mueller (“Introduction to the Ecclesiology of the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12/2 [2001]: 199-215), who has identified a variety of designations for the church in Revelation. However, his purpose is very different from mine: he focuses on a few select designations, where they are found in the book, characteristics and tasks of the ideal church, appeals and promises to the church, difficulties for the church, and God’s relationship to the church and her final victory, along with some practical implications.

the false. Finally we consider the theological implications of the conclusions of the research.

### **The Language of Ecclesiology in Revelation**

There is a variety of ways in which the book of Revelation refers or alludes to the Church. First and foremost is the direct reference to seven real churches in the province of Asia to which John is directed to write letters from Jesus Christ. After recording the messages in a scroll, he is to send it to the churches (1:4,11). The content of these seven letters is recorded in Rev 2-3. The Greek word used for the church here is ἐκκλησία, the same word used for the church throughout the New Testament. It signifies an assembly or community of people who are chosen for a special purpose. The way it is used in Rev 1-3 is with reference to separate congregations of Christians meeting together for worship in their local communities. We shall see subsequently some of the things Christ has to say about them, but at this point it is important to note that the seven churches are literally only separate congregations of the Church, and neither individually nor collectively do these seven congregations constitute the whole Church, though the symbolic number seven suggests that they function as representatives of the whole, universal Church.<sup>3</sup> At the end of each of the messages, Christ says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). What He says to one church, He says to all.

A second important term for the people of God in Revelation is “saints” (ἅγιοι), which means “holy people.”<sup>4</sup> God identifies such with a key attribute of His own character (Lev 11:44-45; 20:26; 1 Pet 1:15-16; Rev 4:8). This term, therefore, always has a positive connotation.

Another way John refers to the Church is with the concept of a group of people who are faithful to Him and belong to Him. Jesus says in 3:4, “I still have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” While these people could be viewed individually, it is possible to see

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<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 186-87; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2002), 62.

<sup>4</sup> Pattemore, 83, states, “By far the most common use of ἅγιοι in the entire book is for the saints, the people of God.” They pray, shed their blood as martyrs, are righteous, etc.

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them also as a subgroup or “remnant”<sup>5</sup> in the church of Sardis who are faithful while the majority are spiritually dead, or at least very nearly so. In 18:4 a voice from heaven declares, “Come out of her [Babylon], My people.” Again, these people could be viewed individually, but it is possible, even likely, that they constitute a sizable group of people being addressed collectively as a “remnant” in Babylon who need to come out before Babylon is judged. Finally, in 21:3, God announces that His dwelling place is now with people (or among people) and He will be their God and they will be His people. When they are thus identified with Himself, the term always signifies a faithful people, despite the fact that they may have been found, as in Sardis, in a spiritually lapsed environment, or, as in Babylon, in a totally corrupt environment.<sup>6</sup>

John also uses the symbol of a woman to represent the people of God. This is not original with John, since God’s people were frequently represented in the Old Testament by the symbol of a woman, whether a beloved wife or lover (cf. Isa 54:1-8; Ezek 16:7-14; Hos 2:19-20) or an unfaithful wife or harlot (cf. Isa 1:21; Jer 3:1-2,6-13; Ezek 16:15-59; 23:1-49),<sup>7</sup> and this use was carried over also into the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-32 ).<sup>8</sup> This symbol is thus capable of representing a spectrum of relationships, from pure and vibrant to loss of love, even to outright unfaithfulness. In this symbol the true and the false become especially apparent.<sup>9</sup> In fact, John draws a clear contrast between the pure Woman of Rev 12:1-3, who bears the messianic Son (v. 5; cf. Ps 2:7-9) and later appears eschatologically as the Bride and Wife of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9; 21:9-11), and the impure Woman, the Harlot of Rev 17:3-6.

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<sup>5</sup> See Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 40-41; and Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Stefanovic, 527-28, observes the parallel with the story of Lot, who was identified with Sodom although he did not participate in its sins (cf. 2 Pet 2:7-8). See also Beale, 899.

<sup>7</sup> William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 17, correctly sees her also as Zion, the mother of the people of God, as in Isa 54:1 and Gal 4:26. However, more often she is portrayed as the lover that God wants to betroth to Himself as a faithful wife under the covenant.

<sup>8</sup> Stefanovic, 378.

<sup>9</sup> Beale, 62, notes that the term “woman” (γυνή) is used ten times for the community of God and seven times for the ungodly community in the book of Revelation.

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These two women are also represented as two starkly contrasting cities: the Holy City, called the New Jerusalem (21:2,9-27), and the Great City, variously called Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon (11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:2,10,16,18,19,21).<sup>10</sup> If the two women represent ecclesiological figures, so do the two cities,<sup>11</sup> though the emphasis as cities tends to be more on the civic or institutional character,<sup>12</sup> while the emphasis as women is more relational and spiritual.

There is other special language used here and there for the Church or the people of God. Among the expressions used are “servants” (δοῦλοι) of God, “brothers” (ἀδελφοί), “witnesses” (μάρτυροι) of Jesus, “the sons [υἱοί] of Israel,” “the 144,000,” and “the remnant” (οἱ λοιποί) of the offspring of the Woman. Some of these terms may at times be used for individuals or special groups, like “his servants the prophets” in 10:7 or “your brothers the prophets” in 22:9, but our particular interest is in where they are used in a more general sense for the corporate group of those who belong to the people of God, or at least a significant subgroup of the large body which constitutes the Church.

### **The Churches and the Church**

In the messages to the seven churches of Asia, Christ gives about as accurate a portrait of the Church as one could find anywhere. In these seven letters He describes the diverse character of the Church as it existed not only in the first century but as it has continued to exist throughout the Christian era. It is not a portrait of the ideal Church but of the Church as it really is. Because it is an accurate portrayal of the real Church, it informs us about both the strengths and the weaknesses, the good and the bad, the true and the false in the Church. Thus there is both reproof and commendation, calls for repentance and reformation as well as promises to the overcomer.

The church of Ephesus is first commended for its efforts to maintain doctrinal purity in the face of false apostles and the Nicolaitans.<sup>13</sup> They

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<sup>10</sup> Edwin Earl Reynolds, “The Sodom/Egypt/Babylon Motif in the Book of Revelation,” Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1994, 53-59.

<sup>11</sup> See Roberto Badenas, “New Jerusalem—The Holy City,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 247; Reynolds, 56-59.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Badenas, 250-51.

<sup>13</sup> The Nicolaitans, according to the message to the church of Pergamos, were teaching the same things as Balaam taught Balak to entice the Israelites to do, namely, to eat

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could not tolerate heresy, so they put to the test those who made claims to apostolic authority to teach, and they found them to be false (Rev 2:2). Yet despite these good things, Christ reproved the church at Ephesus for having left their first love (v. 4). He appealed to them to repent and return to the earlier condition from which they had fallen. If not, He would come and remove their lampstand—their church (v. 5). The first step toward loss of status as the Church of Christ is to lose that love that provides the proper motivation for all works of service, including adherence to correct doctrine and the practices that are grounded in that doctrine. Orthodoxy apart from love results in legalism and formalism.<sup>14</sup> This was the problem of the church of Ephesus, and it is the problem of many churches today. Christ appeals to everyone who has an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (v. 7).

The church of Smyrna is one of two churches to which Christ issued no reproof. Members were suffering from malicious slander and were about to suffer more intense persecution, even to the point of martyrdom (2:9-10). They were poor in this world's estimation, but Christ assured them that they were rich in what heaven regards as of value (v. 9). He appealed to them only to be faithful unto death so they would receive the crown of life (v. 10).

The church of Pergamos was located in a place where it was difficult for members to maintain their faith. Jesus said it was “where Satan has his throne” (2:13).<sup>15</sup> Some were maintaining their faith in that environment, even to martyrdom (ibid.). Yet Jesus protested because, unlike the church of Ephesus, the church in Pergamos tolerated those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and those who held the doctrine of Balaam, who introduced pagan practices among the children of Israel and caused them to sin (vv. 14-15). Compromise with the pagan environment in

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things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality, things explicitly proscribed to the Gentile churches by the first church council (Acts 15:20,29). In other words, they were teaching the churches that it was acceptable to compromise on some of the essentials of church teaching and practice. For more on the Nicolaitans, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52 (Dallas: Word, 1997), 148-49.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, softback ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 75.

<sup>15</sup> On the first-century situation, see Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, no. 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1989), 82-87; and Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 95-96.

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which they were living and increased tolerance of sinful teachings and practices was threatening to place them at odds with Christ Himself. Jesus said that unless they repented of this spirit of compromise, He would come to them quickly and fight against them with the sword of His mouth (v. 16). Clearly, Christ accepts no compromise, despite the circumstances in which the Church finds itself and the readiness of some to refuse to deny His name even in the face of the threat of martyrdom. The church of Pergamos was going another step beyond that of Ephesus in moving away from the plan of Christ for His Church.<sup>16</sup>

The church at Thyatira seems to have sunk even deeper into the pit of apostasy than that in Pergamos. Although Christ always finds something He can commend His Church for, in the case of Thyatira it is actually the members' latter works rather than their former ones that He finds more worthy of commendation (2:19). Thyatira has been tolerating a false prophetess who teaches the same kinds of things that Pergamos was tolerating, compromise with pagan practices like idolatry and sexual immorality (v. 20). Jesus calls this prophetess Jezebel, identifying her character and teaching with that of the pagan wife of Ahab and daughter of the king of Sidon (1 Kgs 16:31).<sup>17</sup> When Ahab married Jezebel to secure a political alliance, he caused Israel to sin and "did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (v. 33). Christ says to the church at Thyatira, "I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent" (Rev 2:22). This reminds the reader of the three and a half years of drought which the true prophet of the Lord announced (Luke 4:25; Jas 5:17; cf. Rev 11:3,6). It also reminds the reader that sexual immorality or adultery functions as a symbol that represents spiritual apostasy.<sup>18</sup> There was widespread apostasy in the church of Thyatira, brought about by a leader claiming to be a prophet who was not only teaching compromise with paganism but "seducing" the people of God into apostasy by her own example (Rev

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, 85; Wall, 75-76.

<sup>17</sup> Doukhan, 37, citing Josephus, notes that Ethbaal, Jezebel's father, was also a priest of Baal and Astarte, but his reference does not say that. Taylor G. Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1947), 164, says the same and adds that Jezebel was probably a priestess and prophetess of Baal worship, but no evidence is cited. We do know that Jezebel was instrumental in getting Baal and Astarte worship established in Israel (1 Kgs 16:31-33). In 2 Kgs 9:22 Jehu accuses Jezebel not only of idolatry but also of witchcraft.

<sup>18</sup> Stefanovic, 131; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 3d ed., 1911 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 44.



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2:20,22). Christ refers to this apostasy as a doctrine that He calls “the deep things of Satan” (v. 24).

At the same time He addresses a “remnant” (οἱ λοιποὶ) in Thyatira,<sup>19</sup> “as many as do not have this doctrine” (ibid.), telling them that He will place no other burden on them but to “hold fast what you have until I come” (v. 25). Again, we are reminded of the “remnant” of seven thousand who were faithful in the time of Elijah before He brought a reformation to the people of God at Carmel and ended the persecution by the religious leaders of the nation (1 Kgs 19:18; Rom 11:2-5). If the church of Thyatira represents a church in a largely apostate condition, it shows how the Church is not exempt from apostasy as a whole, while only a small remnant of faithful ones may remain true to the principles of the Church founded by Christ. The history of the Church reveals just such a pattern.<sup>20</sup>

The message of Christ to the church of Sardis reveals a church in serious trouble. The members have a reputation of being alive, but they are as close to spiritual death as it is possible to be without being dead (3:1-2). Their works are unacceptable to God (v. 2). The best thing Christ can say about them is that they “have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes” (v. 4). There is a small, faithful remnant even in Sardis, the church that is the closest to closing its doors of any of the churches. They need the life-giving Spirit of God that Christ has to offer them (v. 1). They need to repent, to be watchful, to strengthen the things that remain, and to hold fast, otherwise Christ will come to them at an hour they do not expect, and, implicitly, they will face severe judgment (v. 3; cf. 2:5,16).<sup>21</sup>

The church at Philadelphia, like that in Smyrna, receives no reproof from Christ. The only seemingly negative thing He says of the members is that they “have little strength” (3:8), but this is not so much a criticism

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<sup>19</sup> See Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 279-80; and Gerhard Pfandl, “The Remnant Church and the Spirit of Prophecy,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 297.

<sup>20</sup> See Doukhan, 37-38; Stefanovic, 133-34, 152-53; and Roy Naden, *The Lamb among the Beasts* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1996), 81.

<sup>21</sup> Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13: *Hebrews—Revelation*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 628.

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as a statement of compassion for their situation, in which, despite their relative weakness, they have kept Christ's word and have not denied His name (ibid.).<sup>22</sup> Because of these things, He has set before them an open door that no one can shut (ibid.). He makes their enemies know that He has loved them, and He promises to keep them from the hour of trial that is going to come as a test upon the whole world (vv. 9-10). He promises them that He is coming soon, and He only asks them to hold fast what they have so that no one will take their crown (v. 11). Clearly, the church at Philadelphia demonstrates a fervor and faithfulness that exceeds their own feeble beginnings. It is not necessary to be strong to be loved and valued by Christ. He gives the power to preserve them through the tests and trials that they will encounter, and when they have overcome, they become strong pillars in the temple of God (v. 12).

The Laodicean church, like that of Sardis, has a serious spiritual problem. They are prosperous and comfortable and do not sense a need for anything (3:17). Jesus says that they do not know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (3:17). This lack of awareness of their own true condition and need makes it nearly impossible for them to do anything about it. Yet Christ calls their attention to the problem and offers them the solution. They need to obtain from Him the heavenly gold of a pure life of faith, refined and tested by trials (cf. 1 Pet 1:7),<sup>23</sup> the white robe of His righteousness to cover the shame of their exposure as sinners (cf. Isa 61:10; 64:6; Rev 3:4; 7:13-14; 19:8), and the anointing eyesalve of the Holy Spirit to take away their spiritual blindness and provide spiritual discernment (cf. John 9:11; 1 Cor 2:14-15).<sup>24</sup> Christ stands at the door knocking and awaiting a response from those who hear His appeal (Rev 3:20). A place with Him on His throne is promised to the one who overcomes by accepting the remedies Christ offers (v. 21).

These messages to the seven churches offer de facto evidence that the Church as a whole is not indefectible, according to Christ's own assessment. The organized, "visible" Church undergoes various struggles, including loss of love as a proper motivation for correct doctrine and

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<sup>22</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 60; cf. notes by Beale, 285-86; and Swete, 54-55.

<sup>23</sup> Beale, 305, states, "*Refined gold* is a biblical idiom for purifying one's life by removing sin (cf. Job 23:10; Prov. 27:21; Mal. 3:2-3; . . .). The metaphor is also used for the purifying effect of tribulation on God's people (Zech. 13:9; 1 Pet. 1:6-9)." Cf. Swete, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Stefanovic, 148; Swete, 62-63.

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practice, tolerance of compromise in doctrine and practice, tolerance of false teachers and false prophets, open apostasy, spiritual slumber and almost death, or complacency and apathy caused by the prosperity and self-sufficiency which blinds them to their spiritual need. Rather, it is the “invisible”<sup>25</sup> Church that proves indefectible, namely, a group of individuals who prove themselves faithful to Christ, or at least responsive to His counsel to repent when in spiritual danger. These are described as the “remnant,”<sup>26</sup> the rest who do not give in to the carelessness, compromise, and apostasy that too often characterize the Church as a whole. These are those who have not soiled their white clothes (3:4), those whom Christ preserves from the hour of trial (v. 10), those of whom He requires nothing more than that they hold fast until He comes (2:24-25), those to whom the promises to the overcomer are made.

**The Two Women, Two Cities, and the Church**

Supplementing the portrait of the Church offered by Christ in His letters to the seven churches is John’s vision of two women, who are also two cities.<sup>27</sup> As already noted, the symbol of a woman was already recognized before the time of John, both in the Old and New Testaments, as representing the people of God. God used the marriage covenant as one model of the kind of covenant He wanted to have with His people.<sup>28</sup> He represented Himself as the Bridegroom or Husband in this model, while

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<sup>25</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one-vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983-85), 1043-44, traces the use of such terminology back as far as Augustine, as a necessary attempt to distinguish the “true church,” comprised of true believers, from the “earthly institution,” which may be comprised of members who are not actually a part of the spiritual body of Christ. For an alternative view of such a distinction, see Larry L. Lichtenwaller, “The Church: Visible or Invisible?” Unpublished paper presented for the course THST 685 Seminar in Systematic Theology, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, February 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2002), 56, point out that “the faithful remnant” in the Old Testament “constitutes the true Israel within an apostate nation of Israel. True Israel is then evidently a spiritual entity, a spiritual Israel, not bound by blood relationship to Abraham.” Likewise, with reference to the new, spiritual Israel in the New Testament, “the true Israel is ‘a remnant, chosen by grace’ (Romans 11:5, RSV). It is a new creation (Galatians 6:15)” (ibid.).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 127; Mueller, 213.

<sup>28</sup> Wonyong Jung, “The Divine Father Concept in the Old Testament,” Ph.D. diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 1996, 122-23.

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He represented His people as His bride, whom He had betrothed to Himself, or as His wife. Often, when His people were unfaithful to the covenant, He represented them as a harlot or an adulterous wife.<sup>29</sup> This imagery is carried over into the book of Revelation in the symbolism of the two women, the pure Woman or Bride and the impure Woman or Harlot. These two figures should be viewed as “two sides of the same coin,” as it were. Both are symbols of spiritual categories by which God evaluates people in their relation to the marriage covenant He wants to establish with humanity.<sup>30</sup> The pure Woman represents the covenant keeping community of faith throughout human history,<sup>31</sup> while the Harlot represents a persistent spirit of rebellion against the covenant and those who want to keep it.

In Rev 12:1-2, the pure Woman is introduced as a great sign. She is clothed with the sun, representing the glory of God seen in the righteousness of Christ with which she is clothed (cf. Isa 60:1-5,19-20; 61:10), and with the moon under her feet, a likely symbol of the word of God<sup>32</sup> upon which her feet are firmly planted (Ps 40:2; Matt 7:24-25; 16:18), which reflects the light of the Sun of righteousness (cf. Mal 4:2). On her head she has a crown of twelve stars, probably a symbol of both the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, the founders and leaders of the people of God under both the old and new covenants (cf. Rev 21:9-14).<sup>33</sup> She is shown to be pregnant with the Messiah, who is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron (vv. 2,5; cf. 19:15-16; Ps 2:7-9).

The Dragon, subsequently described as “that ancient serpent, called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (Rev 12:9), is shown standing before her, waiting for her to give birth so that he can

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<sup>29</sup> See Hans K. LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 159.

<sup>30</sup> LaRondelle, “Babylon,” 158, states that “the covenant framework is the basic point of orientation for understanding the new Babylon.” Again, “The symbolic language of Babylon as the great ‘prostitute’ in Revelation 17 is *covenantal language* that continues the framework of the covenant of the OT prophets. . . . Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and especially Ezekiel, described apostate Israel and Jerusalem as *the wife of Yahweh* who had become in their time the greatest prostitute on earth. She would not escape her judgment, the covenant wrath of God” (159).

<sup>31</sup> Beale, 631; Reynolds, 64; Stefanovic, 378-80.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, 61; Johnson, 696, understands it at least as “signifying her permanence (Pss 72:5; 89:37; cf. Mt 16:18).”

<sup>33</sup> Mounce, 236; Reynolds, 62-64; Stefanovic, 378, 380.

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devour her Child as soon as it is born (v. 4). The imagery of the ancient deceiving serpent, the woman, and her promised Child is intentionally reminiscent of the story of the Fall and the promise of salvation included in the curse on the serpent (Gen 3:15).<sup>34</sup> The Woman in Rev 12 represents the people of God in all ages who look to the birth of the promised Child who would crush the head of the serpent. As the mother of the Messiah, she represents every family who looked forward to the coming of the Promised One. The fact that she both pre-dates the Messiah and continues to exist and suffer the persecution of the Dragon after the Messiah has ascended to God and to His throne provides evidence that she is a symbol covering the whole history of humanity<sup>35</sup> from Eve to the time when the pure Woman becomes the Bride and Wife of Christ in the eschatological era, a symbol of His kingdom, represented by the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (19:7-9; 21:2,9-14).

In contrast to this image of the pure Woman is the image of the Harlot. The contrast is particularly explicit in the introduction of the Harlot in Rev 17:1-5 when compared with the introduction of the Bride in 21:9-11. Both are introduced in parallel language: “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you . . .’”(17:1; cf. 21:9). In both cases John is carried away by the Spirit and shown a woman who is also a city. In 17:1,3 John is carried away into a wilderness and shown a harlot sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of names of blasphemy. This Harlot is the Great City Babylon, which reigns over the kings of the earth (vv. 5,18). In 21:9-10 John is carried away to a great high mountain and shown the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife, which is the Holy City Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. While the Bride in 21:11 is clothed with the glory of God, a radiance like a crystal- clear precious stone refracting the light, the Harlot in 17:4 is adorned as a prostitute (Jer 4:30),<sup>36</sup> wearing purple and scarlet and decorated with gold and precious stones and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. Further, the Harlot is drunk with the blood of the saints and of the witnesses of Jesus (v. 6). In fact, according to 18:24, “in her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth”

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Beale, 655-56; Beasley-Murray, 201; Stefanovic, 381, 387. Beale, 630-32, like many other commentators, notes also the various parallels to the Exodus story in this passage.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Beale, 631; Stefanovic, 378.

<sup>36</sup> Beale, 854-55.

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(cf. Jer 51:49).<sup>37</sup> This makes her a symbol of the stubborn and rebellious defectors from truth and enemies of God and His people all the way back to Cain and Abel (cf. Matt 23:35).<sup>38</sup> Cain belonged to the people of God, but he was not prepared to obey the command of God in the manner of how to offer acceptable worship to God. Cain wanted to do things his own way. As a result, when God did not accept his offering, he became angry and slew his brother Abel (Gen 4:3-8; Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12). This same spirit motivates spiritual Babylon.

Other evidence also points to the universal symbolism of the Harlot. In 17:18 the Harlot is described as “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” The kings of the earth in this context are the heads and horns of the scarlet Beast (cf. vv. 9-10,12), which are kingdoms of earth through which the scarlet Beast historically exercised his authority on earth.<sup>39</sup> In the words of the interpreting angel to John, “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while” (vv. 9-10 ESV).<sup>40</sup> This explanation makes evident that the heads of the Beast rule consecutively, not all at the same time, and between the seven heads and the ten horns they cover the whole period of the operation of the Beast in the history of the conflict between the covenant people of God and her enemies.<sup>41</sup>

The Harlot is described in this passage as seated on the seven heads of the Beast (v. 9), which is the same as saying in verse 18 that she reigns over the kings of the earth. In other words, she has been around as long as the kingdoms of the world have been around, and she has exerted a spiritual influence over them that is described as committing adultery with the kings of the earth (v. 2). She is also described as sitting on

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<sup>37</sup> Johnson, 752, points out that the Greek word used here for “kill” (σφάζω) is consistently used for martyrs in Revelation, implying “all the persecution against God’s servants.”

<sup>38</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 195-96.

<sup>39</sup> Stefanovic, 515; Kenneth A. Strand, “The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2: Exegetical and General Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 185-87.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the critical issues in this text, see Strand, 186-191.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-191.

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“many waters” (v. 1). This image, drawn from Jer 51:13, is an allusion to the city of Babylon’s location on the Euphrates River, but is interpreted by the angel to John in very specific symbolic terms: “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages” (Rev 17:15). Over these vast peoples and nations the Harlot has a powerful influence, for the angel tells John that “the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries” (v. 2; cf. 14:8; 18:3). In the end, the Harlot is judged by God, “for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes” (18:5).

In the two women of Revelation one can see the true and the false in religious systems.<sup>42</sup> One system enters into covenant with God and chooses to remain faithful to the covenant. If there are lapses or temporary backsliding, when God sends his prophets and apostles to remind people of His claims upon them, they repent of their backsliding and respond appropriately to God. When the Bride has made herself ready, Christ marries His kingdom, the pure, glorified Woman, and the members of the kingdom are invited to the marriage feast (19:7-9). The other system knows what the claims of God are but does not care. It spurns and violates the covenant with God and lashes out in rebellion, attacking not only God but also His beloved people who remain faithful to the covenant. Like Jezebel, the false prophetess of Thyatira, it teaches falsehood and seduces God’s servants to compromise their beliefs and practices for the sake of blending in with the paganism that surrounds them. The wine of her fornication alters the judgment so that people do things they would not otherwise do. In the spirit of Cain, they even join her in persecuting those who are faithful to God (cf. John 16:2-3; 1 John 3:10-15). In her role as a leader in rebellion against God, the Harlot, along with her spiritual daughters (Rev 17:5), who behave just like her (Ezek 16:44-45), incurs God’s judgment.

**A Remnant of Faithful Ones in the Church**

An important passage reveals that before God brings final judgment on Babylon, He makes a stirring appeal to some who are still inside: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues” (Rev 18:4). This call shows that until the very end God still has a “remnant” of His people even in

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<sup>42</sup> Johnsson, 35, says that the two cities “stand for more than political and national entities. They represent the religion of Yahweh and the false, counter religious system.”

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Babylon.<sup>43</sup> They have apparently been deceived by her but have not adopted the spirit of rebellion that defines her, and now God issues a clarion call to come out of Babylon while there is still opportunity. Once again, we see the concept of the remnant applied, this time to those who are even in Babylon.

There is not only a remnant in Babylon, but there is a remnant also among the offspring of the Woman. Just as the Harlot has daughters who are harlots, so Rev 12:17 indicates that the pure Woman has other children besides the Male Child. After the Serpent has pursued and persecuted the Woman, forcing her to flee into the wilderness for 1260 days (vv. 6,13-14), unsuccessfully trying to destroy her with a flood of water (vv. 15-16), we are told that “the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17). The characteristics of these other children of the Woman are significant,<sup>44</sup> placing them in the same category with the steadfast saints in 14:12, “who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (cf. 10:10).

The saints in Revelation not only obey God’s commandments, endure steadfastly, and hold to the faith or testimony of Jesus, but they also offer prayers (5:8; 8:3-4), suffer persecution at the hands of the enemies of God (13:7; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24), have righteous acts attributed to them (19:8), and are found in the beloved city of God at the end of the thousand years (20:9). These are those who remain faithful to the covenant and will receive the promises to the overcomer. They are equivalent to the “witnesses of Jesus” (NASB) who share their fate in 17:6 and to “their fellow servants and brothers” who share a similar fate in 6:10 (cf. 1:9; 12:10-11).<sup>45</sup>

In Rev 7:4 John is told about a group of people who are sealed with the seal of the living God, referred to as “144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (ESV). The “sons of Israel” here apparently represent the corporate people of God, both Jew and Gentile (Rom 9:6-8; 11:26; Gal 3:29; 6:16), for the tribes of Israel listed here do not match

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<sup>43</sup> The allusions to the prophecy of Babylon’s coming judgment in Jer 50-51 indicate that those who come out of Babylon are equated with “the remnant I spare” in Jer 50:21.

<sup>44</sup> See further on the context of these offspring of the Woman in Pfandl, 298-303.

<sup>45</sup> Beale, 860, states that “the καί [in 17:6] is best taken as explanatory (‘even’). Consequently, true ‘saints’ are those who are ‘witnesses to Jesus.’”



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any list of the tribes of Israel in the Old Testament,<sup>46</sup> and when John turns to look at what has been described to him, he sees “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (7:9). John is shown this same group again in 14:1: “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. This group, he says, “were redeemed from the earth” (v. 3) and “were redeemed from among men” (v. 4). Yet they do not represent the whole of the visible, corporate people of God represented by the “sons of Israel,” since only 12,000 from each tribe becomes a part of the 144,000 who are redeemed from among men.<sup>47</sup> The rest of the “sons of Israel” implicitly are not redeemed. Not only are the tribes of Dan and Ephraim excluded from the tribes making up the 144,000,<sup>48</sup> but all others above and beyond the twelve thousand from each of the named twelve tribes are excluded from the 144,000. The implication is that it is not enough to be one of the “sons of Israel”; one needs also to be sealed with the seal of God in the forehead (7:3-4). This seal is apparently represented in 14:1 by the names of the Lamb and the Father written in the forehead, signifying the holy and spotless character which they have obtained (vv. 4-5; cf. Jer 2:3; Rom 11:16), by virtue of which God places His seal of approval, identification, and ownership upon them (John 6:26; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 2 Tim 2:19).<sup>49</sup> It is the “remnant” of the “sons of Israel” who are finally sealed and saved (cf. Rom 9:27; 11:5).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 464-65; and Beatrice S. Neall, “Sealed Saints and the Tribulation,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 262.

<sup>47</sup> Beale, 416-17, argues for this. Understanding “Israel” as a symbol for the “new Israel,” which includes all of God’s people, he states, “Yet the whole nation is not portrayed as saved. The sealed are the full number of redeemed Israelites who have been saved *out of* the twelve tribes as a remnant” (417). Again, he says of the 144,000 on p. 416, “This group is identified further as a remnant of Israelites who have been saved from out of the whole nation.”

<sup>48</sup> Stefanovic, 262, notes that Dan and Ephraim were both described in the Old Testament as apostate. “This suggests that the unfaithfulness of these two tribes may account for their exclusion from the list of tribes of the eschatological Israel.”

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Neall, 275.

<sup>50</sup> Beale, 416-17.

**Theological Implications**

The evidence we have examined from the book of Revelation strongly suggests that while the visible, organized Christian Church is defectible, there is an invisible Church, a “remnant” of the visible Church, that is indefectible, that will be faithful to the end.<sup>51</sup> This conclusion has to do with the Christian Church as a whole. It does not address the question of a “visible remnant” which has been raised in some studies based on interpretations of Rev 12:17.<sup>52</sup> Nor does it address the related question of a “remnant within the remnant,” a concept that is not strictly biblical, but which some would like to propose. The evidence of this paper is not exhaustive, due to the limits imposed from without, but it suggests that the visible, organized Christian Church would expand to encompass a significant segment of the world’s population and would extend its power and influence into the political and civil sphere to the point of world-wide influence. In so doing, it would become increasingly secular and corrupt, failing to meet the purpose of Christ for His Church. Although Christ calls the Church to repentance and reformation, it fails as a whole to respond appropriately. Only a relatively small number of faithful believers remain true to the principles of Christ and His covenant and become a part of the “remnant” which constitutes the invisible people of God. These are characterized as the saints who become faithful witnesses, steadfastly enduring even to martyrdom for the sake of obedience to all of God’s requirements and holding on to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Although some aspects of this group may be perceived as visible, at least at particular periods, since they would not otherwise be recognizable to function as witnesses for their faith, they should not be confused with the visible Christian Church at large.

It is God’s purpose that His people shall be able to discern the true from the false. This is so not only with respect to the world at large but also with respect to that which purports to be in close association with Him. The book of Revelation is greatly concerned with what is true and what is not. Jesus presents Himself to the churches as the Faithful and True Witness (3:14). His name is also Faithful and True (19:11). Jesus or His Father are pronounced true and holy or true and righteous five times

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<sup>51</sup> Strictly speaking, the concept of an invisible Church may also include many who are not a part of the visible Church. However, since we have been studying only the language of the Church or the corporate people of God, those outside of that group are not a part of this study, so it would not be proper to draw conclusions about them within the scope of this study.

<sup>52</sup> See Lichtenwalter, 32-33, and Mueller, 205, 215.

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(3:7; 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2). And three times the reader is assured that the words that have been communicated are true and trustworthy (19:9; 21:5; 22:6). Everything in the book is affirmed by the testimony of two witnesses that cannot lie—the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:2). Nothing is to be added to it or taken away from it, on pain of dire plagues and death (22:18-19). Those who stand at last with the Lamb before the throne of God have no deceit found in their mouths (14:5), while deception is the chief characteristic of the devil (12:9; 20:3,8) and is also a mark of his agents (13:13-14; 16:13-14; 18:23; 19:20), and all who love and practice falsehood and deception will be excluded from eternal life in the kingdom of God (21:8; 22:15).

It is evident, then, that God would have His people discriminate the true from the false, even with regard to that which makes a pretense of being true but is not, namely the professed people of God, the Christian Church. One of the key purposes of the book of Revelation is to aid the reader or hearer in making those distinctions clear so that he or she can make wise and discriminating choices in regard to what is true and what is false, what meets the test of faithfulness to God and what does not, what is genuine worship of God and what is counterfeit. The blessing pronounced upon the reader or hearer is for those only who “take to heart what is written” in the book (1:3).

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## **From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part III Sanctuary and Hermeneutics**

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### **1. Review**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Adventist theology stands divided. In the first article of this series, we discovered that Adventist theological pluralism originated when the lay theology of early Adventism faced the academic world of scholarly research. Theological tradition, philosophy, and science generated questions they were not prepared to answer. By the late seventies, a sector of Adventism was adjusting Adventist beliefs to Evangelical theology. Simultaneously, another sector was adjusting Adventism to science. In the process, Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms forgot and replaced the sanctuary vision that originated the systematic understanding of Christian theology that brought Adventism to existence. The nature of Adventist pluralism is methodological. It generates from disagreements on the basic principles from which we interpret scripture and understand Christian doctrines. It seriously endangers the unity, ministry, and mission of the church.

In the second article, we saw that Adventism could overcome its present theological divisions by creatively engaging in biblical and systematic theologies. Systematic theology provides the scholarly method and space for the complete and harmonious system of truth Adventist pioneers saw. Systematic and biblical theologies assume methodological conditions and a hermeneutical vision to guide them in the discovery of truth.

## 2. Introduction

However, the conviction that philosophy and science provide the hermeneutical guide and principles from which Christian theologians should interpret scripture and articulate Christian doctrines in a systematic way is the methodological rock on which the great and long theological tradition of Christian theology rests. Can we challenge this conviction in a scholarly way? Can we derive the theological *apriori* from scripture? Is a biblical systematic theology possible at the scholarly level? To answer these questions we need to consider the hermeneutical role philosophy and science play in Christian theology. Within this general context, the specific purpose of this article is to assess the possibility of interpreting the theological *apriori* from *sola-tota scriptura* and the hermeneutical light of the sanctuary doctrine.

To reach this goal, we will (1) underline the hermeneutical role that philosophy has in Christian theology; (2) recognize the scholarly area where theologians should identify, criticize, interpret, and formulate the philosophical and scientific conditions of theological method, interpretation, and construction; (3) identify the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology; (4) call for a biblical interpretation of them; (5) argue that theological pluralism in Adventism stems from different interpretations of the hermeneutical principles of theology; (6) explore briefly the hermeneutical consequences of the timeless understanding of God's reality derived from philosophy; (7) explore briefly the hermeneutical consequence of the temporal understanding of God's reality present in scripture; (8) explain the context in which the sanctuary doctrine functions as hermeneutical vision; (9) suggest that the sanctuary and covenant doctrines clarify each other and work together as hermeneutical vision; (10) argue that postmodernity open the door for the scholarly acceptance of the biblical approach to theological hermeneutics; (11) describe the nature of theological pluralism in Adventism; (12) consider a way to overcome theological pluralism in Adventist theology; (13) and outline the challenge to think theologically in the light of scripture within postmodern times.

## 3. Philosophy: Nobody's Land

Should Biblical Adventism concern itself with Philosophy? Adventism and philosophy seem to cancel each other out. Because of its strong biblical origins, Adventist theology has not engaged philosophy at its

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disciplinary level.<sup>1</sup> In the last decades of the twentieth century, Progressive Adventism began dealing with ethical issues and searching for the meaning of beliefs in the context of their cultural situation. Their search relates better to systematic than exegetical methodology. Thus, Progressive Adventism departed from Biblical Adventism not only in methodology,<sup>2</sup> but also in disciplinary concentration. Progressive Adventism engaged in issue-oriented thinking that relates to philosophy more closely than biblical studies. Meanwhile, mainstream Adventism was ill prepared to understand and evaluate the new ideas developing on this front. Because these ideas have departed radically from Biblical Adventism, it becomes necessary to consider the role that philosophy should play in Adventist theology.

In this article I will briefly argue that, in part, the present theological pluralism in Adventism is nurtured by a lack of critical and creative thinking in this area where the hermeneutical foundation for all theological disciplines lies. Overcoming theological pluralism in Adventism, then, requires faithful creative thinking in the area of philosophy.

Adventism cannot avoid theological pluralism by reaffirming its traditional commitment to stay away from philosophical study and reflection. Implicitly or explicitly, all theologians assume philosophical notions whose existence and operation go unnoticed at the level of theological thinking. These assumptions are necessary for the proper operation of all theological disciplines and their interdisciplinary relations. The question is not whether we have to use philosophical assumptions in theology, but how we are going to interpret them. More specifically, from what source we are going to derive our interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology. In short, Adventism cannot choose not to use philosophical ideas. Adventist theologians can only choose how to interpret the philosophical ideas they must use when approaching the task of Christian theology from the *sola-tota scriptura* principle.

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<sup>1</sup> Most Evangelical and Protestant theologians do not engage in the scholarly field of philosophy. They draw from philosophical thought what they need for theological construction as needed. Tradition results from the direct hermeneutical contributions of ontological and epistemological teachings from various philosophers throughout Christian history.

<sup>2</sup> While Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms endorse the historical critical method, Biblical Adventism works with the historical grammatical method. See, Fernando Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—II." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16/1-2 (2005): 121-124.

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Does this mean the end of the *sola-tota scriptura* principle? In other words, since theologians “have to” use “philosophical” ideas, are they in practice bound to capitulate to the multiple sources of theology matrix?<sup>3</sup>

I suggest that this is what Protestant and Evangelical theologians implicitly do. They deal with philosophy by using philosophical ideas produced by different philosophical systems through the history of western civilization.<sup>4</sup> Evangelical and Progressive Adventists borrow this methodological pattern and implicitly or explicitly use philosophical and scientific guidance in their interpretation of scripture and understanding of Christian doctrines. Philosophy and science produce the ideas that guide the hermeneutical enterprise of Christian theology in all its disciplines, including biblical and systematic theologies.

To avoid implicitly drawing our interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of theological method from philosophy and science, it is necessary to apply the *sola-tota scriptura* principle to the criticism and interpretation of them. This preliminary task calls for the contributions of at least a scholarly discipline that is almost non-existent in Evangelical and Adventist theologies. Let us consider briefly the task of fundamental theology.

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke point out that theologians who reject the reality of the fact that the interpretation of scripture “is always shaped by the theological and cultural context within which interpreters participate. . . . and seek an interpretation unencumbered by the ‘distorting’ influence of fallible ‘human’ traditions are in fact enslaved by interpretive patterns that are allowed to function uncritically precisely because they are unacknowledged” (*Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 112-113).

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Grenz and John Franke summarize this broadly accepted methodological conviction by explaining that the *sola scriptura* principle means that scripture is the *norma normans non normata* (the norm with no norm over it) of Christian theology. Yet, “in another sense [they add] *scriptura* is never *sola*. Scripture does not stand alone as the sole source in the task of theological construction or as the sole basis on which the Christian faith has developed historically. Rather, scripture functions in an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the Christian tradition, as well as with the cultural milieu from which particular readings of the text emerge” (ibidem, 112). Yet, why is this definition of *sola scriptura* as norm with no other norm over it not applied to all issues that belong to theological construction? Why should we abstain from applying the scripture norm to ontological and epistemological issues that are included in biblical thinking and assumed in biblical interpretation and theological construction? The only reason that comes to mind is that tradition has not done it. So, let us break with tradition. It will not be the first or the last time tradition has held theology captive.

#### 4. Fundamental Theology

There is no scholarly consensus about the name or disciplinary structure the study of ontological and epistemological assumptions should have in theology. In Catholic theology, philosophy and natural theology play this fundamental role. Probably the reason for this situation is that Catholic theologians draw their method of studying theology directly from philosophy. Protestant theology, being by far less familiar with philosophy and hesitant to relate it to theology, refers to the same philosophical task in various ways. Pannenberg, for instance, addressed this area of theology under the label of “Philosophy of Science.”<sup>5</sup> Some systematic theologies group the various preliminary, methodological, and hermeneutical issues under the rubric of “prolegomena” to theology proper.<sup>6</sup> The “fundamental theology”<sup>7</sup> and “metatheology”<sup>8</sup> labels are also used.

I prefer the “fundamental theology” label because it properly describes the nature and role of the issues we discuss at this level. Briefly, scholarly reflection in this area investigates all the issues related to the methodological and hermeneutical foundations of Christian theology. They include the cognitive, hermeneutical, teleological, and methodological principles of Christian theology. On the positive side, to name this area of reflection “fundamental theology” properly moves the notion

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<sup>5</sup> *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003); Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics I: Prolegomena to Theology*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); and Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology*, trans. Philip S. Watson, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, see Johannes B. Metz, ed., *The Development of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1969); David Tracy, “Task of Fundamental Theology,” *Journal of Religion* 54 (1974): 13-34; Avery Dulles, “Method in Fundamental Theology,” *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 304-316; Rene Latourelle and Gerald O’Collins, ed., *Problems and Perspective of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1982); Matthias Neuman, “The Role of Imagination in the Tasks of Fundamental Theology,” *Encounter (Indianapolis)* 42 (1981): 307-327; Randy L. Maddox, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico: Scholars, 1984); Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, trans. James Bohman (Cambridge: MIT P, 1984); and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987). However, fundamental theology mixes methodological and apologetical issues.

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1999), 7.



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of foundationalism from the modern to the postmodern meaning and use. On the negative side, Roman Catholic theology uses the fundamental/foundational theology label to designate the apologetical task in theology.<sup>9</sup>

Stanley Grenz has popularized the “foundationalism” and “non-foundationalism” labels to refer to modern and postmodern epistemologies respectively.<sup>10</sup> “Foundationalism” becomes the label pointing to a philosophical loyalty to the epistemological teachings of modernity and its commitment to absolute certainty. In the label “fundamental theology,” the word “fundamental” is closely related to the word “foundation,” and therefore, could be incorrectly connected to modern, empiricist scientific foundationalism. Instead, it names the area where theologians address the basic issues they assume in theological thinking and methodology. Fundamental theology, then, addresses issues we have become aware of through postmodern research in the area of hermeneutics.<sup>11</sup> Since these issues become guiding principles from which we build our theologizing, they play a foundational role. Therefore, we can appropriately consider them as “foundations” of the theological task. The Adventist reader must be aware at this point that early Adventists unknowingly addressed this area of theological thinking under the “Pillars of the Church” label. Implicitly, the “Pillars of Adventism” refer to some of the foundational issues included in fundamental theology. Explicitly, they assume a biblical understanding of them.

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance, Metz; Latourelle and O’Collins; Ratzinger; and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 3-54. Because Grenz assumes the multiplex matrix of theological sources, he replaces modern epistemology with postmodern epistemology without much philosophical reflection involved in the process. His theological method requires integrating philosophical teachings. When philosophical teachings change, then, theologians must adjust to the new philosophical view. One gets the impression that postmodern epistemology does not affect the overall constitution of Christian doctrine, only its universality and certainty. Grenz overcomes postmodern relativism by calling on the community of faith, where the spirit gives the certainty of salvation. Unfortunately, Grenz begs the question. Changes in epistemology directly require changes in the contents of the theology of the community.

<sup>11</sup> On the philosophical study of hermeneutics as a process of interpretation, see, for instance, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989); Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); and John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana UP, 1987).

### 5. Hermeneutical Principles

More specifically, the fundamental theology label names the area where theologians reflect on the theological *apriori*. The theological *apriori* refers to all the necessary assumptions theologians make when engaging in the task of doing theology in the various disciplines of the theological encyclopedia. The theological *apriori* includes the cognitive, hermeneutical, teleological, and, methodological principles of Christian theology.

Here our discussion requires brief familiarity with the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology. Even though all the principles included in the theological *apriori* studied by fundamental theology provide “guidance” to the theological task, hermeneutical principles play the leading role in the interpretation of scripture and building the teachings of Christianity. The hermeneutical principles of the theological *apriori* include our assumptions on ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics. In Christian theology, the hermeneutical principles include the areas of (1) *reality* (principle of reality, technically known as ontology); (2) *reality as a whole* (principle of articulation, technically known as metaphysics, studying “the whole and the parts” or “the one and the many” issue);<sup>12</sup> and, (3) *knowledge* (principle of knowledge, technically known as epistemology).

For reasons I cannot explain here, the understanding of all the components or fields of theological *apriori* revolves around the way we interpret reality. This area includes general ontology, or the interpretation of the main overarching interpretations of the basic characteristics of all that is real. On this basis, regional ontologies study the reality of God, human beings, and the world. The interpretation of knowledge builds on the understanding of reality. It includes, among others, the question about the origin and interpretation of human knowledge. The interpretation of the “whole and the parts” envisions the way in which all reality, “the one and the many,” relate to each other, forming an orderly “whole.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On the whole-part issue as belonging to metaphysical studies see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V. 26; 1023b,26-1024a,10; and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics & the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 139-152.

<sup>13</sup> In common parlance the philosophical question of the “one and the many” the “whole and the parts” is expressed as “the big picture” or the “forest and the trees.”

## 6. Biblical Philosophy

Traditionally, theologians have adapted for theological use what Christian and non-Christian philosophers have concluded on these issues.<sup>14</sup> This intellectual borrowing fits the multiplicity of sources matrix in theological method. Since Adventism and many Evangelical theologians side with the *sola-tota scriptura* principle, we need to develop our own thinking on these issues on the light of scripture. We cannot use what Christian and non-Christian philosophers have taught on them. We need to arrive at our own conclusions on how to understand the issues we assume from the light scripture provides on them.

A fundamental theology faithful to the *sola-tota scriptura* principle should identify these philosophical ideas and discover why we need them in the theological task. Then, we should discover how philosophers have interpreted these ideas and how Christian theologians have adapted them for theological use. Finally, we should discover how biblical authors have interpreted the same ideas. This procedure will help us identify what we may have borrowed from extrabiblical sources from our theological readings and belonging to western culture. In this way, early Adventist deconstruction of tradition finds a home in the scholarly realm.<sup>15</sup> Once we identify the philosophical and scientific interpretations of the hermeneutical principles of theology, we can replace them with biblical ones. Thus, we define first our philosophical ideas from scripture (*sola-tota scriptura* principle), and then we use them as hermeneutical guides to understand all theological and scientific disciplines (*prima scriptura* principle).

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<sup>14</sup> This procedure is the hallmark of Roman Catholic theological methodology. Yet, implicitly it continues to operate in Protestant theology. See, for instance, one occasion when Luther recognizes the commonly held view that Platonic philosophy is compatible with biblical thought. "The Platonic philosophers have stolen much from the fathers and the Gospel of John, as Augustine says that he found almost everything in Plato which is in the first chapter of John. Therefore, those things which the philosophers say about these ecclesiastical matters have been stolen, so that a Platonist teaches the Trinity of things as (1) the maker, (2) the prototype or exemplar, (3) and compassion; but they have mixed philosophical thoughts with one another and have falsified them" (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament IV*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, Luther's Works [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999, c1971]; 38: 276).

<sup>15</sup> Fernando Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part I: Historical Review." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/2 (2004): 9.

### **7. Hermeneutical Vision and Pluralism**

Theological pluralism in Adventism does not take place as superficial differences in lifestyle, biblical interpretation, or doctrinal emphasis. Instead, it comes from the deep methodological ground where the entire edifice of biblical interpretation and doctrinal construction stands. Understanding and overcoming theological pluralism in postmodern times, then, requires careful reflection in the area of fundamental theology.

We may trace deep theological differences back to the hermeneutical principles Christian theologians explicitly or implicitly assume in their work. We can track the origin of classical, modern, evangelical, and postmodern hermeneutical principles back to philosophical ideas theologians adapted for theological use. After all, when doing Christian theology one assumes an understanding of reality (ontology), the big picture (metaphysics), and the nature of knowledge (epistemology).

In Evangelical Adventism, justification by faith works as the hermeneutical vision from which proceeds the interpretation of Scripture and the construction of Christian theology. In Progressive Adventism, the notion of biological and historical evolution works as the hermeneutical vision from which proceeds the entire interpretation of Scripture and the construction of Christian theology. Obviously, their views will be largely incompatible with each other. However, because they build on the same basic ontological assumptions, they are able to agree on the essentials.

Hermeneutical visions derive from philosophical sources. Evangelical and modern versions of Christianity build from the same philosophical non-biblical sources. Thus, the philosophical foundation of theology becomes the guiding light from which proceeds all theological hermeneutics.

Earlier in this study, we have suggested that biblical interpretation and theological construction require hermeneutical guidance. We have noticed also that Christian theology has drawn its hermeneutical guidance from philosophical ideas. Moreover, we know that the ontological, metaphysical, and epistemological issues philosophy addresses are necessary presuppositions for the task of theology. We cannot avoid the issues, but we can choose how to interpret and use them in theological disciplines. Both Evangelical and Progressive Adventists explicitly or implicitly draw their hermeneutical visions from the same philosophical

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and scientific sources classical and modern theologians use.<sup>16</sup> What are the hermeneutical assumptions from which Biblical Adventism operates? To answer this question, we need to explore briefly the hermeneutical assumptions implicit in the sanctuary doctrine early pioneers experienced as hermeneutical vision leading their biblical interpretation and theological understanding. Can we use the same hermeneutical vision in our disciplinary approach to Christian theology?

As we mentioned above, in Christian theology, the hermeneutical principles include principles of reality (ontology), articulation (metaphysics), and *knowledge* (epistemology). The doctrine of the sanctuary implies specific ontological views regarding the principles of reality and articulation. These views, in turn, have direct implications for biblical epistemology. Here we will briefly consider the principles of reality and articulation implicit in the biblical sanctuary. With this goal in mind, we turn our attention to the way in which the sanctuary doctrine assumes the reality of God.

#### 8. God and Timelessness

Biblical and systematic theologies agree in affirming the centrality of the doctrine of God in their interpretations and constructions.<sup>17</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Fernando Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—II," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16/1-2 (2005): 141.

<sup>17</sup> Philosophers and theologians recognize the central role of the doctrine of God. Among the philosophers we find, for instance, Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 6.1.10,11) and Martin Heidegger ("The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper and Row, 1969], 59, 60). Among biblical theologians, see Gerhard Hasel (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 100); and among systematic theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg, who explains that "in theology, the concept of God can never be simply one issue among the others. It is the central issue, around which everything else is organized. If you take away that one issue nothing would be left to justify the continuation of that special effort that we call 'theology' " (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 21). John Macquarrie states that in Christian theology the doctrine of God "has a central place" that "underlies all the other doctrines," and he further explains that this "doctrine of the triune God already contains *in nuce* the whole Christian faith, so that reflection upon it will provide us with a center to which we can relate all the other doctrines as we pass through them" (*Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977], 187). In addition, see Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 357; and David Tracy, *Blessed Rage*

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means that the implicit or explicit understanding of God's being (reality) and actions theologians assume when reading scripture or reflecting on the doctrines of the church determine their interpretations and constructions.

As presented in scripture, the sanctuary is not primarily a doctrine but a reality. This means that when biblical authors wrote about the sanctuary they were interpreting reality. The reality of the sanctuary is not primarily a building but a Being, God. This means that we cannot understand the meaning of the sanctuary by focusing on the building. Instead, we should focus on the Being who inhabits and relates through the building. The sanctuary is the "house of being." According to scripture, God dwelt in the Old Testament sanctuary (Exodus 25:8). Did He really dwell in a spatiotemporal tent? Should we understand this statement "theologically" as symbol or metaphor? Most schools of theology will deny that God really dwelt in space and time. This denial stems from the conviction that God's reality has no time or space. We know this view as the timelessness of God. Theologians generally relate timelessness to "eternity" as an attribute of God<sup>18</sup> and fail to see how timelessness determines the kind of reality God is and the way in which He acts.

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*for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 146-147.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 168-169; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 91-93; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 1994), 1:401-410. Millard Erickson connects divine timelessness to God's infinity (*Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998), 300). The contemporary discussion on divine timelessness and temporality includes, for instance, Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness, Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970); Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992); William J. Hill, *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001); *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001); Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001). These studies approach eternity as an attribute of God. They do not consider the analogical understanding of God's being as basic characteristic of his ontology. The notion that the history of God presented in scripture is real is being discussed but still has not found an acceptable ontology that may make it "usable" as a hermeneutical presupposition for theological method.

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The basic characteristics of timelessness are the total absence of temporal sequence and space in that which is timeless.<sup>19</sup> God exists, lives and acts outside of the future-present-past sequence of time.<sup>20</sup> His being

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<sup>19</sup> Thus Augustine explains, “It is not in time that you precede time: otherwise you would not precede all times. You precede all past times in the sublimity of an ever present eternity, and you surpass all future times, because they are to come, and when they come, they shall be past, ‘but you are the Selfsame, and your years shall not fail’ (Psalm 102:27). Your years neither come nor go, but our years come and go, so that all of them may come. Your years stand all at once, because they are steadfast: departing years are not turned away by those that come, because they never pass away” (*Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan [Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960], 11. 13, page 287). Boethius provides the classical definition of timelessness. “Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life. This will appear more clearly if we compare it with temporal things. All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future; there is nothing set in time which can at one moment grasp the whole space of its lifetime” (Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. W. V. Cooper, Gateway ed. [Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1981], 5.6, page 115). In contrast with temporal life, “[w]hat we should rightly call eternal is that which grasps and possesses wholly and simultaneously the fullness of unending life, which lacks naught of the future, and has lost naught of the fleeting past; and such an existence must be ever present in itself to control and aid itself, and also must keep present with itself the infinity of changing time” (ibidem, 116). Aquinas connects the notion of timelessness to the being of God by saying that there is “no before and after in Him: He does not have being after non-being, nor non-being after being, nor can any succession be found in His Being. For none of these characteristics can be understood without time” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956], 1.15.3).

<sup>20</sup> The God of the Bible thinks and works in the future, present, past sequence of time. Yet, the God of Greek ontology that Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions use to interpret scripture and construct their theological systems requires the assumption that God does not act historically but simultaneously. This affects all actions of God and therefore all doctrines. Augustine clearly explained the timeless way of divine activities. “Will you say that these things are false, which, with a strong voice, Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the very eternity of the Creator, that His substance is in no wise changed by time, nor that His will is separate from His substance? Wherefore, He willeth not one thing now, another anon, but once and for ever He willeth all things that He willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards what He willeth not before, nor willeth not what before He willed. Because such a will is mutable and no mutable thing is eternal; but our God is eternal. Likewise He tells me, tells me in my inner ear, that the expectation of future things is turned to sight when they have come; and this same sight is turned to memory when they have passed. Moreover, all thought which is thus varied is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal; but our God is eternal.” These things I sum up and put together, and I find that my God, the eternal God, hath not made any creature by any new will, nor that His knowledge suffereth anything transitory” (Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J.G. Pilkington, vol. 1, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [Albany: Ages Software, 1996], 12.15.18). By modifying the as-

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experiences all perfections and our history simultaneously. God's timelessness extends to His life. God does not experience his perfect life in a past present and future sequence. If He would, by definition He would cease to be perfect, immutable, and eternal. He would cease to be God because time is the basic ontological trait of creation. Consequently, God does not have real history. God does not have space. God is incompatible with space and time. If we assume God has no space or no time in any sense of the word, then we cannot accept that God actually, really dwelt in the Old Testament sanctuary and interacted with Israel as the Old Testament claims. These ontological presuppositions require us to interpret biblical language about sanctuary and divine activities as being real in a timeless, non-historical sense, that is, in a timeless spiritual sense.

This assumption provides the hermeneutical vision for theological interpretation through the spectrum of Christian theologies throughout history.<sup>21</sup> Theologians understand and interpret scripture and theology assuming the main features of Plato's dualistic cosmology. That is to say, there are two levels of reality. There is "this" side, the side of nature where we live in space and time. Then, there is "the other side," the side of God and supernature. God's side is timeless; our side is temporal. As-

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sumed referent of divine actions, divine timelessness affects the understanding of all Christian doctrines.

<sup>21</sup> To scholars unfamiliar with the process of the construction and development of Christian doctrines, this assertion may sound like an overstatement. It is true that the way Greek ontological thought influences concrete theologians may vary greatly. At times, Protestant theologians seeking to be faithful to Greek and biblical ontologies affirm contradictory theological statements. Charles Hodge represents the few that recognize the inner contradiction that exists between the timeless philosophical notion of timelessness and the temporal view of divine reality presented in scripture. On one hand, following tradition, Hodges incorrectly believes that God "does not exist during one period of duration more than another. With Him there is no distinction between the present, past, and future; but all things are equally and always present to Him. With Him duration is an eternal now. This is the popular and the scriptural view of God's eternity" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Originally Published 1872. [Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997], 1:385). On the other hand, following scripture, Hodges correctly believes that God "is not a stagnant ocean, but ever living, ever thinking, ever acting, and ever suiting his action to the exigencies of his creatures, and to the accomplishment of his infinitely wise designs" (Ibid., 1:389). He concludes, "Whether we can harmonize these facts or not, is a matter of minor importance. We are constantly called upon to believe that things are, without being able to tell how they are, or even how they can be" (Ibid.) Unfortunately, the way we understand God's reality is not "a matter of minor importance," but the basic assumption on which theologians conceive and formulate their teachings.



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suming this map or reality, theologians have attempted to understand God and His relation to us. This is the basic hermeneutical vision of Christian theology.

The full picture of the ontological dualism that Christian theologies assume includes the more familiar ontological dualism of body and soul. Thus, the timeless understanding of ontology calls not only for a cosmological dichotomy between heavenly and historical realities, but also for an anthropological dualism between soul and body. We find these ontological interpretations firmly established in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas. Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies retrieve their ontological foundations from their writings.

The consequences of this hermeneutical vision extend to the entire body of Christian doctrine.<sup>22</sup> For instance, let us consider Christ's death at the cross. What did God do at the cross? The cross being a temporal event and God being a timeless being posit a major challenge to theologians. They have met the challenge in many and creative ways. Yet, when we take the timelessness of divine being into account, we arrive at the inescapable conclusion that whatever happened at the cross was only a manifestation of what already and always exists in God.<sup>23</sup> In other

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<sup>22</sup> The way in which the timelessness of God and the soul shape Christian doctrines depends on the nature of each doctrine and the creativity of each theologian. However, in general issues—for instance, spirituality, salvation, sacraments, revelation, eternal life, and eschatology—there is broad agreement across main line denominations. In more biblically oriented communities and theologians we will find the effects of the timelessness of God and the soul mixed in various configurations with ideas that properly correspond to the historical frame of biblical thinking. I have shown the way in which the absolute timelessness of God and the relative timelessness of the soul shape the leading models of revelation and inspiration reigning in Christian theology (see my *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundations of Christian Theology in the Postmodern World* [Lanham: UP of America, 2001]). I have explored the role of timelessness in the doctrine of creation and theological method in my *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews U Lithotech, 2005). In the second volume of his *Systematic Theology* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, expected publication date November 2007), Norman Gulley explores the way in which the timeless view of Greek ontology has influenced the doctrines of God, human nature, and Christ.

<sup>23</sup> We find an example of the notion that the reality of God's act at the cross takes place in eternity and therefore precedes and grounds what is revealed at the cross when Moltmann alludes to salvation in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. We should bear in mind that Moltmann assumes God's eternity is timeless (see below). "[T]he Son's sacrifice of boundless love on Golgotha is from eternity already included in the exchange of the essential, the consubstantial love which constitutes the divine life of the Trinity.

words, the historical events that the Gospels narrate only reveal God's eternal love and salvific intentions but do not cause our salvation. This directly contradicts the claim in Hebrews 5:7-9 that Christ's death is the cause of our salvation. I have written elsewhere regarding the way this hermeneutical vision affects the doctrine of the sanctuary.<sup>24</sup> Suffice it to say, there is not a real sanctuary in heaven where God engages in a sequential series of salvific activities. The heavenly sanctuary, like all "heavenly" realities, is "spiritual" because they have neither space nor time.

### **9. God and Time**

The timelessness of God originates in Greek philosophical thinking that Christian theology continues to respect due to the multiple sources of theological method matrix it chooses to follow. Yet, divine timelessness has no ground in scripture. The evidences of this fact are present throughout scripture. The God who ordered Moses to build a sanctuary so that He might live among them was the same God who appeared to him in space and time on Mount Horeb earlier (Exodus 3:1). In response to Moses' request for divine identification, God revealed Himself as I Am (being). God revealed the temporality of his being by making Himself present in space and time before Moses (Exodus 3:1-15).<sup>25</sup> Even though God reveals the temporality of His being, He does not explain it. Yet, God's being is not timeless but temporal. The move from a timeless to a temporal understanding of divine reality entails the major hermeneutical paradigm shift in the history of Christian theology.

Recently, a number of studies on timelessness and God's relation to time have been published. The timelessness of God is ingrained so deeply in the collective consciousness of Christian theologians that it is difficult if not impossible to replace its assumed role as hermeneutical

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The fact that the Son dies on the cross, delivering himself up to that death, *is part of the eternal obedience* which he renders to the Father in his whole being through the Spirit, whom he receives from the Father. *Creation is saved and justified in eternity in the sacrifice of the Son, which is her sustaining foundation*" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* [New York: Harper & Row, 1981], 168).

<sup>24</sup> See Fernando Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36/2 (1998): 183-206.

<sup>25</sup> For an in depth study of the biblical affirmation of the temporality of God's reality in these verses, see Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, vol. 10, *Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series*, (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), chapter 3.

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vision. For instance, Nelson Pike concludes his research on divine timelessness by reporting that he has not found any basis for divine timelessness “in biblical literature or in the confessional literature of either the Catholic or Protestant churches.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, he confesses that on this crucial point the evidence he has uncovered “seems to point rather clearly in the other direction.”<sup>27</sup> However, Pike seems to have no replacement for timelessness as hermeneutical vision. This is seen when he suggests that we should not exclude the doctrine of timelessness from a system of Christian theology. Instead, we should ask ourselves “what reason is there for thinking that the doctrine of God’s timelessness should have a place in a system of Christian theology?”<sup>28</sup> Addressing the same issue, Alan G. Padgett suggests, “God is in fact both temporal and ‘relatively’ timeless”<sup>29</sup> in a fashion that brings to mind Process Philosophy’s proposal. In a similarly dualistic attempt to understand God’s reality as both timeless and temporal, William Lane Craig suggests, “God is timeless without creation and temporal since creation.”<sup>30</sup> This may very well be a “perfectly coherent”<sup>31</sup> view, but it does not respond to the biblical understanding of divine reality.

There are few theologians affirming the temporality of God from scripture. Openview theologians, for instance, affirm the temporality of God without giving much theological or philosophical thought to it. For instance, Clark Pinnock sees Jonah 3:10 implying that “God experiences temporal passage, learns new facts when they occur and changes plans in response to what humans do.”<sup>32</sup> On this basis, he adds, “God is unchanging in nature and essence but not in experience, knowledge, and action.”<sup>33</sup> Oscar Cullmann, in a more detailed study about time in the New

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<sup>26</sup> *God and Timelessness, Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion*, 190.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*,

<sup>29</sup> *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time*, 241.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 265. I suspect there is some sort of incoherence in Craig’s view. When we assume an ontological transition from timelessness to temporality, the contradictory notion that what is timeless can change seems to be assumed. By definition, if a reality is timeless, transition (change) cannot take place. If a reality is temporal, transition belongs to its nature. Probably, Craig is not thinking in ontological terms.

<sup>32</sup> Clark Pinnock, et al, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 118.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

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Testament, unambiguously affirms that New Testament writers assumed the temporal reality of God's being.

[T]ime and eternity share this time quality. Primitive Christianity knows nothing of a timeless God. The 'eternal' God is he who was in the beginning, is now, and will be in all the future, 'who is, who was, and who will be' (Rev 1:4). Accordingly, his eternity can and must be expressed in this 'naïve' way, in terms of endless time. This time quality is not in its essence something human which first emerged in the fallen creation. It is, moreover, not bound to the creation.<sup>34</sup>

More recently, Yale's philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff affirmed divine temporality from scripture. He shows biblical texts used to "prove" that divine timelessness is a biblical idea fail the test. Instead, they indicate that God is temporal.<sup>35</sup> If God is temporal, then we can speak of a real history of God. The history of God revolves around his actions. Wolterstorff correctly explains,

The actions of Jesus were not simply human actions brought about by God, plus human actions freely performed by Jesus in situations brought about by God; they were God's actions. In the life and deeds of Jesus it was God who dwelt among us. The narrative of the history of Jesus is not just a narrative concerning events in the history of the relationship of a human being to God; it's a narrative about God. God does have a history; the doctrine of the incarnation implies that the history of Jesus is the history of God.<sup>36</sup>

The change from a timeless to a temporal understanding of the hermeneutical principle of ontology is the most radical hermeneutical paradigm shift in the history of Christian theology. This shift requires critical assessment of doctrinal tradition. In other words, systematic theology must start by a systematic deconstruction of received doctrines because earlier theologians constructed them from non-biblical hermeneutical visions. Then, the interpretive (biblical theology) and constructive (systematic theology) tasks ensue. We should start by reinterpreting the entire doctrine of God and His history. The biblical outline of God's history

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<sup>34</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 63.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Unqualified Divine Temporality," in *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 187-193.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, 209-210

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beginning with foreknowledge, predestination, and continuing with creation and providence should uncover the metanarrative that articulates the inner logic of biblical thinking.<sup>37</sup> The historical acts of God's being are the center that articulates the biblical metanarrative. In it, God's acts proceed in a real historical chronological progression.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, we should attempt to understand each divine act as historically generated from within God's being.

The situation is clear. If we work from a multiple sources of theology methodological paradigm, we commit ourselves to "integrate" biblical insights with insights drawn from tradition, philosophy, science, and culture. From this commitment, we inherit the hermeneutical principle of divine reality from philosophy via tradition. From these sources we are led to believe that divine reality is either totally timelessness, or in some way is both timeless and temporal, thus "making" room for the obvious realities of human existence and biblical narratives.

When we operate from the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle, the timeless interpretation of divine reality becomes an extrapolation originating not in divine revelation but human imagination. Bible authors express and assume divine temporality throughout scripture. There is no reason not to think God is temporal or has a real history. Of course, we need to understand what we mean by saying God is temporal. Affirming divine temporality without further clarification of its specific characteristics may lead some readers to view God as possessing the same limitations creatures have. Moreover, this is not what scripture teaches. We need to leave for a later time a full study of God and time. For our specific purpose here it suffices to say that whatever God's temporality means is something we need to discover while thinking in obedience to biblical revelation and not by assuming it means the same as time means to us. Quite to the contrary, a careful consideration of God's actions and revelation through scripture will lead us to understand divine temporality in ways that are quite different (transcendent) from ours. Thus, we should not understand divine temporality univocally<sup>39</sup> or equivocally<sup>40</sup> but analogically to created temporality.

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<sup>37</sup> I discuss these foundational issues in my recent *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs: Andrews U Lithotec, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Because Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies work from a timeless hermeneutical vision, they interpret God's history in a logical rather than historical order. Obviously, this situation calls for a careful deconstruction of tradition.

<sup>39</sup> Process Philosophy understands divine temporality univocally. That is to say, the meaning of God's time and our time is the same. This shows up in the pantheistic no-

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A temporal understanding of the hermeneutical principle of reality is important because it determines whether we should understand scripture cognitively as real history or, functionally as metaphorical, symbolical, and mythical pointers to timeless spiritual reality. Thus, what matters in the end is that the “real” meaning of scripture depends on our interpretation of the hermeneutical principle of reality. We can appreciate the “guiding” hermeneutical role of the principle of reality as we compare two different approaches to biblical eschatology.

Adventist theology arose as a truly “eschatological” theology a century before the German “eschatological” theologians Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann came to prominence. We can trace the radical differences that exist between these two “eschatological” theologies to the hermeneutical principle of reality from which they flow. The former

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tion of a dipolar God. Although in his *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Alfred North Whitehead does not deal explicitly with the notion of time his dipolar view of God implicitly assumes it. “Thus, [explains Whitehead] analogously to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is conscious; and *it is the realization of the actual world in the unit of his nature*, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the waving of God’s physical feelings upon this primordial concept.” In the next paragraph Whitehead further explains that the consequent nature “. . . originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then, acquires integration with the primordial side.” Whitehead additionally explains that “In God’s nature, permanence is primordial and flux is derivative from the World . . .” ([New York: Macmillan, 1960], 529, see also 531). Thus, it is clear that Process Philosophy understands divine time and flux univocally to human time and flux. Divine time and human time are identical.

<sup>40</sup> Barth speaks about the history of God, but still he subscribes to the timelessness of his Being. Thus, whenever we apply the terms “history” or “time” to speak about timeless God and temporal reality, we are using the words in an equivocal sense. That is to say, they carry complete different meanings. Since Karl Barth affirms the timelessness of God’s being, language about God’s history is to be understood in an equivocal sense. Barth writes about the timelessness of God in clear terms. “The being is eternal in whose duration beginning, succession and end are not three but one, not separate as a first, a second and a third occasion, but one simultaneous occasion as beginning, middle and end. Eternity is the simultaneity of beginning, middle and end, and to that extent it is pure duration. Eternity is God in the sense in which in himself and in all things God is simultaneous, i.e., beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction. Eternity is not, therefore, time, although time is certainly God’s creation or more correctly, a form of His creation. Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present and future” (*Church Dogmatics*. ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 13 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936], II/1, 608).

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implicitly adopts the biblical temporal-historical interpretation flowing from scripture. The latter explicitly adopts the traditional timeless interpretation flowing from Greek philosophy via the tradition of the church.<sup>41</sup> Adventist eschatology accepts the historical reality of the new earth. This specifically means that the new earth will be real in space and time. We take this clue from the understanding that the new creation of which Revelation 21:1-5 speaks is a restoration to the perfect design this planet had when God created it (Genesis 1-3).

We can clearly see how the timeless interpretation of the principle of reality guides Moltmann's eschatology when he explains that in the new earth there will be no more time and no more future.<sup>42</sup> The "eon of glory" describes the reality of the new earth. Following Plato and Christian tradition, Moltmann understands the reality of the new creation as belonging to "aeonic time," which corresponds to the eternity of God. In aeonic time, the "before and after"<sup>43</sup> succession essential to created time does not exist. Instead, everything exists "simultaneously."<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the "new earth" is not this planet restored, but a metaphor for God's presence and interpenetration of creation.<sup>45</sup> In this act God is not restoring the perfect plan He achieved at creation week, but bringing about the ultimate goal of creation for the first time.<sup>46</sup> In sum, because Moltmann assumes God's reality is timeless, he thinks that in heaven there will be no time<sup>47</sup> or space as we experience them now.<sup>48</sup> There will be no places

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<sup>41</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:401-410; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> He writes, "The temporal creation will then become an eternal creation, because all created beings will participate in God's eternity. The spatial creation will then become an omnipresent creation, because all created beings will participate in God's omnipresence. Creation's departure from time into the aeon of glory comes about through the annihilation of death and the raising of the dead. Once death is no more, *there will be no more time either, neither the time of transience nor the time of futurity*" (ibidem, 294). In the introduction to his book, however, Moltmann declares that the "eschaton is neither the future of time nor timeless eternity" (ibidem, 22).

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, 282.

<sup>44</sup> ". . . for simultaneity is one of the attributes of eternity. Universal simultaneity would be absolute eternity as 'the fullness of time'"(ibidem, 287).

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, 295.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, 318.

<sup>47</sup> Moltmann explains, "The figure, or configuration, of time that corresponds to the one, unending eternity is *cyclical* time, which has no end. It represents the reversible, symmetrical, unending and hence timeless form of time. According to Plato 'the body of

or days to worship God or do new things. There will be no Sabbath day to keep.

When classical and modern theologians understand God's reality as timeless, they expect biblical texts to speak about timeless reality also. Yet, scripture presents God acting historically in the flow of created historical time. In this hermeneutical context, a literal interpretation of scripture is impossible because it involves an inner contradiction. God cannot be temporal and timeless at the same time. To solve this problem, they interpret scripture "theologically"<sup>49</sup> or "spiritually."<sup>50</sup> For them, scripture is symbolic, metaphorical, or mythical language indirectly referring to God's spiritual, non-historical reality. In technical jargon, scripture speaks about "ultimate" reality.

However, if, following biblical thought, we understand God's reality as infinitely temporal, we realize that biblical texts do speak directly about God's reality. Since this assumption stands on God's revelation in scripture, we should prefer it to the timeless view that stands on human imagination. Because God is a historical being who acts historically in the sequential future-present-past order, to understand scripture "theologically" and "spiritually," we need to interpret it historically.

### 10. Sanctuary Hermeneutical Vision

In scripture, the metanarrative of "God's history" includes but is much broader than the history of God in Jesus Christ. The history of God extending from past to future eternity becomes the metanarrative that biblical and systematic theologies develop from the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle and the temporal understanding of the hermeneutical principle of reality. Early Adventist theology implicitly assumed God is temporal and acts in a historical chronological sequence that constitutes His history. This implicit conviction allowed them to realize that God operates His work of Salvation *historically* through the sanctuary structure, and interpret the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation *historically*. This led them to view the biblical metanarrative as a great controversy

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the world' is spherical, and in the same way the time of the world is 'a movable image of non-transience', 'a circle'" (ibidem).

<sup>48</sup> We will be "interpenetrated" by the divine presence in a static never changing state of being (ibidem, 307-308). This resembles Aquinas' *visio Dei* (vision of God).

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Fritz Guy, "Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-first Century," *Spectrum* 31/2 (2003): 5-16

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 190).



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between Christ and Satan. In this way the sanctuary doctrine became the key that opened to view a “*complete system of truth, connected and harmonious.*”<sup>51</sup>

The system of truth connected and harmonious refers to all Christian doctrines that find their inner logic when interpreted from the biblical understanding of the hermeneutical principle of reality (ontology) and articulation (metaphysics).<sup>52</sup> Because biblical authors speak of God as unlimited by space and time yet able to relate temporally and spatially with His creation, “metaphysics” becomes “metanarrative.” In other words, the traditional issue of the “one and the many” (the whole and the parts) that Greek philosophy explained by way of “metaphysics,” biblical thinking addressed by way of “metanarrative.” Metaphysics and metanarrative are different ways to solve the same philosophical problem of the one and the many, the whole and the parts. Metaphysics is the classical and modern approach that explains it by way of a static hierarchical structure of timeless-temporal entities. Metanarrative is the post-modern approach that explains it by way of a dynamic ongoing historical process.<sup>53</sup> There are many possible ways to interpret metaphysics and metanarratives. Scripture is one among many possible philosophical metanarratives explaining the issue of the one and the many.

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<sup>51</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 423 (emphasis mine).

<sup>52</sup> Gregory Boyd correctly perceives the hermeneutical role that the “warfare worldview” plays in our understanding of the cross. He maintains that “the anthropological significance of Christ’s death and resurrection is rooted in something more fundamental and broad that God was aiming at: to defeat once and for all his cosmic archenemy, Satan, along with the other evil powers under his dominion, and thereby to establish Christ as the legitimate ruler of the cosmos, and human beings as his legitimate viceroys upon the earth” (*God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997], 240). So far, however, Boyd has applied the biblical metanarrative only to the question of evil.

<sup>53</sup> When theologians assume God’s reality is timeless, they assume “metaphysics.” Yet, if we assume God’s reality is temporal and his acts historical, we speak of “metanarrative.” This language is not just an accommodation to postmodernity and its emphasis on metanarratives. Instead, the technical word “metanarrative” replaces “metaphysics” because postmodernity no longer understands the inner logic and connection of what is real from timelessness but from time. The reason for our temporal historical view of reality, however, is not postmodern philosophical teaching that reality is temporal, but the ancient revelation of God in scripture. Martin Heidegger has written the decisive ontological argumentation about the temporality of Being, thereby departing fully from the philosophical tradition on which theologians have been constructing Christian tradition for two millennia. See, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Collins, 1962).

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Adventism needs to recover the great controversy metanarrative biblically.<sup>54</sup> Most Adventists relate to the great controversy through Ellen White's writings.<sup>55</sup> Then they apply it to their biblical interpretation and doctrinal construction. With the passing of time, the exponential growth of the church, and the advent of a postmodern, visually oriented society, today Adventists are much less acquainted with Ellen White's writings and the great controversy motif than were earlier generations.

Moreover, Adventism has come to experience the sanctuary doctrine as one of its parts, the judgment prior to the second coming of Christ.<sup>56</sup> When new generations of Adventists receive the sanctuary doctrine in this limited way, they understand it from the context of a different metanarrative. As we saw in the first article of this series, Evangelical and Progressive Adventists find the sanctuary-investigative judgment either meaningless or contradictory to the doctrine of justification by faith. The events surrounding Christ's sacrifice at the cross implicitly become the metanarrative from which they understand the doctrine of the sanctuary. Yet, as we will see later, the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary includes more than the investigative judgment and opens to view a broader biblical great controversy metanarrative that includes and articulates the incarnation and death of Christ.

Besides, the biblical text does not yield its metanarrative to the descriptive approach of biblical theology, but to the constructive approach of systematic theology. The biblical metanarrative comes to view when we are able to follow the inner logic and progression of the historical process of divine activities described in scripture. For this reason, the great controversy metanarrative is more than the cosmic battle in heaven

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<sup>54</sup> Recently, Gregory A. Boyd has explored the great controversy metanarrative that he identifies as a "warfare worldview" (*God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict*, 9-27). He uses exegetical methodology to survey the question of warfare in the Old and New Testaments. His goal, however, is to use the biblical warfare to challenge traditional theodicy and the theistic ideology that stands behind it (ibidem, 20).

<sup>55</sup> Notably, see, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958); *Prophets and Kings*, 1917 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1943); *The Desire of Ages*, 1898 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940); *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1911 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911); *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*, 1888 (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1907).

<sup>56</sup> Roy Adams convincingly argues for dropping the "investigative" nomenclature to refer to the "Pre Advent Judgment" (*The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* [Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1993], 124-129). The opening of the books in Daniel 7:9-10 seems to imply revelatory and evaluative actions rather than investigation as fact finding activity.

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before the creation of this planet described by Ellen White.<sup>57</sup> The great controversy is also more than the conflict between God and the powers of evil Gregory Boyd describes as the “warfare worldview.”<sup>58</sup> The great controversy as metanarrative comes to view when we are able to follow the inner logic and historical progression of divine activities involved in the plan and accomplishment of cosmic redemption.

How do we recover the great controversy metanarrative biblically? First, we need to be convinced we need to use it in our theological method. Second, we need to work systematically from the ground of the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle under the hermeneutical guidance of the biblical understanding of the hermeneutical principle of God’s reality. Third, we need to use the contents of the sanctuary doctrine we already have as a community as the key to access the flow of historical acts involved in the plan of redemption. Here I will only make a few suggestions of how to proceed.

To use the sanctuary doctrine as the key to access the biblical metanarrative of the great controversy, Adventists need to become familiar with its contents.<sup>59</sup> We also need to broaden our view of what the sanctuary doctrine entails in scripture.<sup>60</sup> This broadened view will help us to use the sanctuary doctrine as a key to the great controversy as metanarrative.

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<sup>57</sup> *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33-43.

<sup>58</sup> We should distinguish between a worldview and a metanarrative. A worldview is one of the three realities assumed in the hermeneutical principle of reality (ontology): God, human beings, and the world. Thus, a worldview refers to a specific interpretation of the world the biblical writers assume. A metanarrative is a way to interpret the principle of articulation, which deals with the problem of the one and the many and the whole and the parts. Although Gregory Boyd, using mainly exegetical methodology and some systematic method is able to correctly affirm what he calls a “warfare worldview,” he has not yet moved to the interpretation of the biblical metanarrative by following the inner logic of God’s historical acts of redemption in scripture.

<sup>59</sup> Non-Adventists also may need some introductory reading to become familiar with the “doctrine of the sanctuary.” For a brief introduction, see Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 409-432; for a broader introduction, see Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs: Diadem, c1999); Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1993). For a full scholarly development, see Alberto R. Treiyer, *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment: From the Pentateuch to Revelation* (Siloam Springs: Creation Enterprises International, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> Roy Adams correctly remarks that the subject of the sanctuary “is so vast that it would take the combined effort of many people to explore its full dimensions” (*The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology*, 14).

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The biblical “doctrine of the sanctuary” does not result from the simple description of sanctuary or “cultic” passages of scripture. It comes to view from the integration of the sanctuary and cultic texts with the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation made possible by the biblical interpretation of the hermeneutical principle of God’s temporal reality. The historical understanding of God’s being and acts grounds the historicist approach to prophetic interpretation and the historical presence and activity of God in the sanctuary.

We will turn our attention now to the way in which the sanctuary doctrine relates to the covenant.

**11. The Sanctuary-Covenant Structure**

We usually deal with the sanctuary doctrine and the covenant as different theological issues. Yet, what if these two are part of a complex structure through which God operates redemption historically in the flow of created time? Perhaps to understand properly the sanctuary doctrine, we need to consider the way it relates to the biblical covenant, and vice versa. In this section, I will suggest that God brings his eternal plan of salvation to operation through a historical sequence of redemptive acts centered in the sanctuary-covenant structure. Following this structure and its connections with history and prophecy will help us to discover the great controversy metanarrative in scripture.

By dwelling in the Old Testament sanctuary, God related to the people and ministered to them His salvation. This dwelling became the type of Christ’s incarnation.<sup>61</sup> As in Christ’s incarnation, in the sanctuary God became close to His people by dwelling in a building. The sanctuary is the dwelling place of God. Just as the sanctuary without God’s presence is an empty building (Exod 33:1-17), God’s presence in the sanctuary without a people is not sanctuary but a purposeless residence. The sanctuary is the spatiotemporal structure through which God was continuously present and relating to His people throughout Old and New Testaments times (Heb 8:1-2). Thus, the sanctuary is a spatial structure facilitating God’s interaction with His chosen people. As God achieved goals in the salvific process of redemption in Christ, the sanctuary moved to heaven to reach still unachieved goals in the plan of salvation at the cosmic level of the great controversy (Heb 1:13; 2:8; 1 Cor 15:23-28).

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<sup>61</sup> That Christ’s incarnation follows the type or pattern of divine dwelling in the Old Testament sanctuary seems suggested by John description of the incarnation as a tabernacling (*εσκήνωσεν*) of God with men.

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Through the covenant, God creates a people out of the world (Gen 12:1-3) to restore in them the perfect design of creation the world lost through sin (Jer 31:33). God initiates His redemptive restoration of the world by working with and for His chosen people in the historical flow of everyday life. In the covenant, God relates to His people through commands and promises (Gen 12:1). The covenant is the living historical relationship between God and human beings that requires the sanctuary setting to articulate the living historical relations of God with His people.<sup>62</sup> By dwelling in the Old Testament sanctuary, God brings about His covenantal relation with his people and fulfills His promises to them.

We can liken the inner relationship between the covenant and the sanctuary to marriage. Marriage is the binding of a man's and a woman's lives and destinies forever. Yet, to share a common life, the married couple needs a home. We can liken the marriage vows to sharing a common life in the covenant. In the covenant, God and the people commit themselves to share a common life. The sanctuary is the place from where that common life takes place.

Covenant and sanctuary belong together. They correspond and complement each other as aspects of the same historical process of redemption God accomplishes in history. The sanctuary without the covenant is empty. The covenant without the sanctuary is blind. The covenant is the content of the sanctuary. The sanctuary gives historical structure and precision to the covenant relationship. In this sense, they become the immediate contexts from which God relates to His people and brings about historically the salvation of the world.

If God is analogically temporal, we should understand His works in the sequential order presented in scripture. God operates the works of salvation not by unleashing the full force of His omnipotence, but from within the limitations of created time and space. In scripture, this progression takes place within the divinely established parameters articulated in the sanctuary-covenant structure.<sup>63</sup> If we use the sanctuary-

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<sup>62</sup> In the book of Exodus, God renews His covenant with Israel after the golden calf rebellion in chapter 34. In chapter 35, Moses asks the people to contribute materials for building the sanctuary. Chapters 36-39 describe the building of all the components, furniture, and ritual clothing required in the sanctuary service. In chapter 40 the sanctuary is assembled, inaugurated, and filled with the presence of God.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, there is an "old" covenant that corresponds to the "old" sanctuary. Likewise, there is a "new" covenant that corresponds to the "new" sanctuary. Why is there something "old" that passes away and something "new" that replaces it? Because in eternity God decided He will secure salvation for humankind and the universe through a

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covenant relational structure as key to understanding divine redemptive activities through past and future histories—historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation—we will arrive at the great controversy metanarrative biblical authors assume when thinking and writing theologically.

As biblical metanarrative, the great controversy is the hermeneutical principle of articulation in Biblical Adventist theology. This fundamental interpretive choice sets Biblical Adventism apart from all classical and postmodern systems of Christian theologies. Biblical Adventism does not articulate biblical teachings and Christian doctrines using the hierarchical metaphysics of classical times, the evolutionistic understanding of history of modern times, or any postmodern metanarrative that philosophers or scientists may generate to explain the philosophical question about the “whole and the part,” the “one and the many.” Instead, Biblical Adventism uses the great controversy metanarrative it finds in scripture.

Clearly, the commitment to the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle calls for a biblical interpretation of all hermeneutical principles that Christian theologians continue to draw from various schools of human philosophy. Yet, can we actually engage in such a radical departure from all theological tradition? Would not such a move leave us outside of the realm of scholarly research and university questioning? Can we shape our theological *apriori* from scripture in postmodern times?

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complex historical process. The Trinity is involved in several divine activities *ad extra* that sanctuary-covenant structure explains and articulates. The major grounding piece on which the whole plan of salvation as historical process stands is the fulfillment of the covenant promise of divine personal historical intervention in the controversy between good and evil, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Later on, in another historical setting, God gave the same promise to Abram: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). Paul understood that this promise spoke about Christ (Gal 3:8). In Gal 3:16, he shows that the *seed* of which Genesis (13:15-16; 17:7-8) speaks refers not only to the historical descendants of Abraham, but also to Christ. Connecting the seed with Christ’s future sacrifice on the cross goes back to the promise about the victory of the seed of the woman over the seed of Satan in Genesis 3:15. Thus, the movement from the old to the new is part of the historical design of divine predestination. Both sanctuary and covenant find their ground in the historical fulfillment of God’s promise of the victory of the seed of the woman and in his providing Himself a substitute for sinners other than animals. God’s test of Abram’s faith—by asking him to offer his only son Isaac—further explains the nature of the blessing God had in mind. God prevented Isaac’s death by providing a ram as substitute (Gen 22:13). Abraham, however, understood the entire experience as a promise of future personal divine intervention. “Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, ‘In the mount of the Lord it will be provided’” (Gen 22:14 NAB).

**12. Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Theological *Apriori***

To answer the questions enunciated at the end of our previous section, we need to relate our study on theological pluralism in Adventism to the “nature” and power of reason. Arguably, theological method is the orderly organization and operation of human reason to reach specific cognitive goals. Changes in the philosophical interpretation of reason and its role in the generation of philosophical and scientific discourses brought about the modern and postmodern eras in the development of western culture.

Modernism understood reason to reach spatio-temporal objects and to function historically. However, modern philosophers still clung to the classical ideal according to which reason produces absolute universally valid results disconnected from the historical circumstances in which all human beings live. By disconnecting itself from history, reason became “objective.” However, with the passing of time, philosophers concluded that reason’s products are also historical and therefore shaped by the actual contents we acquire through life experiences. From this, an unavoidable conclusion followed. Western civilization had overemphasized the powers of reason since its earliest beginnings. We have come to know the conviction that reason does not produce absolute but rather relative results under the ubiquitous label of “postmodernity.”

The reason for this scientific conviction came from the realization that reason assumes presuppositions that work hermeneutically. That is to say, knowledge we have gained in the past opens to view the meaning of things we know in the present. The same dynamic applies to scientific work and scholarly theology. Knowledge is not absolute not because postmodernity affirms the sheer subjectivity of meaning. It is true that books about postmodernity describe postmodernity as advancing wild subjectivism and radical pluralism. This popular picture will soon fade away, at least in scientific and philosophical circles. Epistemologically speaking, postmodernity still maintains objective knowledge. What is new is the notion that the categories reason needs to produce meanings originate from the historical nature of human beings and their historical experiences. Thus, we can look at the same object from different categories that produce different understandings (relative to the category employed by each subject). Conversely, classical thought and modernity believed that all human beings had the same categories from which to understand objects. Hence, reason was capable of producing absolute meanings valid for all human beings in all cultures and times. Postmodern reason is hermeneutical reason. This means that all knowledge is an

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interpretation that requires careful selection of the presuppositions with which we approach our scholarly enterprise.

Applied to theological method, this means that modern theology expected to produce one absolute truth all rational persons were supposed to accept unless they did not mind the “irrational” or “intellectually dishonest” labels. A modern frame of mind seems to operate in Adventism. Scholars from the various sectors of the church assume that there is only one way to do scholarly theology. Evangelical and Progressive Adventists think that the theological and academic communities outside of Adventism express that “one” scholarly way of doing theology in an “intellectually honest way.”

The notion that knowledge is interpretation produced with the presuppositions we bring to the objects we attempt to understand may help us understand the genesis of theological pluralism in Adventism and in the broader world of Christian theology. Variations in Bible interpretation and doctrinal construction generate directly from the way we choose to define our theological *apriori*. In other words, there is not one but many equally “rational” ways to define any condition of the theological *apriori*.

In this context, overcoming present theological pluralism in Adventism by finishing the unfinished theological task of the pioneers becomes possible. There are many rational and coherent theological projects. All scholarly theological projects should explain and justify clearly the way in which they interpret and apply the conditions of theological methodology. No theological project, however, can claim universal assent from all human beings due to its *rationality*. Yet, a biblical theological project such as we are proposing can claim universal assent from all human beings due to its *revelational* origin.

### **13. The Nature of Adventist Theological Pluralism**

About fifteen years ago, I participated in a committee studying the coordination of theological training in Adventist Universities in North America and Canada. In the middle of the conversation, somebody said that Adventism was a pluralistic community. What did my colleague mean? He answered my question with an example. For him pluralism was divergence on the application of church policy. For instance, in some parts of the world married couples wear wedding bands, in other parts they do not. He was right—at this level there is and will be pluralism in Adventism.



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Diversity of views at the application level is not divisive but part of the dynamic life of the church. Moreover, diversity in the application of theological teachings and church policy does not lead to theological diversity. Instead, it assumes theological agreement. Hence, to describe non-divisive differences at the level of application of doctrines, I prefer the term “diversity” and reserve the word “pluralism” to describe divisive diversity at the level of the conditions of theological method.

Fifteen years later, I am convinced that there is divisive theological pluralism in Adventism.<sup>64</sup> Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms did not originate from a better application of the same theological data and method followed by early Adventist thinkers. Instead, they originated because explicitly or *implicitly* they work from different interpretations of the conditions of theological method. Differences in theological method explain differences in theological system and practice. A theological system follows an order or inner logic that flows from the principle of articulation chosen as guiding hermeneutical light.

As explained in the first article of this series, Evangelical Adventism works from the Protestant interpretation of the principle of articulation. Justification by faith is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. It not only explains the doctrine of salvation but also becomes the light from which theologians construct the inner logic or order of the system of Christian theology.

Progressive Adventism works from the modern interpretation of the principle of articulation. Evolutionary theory not only explains biological and human histories, but it also becomes the light from which theologians construct the inner logic or order of the system of Christian theology.

Adventist theology works from the biblical interpretation of the principle of articulation. The sanctuary doctrine as the key to the great controversy metanarrative not only explains the way in which God operates in the history of salvation, but also becomes the light from which Biblical Adventist theologians construct the inner logic or order of the system of Christian theology.

The principle of articulation, however, is only the guiding light working from within the entire constellation of activities and conditions of theological method. The material condition where theologians discuss and interpret the sources of Christian theology plays a grounding role. From it, theologians derive their views on the hermeneutical conditions

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<sup>64</sup> For an introduction to the historical development of theological pluralism in Adventism, see the first article of this series.

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of method and the guiding light of theological thinking. We can trace the source of Adventist theological divisions back to the material condition of method. Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms spring their views from the plurality of theological sources conviction they *implicitly* borrow from Roman and Protestant theologies. This borrowing has taken place slowly through a long process of doing “piggyback” theology. That is to say, by doing theology on the shoulders of Protestant and Evangelical theologians. Thus, Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms are not “original” theologies but a rehashing of the Evangelical and modern theological systems.

Theological pluralism in Adventism is divisive because it stems from various and opposite interpretations of the same conditions of theological method. Differences in hermeneutical vision generate incompatible theological systems that, in turn, shape incompatible religious communities involving incompatible ways to worship, minister, and live the Christian life. This situation endangers the unity, mission, and future of Adventism. Can Adventism as a worldwide ecclesiastical institution harboring incompatible theologies survive? Can a house divided against itself stand (Mark 3:25)?

#### **14. Overcoming Theological Pluralism**

Adventist pioneers organized the Adventist Church for theological reasons. Adventist believers came out of many denominations because their biblically generated theological views were unacceptable to their communities of faith. Their theology united them and gave them a sense of mission so strong that in one and a half centuries they spread to virtually all the nations around the world. Yet, as we outlined in the first article of this series,<sup>65</sup> at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Adventist theology is divided. There is theological pluralism in Adventism. As we showed in the previous sections of this article, divisions are not about minor nuances in obscure matters of biblical interpretation, nor have they originated in the various ways Adventists have understood and applied some ambiguous lifestyle issues. On the contrary, divisions are about foundational methodological issues that affect the entire theology, ministry, and mission of the church. Theological divisions in Adventism are so deep that there is no common theological ground to speak about diversity

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<sup>65</sup> “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part I: Historical Review,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/2 (2005): 5-39.

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from a common theological perspective. How should Adventism deal with theological pluralism?

One way to deal with theological pluralism in the church is to accept it as an unavoidable, unmovable, unchangeable, unchallengeable fact. When the community accepts this way of dealing with theological pluralism, it will design ways to minimize the role of theology (where the differences lie) and maximize the role of the Holy Spirit and love. What is important is love and acceptance, not theological unity. The community can stand united in the Spirit and divided theologically, this option assumes. Evangelical and Progressive Adventists conscious of their theological disagreements with traditional Adventist teachings but still desiring to remain in the Adventist community propose this solution. Unity does not follow from theological agreement, but from the work of the Spirit who creates accepting and all-inclusive love.<sup>66</sup>

Over a year ago, after a presentation on the consequences of adopting evolutionary theory for Adventism to a selected audience of Adventist international leadership, a group of Progressive Adventists came to dialogue. We knew our theological views were incompatible. In a conversation a few minutes earlier, one of them frankly said my views on creation were wrong. Likewise, I told him his views on evolution were wrong. Their interest was not theological but practical. Would I accept in the Adventist community brothers and sisters that believed in evolution? Obviously, they were “testing” my love level, not my theological views. The implication was, if we cannot agree theologically, we can unite in love. My answer was, love must lead us to talk among ourselves and reach theological agreement based on scripture, one common understanding of truth. Can we survive on love while broadly divided in theology? Can we survive based on the sole strength of a worldwide ecclesiastical institution? Can a house divided against itself stand (Mark 3:25)? I think not. Our survival, identity, unity, and mission revolve around the understanding of biblical truth. Adventism needs to strive for theological

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<sup>66</sup> On this issue, see Richard Rice arguing the community is the work of the Spirit in *Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Finding New Love for the Church* (Roseville: Association of Adventist Forums, 2002), 24-32. Rice is dealing with the irrelevance of the church to young Adventists. To make the church relevant to them, we should make community primary to doctrine and behaving (ibidem, 62). It is true that the “Spirit creates community” (ibidem 28). Yet, it does not first create community (belonging) and then lead it to theological understanding (belief) and everyday life (behaving). Instead, the Spirit works through the believing (theological understanding) to create a community (belonging) that testifies through a life lived according to what they believe.

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unity. It needs to use the sanctuary vision to discover the complete and harmonious system of biblical truth in the development of its own scholarly approach to Christian theology. Postmodernity has shown that there is not one but many rationally and methodologically viable theological projects. Therefore, Adventism does not need to accept the methods and assumptions generally accepted in Christian tradition and scholarship. Instead, it needs to challenge them and build its own approach to biblical, systematic and fundamental theologies from the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle.

Could Adventism overcome its present theological divisions theologically? Or, is Adventism facing a situation where moving into the scholarly arena necessarily requires it to abandon early Adventist thinking because it clearly shows its inadequacy and broad departure from truth? Must Adventism accept theological pluralism for intellectual or theological reasons? In short, are Evangelical and Progressive Adventists right in their claims that we should confess the theological errors of our ancestors, the foolishness of the “remnant church” claim, and their plea for a theological Adventist aggiornamento?<sup>67</sup>

Adventism can overcome present theological divisions theologically. Only a full understanding of the richness, depth, and inner logic of Christianity in the light of scripture will dispel theological pluralism in Adventism. The same understanding will attract many outside secular-minded persons unsatisfied with modern and postmodern versions of Christianity. Moreover, there are no rational or scholarly reasons that compel Adventists to accept the views of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists. Their claims that we should confess the theological errors of our ancestors, the foolishness of the “remnant church” stand on methodological and hermeneutical interpretations based on science and philosophy. Besides, as we have seen in section 10, postmodernity stresses differences,<sup>68</sup> not sameness.<sup>69</sup> No longer does rationality validate only “one” (sameness) approach to scholarly theology that one must accept to maintain

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<sup>67</sup> “Aggiornamento” is an Italian word that became part of theological jargon in relation to the reason for the convocation of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council. It means the process of bringing an institution or organization up to date; modernization, updating.

<sup>68</sup> Jaques Derrida speaks of “*différance*” as the condition of the possibility of differences and oppositions that take place in language and historical reality. For an introduction to Derrida’s notion of “*différance*,” see, for instance, John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jaques Derrida* (New York: Fordham UP, 1997), 96-105. Clearly, Derrida’s “*différance*” stands on a temporal conception of reality.

<sup>69</sup> “Sameness” of reality and meaning flows from a timeless understanding of reality.

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intellectual honesty. Instead, there are many scholarly viable theological projects. Postmodernity recognizes the historical fact that there are many theological projects in Christian theology claiming to portray accurately the meaning of Christianity. Since postmodernity recognizes the limitations of human reason to produce one absolute universally binding view of reality, all theological projects become alternate projects in competition with each other.

There is no need for an “aggiornamento” of biblical theology in the sense that we should adapt it to the ever-changing patterns of human science and philosophy. Yet, Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms have shown the need for theological coherence and progress in theological understanding that unfortunately have been frequently absent in Biblical Adventism. Thus, there is a need for a scholarly development of Biblical Adventism. I am thinking in an Adventism that thinks with the times but in the light of scripture. This movement is already underway, but needs to find its ground in the area of fundamental theology and its expression in the area of systematic theology. For instance, in the area of biblical studies, we find publications by Gerhard Hasel,<sup>70</sup> Richard Davidson,<sup>71</sup> Jacques Doukhan,<sup>72</sup> and Jon Paulien;<sup>73</sup> in systematic theology, by Hans

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<sup>70</sup> *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); and *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glossolalia* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1991).

<sup>71</sup> *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τυπος Structures* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1981); and *A Love Song for the Sabbath* (Washington: Review and Herald, c1988).

<sup>72</sup> *Le cri du ciel: etude prophétique sur le livre de l'Apocalypse* (Dammarie les Lys: Editions Vie et Santé, c1966); *Boire aux sources* (Dammarie les Lys: Éditions SDT, 1977); *The Genesis Creation Story* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1978); *Aux portes de l'esperance: essai biblique sur les prophéties de la fin* (Demmarie les Lys: Editions Vie et Santé, c1983); *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, c1987); *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000); Jacques Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002); and, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:1-12* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1988); *The Book of Revelation: Too Good to be False!* (Washington: Review and Herald, c1990); *John: Jesus Gives Life to a New Generation*, ed. George R. Knight (Boise: Pacific Press, 1995); *Knowing God in the Real World; How To Have an Authentic Faith in a Faithless Society* (Nampa: Pacific Press,

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La Rondelle,<sup>74</sup> Norman Gulley,<sup>75</sup> Miroslav Kis,<sup>76</sup> and John Baldwin;<sup>77</sup> and in fundamental theology, by Norman Gulley,<sup>78</sup> Raul Kerbs,<sup>79</sup> and the Biblical Research Institute.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, will doing theology and ministry in harmony with the methodological patterns of the academic community generate identity, unity and growth in the Adventist community around the world? The answer to this question is “no.” Philosophy and the sciences are changing and fragmenting lights. To adopt them as hermeneutical guides will further fragment and divide Adventist thought and community. The fading sense of identity will fade even faster. Instead of growth, larger groups of Adventists will follow the logical consequences of their culture-accommodating theologies. As the fathers adopt the theological projects of other Christian communities, the children will join them in increasing numbers. The motivation for evangelism will decrease, along with the

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2001); *The Millennium Bug: Is this the End of the World as We Know it?* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999); and, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000); *The Day that Changed the World: Seeking God after September 11* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, c2002); and, *John: The Beloved Gospel* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> *Christ our Salvation: What God Does For Us and In Us* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1980); *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs: First Impressions, 1983); *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota: First Impressions, c1997); and, *Assurance of Salvation* (Nampa: Pacific Press, c1999).

<sup>75</sup> *Final Events on Planet Earth* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1977); *Christ our Substitute* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1982); *Christ our Refuge: Making It Safely Through the Last Days* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1996); and, *Christ is Coming: A Christ-centered Approach to Last-day Events* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1998).

<sup>76</sup> *Follow Me: How to Walk with Jesus Every Day* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> Raúl Kerbs, “Sobre el desarrollo de la hermenéutica,” *Analogía Filosófica*, 2 (1999): 3-33; “El problema fe-razón (1),” *Enfoques* 12/1 (2000): 105-125; “Las parábolas bíblicas en la hermenéutica filosófica de Paul Ricoeur,” *Ideas y Valores*, 113 (2000): 3-27; “Una interpretación sobre el origen de la articulación de la desmitologización (interna y externa) y la restauración de los mitos en Paul Ricoeur,” *Logos* 29/86 (2001): 57-84; “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte 1),” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 105-123; “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte II),” *DavarLogos* 2/1 (2003): 11-27.

<sup>80</sup> George W. Reid, *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, 2005).

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monies donated for such purposes. Adventism will join the Charismatic and Ecumenical movement.

This scenario does not need to happen. There is another way, a better way, the biblical way. Thinking theologically in the light of scripture will overcome theological pluralism originating from thinking theologically in the light of science, philosophy, and culture. The Adventist church is not compelled to embrace the latter or the pluralism it originates. Yet, if the theological enterprise does not play a central role in the life of the community, seminaries, universities, and administrations, theological pluralism will continue to thrive in Adventism. Further theological divisions and fragmentations will lead many to theological cynicism and abandoning the church. Those who remain will feel pressed from many angles to embrace a progressive Protestantization and Charismatization of Adventism. If this scenario happens, Adventism will evolve into an altogether different religious community with little or no theological connection with its historical roots.

In contrast, expanding beyond biblical theology to fundamental and systematic theologies become necessary tools as present and future generations of theologians attempt to finish the unfinished task of Adventist theology. By interpreting the hermeneutical principles of scholarly theology in the light of scripture, Biblical Adventism will uncover the inner logic of scripture and probe even deeper and farther than the early pioneers and Ellen White ever did into the treasure house of scriptural truth.<sup>81</sup> As the harmonious and complete system of biblical truth begin to permeate the thinking, life, and imagination of the church, a new and firmer sense of identity as remnant will become evident and explicit in worldwide Adventism. As theologians, pastors, and administrators unite in the task of further understanding, applying, and disseminating the theological understanding of biblical truth, the Holy Spirit will generate the inner conviction of the mind and involve laity in the final mission

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<sup>81</sup> This notion of incompleteness seems implied in Ellen White's thought. Consider, for instance, the following statement. "If our youth are seeking to educate themselves to be workers in His cause, they should learn the way of the Lord, and live by every word that proceedeth out of His mouth. They are not to make up their minds *that the whole truth has been unfolded, and that the Infinite One has no more light for His people.* If they entrench themselves in the belief that the whole truth has been revealed, they will be in danger of discarding precious jewels of truth that shall be discovered as men turn their attention to the searching of the rich mine of God's word" (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work* [Washington: Review and Herald, 1938], 32-33).

before the coming of the Lord. In this way, Adventism will overcome theological pluralism.

### 15. Thinking in the Light of Scripture

Overcoming theological pluralism, then, requires finishing the unfinished task of Adventist theology. Can Adventist theologians finish the theological task in the scholarly realm of university research? Can Adventism use the sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision from which to discover and formulate a harmonious and complete system of truth in the scholarly arena? The answer to these questions is yes, they can. However, they cannot do it from within the theological discipline of biblical theology. They also need the contributions of systematic and fundamental theologies, two broad theological areas in which Adventist theology is virtually non-existent.<sup>82</sup> So far, Biblical Adventism has developed mainly within the scholarly discipline of biblical theology. However, we can appreciate better its main contributions and revolutionary nature in the areas of fundamental and systematic theologies. I am not speaking of borrowing from existent approaches of past and present scholarship. Such an approach is already well underway in Evangelical and Progressive Adventism.

Let us turn our attention to another related question. Can we finish in postmodern times the unfinished intuition of a theological system early pioneers and Ellen White formulated over a century ago? The answer to this question is also yes. Postmodernity opens the possibility and shows the reason why a biblical approach to theological methodology and hermeneutics is acceptable as scholarship.<sup>83</sup> Modernity believed that there was only one way to truth. Anything deviating from it fell outside of truth or was unacceptable scholarship. Postmodernity, instead, has convincingly shown that, as David Tracy put it, “to understand at all is to

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<sup>82</sup> There is a small and welcome beginning in these areas. Norman Gulley is doing pioneer work in the area of systematic theology; see his *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003). In the area of fundamental theology, Fritz Guy's *Thinking Theologically* and Richard Rice's *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (Riverside: La Sierra UP, 1991) are pioneer works. They do not work within the same methodological convictions. While Norman Gulley works within the methodological parameters of Biblical Adventism, Fritz Guy and Richard Rice work within the methodological parameters of Progressive Adventism. Thus, their works do not contribute to the development of the biblical approach to fundamental theology I am suggesting here.

<sup>83</sup> See the section on Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Theological *Apriori*.



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interpret.”<sup>84</sup> As with our scientific and philosophical knowledge, our scientific knowledge is as good as the presuppositions on which we build it.<sup>85</sup> Thus, to deconstruct and reinterpret the hermeneutical structure of theology is an acceptable scholarly enterprise. Biblical Adventism has the opportunity to express the sanctuary doctrine vision and the great controversy metanarrative that it opens to view in the scholarly arena of hermeneutical presuppositions of theological method. Additionally, we have also mentioned in passing that postmodernity has turned from a timeless understanding of reality as “metaphysics” to a temporal understanding of reality as “metanarrative.”<sup>86</sup> The historical approach to theology implicit in the sanctuary doctrine and great controversy metanarrative fits the postmodern historical turn.<sup>87</sup> It also makes much more sense to common experience than classical and modern approaches to Christian theology.<sup>88</sup>

To overcome theological pluralism, then, Adventism needs to finish the theological thinking early generations left unfinished. To finish the task of Biblical Adventist theology, Adventism needs to think in the light of scripture within the scholarly context and facing the conditions of postmodern times. What does it take to think in the light of scripture?

We have noticed that theological method is a complex structure, including repetitive procedures and conditions that different theological traditions interpret in diverse and even conflicting ways. Additionally, in this article we have become aware that philosophy and science have shaped the hermeneutical light guiding the theological vision of classical,

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<sup>84</sup> *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 9. For an introduction to the task of theological interpretation, see, for instance, James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> This is a major feature of scientific method. See, for instance, Fernando Canale, “Evolution, Theology and Method Part I: Outline and Limits of Scientific Methodology,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41/1 (2003): 65-100; and a major component in Thomas S. Kuhn’s, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970).

<sup>86</sup> See above, footnote 53.

<sup>87</sup> The appreciation of history began in modern times. Its completion brought about a transition age we call “postmodernity.”

<sup>88</sup> Clark H. Pinnock make this point in defense of the openview of God, see, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 154. The openview of God also assumes the historicity of divine activity. Unfortunately, open view theologians continue to define other conditions of method in the classical way (ibidem, 19-24).

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modern, and postmodern theologians. The guiding light of these systems is the notion that God's reality exists and His actions take place in a dimension of reality where space and time do not exist (principle of reality). While theology takes place in the spiritual (timeless spaceless reality), our lives transpire in the spatiotemporal realm. On this assumption, the sanctuary doctrine cannot open to view the great controversy metanarrative from which to discover a complete and harmonious system of truth. Instead, the sanctuary and the great controversy are metaphors about God's eternal timeless actions. Greek metaphysics replaces biblical metanarrative.

Conversely, we have underlined that Biblical Adventism assumes the biblical understanding of reality. God's reality is not timeless but analogically temporal. His life does not take place in total simultaneity (*totum simul*), but He has a history independent from creation. Moreover, God is able to act within the limitations and flow of created spatiotemporal reality. From this assumption, biblical metanarrative replaces Greek metaphysics. Thus, the sanctuary doctrine becomes the light guiding the vision of Adventist theologians. Thinking in the light of scripture, then, requires defining all the conditions of theological method from scripture. Consequently, it means to think historically (principle of reality) from the light of the sanctuary doctrine and great controversy (principle of articulation). This perfectly fits another pillar of early Adventist belief, the biblical teaching that humans are not souls but historical beings, whose existence takes place only in space and time. Biblical cosmology (principle of reality) stands on God's perfect design for creation, which He brought about in a closely-knit seven days historical process. Biblical epistemology stands on the revelation-inspiration process that originated scripture as sole source of theological data. Not surprisingly, biblical thinking (hermeneutics) follows a historical pattern where present actions find their meaning in the context of God's past marvelous deeds (history) and prophesied future actions (promises and eschatological future).

The philosophical and biblical visions for Christian theology are antithetical. Thinking in the light of scripture, then, requires a radical paradigm shift in the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology. Early Adventist theology, formulated from the sanctuary doctrine-great controversy metanarrative, implicitly assumed this paradigm shift at the hermeneutical level of theological interpretation and construction. They gave us the vision and an unfinished theological task we need to finish at the scholarly level of academic research.

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Biblical Adventism cannot follow the philosophical vision of Christian theology without ceasing to be faithful to the *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle. Consequently, Adventism must start “from scratch.” As Husserl and Heidegger used to say, we need to start “from the things themselves.” In the case of Adventist theology, we must start from scripture to uncover the biblical explicit or implicit interpretation of the conditions of theological method with special emphasis in the hermeneutical principles from which the vision for theological thinking flows. These studies provide the necessary scholarly platform from which to develop the scholarly methods for biblical and systematic theology. Then, Adventism will be able to develop a biblical (Adventist) approach to biblical theology, as Gerhard Hasel proposed,<sup>89</sup> and a biblical systematic theology as well. At this point, the need for an interdisciplinary approach to Adventist theology shows up.<sup>90</sup> For instance, an interdisciplinary methodology is required to answer questions such as, for instance, how do we relate the findings of biblical and systematic theologies? How are they corrective of each other? How do they contribute to each other functioning?

#### 16. Summary

Before drawing some conclusions, a brief review may help us to connect the main points we have explored in this article. We started by recognizing the role that philosophy plays in theological hermeneutics and suggesting that Adventism should address philosophical issues involved in theological hermeneutics from the *sola-tota scriptura* principle. Then, we recognized that theologians need a theological discipline to identify, evaluate, interpret, and formulate the ontological and epistemological assumptions involved in the task of Christian theology. Generally, theologians draw these assumptions from the philosophical and scientific supermarket. Although now, with the advent of postmodernity, theologians are increasingly addressing these issues themselves, they have not yet agreed on a general label for this area of scholarly research. I suggest that the fundamental theology label accurately reflects the importance and role of the theological *apriori* theologians discuss in this

<sup>89</sup> See Fernando Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part II," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16/1-2 (2005): 129-133.

<sup>90</sup> For an introduction to interdisciplinary methodology, see, for instance, Fernando Canale, "Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43/3 (2001): 366-389.

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portance and role of the theological *apriori* theologians discuss in this field of research.

We surveyed the theological *apriori* that includes a complex web of methodological principles. Among them, we found out that a few hermeneutical principles guide biblical interpretation and the articulation of Christian doctrines. Among them, the principle of reality (ontology) and the principle of articulation (metaphysics-metanarrative) play leading roles in theological hermeneutics. Their influence derives from their all-inclusive reach. In other words, their reach includes everything. The principle of reality interprets the reality of God, human beings, and the world. The principle of articulation interprets the way in which these realities articulate as a whole.

Based on the multiplex sources of theology conviction, Christian theology has consistently drawn its interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of theology from philosophy and science. Based on the *sola-tota scriptura* principle as the source of theology, Biblical Adventism requires the deconstruction of the philosophical and scientific interpretations of the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology, and adopts their biblical interpretation. This is what implicitly took place when the sanctuary doctrine opened to the view of early Adventist believers a complete and harmonious system of truth.

Theological pluralism in contemporary Adventism stems from different ways of understanding the hermeneutical principles of theology. Assuming the plurality of theological sources, Evangelical and Progressive Adventisms implicitly draw their understanding of the hermeneutical principles of theology from philosophy and science. Progressive Adventism's push for the acceptance of evolutionary ideas stands out as a clear example of this trend. Evolutionary ideas radically differ from the biblical understanding of the cosmological principle of reality and unleash a paradigm shift in theological interpretation that reaches the entire range of Christian doctrines.

While classical theology understands God's reality as timeless and therefore incompatible with space and time, scripture presents a God who is compatible with space and time and therefore not timeless. The sanctuary doctrine assumes God's direct historical activity in created time and is incompatible with the classical notion of divine timelessness. When divine timelessness is assumed, the sanctuary doctrine as conceived by the Adventist pioneers fades away into metaphorical oblivion. This explains why scholarly models of Christian theology have never

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considered the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary doctrine as a serious option.

We can trace the radical differences that exist between Christian theologies and Biblical Adventism back to the hermeneutical principle of reality from which they flow. The former explicitly adopts the traditional timeless interpretation of God's reality flowing from Greek philosophy via the tradition of the church.<sup>91</sup> The latter implicitly adopts the biblical temporal-historical interpretation of God's reality flowing from scripture.

Changes in the understanding of the principle of reality require changes in the principle of articulation in charge of interpreting the philosophical question of the "whole and the parts." When reality is timeless, metaphysics explains the "whole and the parts." When reality is temporal, metanarratives explain the "whole and the parts." As Biblical Adventism replaced the timeless with the biblical understanding of God's infinite temporality, the sanctuary doctrine helped to understand God's history of salvation as the "great controversy" metanarrative. In turn, the great controversy metanarrative becomes an added hermeneutical guide for biblical interpretation and theological construction.

God brings his eternal plan of salvation to reality through a historical sequence of redemptive acts. In scripture, this redemptive history takes place within the divinely established parameters articulated in the sanctuary-covenant structure. If we use the sanctuary-covenant relational structure as key to divine redemptive activities through past and future histories—historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation—we arrive at the great controversy metanarrative biblical authors assume when thinking and writing theologically. As biblical metanarrative, the great controversy becomes the hermeneutical principle of articulation of Adventist theology. As we make this fundamental interpretive choice, we are in fact departing from all classical and postmodern systems of doing Christian theologies.

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:401-410; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 279-319. The timelessness of God becomes clear when Moltmann explains that in the eschaton "The temporal creation will then become an eternal creation, because all created beings will participate in God's eternity. The spatial creation will then become an omnipresent creation, because all created beings will participate in God's omnipresence. Creation's departure from time into the aeon of glory comes about through the annihilation of death and the raising of the dead. Once death is no more, *there will be no more time either, neither the time of transience nor the time of futurity*" (ibidem, 294).

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Can such a radical departure from Christian tradition be valid scholarship? Schools of theology following the lead of Christian tradition will strongly oppose its scholarly status. However, postmodernity has opened the door for multiple and contradictory scholarly approaches by showing that reason is not able to produce universally valid results. Eventually, scholarship will recognize the existence of multiple contradictory approaches. Thus, many rational and coherent theological projects compete in the scholarly arena. To achieve scholarly status, they must explain and justify clearly the way in which they interpret and apply the conditions of theological methodology. No theological project, however, can claim universal assent from all human beings due to its *rationality*. Yet, a biblical theological project as we are proposing can claim universal assent from all human beings due to its *revelational* origin.

Theological pluralism in Adventism is divisive because it stems from various and opposite interpretations of the same conditions of theological method. Differences in hermeneutical vision generate incompatible theological systems that, in turn, shape incompatible religious communities involving incompatible ways to worship, minister, and live the Christian life. This situation endangers the unity, mission, and future of Adventism.

To accept theological pluralism as an unchangeable fact and expect that the church will stay united by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and communitarian love will displace theological understanding from playing its central role in uniting and energizing the community of faith. It will also further divide the church as philosophical, scientific, and cultural communities continue to produce contradictory teachings to which theologians feel obliged to accommodate. Instead, Adventism should overcome present theological pluralism theologically by expanding theological thinking in the light of scripture. Strong development in the scholarly disciplines of fundamental and systematic theologies should strengthen the progress Biblical Adventism is already making in the area of biblical theology. As this enhanced, deepened, and timely theological understanding is disseminated through seminaries, universities, colleges, academies, schools, and churches around the world, the worldwide church will become united and strongly motivated for missionary action in postmodern times.

### **17. Conclusion**

Adventism's "uniqueness" is theological. Uniqueness means difference. For over a century, Adventists have sought for their "sameness"

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with Evangelical and modern theological projects. Yet, in its essence, Adventism implies a theological revolution not seen in the history of Christian theology since New Testament times. Sadly, that revolution was never completed and subsequently forgotten in the scholarly arena. In the world of academic theology, the Adventist theological project involves a macro hermeneutical shift of monumental proportions.<sup>92</sup>

Moving from a traditional to a biblical interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of Christian theology, Adventist theology challenges tradition at its foundational philosophical level. The repercussions of this paradigm shift reach the entire range of theological disciplines. It changes the rules of the game. It generates a new vision from which to interpret biblical texts and understand Christian doctrines. It produces a new and complete understanding of Christianity. Adventist pioneers saw Christian theology from within this paradigm shift. Ellen White left the best guidelines we have of what they understood from this revolutionary perspective. Yet, they left only an incomplete theological intuition in need of further expansion and formulation.

Through the years, Adventists have forgotten and replaced the biblical sanctuary hermeneutical vision with other visions of human origin. They need to remember the biblical hermeneutical vision and use it as hermeneutical light to finish the unfinished task of Adventist theology at the scholarly level of academic theology.

The task is not easy. It requires changes in the way Adventists do theology. They should realize that the theological intuition early Adventists saw and left unfinished cannot be properly expressed within the disciplinary constraints exegetical methodology places over biblical theology. Consequently, Adventists need to develop systematic and fundamental theologies as theological disciplines to join biblical theology in the search for biblical truth. They should express their hermeneutical vision and interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of theology in a scholarly way. They should present this methodological understanding as

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<sup>92</sup> This does not negate the fact that throughout the history of Christianity, many communities faithful to the *sola scriptura* principle have recognized truths that we also hold dear today. They are antecedents of the same unfinished theological task present day Adventists have inherited from their pioneers. They certainly did not finish the task at the scholarly level. Precisely because the hermeneutical revolution stands on the consistent application of the *sola scriptura* principle, the task of Adventist theology I am proposing should be worked out in the public arena of postmodern scholarship. In this way it will become not only a token of unity and blessing for Adventists, but for all Christians building their beliefs on the same methodological grounds.

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the biblical option competing with other available approaches based on tradition, philosophy, and science. To achieve these goals, Biblical Adventism should concern itself with philosophical disciplines such as ontology and epistemology. They need to show the inner logic (order) of biblical thinking and its external coherence with historical realities and translate it in ontological and epistemological categories and language. They should be able to explain why a departure from tradition, philosophy, and science are essential to Christian theology, faith, and mission. They need to formulate the Adventist theological project not only for Adventists within the church but also for the academic community in general.

Will a new generation of postmodern Adventists spread around the world be able to do scholarly theology in harmony with the sanctuary hermeneutical vision that opened to the view of Ellen White and early Adventists a complete system of truth, complete and harmonious? Would such a vision and the system of theology it brings to view require changes in the practical level of Adventist ministry and mission? Would such a theology generate identity, unity, and growth in the Adventist community around the world? We will explore these questions in the next article.

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## **Did King David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative Theology**

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### **Introduction**

The historical narrative of David’s adultery involving Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12) has often been interpreted as implicating Bathsheba as co-conspirator or at least as partly to blame. For example, Randall Bailey argues at some length that Bathsheba is “a willing and equal partner to the events that transpire”<sup>1</sup>; H. W. Hertzberg suggests a possible element of “feminine flirtation”<sup>2</sup>; and Lillian Klein speaks of “Bathsheba’s complicity in the sexual adventure.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, according to Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “the text seems to imply that Bathsheba asked to be ‘sent for’ and ‘taken.’”<sup>4</sup> Do these interpretations represent the intent of the narrator? How can one decide?

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<sup>1</sup> Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 86.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1964), 309.

<sup>3</sup> Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 56. Cf. idem, “Bathsheba Revealed,” in *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Feminist Companion to the Bible 2/7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 2000), 47–64.

<sup>4</sup> Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “Slingshots, Ships, and Personal Psychosis: Murder, Sexual Intrigue, and Power in the Lives of David and Othello,” in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, Semeia Studies 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 59. Cf. the commentary of Keil and Delitzsch: “In the expression ‘he took her, and she came to him,’ there is no intimation whatever that David brought Bathsheba into his palace through craft or violence, but rather that she came at his request and without any hesitation, and offered no resistance to his desires. Consequently Bathsheba is not to be regarded as free from blame. The very act of bathing in the uncovered court of a

The narrative in 2 Sam 11-12 comprises one of the prime biblical examples of a sophisticated and intricately-written literary masterpiece, calling for careful attention and sensitivity to the inspired narrator's artistic techniques in order for the interpreter to grasp the theological truths highlighted in the narrative. Here I summarize some eighteen lines of evidence that have convinced me—contrary to the common interpretation implicating Bathsheba—that Bathsheba was a victim of “power rape” on the part of David and that the narrator indicts David, not Bathsheba.<sup>5</sup>

### Narrative Analysis of 2 Samuel 11-12

**1. Literary Structure.** Yehuda Radday's literary analysis of 1–2 Samuel reveals a chiasm encompassing each book.<sup>6</sup> David's sin involving Bathsheba (recorded in 2 Sam 11-12) is placed at the chiasmic center of 2 Samuel, just as Saul's failure to destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam 15) forms the chiasmic apex of 1 Samuel. The first half of each book depicts the successful rise to power of Saul and David, respectively; the central chapters of the respective chiasm delineate each king's pivotal moral failure, his “great sin”; and the last half of each book portrays the decline of the respective king as a result of his sin. Thus, 2 Sam 11-12 serves as the fulcrum event in the life of David, tipping him toward his descent from integrity and power. The emphasis within the overall literary structure of 2 Samuel points to David's moral fall as the critical turning point in his life and implicitly lays the blame for this moral fall squarely at his feet.

**2. Historical Context (vv. 1–2).** Already in the introduction to this narrative, the ironic contrast is set forth, with a long sentence about the war—“Now it came to pass in the spring of the year, at the time when

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house in the heart of the city, into which it was possible for any one to look down from the roofs of the houses on higher ground, does not say much for her feminine modesty, even if it was not done with an ulterior purpose, as some commentators suppose” (C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, trans. James Martin, 1872 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], 383).

<sup>5</sup> See especially the following careful narrative analyses which also support this conclusion: Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 144–155; and Moshe Garsiel, “The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 244–262. I am indebted to the insights of Dennis and Garsiel in many of the points that follow.

<sup>6</sup> Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasm in Samuel,” *LB* 9–10/3 (1973): 23; idem, “Chiasmus in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 78–80.

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kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah”—juxtaposed with a short three-Hebrew-word statement about David: “But David remained in Jerusalem.” The Hebrew word order of this last clause emphasizes the subject “David” by placing it first in the clause, instead of the usual order of verb followed by subject, which is roughly equivalent in English to highlighting David’s name with italics. At the time of year when *kings* normally go forth to war, David’s general and his army, yes “all Israel” are risking their lives on the battlefield, but *King David himself* stays home in Jerusalem. The contemporary readers are aware that in the world of the books of Samuel, people expected their king to “go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam 8:19), and they remember that David gained his initial prestige for strong and daring leadership when he went out to battle in contrast to the stay-at-home King Saul (1 Sam 18:19; cf. 2 Sam 5:2). As Meir Sternberg remarks, “It therefore leaps to the eye that this is the first war in which David fails to lead the army in person.”<sup>7</sup> The irony is intensified in v. 2 when, in contrast to the nation fighting at Rabbah, the narrator describes David in relative isolation, “leading a life of idleness in Jerusalem, taking his leisurely siesta, getting up in the evening, and strolling about on his roof.”<sup>8</sup>

**3. Topographic and Architectural Data Illumined by Archaeology (vv. 2,8–10,13).** The archaeological excavations of the city of David have unearthed the Millo (near-vertical retaining wall) probably supporting the royal palace in David’s time,<sup>9</sup> and some remains of David’s royal palace itself may also have been uncovered.<sup>10</sup> The elevated placement of the royal palace makes clear that David would have had a commanding view over the dwellings in the Kidron Valley directly below. (One can still stand atop the “stepped-stone structure” [probably the “Millo” of 2 Sam 5:9] of the city of David and have a clear view into the courtyards of the houses in the modern village of Silwan below—I did, while contemplating this narrative!) The text indicates that Bathsheba’s house was among those dwellings in the valley below the palace (vv. 8–13 repeat five times the necessity of Uriah to “go down” [*yārad*] to his

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<sup>7</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> See 2 Sam 5:6–9. Cf. David Tarler and Jane M. Cahill, “David, City of,” *ABD* 2:55–56; G. J. Waightman, *The Walls of Jerusalem: From the Canaanites to the Mamluks*, Mediterranean Archaeological Supplement 4 (Sydney: Meditarch, 1993), 27–37.

<sup>10</sup> See Eilat Mazar, “Did I Find King David’s Palace?” *BAR* 32/1 (January/February 2006), 16–27, 70.

house from the palace). The architectural reconstructions of the typical Israelite four-room house reveal an open courtyard where household residents probably bathed.<sup>11</sup> All these data combine to make the point that from his rooftop David could have seen a woman bathing without her being deliberately provocative.

**4. The Time of Day (v. 2) and Purpose of Bathing (vv. 2,4).** It is not merely incidental that the narrator mentions the time of day when David sees Bathsheba bathing. It is early evening (the Hebrew narrator punctuates this with deliberateness: *lě'ēt hā'ereb*, literally “to the time of the evening”). Verse 4 makes clear the purpose of Bathsheba’s bathing: she is engaging in a ritual washing, purifying herself from the ritual impurity incurred during her monthly period, as required in Lev 15:19,28.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a description of the four-room house, see Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 486; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 28–35. Regarding the likelihood of Bathsheba’s full-body bath in the courtyard, see, e.g., Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 78: “Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, was taking a full-body bath, possibly in her courtyard, when David, who was on the roof of his house, saw her and liked her (2 Sam 11:2).”

<sup>12</sup> The clause “she [had been] purifying herself [*hitpa'el* ptc. of *qādaš*] from her ritual impurity” is best taken as a parenthetical flashback to v. 2, explaining the purpose of Bathsheba’s bathing as constituting a ritual cleansing from her menstrual period. The narrator clearly marks this as a parenthetical statement by interrupting a whole string of verbal forms indicating narrative flow—*vav* consecutives plus the imperfect—with this abrupt and singular appearance of the participle indicating a state. The parenthetical use of the participle here in v. 4 links grammatically and conceptually with the only other participle found in the sexual encounter scene (vv. 2-5), i.e., the “bathing” of Bathsheba in v. 2, the latter (“she [had been] purifying herself”) clarifying the reason for the former (“bathing”). Versions such as NJPS capture the intent of the Hebrew text of this verse: “David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her—she had just purified herself after her period—and she went back home.” (See also the NIV, NLT, NJB, and ESV for similar translations.) Some modern versions (e.g., NASB) have taken v. 4 to indicate that after Bathsheba had sex with David she engaged in a ritual post-coital purification and then returned to her house (so also, e.g., Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 57, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* [New York: Schocken, 2002], 147). Such an interpretation fails to recognize the narrative clue of the grammatical interruption of verbal narration by a participle denoting state and seems to be based in part on the assumption that since Lev 15:19,28 do not explicitly mention a ritual ablution after a women’s menstrual period is complete, this cannot be what is referred to by the narrative (but “is anachronistically based on later rabbinic law” [ibid.]). However, Jacob Milgrom gives weighty evidence showing that “all statements regarding the duration of impurity [in Leviticus] automatically imply that it is terminated by ablutions” (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 [New York: Double-

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According to the Levitical legislation, a woman was “in her impurity seven days” (v. 19), and the counting of the days ended in the evening (at sunset, the biblical beginning of the next day). Hence, the evening, right after sunset, would be the expected time for a woman completing her menstrual period to engage in the ritual washing. There is no hint of a deliberate ploy on the part of Bathsheba recorded in this part of the narrative. Rather, while Bathsheba was seeking to faithfully discharge the requirements of Torah regarding prescribed ceremonial cleansing from ritual uncleanness, David was lustfully watching her.

**5. David’s Walking Around on the Palace Rooftop (v. 2).** The fact that David is “walking around” (*hitpa’el* of *hālak*, v. 2) and happens to see Bathsheba bathing also implies chance circumstances, not a plot. That David was not stalking Bathsheba specifically is indicated in v. 3, in that he did not know the identity of Bathsheba at the time he saw her bathing and needed to inquire concerning her.

At the same time, David’s strolling about on the palace rooftop at this very time of day may reveal the first deliberate steps in his moral fall. It is not unreasonable to assume that the generally-accepted code of decency in David’s day included the understanding that it was inappropriate to look out from one’s rooftop or upper-story down into the courtyard of a neighbor’s property at this time of day, out of respect for privacy, since this was the normal time for baths to be taken. Still today this is part of an unwritten but strictly-enforced code of ethics prevalent in Middle Eastern culture (that I experienced personally while living in Jerusalem).<sup>13</sup> For David to stroll on his rooftop at this time of day was

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day, 1991], 934). Those who see no connection between Bathsheba’s bathing and her purification after her menstrual period fail to recognize that this otherwise inconsequential detail is actually reserved for this location to establish beyond question that Bathsheba’s pregnancy mentioned in the next verse is due to the sexual impregnation by David that has just occurred. Having just been purified from her monthly period before this sex act, there is no possibility that Bathsheba was pregnant from Uriah her husband. Sternberg notices how “what was previously taken as an objective and impartial recording of external facts now turns into covert indictment” of David, and he also points out an even greater irony: “the very detail that might at first have been interpreted as the sole meritorious feature of David’s act (‘and he did not transgress the laws of menstrual purity’) twists around to condemn him.” (*Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 198.)

<sup>13</sup> For a line of thought similar to mine, see Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 72: “Perhaps it was assumed by etiquette of the time that those on their rooftops looked out but not down, so as to preserve the privacy of others.”

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probably already to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, inviting temptation to impure thoughts and actions.

That David's sin started with lustful looking on his rooftop is made clear later in the narrative when Yahweh decrees judgment upon David for his sin. Nathan predicts the divine punishment of *lex talionis* ("measure for measure" retributive justice): "*Before your very eyes I will take away your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight*" (2 Sam 12:11b, NIV). According to 2 Sam 16:21-22, David's son Absalom rapes his father's wives/concubines on the roof of the king's house. Moshe Garsiel insightfully points out the narrative parallel of David's rooftop lust and his son's rape of David's wives on the same rooftop:

To look at a woman who is bathing and covet her constitutes a deviation from the modesty usual between the sexes (Gen 24:64; Job 31:1), so the narrator invokes the principle of "measure for measure" upon the location where the sin commences. From his roof David sees the woman with whom he later commits adultery, and on that same roof Absalom takes his father's concubines.<sup>14</sup>

The narrator's description of David's walking about on the rooftop of his palace, by sight invading the privacy of his subjects below, also has the effect of putting him "in the position of a despot who is able to survey and choose as he pleases."<sup>15</sup>

**6. The Identity of the Bather (v. 3).** When David inquires as to the identity of the one he has lusted after, he is told by someone, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (v. 3). The information concerning Bathsheba's identity takes on enormous significance when one realizes that *both* Bathsheba's father (Eliam) and husband (Uriah) are listed among the select group of soldiers called David's "Thirty Mighty Men" (2 Sam 23:13,34,39). These men were David's close comrades, "trench-buddies" who had fought together before David was king! Furthermore, Eliam was the son of Ahithophel, David's personal counselor (2 Sam 15:12; 1 Chr 27:33). The question, "Is this not Bathsheba, Eliam's daughter, Uriah's wife?" should have pricked David's conscience and restrained his lust. Recognizing such

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<sup>14</sup> Garsiel, "The Story of David and Bathsheba," 253.

<sup>15</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *King David (II Sam 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)*, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, vol. 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 51.

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intimate ties between David and Bathsheba's husband and father and grandfather, makes the sexual sin of David against Bathsheba all the more audacious and appalling. He took his close friends' wife/daughter/granddaughter!

**7. Accelerated Narrative Tempo (v. 4).** The fast narrative flow of 2 Sam 11:4 depicts David's impulsive succumbing to lust as he "sent messengers, and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her." The string of verbs in this narrative sequence ("saw . . . sent . . . inquired . . . sent . . . took her . . . lay with her") indicates that it is David's initiative throughout, not Bathsheba's. These verbs, as Trevor Dennis puts it,

speak his power, and tell, surely, of his abuse of that and of Bathsheba herself. There is a terrible abruptness and stark quality to his actions. There is no time for speech or conversation, no time for care, and certainly none for love, no time for even courtly etiquette. . . . Bathsheba's verbs in v. 4, by way of contrast, merely describe the setting for those actions of David, and their immediate prelude and aftermath.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, her action of coming to David (v. 4, "she came to him") is in obedient response to the explicit command of her sovereign lord, the king. "Summoned by the king, she must obey."<sup>17</sup> This interpretation is later confirmed by the use of the same expression with reference to her husband Uriah, who, after being summoned by David, obediently "came to him" (2 Sam 11:7). That the authority of David's command was not to be trifled with is also confirmed in the later experience of Uriah: "Uriah's noncompliance with David's suggestions, commands, and manipulations cost him his life."<sup>18</sup> Bathsheba is portrayed as "a powerless woman who was victimized by the conglomeration of David's power, gender, and violence."<sup>19</sup>

**8. Verbs of Initiative Indicating David's Power Rape (v. 4).** Two verbs found at the heart of this action-packed scene have David as their

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<sup>16</sup> Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 148.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim and M. Fulgence Nyengele, "Murder S/He Wrote? A Culture and Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 11–12," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, Semeia Studies 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 114.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 115. So also Kenneth A. Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 234 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1996), 97: "Bathsheba's action is no independent initiative (unlike David's), but the response to a royal command."

subject: David “takes her” and he “lies with her.” The word *lāqah* [“take”] in this context (of sending royal messengers) should probably be understood in the sense of “fetch” (NJB) or “summon”<sup>20</sup> and clearly implies psychological power pressure on the part of David and not voluntary collusion on the part of Bathsheba. According to the text, David sends “messengers” (plural), but the verb *lāqah* [“take”] has a singular masculine subject (“he took her”). Although many modern versions are ambiguous at this point, giving the impression that it was the messengers who “took” Bathsheba to the palace, the Hebrew unambiguously indicates that “he,” i.e., David himself (by means of the messengers, to be sure,) “took” Bathsheba.<sup>21</sup> By using the term *lāqah* [“took”], the narrator clearly implies that “the primary emphasis is on the responsibility of the subject for that act.”<sup>22</sup> David’s “taking” Bathsheba makes him responsible for her coming to him. The whole narrative flow here suggests Bathsheba’s vulnerability once she is inside the palace, yes, even before. As Dennis asks, “Who is there who might protect her from the designs of the king? We are made to feel there is no one.”<sup>23</sup> Irmtraud Fischer elaborates: “If the woman [Bathsheba] were to cry for help, no one would dare force his or her way into the royal chambers to rescue the woman from her rapist!”<sup>24</sup>

The expression “lay with” (*šākab ‘im*) used for the sexual intercourse between David and Bathsheba does not stress the use of overpowering physical brutality on the part of David, as in the case of the terminology used for the rape of Dinah (Gen 34) and Tamar (2 Sam 13).<sup>25</sup> However,

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<sup>20</sup> See P. J. J. S. Els, “לָקַח,” NIDOTTE 2:814, meaning 1 (m), for examples of this common semantic nuance when *lāqah* is used of humans.

<sup>21</sup> While it true that sometimes in Hebrew grammar the use of a Hebrew predicate in the singular does not always call for a singular subject (GKC Par. 145), in this context, the string of masculine singular verbs taking David as the subject are clearly employed by the narrator to point the finger of accusation against the king. As Dennis puts it, “David is the subject of the two verbs at the center of it all, the verbs that matter more than any of the others. He ‘takes her’; he ‘lies with her’. He takes her. He lies with her. That is how the storyteller puts it. In doing so he tells us all we need to know” (*Sarah Laughed*, 145; emphasis his).

<sup>22</sup> Douglas W. Stolt, “לָקַח *lāqah*,” *TDOT* 8:17.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Irmtraud Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel’s Beginnings*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005), 93.

<sup>25</sup> The narrators in Gen 34:2 and 2 Sam 13:14 use the verb plus the direct object (*ōtāh*) “he lay her” rather than the usual indirect object (prepositional phrase *‘immāh*)



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as evidenced in the Pentateuchal legal material (Deut 22:25–27), the term “lay with” employed here can indeed imply rape if the context indicates such. Given the context of (at least psychological) coercion in this passage, the best modern expression to describe David’s action is “power rape,” in which a person in a position of authority abuses that “power” to victimize a subservient and vulnerable person sexually, whether or not the victim appears to give “consent.” David, the king, appointed by God to defend the helpless and vulnerable, becomes a victimizer of the vulnerable. Just as intercourse between an adult and a minor, even a “consenting” minor, is today termed “statutory rape,” so the intercourse between David and his subject Bathsheba (even if Bathsheba, under the psychological pressure of one in power over her, acquiesced to the intercourse) is understood in biblical law, and so presented in this narrative, to be a case of rape—what today we call “power rape,” and the victimizer, not the victim, is held accountable.<sup>26</sup>

**9. Bathsheba’s Response to the Power Rape (v. 4).** The narrator stresses that after the sexual intercourse Bathsheba on her own initiative returned to her house and did not try to stay in the palace (v. 4b); she desired to go back to her status as Uriah’s wife. Her response to David after she knows she is pregnant is a mirror image of what David had done to her: as he sent messengers to fetch her, so now she sends a message to

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“he lay with her” to indicate the brutality of the rape. Here in 2 Sam 11:4 we find the usual indirect object with the prepositional phrase *‘immāh*.

<sup>26</sup> For helpful discussion of sexual abuse of power in the case of David with Bathsheba, and modern counterparts, see Larry W. Spielman, “David’s Abuse of Power,” *WW* 19 (1999): 251–259. Cf. Peter Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women’s Trust* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989), 21 (brackets 25): “any sexual behavior by a man in power within what I define as the forbidden zone [= ‘a condition of relationship in which sexual behavior is prohibited because a man holds in trust the . . . woman’] is inherently exploitive of a woman’s trust. Because he is keeper of that trust, it is the man’s responsibility, no matter what level of provocation or apparent consent by the woman” (italics his). See also Deut 22:25–26, for a situation parallel to that of David with Bathsheba: “But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her [verb *šākab* plus prep. phrase indirect ob. *‘immāh*, just as in 2 Sam 11:4], then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin worthy of death. . . . there was no one to save her.” Deuteronomy 22:25–27 speaks of no one to save the woman who (presumably) cried out in the countryside; the narrative of David and Bathsheba presents a similar situation in which “all Israel” is gone off to war, and Bathsheba, alone without her husband, finds herself coerced by the psychological power of the king, with “no one to save her.”

him that she is pregnant. Dennis shows how by this means the narrator gives to Bathsheba some dignity of her own:

She is doing what David did. She is sending him a message. She is answering his show of power with hers. He asserted his power over her by raping her. She asserts her power over him by conveying to him the words: 'I am pregnant.' . . . To David they [these two words in Hebrew] are devastating. He will never be the same again. On them the plot of his whole story, from 1 Samuel 16 to 1 Kings 2, turns. They are not the triumphant cry of a woman who knows she bears the probable heir to the throne. They are the plain speaking of a woman who has been raped and discarded and who wishes most courageously to make clear to her rapist the consequences of his act.<sup>27</sup>

Bathsheba's response to David, "I am pregnant," far from implicating her as co-conspirator, reveal her as the victim who seeks to hold her rapist responsible for his rape.

**10. David's Continued Use of Royal Power to Summon Uriah (v. 6).** Verse 6 contains only one verb, "send" (*šālah*), and this verb is utilized three times in the verse to describe David's use of kingly power to summon Uriah: "So David sent (*šālah*) to Joab. . . . Send (*šālah*) me Uriah the Hittite. . . . And Joab sent (*šālah*) Uriah to David." The parallel between David's action toward Bathsheba and his actions toward her husband in this same paragraph of the narrative cannot be overlooked. Just as Uriah's wife was sent for, so he is sent for. Just as Uriah is helpless and must do what the king orders, so Bathsheba was constrained by the same power pressure of the king's orders. David's power rape of Bathsheba is paired with his "power murder" of Uriah.

**11. Bathsheba's Response to Word of Uriah's Death (vv. 26–27).** The strong emotive language used to describe Bathsheba's grieving for Uriah when she heard he was killed assures us that she was not co-conspirator with David: she doesn't merely engage in customary "mourning" (*'ēbal*, v. 27) but "wails/laments with loud cries" (*sāpad*, v. 26). The narrator here "uses a strong verb to express her wailing and lamentation, much more heavily freighted with emotion than the one he uses in the next verse of the rites of mourning."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 149.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 151–152. Cf. BDB, 704.

**12. References to Bathsheba and Uriah at the Time of Uriah's Death (v. 26).** The fact that the narrator still here calls her “the wife of Uriah” implies her continued fidelity to her husband, as does the reference to Uriah as “her lord/husband.” By using the term *ba'al* [“lord”] to denote her husband, the narrator intimates that “if Uriah is her ‘lord,’ then David is not.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is important to notice that the narrator carefully avoids using the name of Bathsheba throughout the entire episode of David's sinning, making her character more impersonal, and thus perhaps further conveying the narrator's intention of suggesting that Bathsheba wasn't personally responsible.

**13. Imagery of David's Ruthlessness Regarding Bathsheba (v. 27).** After her mourning rites were passed, according to v. 27 David again sent for Bathsheba and “harvested” her: the Hebrew word *'āsap* (usually used for harvesting a crop or mustering an army)<sup>30</sup> further implies King David's capacity for cold and calculating ruthlessness, which was exercised in his power rape of Bathsheba and subsequent summoning (“harvesting”) of her to the palace.

**14. The Narrator's Explicit Indictment of David, not Bathsheba (v. 27).** In this same verse is a crucial statement of culpability: “The thing that David had done [note—not what David and Bathsheba had done] displeased the Lord.” As Dennis pointedly remarks, “David is here condemned by God, but Bathsheba is not. The most natural way to interpret that is to suppose that Bathsheba has indeed been the innocent party all along, and David's victim, not his co-conspirator.”<sup>31</sup> Those who set forth arguments such as, “She could/should have said no!” are simply not hearing the overriding theological message of the narrative!

**15. Nathan's Parable and Interpretation Indicting David and not Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:1–6).** The parable told by the prophet Nathan to David in the next chapter confirms the conclusion that it is David who is indicted for his victimization of both Bathsheba and Uriah. Nathan equates the “little ewe lamb” with Bathsheba,<sup>32</sup> who had (like the lamb) “lain in the bosom.” Dennis rightly draws the implication: “Now there

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<sup>29</sup> Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 152.

<sup>30</sup> BDB, 62; HALOT, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 152–153.

<sup>32</sup> Dennis (*ibid.*, 154) points to a number of narrative details that confirm this equation. For example, the phrase “lie in his bosom,” referring to the lamb, also has sexual connotations of Bathsheba lying in her husband Uriah's bosom (cf. 2 Sam 12:8; 1 Kgs 1:2; Mic 7:5). Again, the mention of the lamb being like the *bat* [“daughter”] is probably a play on words with the beginning of the name Bathsheba.

can be no doubt left. The lamb in Nathan's parable is an innocent victim. Nothing could be clearer. And that means Bathsheba in ch. 11 was also an innocent victim. Unless, of course, both Nathan and God have seriously misjudged the events!"<sup>33</sup> God and Nathan have not misjudged!

Furthermore, Nathan announces the death of the child conceived from David's intercourse with Bathsheba as divine judgment upon David's sin, not upon the sin of both David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:13–14). Nathan could easily have used the plural pronouns, "The Lord has put away your [plural] sin," implicating both David and Bathsheba, as plural pronouns appear in other biblical passages when the couple are indicted together (e.g., Deut 22:22,24), but consistently throughout this passage Nathan utilizes singular pronouns, referring only to David's sin.

**16. The Honoring of Bathsheba as Progenitor of the Davidic Line (2 Sam 12:24–25).** After David's repentance and forgiveness for his sin, David and Bathsheba had another son, Solomon, and the narrator makes the striking statement that "the Lord loved him" (v. 24). It is the son of Bathsheba, and not another of David's wives, who becomes the divinely-appointed successor to David and part of the ongoing Davidic royal line (1 Kgs 1). Whereas David's part in the sexual encounter incurs sharp rebuke by Yahweh, Bathsheba, by contrast, is blessed by bearing the next king of Israel.

**17. Bathsheba the Faithful One in the Time of Revolt Against David (1 Kgs 1).** Far from being presented as a sinister character throughout the narratives of Samuel-Kings, and therefore to be regarded in character as co-conspirator in this narrative, as some have surmised, Bathsheba is presented by the narrator of Samuel-Kings as consistently faithful to David and the concerns of the kingdom, even when close associates betrayed the king. During the attempt by Adonijah, Solomon's older brother, to usurp the kingship, Bathsheba constitutes one of the few individuals faithful to David in the royal court. Bathsheba, Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and a few others remained faithful when even General Joab and Abiathar the priest sided with Adonijah, and Bathsheba played a decisive role, under the encouragement of Nathan, in motivating David to appoint Solomon as his co-regent before it was too late (1 Kgs 1:11–31). In a later attempt by Adonijah to usurp Solomon's throne, Bathsheba reveals her trusting and forgiving spirit, even willing to ask a favor of her son Solomon on behalf of Adonijah, clearly unaware that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 155.

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this favor (that Adonijah be allowed to marry Abishag) was an attempt by Adonijah to take over Solomon's throne (1Kgs 2:13–22). The conclusion of this episode of the narrative makes apparent that King Solomon did not hold Bathsheba responsible, but rather his conniving half-brother who had taken advantage of Bathsheba's innocent willingness to do a favor even for one who had earlier sought to usurp the throne from her son (1 Kgs 2:23–25). In light of the invariably positive characterization of Bathsheba in other narratives of Samuel-Kings, any suggestion of her complicity in 2 Sam 11 would be inconsistent with the larger canonical context of this narrative.

**18. Bathsheba as Progenitor of the Messiah (Matt 1:6).** Christians may add another piece of evidence regarding the consistently positive characterization of Bathsheba in the biblical canon. Bathsheba is chosen by the evangelist Matthew as one of five women to be included in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>34</sup> She is placed among the honored women in the line of the Messiah!

In light of the evidence presented above, I conclude that Bathsheba was not a sinister character, nor an accomplice in the events described in 2 Sam 11-12, but an innocent victim of power rape on the part of King David. By means of numerous narrative techniques in this literary masterpiece, the narrator communicates powerfully—perhaps more powerfully than the explicit pentateuchal legal prohibitions—the divine indictment against rape, and in particular “power rape” by a person in authority.

**The Narrative of David and Bathsheba in the Adventist Tradition**

Seventh-day Adventist commentators, like many other Christians in the history of interpretation, have not been immune from placing at least part of the blame upon Bathsheba in the narrative of 2 Sam 11-12. For example, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* states: “There is no indication that David's messengers took Bath-sheba by force. Bath-sheba was beautiful, and she was not beyond temptation. Possibly she

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, all of these women were misunderstood, maligned, mistreated, or denigrated in some way: Tamar was wronged by Judah; Rahab was despised as a prostitute; Ruth the Moabitess was seen as a foreigner; Bathsheba has often been accused of seducing David; and Mary was suspected of marital unfaithfulness to Joseph. It is true that David also is included in this genealogy, necessarily so since the Messiah was “the son of David,” but the reference to Bathsheba was not essential to the flow of the genealogy, and thus her inclusion specifically affirms and honors her, along with the other four women so honored.

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was flattered by the overtures made to her by the king, and yielded herself to David without resistance.”<sup>35</sup>

However, there is an exception to this line of Adventist interpretation implicating Bathsheba. Nineteenth-century Adventist interpreter Ellen White, standing over against the prevailing trend of mostly-male interpretations of the Bathsheba-David narrative in her generation, unequivocally points the finger of guilt solely at David, and not Bathsheba, as the one who committed great injustice and sinned against Bathsheba just as surely as he did against Uriah her husband. In her various references to this OT event, White consistently presents the grievous sin of David as *toward* Bathsheba, not *with* her. According to White, Bathsheba is wronged by David, and not one word of condemnation goes toward Bathsheba, who is presented as the victim of David’s great injustice against her. Furthermore, White describes Bathsheba in her later life as David’s wife and Solomon’s mother not as a sinister person, but as one of the faithful remnant in David’s kingdom. Here is a sample of White’s comments on this narrative and her characterization of Bathsheba:

David was made to feel bitterly the fruits of wrongdoing. His sons acted over the sins of which he had been guilty. Amnon committed a great crime. Absalom revenged it by slaying him. Thus was David's sin brought continually to his mind, and he was made to feel the full weight of the *injustice done to Uriah and Bathsheba*.<sup>36</sup>

As time passed on, David's *sin toward Bathsheba* became known, and suspicion was excited that he had planned the death of Uriah.<sup>37</sup>

David had committed a *grievous sin, toward both Uriah and Bathsheba*, and he keenly felt this. But infinitely greater was his sin against God.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The *Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington: Review and Herald, 1954), 2:647.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a (reprint, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), 89; idem, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 1870 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1969), 381 (italics supplied).

<sup>37</sup> Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 720 (italics supplied).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 722 (italics supplied).

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The defection of Ahithophel, the ablest and most wily of political leaders, was prompted by revenge for the family disgrace involved in the *wrong to Bathsheba*, who was his granddaughter.<sup>39</sup>

The rebellion was ripe; the conspirators had assembled at a great feast just without the city to proclaim Adonijah king, when their plans were thwarted by the prompt action of a *few faithful persons*, chief among whom were Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and *Bathsheba the mother of Solomon*.<sup>40</sup>

Ellen White, in harmony with the portrait that has emerged from our close reading of Scripture, clearly implicates David in his grievous sin against the innocent victim Bathsheba.

### **Conclusion**

There are indeed biblical references to women who seduce men and receive divine condemnation (e.g., the “immoral woman” of Prov 1-9) and to women who commit sexually immoral acts together with men and together are indicted by God (e.g., Deut 22:22,24). But the account of Bathsheba is not such a reference. This narrative concerning Bathsheba and King David represents an indictment directed solely against the man and not the woman, against David and all men in positions of power (whether civil or ecclesiastical or academic) who take advantage of their “power” and victimize women sexually. Power rape receives the strongest possible theological condemnation in this narrative.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 735 (italics supplied).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 749 (italics supplied).

## Was Ellen White Confused About Justification?

Thomas A. Davis

Since the Protestant Reformation, the customary position of Protestantism has been that justification is by faith alone, plus nothing. Thus, one prominent Adventist author wrote, approvingly, “Reformers taught that justification was something that God does *for* us not *in* us—a crucial distinction . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Many Seventh-day Adventists stand on this platform. Thus, we have statements such as, “We’re justified only by what Christ did for us, apart from us, outside of us.”<sup>2</sup> Is justification, then, only legal, declarative, forensic? Is there no experiential element?

Many would answer, no, there is not.

Ellen White said, yes, there is, on a number of occasions.

Now, before some throw up their hands in bafflement and exclaim, “But this is rank Catholicism,” let us explore the matter, hopefully with an open, receptive, mind.

Ellen White’s several statements on this subject have caused some puzzlement for those who have considered them. They appear to be at variance with the dominant Protestant position. Some might say they vary even from much that she herself has written on the subject. It has even been suggested that when she wrote them she was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification and did not get her concepts straightened out until she hit on an insight, found in *Messages to Young People*, that she penned in 1895: “Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. . . . The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Goldstein, “By Grace Alone?” *Adventist Review* (June 22, 2000): 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



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is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”<sup>3</sup>

The implication is, then, that when she penned those words she had begun to think of imputation as exclusively legal, and impartation as referring to the changed life of the individual subsequent to justification. She did not confuse the roles of justification and sanctification in her writings from that time on, some hold. But did she really confuse them before this?

It has also been suggested that she could make mistakes, as Nathan was mistaken when he encouraged David to build the temple, only to find the idea vetoed by God. No doubt she could, and did, make similar mistakes. But that would be a case of personal judgment, not of mistaken inspiration, just as Nathan’s mistake was one of personal judgment. And Ellen White observed, regarding her writings: “I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”<sup>4</sup>

As T. Housel Jemison wrote, “Trying to make distinctions, except with everyday experiences and biographical accounts, is dangerous. It involves setting up one’s own judgment as a criterion in place of the clear declaration of the messenger whom he claims to believe is inspired. If the word of the messenger cannot be accepted, then none of the messages should be accepted as being of God.”<sup>5</sup>

Manifestly, Ellen White did refine and more plainly express her ideas as time went on, but she did not change them fundamentally in any way.

Continuing our discussion of justification, we note that in his book, *Messenger of the Lord*, Herbert Douglass posits that as a first rule of interpretation one must embrace the wider context and, “Include all that the prophet has said on the subject under discussion before coming to a conclusion.”<sup>6</sup> Agreeing with this rule, we must therefore include, in our understanding of Ellen White’s view of justification, the quotations under consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Young People* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1930), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:67.

<sup>5</sup> T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1955), 398.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999), 394.

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This being so, it would seem she uses the term justification in two senses. The first usage may be understood in the generally accepted sense of the sinner being declared right, objectively regarded by God as being righteous through Christ's righteousness credited to him.

The grace of Christ is freely to justify the sinner without merit or claim on his part. Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace.<sup>7</sup> "If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Savior, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned."<sup>8</sup>

With this understanding virtually all Christians are in accord.

It is in connection with Ellen White's second usage of justification that problems arise, for here she uses it subjectively, in a way that is not merely attributive but is also experiential.

If you pray in sincerity, surrendering yourself, soul, body, and spirit, unto God, you put on the whole armor of God, and open the soul to the righteousness of Christ; and this alone,—Christ's *imputed* righteousness,—makes you able to stand against the wiles of the devil.<sup>9</sup>

Christ clothed His divinity with humanity, and endured the test upon the point of appetite, ambition, and love of the world, thus making it possible for man to keep the commandments of God through his *imputed* righteousness.<sup>10</sup>

He who obeys the law through the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, meets every claim that the Bible presents; . . .<sup>11</sup>

These are but three of a number of similar statements. These statements merit our consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1973), 107.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1982), 62.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1955), 346; emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* (June 18, 1894), 3:125; emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> October 1, 1894, 3:153; emphasis added.

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As we have noted, much of Protestantism has insisted that justification is an outside-of-you legal arrangement that does nothing for one experientially. But there are some, a growing number, who believe that the nature of the Reformation controversy with Catholicism forced an emphasis that was actually an imbalance of the true meaning of that term. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that Luther himself did not insist on the exclusively legal aspects of justification, as some have held he did.

In his study *Luther on Justification*, Robin A. Leaver wrote that Luther “did not teach that when an individual simply comes to believe that he is justified his salvation is sure, without any reference to the personal presence of the indwelling Christ.”<sup>12</sup> He quotes Luther as writing,

“Among the distinguished teachers there are some who say that forgiveness of sins and justification by grace consist entirely of divine imputation, that is, in God’s accounting it sufficient that he to whom He reckons or does not reckon sin is justified or not justified from his sins by this.” Luther goes on to characterize this as a “horrible, terrible understanding.”<sup>13</sup>

That biblical justification is legal, forensic, no Bible student will deny. In fact, it has to be. To quote Phillips’ paraphrase of Romans 3:20: No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law’s demands—indeed it is the straight-edge of that Law that shows us how crooked we are.” So there is no other way to be justified, except through Christ’s perfections accounted to us. We are justified freely by grace through the blood of Christ (Romans 3:24; 5:9,16). Whatever is ours by grace is always absolutely unearned and undeserved.

We earlier observed that some have suggested that Ellen White was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification at the time she penned the quotations under discussion. But if justification is always only judicial, and the experiential is found only in sanctification, and if imputation always connotes only a legal declaration, Ellen White continued to be confused for some time after she wrote the statement found in *Messages to Young People*. For example, she wrote, in 1896, the Savior “testifies that through His *imputed* righteousness the believing soul shall obey the commandments of God”<sup>14</sup> And in May of

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<sup>12</sup> Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 58.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1896 (3:264); emphasis added.

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the same year she wrote, “Let perfect obedience be rendered to God through the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, . . .”<sup>15</sup> So she hadn’t “caught on” a year later, it appears.

But there is another problem involved with that argument. If Ellen White was herself unclear, naive, in that area, the question arises that is often asked under similar conditions: Can we be sure she was not mistaken in others? At this point all we do is testify to our belief in the inspiration and dependability of the Spirit of Prophecy as manifested in Ellen White’s writings.

In that same year, 1896, her important book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* was published. On page 114 we read,

God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which he sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.

She here uses the term forgiveness, but this must subsume justification, because she wrote, “Pardon [forgiveness] and justification are one and the same thing.”<sup>16</sup> Thus we read, “To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven [justified], but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.”<sup>17</sup>

Of course, this insight of pardon and justification being synonymous is not unique with Ellen White. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*<sup>18</sup> maintains that, in the apostle John’s writings, “the confession of sins that leads to forgiveness seems only another name for the justification that brings peace.” And it states that Paul “rarely uses the term ‘forgiveness,’ but in its place prefers ‘justification.’ They are to his understanding practically synonymous.”<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the notion that justification is always only a legal pronouncement is not in tune with some recent theological thought. The evangelical author John R. W. Stott insists that the teaching that we are justified *in* Christ, “makes it impossible for us to think of justification as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., May 28, 1896 (3:296).

<sup>16</sup> F. D. Nichol, editor, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1070.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 3:190.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromily, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:1171.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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a purely external transaction.”<sup>20</sup> And the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, states that justification is “the *cleansing* and putting on of the new man ‘created in... holiness’ (Eph. 4:24. Emphasis supplied.)”<sup>21</sup> The theologian Joachim Jeremias wrote, “God’s acquittal [justification] is not only forensic, it is not an ‘as if’, . . . It is the beginning of a new life, a new existence, a new creation through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

Returning to Ellen White’s understanding of justification, we note again a statement we quoted earlier—*Steps to Christ*, p. 62—to demonstrate her view. She affirms that if we surrender our lives to Christ, taking Him as our Savior, no matter how sinful we may have been, His character is accepted in place of ours and God sees us as though we had committed no sin. This is forensic justification. But immediately she merges the subjective seamlessly with the forensic:

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the constant surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.<sup>23</sup>

It will generally be agreed that transformation, sanctification, begins simultaneously with justification. But that this transformation *is connected with justification* is the difficulty. For, as we have observed, by many it seems to be settled that the Bible teaches that justification is only accounted.

But is this so? Does the Bible clearly and consistently show that the terms translated by justification or related words are always forensic?

In important respects the answer is a theological, not a linguistic one. And often one’s theology depends on one’s educational bias, philosophy, preconceptions, and spiritual experience. As Frederick Buechner has observed, one’s theology is “essentially autobiography.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1986), 119.

<sup>21</sup> 6:88.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, Willard H. Taylor in *God, Man, and Salvation* (Kansas City: Beacon House, 1977), 399.

<sup>23</sup> *Steps to Christ*, 62-63.

<sup>24</sup> Pastor and novelist Frederick Buechner wrote, in *The Alphabet of Grace* (1970), that “at its heart most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography.”

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So if we ask, “What does the Greek say?” linguistics does not always solve the problem. The answer frequently depends on the person interpreting the Greek. To no small degree the meaning one accepts often depends on one’s theological leanings. This is so in the case of the words associated with justification in the Bible.

An example of theological bias may be seen in the exegesis of the word *katargethe* in Romans 6:6, translated “destroyed” in the KJV. One exegete holds that the word translated to destroy “does not mean to suppress, to weaken, or to render inactive—it means the destruction, the removal, the demolition of something which stands in the way.”<sup>25</sup> Another insists it means “to put out of commission or effect. It is made too strong when it is rendered: to destroy, to annihilate.”<sup>26</sup> Obviously, the theological stance of each expositor influenced his understanding. So it is with the understanding of justification.

The key term in resolving our difficulty with justification is *dikaio-sune*. This word actually has a very wide range of meaning,<sup>27</sup> which tells us its interpretation in a particular text often depends not only on linguistics and context, which do not always resolve the problem, but also, sometimes determinably, on one’s theological bent.

The Greek lexicographers Thayer and Arndt-Gingrich and others inform us that in Paul’s writings *dikaio-sune* refers to character. “In Paul,” says Thayer, it is “the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through the faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ”<sup>28</sup> He defines one of its meanings as “denoting the characteristics of the *dikaio-s*: righteousness, uprightness,” “the characteristics required of men by God.”<sup>29</sup> The Presbyterian theologian A. A. Hodge observes, in connection with Romans 8:3,4, that *dikaio-sune*, righteousness, “is the character of the *dikaio-s* [the

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<sup>25</sup> Donald S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon House, 1971), 143.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1945), 402.

<sup>27</sup> R. V. C. Tasker, ed., Tyndale N.T. Commentaries, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 280, footnote.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 149.

<sup>29</sup> William F. Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957), 195.

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righteous one], that in him which satisfies the law.”<sup>30</sup> The context supports this.

The *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, in its comments on Galatians 2:17,<sup>31</sup> quotes Arndt-Gingrich in reference to sinners being “acquitted, . . . pronounced and treated as righteous [which is legally justified], and thereby become *dikaios* (righteous), [and] *receive* the divine gift of *dikaiosune* (righteousness).” It then goes on to observe,

This reflects the modern swing from a purely forensic understanding . . . (which could, at extremes, resemble legal fiction). . . . [I]t is important to realize that being ‘put right’ with God [being justified] involves a subsequent total change in our moral behavior (though this of itself could never commend us to God.)

He who becomes *dikaios* (righteous) by faith, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains, receives by faith God’s *dikaio-sune* (“the righteousness bestowed by God,”<sup>32</sup>) into his life as the “power and salvation of God.”<sup>33</sup> *dikaiosune*, then, refers to the righteous qualities<sup>34</sup> “the Power of the New Life,”<sup>35</sup> the believer receives with justification.

There is a word in the two preceding quotations that is the key to the resolution of our problem. That word is *power*.

When the thrust of the more than two dozen Spirit of Prophecy quotations are examined—the quotations which refer to righteousness, grace, and power as being *imputed* in justification—an interesting common concept emerges. In each of them the explicit or implicit idea is *empowerment*. “His imputed grace and power he gives to all who receive Him by faith.”<sup>36</sup> “‘Without me ye can do nothing;’ but in him, and through His righteousness *imputed* to us, we may do all things.”<sup>37</sup> “Every true Christian will be strong, not in the strength and merit of his good

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<sup>30</sup> Archibald A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 262.

<sup>31</sup> Tyndale NT Commentaries, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 80-81.

<sup>32</sup> Arndt-Gingrich, 196

<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromily, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 3:171.

<sup>34</sup> Colin Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3: 354.

<sup>35</sup> *TDNT*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> White, *Ms. Release* (Silver Spring: E. G. White Estate, 1996), 6:341.

<sup>37</sup> *Review and Herald*, July 1, 1890, 2:407.

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works, but in the righteousness of Christ, which through faith is *imputed* to him.”<sup>38</sup>

As in creation God “spoke and it was” (Ps. 33:9), so when God pronounces a person justified, it is not only declarative, but dynamic.

The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature, and recreates the soul in the image of God.<sup>39</sup>

“The word of God is . . . dynamic. It is filled with a power which is felt by those who receive it.”<sup>40</sup> “The words of the Lord always had the power appropriate to their particular character, and were effective for their particular purpose.”<sup>41</sup> We earlier quoted J. Jeremias, who averred that scripture is “not a mere word, but it is God’s word that works and creates life. God’s word is always an effective word.”

This, I suggest, is what Ellen White means to convey in her statements in question about imputed justification, and in similar statements in which imputed seems to some to be used in an unusual way.

“Through faith in His name He *imputes* unto us His righteousness, and it becomes a living principle [power] in the life . . .”<sup>42</sup>

Ellen White does not place the concept of “empowering” exclusively with sanctification, for sanctification is possible *only as a result of the empowering*. The empowering must therefore precede sanctification. She couples empowering with justification because the power accompanies justification, it coexists with it, it makes it the dynamic, “effective word.” As light emanates from the sun, that power emanates from justification. Thus, when God declares a person right, it is not simply a legal pronouncement to be recorded in some celestial book which registers a change in status. The declaration, because the Word of God is powerful, produces a change in state. Now, as a result of God’s empowering imputed righteousness, sanctification, as a process, begins immediately. It is initiated by justification. So Ellen White could write, “Justification

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<sup>38</sup> *That I May Know Him* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1964), 150.

<sup>39</sup> *Education* (Mountain View : Pacific Press, 1942), 126.

<sup>40</sup> *TDNT*, 508.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1957), 284.

<sup>42</sup> White, *That I May Know Him*, 302; emphasis supplied.



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means that the conscience, purged from dead works, is placed where it can receive the blessings of sanctification.”<sup>43</sup>

In a definitive study on “Salvation” by Ivan Blazen in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*,<sup>44</sup> we read,

Justification is a far more powerful reality than a mere legal adjustment in the books of heaven. It is a dethroning of the illegitimate authority that prevents a sanctified life, and the establishment of that divine authority that enables it.

Thus, on the basis of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, I accept that frequently, whether in the immediate context Ellen White refers to imputed righteousness (justification or pardon) as judicial or subjective, the other meaning may be understood as intrinsic.

So what do we conclude? That it is indeed by faith alone through grace that God sees us, declares us, accepts us, as righteous. But the result of that declaration is not, cannot be, simply a legal position. Because God’s word is always dynamic, justification carries with it a galvanic spiritual energy that transforms those justified by faith.

Concurring with this, Blazen writes of justification “as the source of sanctified living.”<sup>45</sup>

On the basis of this study we may conclude that justification is not only forensic, judicial, and legal, but also subjective and experiential.

But this fact need not be seen as in some way diminishing the forensic aspect. One of my correspondents, in defending the “outside-of-me” only position, wrote, “The forensic act of the Judge in acquitting me becomes the most fabulous experience in the world, and it can only be that fabulous an experience because it is forensic. I could simply not believe in it, I’d always be doubting it, if it was all staged in me; if it was not the outside-of-me act of the Judge Himself.”

But could not one respond, of the subjective and experiential aspect of justification: I agree totally and without qualification that God’s gracious act in pronouncing me and accounting me utterly innocent in His sight is a fabulous, utterly unmerited act—but is there more?

I am reminded of an account of two footsoldiers in the days of chivalry arguing about the color of the shield of a certain knight. One insisted

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<sup>43</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:908.

<sup>44</sup> Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 294.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

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it was black, the other, white. It turned out one half of his shield was black, the other white.

The Bible makes it clear—and this is abundantly supported by Ellen G. White—that Christians not only rejoice in God’s forgiveness for past sins, but also rejoice in the promise of power to live His new life. Living the Christian life acceptable to God is as impossible for Christians on their own as is erasing the records of their sins from the books of heaven. Both are possible only by the grace of God.

“Be holy, for I am holy,” “pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (1 Peter 1:16; Heb 12:14), are not forensic statements. Whatever definition Christians may have of holiness, it must do with life and living. It is experiential. And to be compatible with Scripture, it must surely include a rectitude of character beyond the scope of man on his own. In the words of Ellen White,

The holiness that God’s word declares [man] must have before he can be saved is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influence of the Spirit of truth.<sup>46</sup>

Holiness is the gift of God through Christ [just as acquittal is the gift of God through Christ] . . . . [Those who are born again] become conformed to His likeness, changed by His Spirit from glory to glory. From cherishing supreme love for self, they come to cherish supreme love for God and for Christ . . .<sup>47</sup>

Our own strength is weakness, but that which God gives is mighty and will make everyone who obtains it more than conquerors.<sup>48</sup>

And here is abundant cause for greater, fresh, praise to our God. For not only does He forgive, justify, which from the human perspective, at least, might seem the simpler act, but He takes hostile, rebellious, selfish, willful, unlovely, often hateful human beings—“and such were some of you”—and, transforming them, polishes them to reflect His own likeness. So I marvel at justification. I can marvel no less at sanctification.

This change in attitude and lifestyle is as fully the work of God as is forgiveness and acquittal. As one is dependent on Him for forgiveness,

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<sup>46</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 203.

<sup>47</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1117.

<sup>48</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:203.

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so is one as fully dependent on Him for overcoming. As one is impossible without the immediate intervention of God, so is the other. All is of grace. And both the forensic acquittal and the empowerment for overcoming, says Ellen White, come through justification.

It is necessary now to clarify the concept of the subjective elements of imputed righteousness, as referred to by Ellen White. At the beginning of this article we played up the notion of a subjective aspect in justification, as though it were strictly Roman Catholic, with no Protestant support. But while both Ellen White and Roman Catholicism—as well as many Protestant theologians—maintain that justification has its experiential as well as legal aspects, this is far from implying they and Catholics are saying the same thing. In fact about the only similarity is that both teach that imputed righteousness is more than a legal transaction. So what is the difference between what we have sketched of Ellen White’s view of justification and the Roman Catholic position? We note a few differences pertinent to our discussion.

1. In Ellen White’s, Adventist, and Protestant teaching, justification never means what Buchanan<sup>49</sup> called the Catholic divine’s “favorite doctrine,” that it becomes inherent, in the sense that when received it is then intrinsic, infused, and so is the Christian’s own. *Justification is a gift of grace*, whether we mean justification in the sense we have seen Ellen White sometimes refer to it, which we term subjective, or whether we mean the justification we call legal or objective. It is always, continuously, and completely only of God. Justification through faith, in any context, can be the Christian’s only in the way that the light bulb can continue to be illuminated—as long as the electrical flow continues. So Christians maintain their justification and continue in the sanctification process only as the Holy Spirit is continuously in their lives. It does not, in the words of the Council of Trent, “adhere to [the soul] as the soul’s own holiness.”<sup>50</sup> Ellen White explicitly denies that it does. She writes, “[I]n order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.”<sup>51</sup> It is ours only in the sense of “Christ within us, “ whether it be

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<sup>49</sup> James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Students’ Reformed Theological Library (Banner of Truth, n.d.), 148.

<sup>50</sup> “Justification: I. [*sic*] The Catholic Doctrine of Justification,” section 2, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Appleton, 1910); retrieved 1 February 2007, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

<sup>51</sup> John Armstrong, gen. ed., *Roman Catholicism* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 203; emphasis in original.

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what we call subjective or objective. For by subjective we understand that Christians must become “partakers of the divine nature;” it must be “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

2. In Roman Catholicism justification is by faith *and a holy life*<sup>52</sup> through the sacrament, baptism—“Justification is conferred in baptism, the sacrament of faith.”<sup>53</sup> In Ellen White justification “comes alone through faith in Christ.”<sup>54</sup> She does not use the term, “faith alone.” This is understandable, and shows her theological precision, because those words are sometimes used without qualification, when, in actuality justification depends on repentance and confession (1 John 1:9), regeneration and renewal. “He saved us, . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. . . so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Titus 3: 5-7, RSV).

3. In Catholicism sanctification is part of justification. “Justification includes the remission of sins, *sanctification*, and the renewal of the inner man”<sup>55</sup> Ellen White defines them as complementary, but different and distinct in a statement we quoted previously: “The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”

4. In Catholicism, sanctification being part of justification, justification “means both the event by which the Christian life is initiated and the *process* by which the believer is regenerated.”<sup>56</sup> And as a process it was described at the Council of Trent.<sup>57</sup> But biblically (Rom 5:1), and in the writing of Ellen White, justification is not a process but an immediate, punctiliar transaction. “The moment true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Christ as a personal Saviour, that moment the sinner is justified before God because he is pardoned.”<sup>58</sup> In summary, we suggest that there are two aspects to justification: the legal, the declarative, and the subjective. This is confirmed not only by Ellen White, but by contemporary biblical scholarship. The subjective has perhaps been underemphasized in view of the strong Reformation emphasis on the legal. It is sometimes felt that to admit anything but the declara-

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<sup>52</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, 1:366.

<sup>53</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 536.

<sup>54</sup> White, *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1892, 2:507.

<sup>55</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 544; emphasis supplied.

<sup>56</sup> *Roman Catholicism*, 203; emphasis in original.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 317.

<sup>58</sup> White, *Our High Calling* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1961), 52.

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tive in justification is to weaken it mortally. But the subjective does not weaken the objective any more than the law weakens grace when rightly understood. The forensic “alien righteousness” aspect of Luther’s justification maintains its place, which is to graciously, freely credit Christ’s merits to the account of the penitent sinner. Here is the heart of justification. The simultaneous subjective aspect of justification, which the Bible and Ellen White affirm, is God’s response of power to the sinner’s call to enable him to strive toward holiness of life. And, we repeat, the second as well as the first is beyond the range of the sinner himself.

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## **Sanctuary Principles for the Successful Church Community**

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In ancient Israel, the Lord governed his people from his sanctuary, which served as the headquarters of his administration at the center of Israelite life and worship. The ways in which God's Presence interacted with his people there teach us enduring principles for success that apply to his "new covenant" church community as he guides, unifies, and empowers it to reveal himself to the world. Following are some of these principles.

### **Do Not Take God for Granted<sup>1</sup>**

When Aaron and his sons inaugurated worship at the sanctuary by performing their first priestly officiation, the Lord's glory appeared and he consumed the sacrifices with fire to complete his acceptance of the sanctuary (Lev 9:23-24). Somewhat similarly, the Sumerian Cylinder B of the ruler Gudea describes initiation festivities when the god Ningirsu and his consort Baba, as represented by their idols, were settled into their new temple. Their entrance was accompanied by offerings, as well as purification and divination procedures. Gudea presented "housewarming gifts" to the divine couple (cf. Num 7), prepared a banquet for Ningirsu, and offered animal sacrifices.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from R. Gane, "Leviticus," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming), vol. 1 on the Pentateuch, comment on Lev. 9:23.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Averbeck, "The Cylinders of Gudea" (2.155), in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger (Leiden: Brill, 1997-) 2:431–432.

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Comparison between the Israelite and Sumerian procedures yields a stunning contrast. The protocol for Ningirsu and Baba followed the standard ancient Near Eastern pattern: Installation of deities, represented by images, was part of a ritual process carried out by human beings. But Israel's deity moved himself, not his image, into his tabernacle *before* any consecration or inauguration rituals were performed (Exod 40:34–35) to rule out the possibility that anyone could think that humans had moved him in! By implication, of course, he could also leave on his own if he chose to do so because his people rejected him (Ezek 9–11). God wants to be with his people (Exod 25:8), but they should never take him for granted.

#### **Make God the Unifying Center of His Community<sup>3</sup>**

Our modern culture revels in personal independence. Commercials from all directions reinforce what we already know: We are the center of the universe and our desires govern it. However, the second chapter of the book of Numbers disagrees with our egocentric worldview. In the Israelite camp, the Lord spatially demonstrated the only proper place of the Most High: at the center. The wilderness war camp formed a hollow square, with the tabernacle of the divine Presence in the middle. He was the Source of strength, the “nuclear reactor.” God's people were not islands of destiny, but a community under God, with each individual and every subgroup fully accountable to him.

At the center of ancient Israelite life and worship was holy fire. At its core, the religion of God's people was not a social club, political bloc, or system of dogma. It was an ongoing encounter with the divine. For this experience to continue, the “pilot light” had to remain lit (Lev 6:8-13 [Hebrew vv. 1-6]). Sparks of any other kindling were ruled out. God's response to Nadab and Abihu's unauthorized fire (10:1-2) showed for all time what he thought of that approach, which puts man in place of God at the center of worship.

As in Old Testament times, God's ministers of the 21st century A.D. are to be keepers of the flame and teachers of instruction (Torah) from the Lord, not lighters of the fire and inventors of their own doctrines. Like the Olympic torch, God's Gospel fire is to be relayed around the

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from R. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 150-151, 505-506. Note that most of the present article consists of adapted selections from this commentary.

world in all kinds of ways, but it must come from the source—the sacred, eternal flame.

### **Worship God in *His* Way<sup>4</sup>**

In the book of Leviticus, God instructed the Israelites how to approach him in worship at his sanctuary. Because the Lord is the superior party, he controls protocols of interaction with him. Unlike Cain's vegetables (Gen 4) or the Israelites' golden calf (Exod 32), our worship should approach God according to his principles so that he will want what we have to offer.

Divine principles of worship allow for tremendous variety, including cultural diversity. The Psalmist's "joyful noise" (e.g. Ps 95:1-2; 98:4-6) is as legitimate as Habakkuk's silence (Hab 2:20). However, usurping divine prerogatives, failing to exalt God as the supreme center of our worship, or misrepresenting him by violating instructions for religious practice that he has specified constitute serious problems.

For example, after Gideon's divinely empowered military victory, he made a golden ephod, which was a garment worn by priests (Judg 8:27; cf. Exod 28:6-14). It was not long before this unauthorized *instrument* of worship became the *object* of worship, an idol.<sup>5</sup> The medium overpowered the message. Once people focused on the instrument more than on God, they lost sight of him, and it was easy to switch gods and turn to Baal worship (Judg 8:33-34).

What happens when church buildings, liturgies, music and musicians, sermons, and ministers of the Gospel themselves become the focus of attention? All of these may be wonderful and legitimate by themselves, testifying to the quality of that which they honor. Indeed God himself is the founder of fine aesthetics. According to the book of Exodus, it was he who directed the Israelites to make gorgeous high priestly vestments and a magnificent tabernacle for impressive ceremonies (cf. Eccles 50:5-21). But how do the infrastructure and procedures of our worship shape attitudes toward God, who should be at the center? True worship is like the ministry of John the Baptist, who said of Christ: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> R. Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1996), 80.



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**Follow God's Leading<sup>6</sup>**

For the Israelites in the wilderness to be with God's resident Presence, they had to move with him. It was no use lingering to venerate the spot where he had been or running ahead to be where he might go next. The important thing was to know where his cloud was and to follow it (Num 9:17-22; 10:11-13). God's leadership calls for readiness to move at any time, and also patience to stay put until he directs otherwise.

It is not that divine leading is a shortcut to do away with decisions and risks. "Indeed, God wants us to develop good judgment, and there is no way to develop it apart from a process that involves choices and risks."<sup>7</sup> But his guidance serves as a Global Positioning System, a dynamic reference point and framework for navigating the challenges of the way.

The Lord doesn't merely give his people a detailed map of their "journey"; he himself is their map.<sup>8</sup> To avoid getting lost, we can find out where God is leading and follow him. Although we have no visible divine cloud to follow, we can discern his will through a combination of avenues, such as his Spirit (including his Spirit of prophecy), our consciences, the Bible, providence, and balanced counsel from mature believers.

**Cooperate with God in an Orderly, Efficient Manner<sup>9</sup>**

The census and organization of Numbers 1-2 were important steps to make a mob of ex-slaves into a focused, disciplined, conquering army. Around the fully functioning sanctuary of the divine King at the core of the war camp, every able-bodied man was in his place and accounted for. All was in order for efficient and effective deployment.

God provided all the order, efficiency, and power the Israelites needed, and to him went the glory for every victory, but he did not do for them what they could and should do. Canaan was his gift to them, but they could only receive it if they would go up and take it. When they did go up, they needed careful strategy and precise execution of plans to get the most "shock for the shekel." Today, as at Jericho and Ai (Josh 6-8), confidence in superior numbers leads to sloppy arrogance, but victory

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<sup>6</sup> Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 567-568.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 142.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H. T. Blackaby and C. V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 503-504.

comes through cooperation with the Lord, who empowers fully utilized and well-ordered human intelligence and strength.

**Value Every Contribution to the Lord's Work<sup>10</sup>**

At the ancient Israelite sanctuary, the Levites did what appeared to be menial labor: maintenance, guarding, packing, and hauling (Num 3-4). But all of it was honorable and vitally important because it was for the divine King. Similarly, the smallest and most insignificant task that contributes to God's work today is important: Cleaning the church, changing its light bulbs, preparing food for a social event, visiting a sick person, teaching a scripture song to a child, encouraging a neighbor, and so on.

Just as Levites were specially set apart to do tasks for the benefit of the priests and the Israelite community (3:6-7; 8:5-22), deacons were set apart to serve the Christian community by doing administrative tasks so that the apostles could be free for spiritual leadership (Acts 6:1-6), devoting themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (v. 4). Just as the dedication of Levites involved laying hands on them before the Lord and standing them before the priests (Num 8:10,13), when the Christians chose deacons, "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

As in the days of the apostles, social and administrative problems can drain a modern pastor's time and energy so that he/she has little left for crucial spiritual leadership. Why not return to the early Christian solution by resuscitating the original job description of deacons? They were administrators and social conflict managers, not simply ushers. As such, they freed spiritual leaders to spiritually lead. This contributed to the explosive growth of the church.

**Touch Those in Need Without Fear of Contamination<sup>11</sup>**

Leviticus 11:29-38 lists eight crawlies and creepies, including several kinds of lizards, and then proceeds to describe how their carcasses defile all kinds of nonhuman objects. However, verse 36 says: "A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean . . ." A source of purity cannot be made impure. This principle explains how Jesus could touch lepers and a woman with an impure hemorrhage in order to heal

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 516-517, 560-561.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 151, 215-218.

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them, without becoming impure himself (e.g., Matt 8:2-3; Mk 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48).

Although God is the ultimate Source of purity and life, Christ makes his followers into secondary sources. Jesus said: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38). Thus, his disciples performed miracles of healing and deliverance as he did (Matt 10:1,8; Luke 10:9,17; Acts 3:1-10; 9:36-42; 16:16-18; 19:11-12). When God’s people are sources of his purity and healing in the world, they do not need to worry about being defiled as they mingle with those in need.

#### **Motivate and Mentor God’s People to Success<sup>12</sup>**

At the beginning of Israel’s history as an independent nation, the Lord employed several strategies to turn his people into a winning team:

1. First, he showed that he was a winner. By defeating Egypt (Exod 7-14), he showed the Israelites that if they were on his team, they would be winners, too.

2. In simple ways regarding practical matters such as food, water, and physical security, God emphasized the foundational principle that winning comes through trust in him.

3. The Lord tested his people over their basic lessons by giving them opportunities to demonstrate what they had learned (e.g., 15:25—at Marah “he tested them”).

4. When the Israelites flunked a test, God repeated it until they could pass. Thus, they encountered lack of drinkable water at Marah (15:23), Rephidim (17:1), Kadesh (Num 20:2), and on the Red Sea road detour around Edom (21:5). Each time they faithlessly grumbled. Finally, at Beer they trusted the Lord (vv. 16-18). At Kadesh they refused to go with God into Canaan and then tried to take it by themselves, as a result of which they were beaten as far as Hormah (Num 14). Decades later they came back to Kadesh (20:1) and were tested by an attack from the king of Arad, which became Hormah, but this time they relied on God and won (21:1-3).

#### **Delegate Responsibility Rather than Hoarding It<sup>13</sup>**

Dwight L. Moody understood the value of delegating. He said, “I’d rather get ten men to do the job than to do the job of ten men.”<sup>14</sup> God

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 683.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 789-791.

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delegated Moses to run a nation, and Moses in turn had to delegate, although this was not always easy for him. Jethro found him trying to do the job of ten men and urged him to appoint judges, which he did (Exod 18:13-26). The Lord found him crushed by the burden of leading the people and instructed him to choose seventy elders, which he also did (Num 11).

Theodore Roosevelt said: “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”<sup>15</sup> This is what Moses did. When he assigned a job, he delegated the authority necessary to accomplish it. He did not over-manage by hovering over and interfering with his subordinates, but he expected and demanded that tasks be done right for the sake of God and Israel (e.g., Lev 10:16-18; Num 31:14-18). The leadership style of God through Moses teaches us that while we are bound for our Promised Paradise, we are not to hoard tasks or the authority that goes with them, but to pass them on.

**Teach Wisely as God Does<sup>16</sup>**

In Numbers 9:1-14 we see several aspects of God’s character at work. First, he took the trouble to remind the Israelites that Passover was coming again. Second, he was flexible in his requirement to observe the festival, bending the religious calendar for those who were stuck in a dilemma because of their unavoidable impurity. Third, he was generous and farsighted, going beyond the immediate need by also providing for people on long trips to celebrate Passover at a later date. Fourth, he was economical, setting up ongoing rules as answers to similar questions in the future. Fifth, he was not susceptible to manipulation, but emphasized that exceptions applied only to those who actually needed them. Sixth, he allowed guests (non-Israelites) to participate, as long as they followed the same rules as everyone else.

In short, the Lord sounds like a wise and well-balanced teacher! He is caring, recognizing the weaknesses and challenging circumstances of his “students.” He is reasonable and fair, but firm about extending deadlines listed in his “syllabus.” He foresees potential problems and systematically preempts them in advance. Finally, he lets “auditors” experience

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<sup>14</sup> Cited by H. Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1994), 100.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by *ibid.*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 566-567.

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the “class” if they are serious about it and do not disrupt things by irregular behavior. Here in Numbers 9 we learn about God’s effective “teaching style,” which would tend to encourage his “students” to remain committed to his “class.”

Whether we are raising our own children, teaching, ministering, administering, interacting with others at work, or socializing, we would do well to follow God’s model. Are we considerate, flexible, reasonable, fair, patient, far-sighted, generous, organized, economical, and firm as he is? Do we give second chances, as he extends another opportunity for the redemption that Passover symbolized to those whose life journeys have taken them far away from home (cf. the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24)?<sup>17</sup>

#### **Encourage and Protect Leaders**<sup>18</sup>

In the Bible, the Lord is hard on some kinds of people, but he is remarkably gentle and encouraging to stressed and burned out pastors. For instance, at Kibroth-hattaavah, God did not berate Moses for his negative reaction to complaints. Instead, he addressed the problems that had brought undue pressure to bear on Israel’s human leader (Num 11).<sup>19</sup>

The Lord expects his people to follow his example in supporting their leaders. Privilege and influence carried responsibility not only for Israelite leaders but also for members of their families to rightly present the Lord’s character to the people. Any PK (priest’s kid) was supposed to be exemplary, much like a preacher’s or politician’s kid today. Failure of a child would harm the influence of his/her father (e.g., Lev 21:9—“she profanes her father”). So the spirit of the exhortation in Leviticus 21:8 for the Israelites to respect the holiness of priests would include the idea that laypeople should help all members of priestly families bear the burden of exemplary living. Don’t undermine their distinctiveness out of jealousy, in order to lower them to your level, whether by unjust criticism, competition, ridicule, deception, or obstruction. Attempting to destroy or compromise those who intercede for you is self-defeating.

Ministers must take responsibility for their actions like everyone else, but trying to trip them up is unconscionable and self-defeating. A ministry is a terrible thing to waste. On the other hand, it is a wonderful

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. E. Feldman, “The Second *Pesah*: Mitzvah as Paradigm,” *Tradition* 24 (1989): 43.

<sup>18</sup> Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 377-378, 584.

<sup>19</sup> Other examples are God’s encouragement of Elijah (1 Kgs 19) and Isaiah (Isa 6).

thing to nurture. Rather than exhausting valuable creative energies in contention and criticism, congregations benefit themselves, their communities, and the cause of God by focusing their energies on upholding dedicated leaders and walking with them on the path of holiness.

**Respect and Value God's Children of Different Races<sup>20</sup>**

The fact that Moses' wife is described as "Cushite" (Ethiopian) only in the context of derogatory talk regarding her by Miriam and Aaron (Num 12:1) suggests that they looked down on her for having darker skin (cf. Song of Solomon 1:6). While a racial slur was only on the "skin" of an underlying issue of status and control, the Lord's punishment of Miriam indicates that he took her xenophobia very seriously by making her skin flaky and/or ghastly white (Num 12:10). It is as though he were saying to her: "Miriam, if you can't get used to the idea that dark is beautiful, see if you like your own skin, which pales by comparison!" After wishing to socially exclude Moses' wife, Miriam herself was physically excluded from the Israelite camp.<sup>21</sup> God's devastating reaction implies that he regards such an attitude as intolerable moral "leprosy."

As in the story of Miriam and Aaron, racism is always about status and control, and it is always an insult to God. Putting someone down for his/her intrinsic genetic nature has the goal of boosting oneself and implies that God makes inferior products in his image (cf. Gen 1:26). Racism is a grossly unfair low blow for exactly the same reason that it is attractive to those who are attempting to get the upper hand at any cost: People are born with their race and cannot change it (Jer 13:23).

Racism is natural in a sinful world and respects no boundaries. It preys on any racial group in the world and can quietly flourish and spread like "leprosy" under the beautiful surface of a Christian business, school, or church (cf. Lev 14:43-44). Combating it requires continual vigilance by everyone. Anyone who claims to be exempt from the potential of a problem in this regard should read Numbers 12:1, where even Miriam and Aaron failed.

No doubt Moses' wife would have endorsed the ideal articulated by Martin Luther King, Jr.: "I have a dream that my four little children will

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<sup>20</sup> Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 594-595.

<sup>21</sup> B. P. Robinson, "The Jealousy of Miriam: A Note on Num 12," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101 (1989): 431-432; P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5 (1989): 22.

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one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”<sup>22</sup>

**Keep Church Problems “In-house”<sup>23</sup>**

God intended for non-Israelites, such as Balaam and the Moabites, to know and respect his blessing on the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:2-3; Num 22:12).<sup>24</sup> Even though the Israelites had given their beneficent deity a hard time, many individuals had lost out on the benefits of the covenant due to their disobedience, and those who remained were still far from perfect, God’s plan to fulfill the divine promises to and through his corporate chosen people was unshaken and unshakeable.<sup>25</sup>

The imperfections of the Israelites were between them and God. While he disciplined them within their corporate boundaries, he did not air their “dirty laundry” in front of people from other nations, such as Balaam and Balak (Num 22-24). To non-Israelites he showed only monolithic support for those he protected as his special possession. To attack them was to assault God.

The Lord’s firm resolve to bless the children of Abraham is also for Christians, who are “Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). Since God’s people are a channel of divine blessing to the world, it is to the benefit of others to accept them and counterproductive to reject them. It is also counterproductive and contrary to God’s example for his people to unnecessarily open up their problems to the outside world (cf. 1 Cor 6:1-8).

**Faithfully Carry Out Discipline when Necessary<sup>26</sup>**

When it comes to the deceptive inroads of apostasy into the church, Christians may need to face some corporate core conflicts head-on, as Phinehas did in Numbers 25. When Jesus drove out those engaged in business at the temple, “His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (John 2:17). The rest of the verse from Psalms cited here reads, “. . . and the insults of those who insult you fall

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<sup>22</sup>In M. Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 854.

<sup>23</sup>Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 705-706.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. J. Sailhamer *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 405-406.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. J. H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 100.

<sup>26</sup>Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 727-728.

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on me” (Ps 69:9 [Hebrew v. 10]). Like zealous Phinehas, Christ identified with God to the extent that there was no difference between defending the Lord’s honor and that of himself.

In an emergency, when God’s people are in imminent danger of losing their connection with him, it may take the swift, accurately focused, decisive leadership of a faithful and wise (not fanatical and unbalanced) person to “spearhead” a defense. We are not living under a theocracy that metes out capital punishment, so a modern “Phinehas” must make his/her point verbally rather than with a literal spear. But there may be occasions that call for removing flagrant sinners from membership in the church (disfellowshipping, not dismembering) so that the Lord’s reputation, people, and work can be preserved (e.g. 1 Cor 5).

**Maintain Loyalty to God<sup>27</sup>**

At the Israelite sanctuary, the Lord provided ritual remedies for the imperfections of his people as long as they were loyal to him. However, if they defied him, spurned his remedies, or failed to demonstrate loyalty on the Day of Atonement, they were condemned (Lev 23:29-30; Num 15:30-31; 19:13,20).

God does not reserve salvation for perfect people who have never sinned. It is too late for that because all have already sinned (Rom 3:23). He knows that his people are faulty: mortal, weak, prone to fall, and unable to make themselves perfect. So he does not judge them simply on the basis of whether they have faults or not. Rather, what he requires is loyalty to himself, the only one who can heal their faultiness.

Loyalty is a matter of relationship, not merely of performance. Obviously what we do to other people or to God reveals our attitudes in ways that help to shape our relationships with them, but the focus is on the health of the relationship.

**Conclusion**

By examining ways in which the Lord interacted with the ancient Israelites from his sanctuary headquarters, we have found a number of enduring principles for success that apply to our modern Christian faith community: Do not take God for granted. Make God the unifying center of his community. Worship God in *his* way. Follow God’s leading. Cooperate with God in an orderly, efficient manner. Value every contribution to the Lord’s work. Touch those who are in need without fear of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 629.



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contamination. Motivate and mentor God's people to success. Delegate responsibility rather than hoarding it. Teach wisely as God does. Encourage and protect leaders. Respect and value God's children of different races. Keep church problems "in-house." Faithfully carry out discipline when necessary. Maintain loyalty to God.

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## **C-5 Muslims, C-5 Missionaries, or C-5 Strategies?**

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An Adventist missionary baptizes a Muslim who still repeats several times a day that “Mohammed is the Prophet of God” and prays for blessings on the “prophet” and his family. A newly baptized convert attends the mosque on a regular basis, where the divinity of Christ is consistently denied. Another convert still participates in the “feast of the sacrifice.” How far can we go with contextualization among Muslims? This is a matter of intense debate within some sending organizations due to the fact that many believe that some approaches have led to syncretism.<sup>1</sup>

It may be useful to remember that contextualization refers to the process of making the Biblical text and its context meaningful and applicable to the thought patterns and situations of a given people. It covers the cultural adjustments that have to be made in cross-cultural evangelization. Syncretism is the fusion of two beliefs. Frequently, syncretism is born of a desire to make the gospel relevant. In order to avoid syncretism, Seventh-day Adventists are admonished to “agree with the people on every point . . . [where they] can consistently do so.”<sup>2</sup> The key concept in the previous sentence is consistency. Syncretism is allowing the culture to change the biblical message and compromising biblical doctrines, “the replacement or the dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Poston, “‘You Must Not Worship in Their Way’: When Contextualization Becomes Syncretism,” in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Van Rheenen (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), 243-63.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, 13 June 1912, par. 4.

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Christian elements.”<sup>3</sup> The syncretism of Christianity happens when the basic content of the gospel is changed by the cultural values of the context. Syncretism is the conscious or unconscious reshaping of Christian beliefs and practices through cultural accommodation so that they blend with those of the dominant culture in ways that are not consistent with the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

According to David Hesselgrave, syncretism occurs in two equal and opposite forms: under-contextualization and over-contextualization.<sup>5</sup> In both cases the worldview of Scripture is ignored in favor of a culture. A healthy contextualization takes place at the very center of the continuum between these extremes, with room for a variety of choices moving on either side. What makes things difficult is that there is no sharp boundary between good and bad contextualization, except faithfulness to Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Even though one missionary’s contextualization is another’s syncretism, the fact is that there are acceptable and unacceptable approaches to contextualization.<sup>7</sup>

Advocates of “Faith Development in Context” (FDIC) ministries (a new name for Adventist efforts using C-5 strategies) admit that they forge their theology according to “the situational realities in the Muslim world.”<sup>8</sup> This paper assumes that doctrines are supracultural and that any attempt to contextualize must preserve their integrity. An acceptable contextualization will not change doctrines. Doctrines are divine truths that should not be confused with theology—at its bare minimum, theology is what humans think about what God said. Theological formulation never happens in religio-cultural vacuums, but a theology that starts with culture will unavoidably lead to syncretism. An acceptable theology does not start with the context but with

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<sup>3</sup> A. Scott Moreau, “Syncretism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 924.

<sup>4</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, “Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself,” in *Contextualization and Syncretism*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, “Syncretism: Mission and Missionary Induced?” in *Contextualization and Syncretism*, 71-98, esp. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Larry Owens, “Syncretism and the Scriptures,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43/1 (January 2007): 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Carlos G. Martin, “What Constitutes Acceptable Contextualization,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 1 (1998): 19-25.

<sup>8</sup> Jerald Whitehouse, “Answers to ‘Questions on C-5,’” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2 (Fall 2005), 42, 44.

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the text. An acceptable theology will always be characterized by faithfulness to the Scriptures.

The following is a summary of the “Contextualization Spectrum.” The “C-Scale” measures the level of contextualization from 1 through 6 among “Christ-centered communities” found in the Muslim context.<sup>9</sup> The question is, how far can we go up in this scale without compromising the integrity of the gospel? The point of contention is concerning the validity of a C-5 approach as it is currently used by FDIC missionaries.

C-1 Traditional church using outside language.

C-2 Traditional church using inside language.

C-3 Churches using inside language and religiously neutral inside cultural forms.

C-4 Contextualized Christ-centered communities using inside language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.

C-5 Muslim communities that affirm they are followers of Isa the Messiah. They still live legally and religiously within the community of Islam.

C-6 Secret/underground believers that are believed to be Muslims by the Muslim community and saying themselves that they are Muslims.

I think that this categorization is incomplete in the sense that it does not describe well the mindset of both outsiders and insiders. This article attempts to identify and differentiate between three approaches to the “Contextualization Spectrum.” They could be described as the “perspective of an insider,” the “perspective of an outsider,” and the “strategical perspective.” This discussion will address the feasibility of the C-5 level within the context of Adventist mission.

### **C-5 Muslims—An Insider’s Perspective**

It is possible to consider the “C-Scale” from the perspective of an insider. Some believers are in a stage where they are still doctrinally, socially, and legally within Islam (C-5). Others, however, have decided to remain culturally within the boundaries of Islam but are aware of the implications of their decision to follow Christ (C-4).

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<sup>9</sup> John Travis, “The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34/4 (October 1998): 407-8.

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It is useful to remember that people arrive at a point of conversion through different paths. From an evangelical perspective, “conversion” is understood as a change of heart that takes place when a person accepts Jesus as Savior. The understanding of what conversion is all about differs greatly among Adventists. It seems that some tend to equate “conversion” with a rational acceptance of a set of doctrines, after which a person is ready for baptism or for a change of denominational preference. Others think that conversion is a sudden, immediate, complete, radical, absolute, final change of life. Others may even see conversion as a process.

The conversion of a non-Christian to Christianity may not be that simple since it may require a change of assumptions in several areas. We may argue about doctrines, but we cannot argue about assumptions. For instance, how can you prove to a Hindu that there is only one God without using the Bible? The natures of God, of man, and of sin as shown in the Qur’an are different from the Christian understanding based on the Bible. In order to change the assumptions of a worldview, a non-Christian may require more time than a Christian does to accept the Sabbath. A Muslim who is in a slow process of conversion needs time to understand the gospel and the requirements of the gospel. A missionary must start where the non-Christian is. “Christ drew the hearts of His hearers to Him by the manifestation of His love, and then, little by little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolded to them the great truths of the kingdom. We also must learn to adapt our labors to the condition of the people—to meet men where they are.”<sup>10</sup>

Instead of starting with “Bible studies,” a Muslim may need to receive “Qur’anic studies.” This person and his community may take a slow path toward Christianity. In time he will study the Bible. The transition from full acceptance of the Qur’an to full acceptance of the Bible may take years. The process of change might be multigenerational, meaning that it will start with individual conversions, possibly with persecution and martyrdom. Ideally, the process will reach a stage where a generation may find it easier to move closer to the ideal when an entire community and even people groups may experience conversion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1974), 484-85.

<sup>11</sup> Missiologists speak of a “multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversion process whereby members of families, clans, villages, and tribes become Christian at the

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Once people are ready for a responsible decision, they should be baptized. They may start as Adventist Muslims (C-5); however, in order to receive baptism, they must at least be Muslim Adventists (C-4). Notice that here I use the “C-Scale” not to describe the strategy followed by a missionary, but the Muslim’s understanding of the gospel. The following version of the “C-Scale,” considered from the perspective of an insider, illustrates the fact that Muslims may be in different stages of maturity:

C-1 Converts who have been uprooted from their culture.

C-2 Converts who are able to transcend cultural differences and can worship using foreign worship patterns.

C-3 Converts who feel at home in worship since they use linguistically and religiously neutral, native cultural forms.

C-4 Baptized believers in Isa who make a conscious effort to witness to the Islamic community by using biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms in worship. In some areas they may need to worship in closed communities, while in others they may even establish “Adventist mosques.” Just as the early church flourished in a spiritually hostile climate, C-4 communities may also emerge in an Islamic context.

C-5 Non-baptized believers who still refer to themselves as Muslims who are followers of Isa the Messiah. The believers remain “legally, culturally, and religiously within the Muslim *Ummah*.”<sup>12</sup> They may attend the Muslim mosque on a regular basis, while at the same time worshipping with fellow believers on Sabbath.

C-6 Secret/underground believers who are believed to be Muslim by the Muslim community and who themselves says that they are Muslim.

An important difference is that C-4 believers are aware of the fact that they have become Christians and have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. C-5 believers still refer to themselves as Muslims. They are in a different stage in the process of conversion, with different levels of understanding of the gospel. C-5 believers are still legally within the community of Islam,<sup>13</sup> meaning that they would repeat

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same time.” “Glossary of Church Growth Terms,” in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, ed. C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and Elmer Towns (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1986), 296.

<sup>12</sup> Jerald Whitehouse, “Issues of Identity,” *Global Center for Adventist Muslims Relations*, 2005, appendix 3, 27.

<sup>13</sup> John Travis, “The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34/4 (October 1988): 408. Even though “participation in corporate worship varies from person

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many times a day and at the mosque that “*Muhammad rusul Allah*” (“Mohammed is the Messenger of God”).

C-5 communities are considered a Muslim offshoot by the Muslim community, and they do not see themselves as being part of the Church, the body of Christ. “The work being facilitated by the Study Centers [sponsored by FDIC] is resulting in new believer groups which are not able, for various reasons, to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and allow for new growth among the new believers.”<sup>14</sup> C-5 believers still maintain many beliefs and practices that are contrary to the gospel<sup>15</sup> or perhaps have not yet understood the requirements of the gospel. This kind of believer needs further instruction and correction (Acts 18:24-26). Even though during a few decades of early Christian history, believers worshipped in the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1) and attended Jewish synagogues until they withdrew either voluntarily (19:8-10) or under duress (Acts 13:45,50; 17:1-2,5; 18:5-7,14), the New Testament also records the rebaptism of an entire community of believers that was baptized without knowing the essential aspects of the Christian doctrine (Acts 19:1-7).

The Scripture refers to the church as a body (Eph 1:22; 4:15,16; Col 1:18). However, C-5 believers “are by definition not linked to the local church.”<sup>16</sup> As a result, and against the advice of the Global Mission Issues Committee, most baptized C-5 believers are not aware “of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical

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to person” in a “modified C-5 approach,” FDIC converts are encouraged to stay “within the framework of Islam.” Jerald Whitehouse, “Developing New Church Structures for More Effective Mission, Nurture and Growth of New Believers,” Global Center for Adventist Muslims Relations, October 1997. Phil Parshall states that fifty percent of those in C-5 go to the traditional mosque on Fridays. “Danger! New Directions on Contextualization,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 22/4 (October 1998): 406.

<sup>14</sup> Whitehouse, “Developing New Church Structures.”

<sup>15</sup> Phil Parshall, author of six books on Islam and a missionary for 36 years among Muslims in Asia, shows that among C-5 believers, 31 percent go to the mosque more than once a day and do standard Arabic prayers which affirm Muhammad as a prophet of God, 96 percent say that there are four heavenly books—while 66 percent say the Qur’an is the greatest of them—and 45 percent do not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization,” 406.

<sup>16</sup> Whitehouse, “Developing New Church Structures.”

community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”<sup>17</sup> This is unethical and against the explicit instructions of Ellen G. White<sup>18</sup> and of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.<sup>19</sup> A baptized person should not be disconnected from the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5).

### C-5 Missionaries—An Outsider’s Perspective

In using another adaptation of the “C-Scale,” we can describe different levels of willingness to adapt in the missionary’s mindset. This section describes the “C-Scale” from the perspective of the outsider, i.e., the missionary.

C-1 Missionaries make no attempt at contextualization at all.

C-2 Missionaries offer a Western church service using inside language.

C-3 Missionaries show appreciation for the local culture by incorporating into worship as many neutral inside cultural forms as possible, such as music, artwork, and ethnic dress.

C-4 Missionaries create contextualized Christ-centered communities that not only use local language and incorporate neutral cultural forms in worship, but also biblically permissible Islamic forms, such as praying with arms raised, touching the forehead on the ground while praying, and separating men from women.

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<sup>17</sup> Global Mission Issues Committee, “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission” (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1993), GM/BRI/ADCOM to MLR.

<sup>18</sup> “The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. It should be understood whether they are simply taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, or whether they are taking their stand on the Lord’s side, to come out from the world and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1948), 6:95. “When they give evidence that they fully understand their position, they are to be accepted.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1962), 128.

<sup>19</sup> “The minister’s work is not complete until he has thoroughly instructed the candidates, and they are familiar with and committed to all fundamental beliefs and related practices of the church and are prepared to assume the responsibilities of church membership.” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 30, 31. Jerald Whitehouse states that appealing to the *Church Manual* “and other extra-biblical sources” is “a dangerous direction of thought and actually counter to the basic Adventist understanding of progressive understanding of truth.” “Response to ‘Questions on C-5,’” 42. I believe that the authority of both the *Church Manual* and the Spirit of Prophecy transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries.



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C-5 Missionaries believe that a Muslim can be saved without leaving Islam. Some baptize Muslims who are not even aware that they are joining the body of Christ. Some even go so far as to legally become a Muslim<sup>20</sup> by repeating the *Shehadah* in front of witnesses.

C-6 Secret/underground believers who are believed to be Muslims by the Muslim community and who themselves say that they are Muslims.

Missionaries with a C-5 mindset have developed a theology that proposes that God created all religions in which there are “kernels of truth.” However, as the result of a subsequent apostasy,<sup>21</sup> a remnant must be raised to restore the truth (just as happened with Christianity). God “desires a remnant in the Hindu community, in the Buddhist community, in the secular developed community, in the Muslim community. Each of these must be culturally relevant and communicating effectively the truth for this time to that community.”<sup>22</sup> The implication is that, following the Muslim pattern, a Hindu could be baptized without leaving Hinduism, and a secular person could be saved in the remnant God is calling out in the secular community. This concept is based on an assumption for which there is no solid biblical support.<sup>23</sup> The “remnant” concept of the C-5 approach is a radical departure from the historical Adventist understanding of the remnant as a body of believers that has “come out” of their religious communities (Rev 14:6-12; 18:1-4) and has identified with a separate and visible

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<sup>20</sup> Parshall, “Danger! New Dimension on Contextualization,” 404. Some three to five Adventists involved in C-5 have taken a Muslim identity. Jerald Whitehouse, “Observations on Phil Parshall’s Article: ‘Danger! New Dimension in Contextualization,’” Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> C-5 missionaries “believe that due to the work of the evil one most religions have fallen victim to apostasy, that the original spiritual values of the religion have been gradually compromised in the majority of believers.” Jerald Whitehouse, “Key Issues Foundational to the Comparison of Seventh-day Adventists Beliefs with Beliefs of Islam Leading to Summary Relation Statements,” Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations, 2000, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Jerald Whitehouse, “Contextual Adventist Mission to Islam: A Working Model,” in *The Three Angels and the Crescent: A Reader*, ed. Jonquil Hole and Børge Schantz (Bracknell: SDA Global Centre for Islamic Studies, 1993), 257. More than ten years later, FDIC affirms that “Adventism acknowledges the genuineness of a remnant within Islam in the form of the FDIC ministries.” “Guidelines for Conducting FDIC Ministries,” FDIC Leadership Consultation, Zelenika, Montenegro, June 7-12, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> “Our approach has been to understand that God is calling out within each cultural group a particular people to represent Him in that community.” Whitehouse, “Contextual Adventist Mission to Islam,” 257.

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group of people who has determined to be loyal to everything God has revealed—the “Remnant Church” (Rev 12:17).<sup>24</sup> A missionary with a C-5 mindset reduces the church to what Islam can reasonably tolerate; this is an erosion of Christianity and an open form of syncretism. This approach threatens the unity of the church as the body of Christ. With the existence of baptized believers who have not developed a full fellowship with other sister communities in the world, the stage has been set for a fragmented world church.

C-5 supporters have even made statements that seem to convey an official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on this matter. For instance, Jerald Whitehouse wrote:

Adventists understand that in the great controversy between God and Satan, *God has acted* through a variety of people and nations to effect His purposes in history, and, further, that *God has been active in revealing truth through chosen messengers*, some of them known to us through writings that *have been preserved under the guidance of God’s Spirit* and others unknown to us today. In this context, it is understood that the original intent of Islam has in God’s purpose contributed to the *restoration of certain important truth[s]*. . . .<sup>25</sup>

There are serious implicit assumptions in the preceding paragraph that reflect the mindset of C-5 missionaries. The first is that God raised Islam to restore certain important truths. It is only within this context that the concept of a remnant within Islam after a “falling away” makes sense. This reasoning starts with a wrong assumption—that God created different religions. I start from a different assumption—that six hundred years after Christ, Satan deliberately raised a movement that mixed truth and error in order to create an alternative religion to Christianity that, by the year 2000, had more than one billion people who deny what Jesus did on the cross. Since the days of Cain and Abel and throughout history, Satan has been very effective in using the approach of raising alternative religions.<sup>26</sup> Cain’s offering

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<sup>24</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 rev. ed., s.v. “Remnant Church.”

<sup>25</sup> Whitehouse, “Key Issues,” 15. Italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> “In all ages, philosophers and teachers have been presenting to the world theories by which to satisfy the soul’s need. Every heathen nation has had its great teachers and religious systems offering some other means of redemption than Christ. . . . And these false teachers rob man as well. Millions of human beings are bound down under false religions, in the bondage of slavish fear, of stolid indifference, toiling like beasts of bur-

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had a “kernel of truth” in it, but the alternative approach missed the mark. Though “kernels of truth” may be found in various religious systems, they are not proof that the movement was raised by God, but an evidence that God was at work in spite of Satan’s efforts to lead people away from the truth in its entirety.

A second implicit assumption in the paragraph is that God revealed truth through the writings of chosen messengers. At the end, this is a justification for a Muslim to legally remain in the mosque by repeating that “Allah is the only God and Mohammed is the Messenger of God.” The simple fact that Mohammed was exposed to Christianity and rejected it, and that his teachings contradicted previous inspired writings (New Testament) should be enough evidence for his rejection as a prophet (messenger) of God.

A third assumption behind that statement is that the Qur’an, written by a Messenger of God and preserved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is as inspired as the Bible. This assumption also provides the foundation for a remnant within Hinduism, Buddhism, and virtually within any religious or secular movement where “kernels of truth” may be found. A vague and wide understanding of inspiration may lead Roman Catholics to justify the role of “tradition,” or a Mormon to stay in his church even after having known the gospel (Mohammed also was exposed to Christianity and rejected it). This does not mean that we cannot use the “kernels of truth” found in the Qur’an to help Muslims be attracted to the message of Isa the Messiah.

Missionaries with a C-5 mindset do not represent the Adventist mission and message. A C-5 missionary (who believes that Islam is a true religion, that Mohammed was a messenger of God, and that the Qur’an is one of the “holy writings”) is a theological contradiction. However, a missionary with a C-4 mindset may use C-5 strategies in order to lead a non-believer to a point where he or she may make a responsible decision for Jesus and His truth.

**C-5 Strategy—The Strategic Perspective**

A third way to see the “C-Scale” is from a strategic perspective. Different strategies should be followed for people in different stages of growth. The approach suggested in this article does not eliminate

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den, bereft of hope or joy or aspiration here, and with only a dull fear of the hereafter.” Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940), 478.

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the usage of Islamic forms. A C-4 missionary (someone who wants to be faithful to the Scriptures and is not willing to compromise the integrity of the gospel) can use C-5 strategies (such as use of the Qur'an) to help a C-5 Muslim (who is still attending the mosque).

In 2004 I had an extended conversation with an Adventist who works within the C-5 scale. He insisted that we should not aim to make an Adventist out of a Muslim and that his converts would remain in Islam. This person has theological problems relating to the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the remnant, the doctrine of inspiration and revelation, and the doctrine of baptism.<sup>27</sup> I am afraid that even though sometimes this is not clearly spelled out, according to what I read in much of the FDIC literature, this is in the background of their approach.

I disagree with using biblical examples to justify the approaches of a C-5 missionary. Just because Paul used the synagogue to launch evangelism and circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) does not mean that if Paul were alive today, he would advise Muslims to “remain in the condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:17-24). While the doctrine of the synagogue was right, the doctrine of the mosque is wrong. While the teachings of the Law and the Prophets were the foundation for the New Testament, the teachings of the Qur'an negate biblical doctrines. While Paul wrote based on teachings of the Old Testament, Mohammed did not write based on the teachings of the New Testament. We cannot equate Judaism with Islam, nor Paul's mindset with the assumptions of C-5 missionaries.

This article suggests that missionaries could use the C-5 strategy in the “Contextualization Spectrum” in order to help Muslims arrive at an understanding of the gospel where they can make a responsible decision for Jesus and His church. When addressing the Epicurean and Stoic Greek philosophers, Paul began where the Athenians were as he made references to “the unknown God” (17:23); then he used C-5 strategies as he quoted from pagan Greek poets (Acts 17:28). Paul then moved to the C-4 level as he forcefully confronted his hearers with the death and resurrection of Jesus, even at the risk of suffering persecution.

A C-5 strategy is not an end in itself, but rather a transitional approach that aims to help Muslims (C-5 believers) become Christians

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<sup>27</sup> Carlos G. Martin, “Questions on C-5,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2 (Fall 2005): 34-41.

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(C-4 believers). These “followers of Isa the Messiah” still live within the community of Islam, legally and religiously. Eventually they may arrive at a point where, individually or as a community, they will become aware that their identity as “followers of Isa” makes them part of the universal body of Christ and, specifically, Seventh-day Adventists with a Muslim background.

The point under discussion is this: Should we baptize people who are still at a stage in their process toward conversion where they are not ready to make a responsible decision to join the body of Christ?<sup>28</sup> My answer is no. Of course missionaries must meet people where they are; however, missionaries should not baptize Muslims who still believe that Islam is the true religion, accept the Qur’an as the Word of God, believe that Mohammed was a true prophet, and think they are still Muslims, just in order to help them move towards Christianity. We should not baptize people who are not able to make responsible decisions concerning the gospel.

We should only baptize people who understand the implications of their baptism. According to Mark 16:15-16, Christians must “preach the gospel to every creature.” However, in the “Great Commission,” according to Matthew 28:20, Jesus asked His followers to make disciples by “teaching them to observe all things.” In obedience to the Great Commission, in Acts 20:27 Paul states, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” As a result of evangelism in the early church, baptized believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). Those who were being saved were “added to the church” (Acts 2:47). The guidelines from the *Church Manual* are in harmony with the Scriptures.<sup>29</sup> All policies related to the General Conference should be in harmony with them.

There is an appropriate use of C-5 strategies. However, these strategies should be viewed as catalysts for movement into the next stage of the scale. The underlying issue is whether the use of C-5

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<sup>28</sup> In 1993 the Global Mission Issues Committee of the General Conference developed guidelines which state: “New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church. . . .” Global Mission Issues Committee, “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission.” I ask that the Global Mission Issues Committee eliminate the phrase “as soon as possible” and replace it with the concept that “*prior to baptism*, new converts should be made aware of the fact that they are joining a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

<sup>29</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 30, 31.

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strategies is an outreach technique or is the mindset of the missionary. A mindset that seeks and is willing to accept and baptize converts who remain at this level is not faithful to the Scriptures or to the Church. An Adventist missionary or an Adventist sending organization should not compromise the integrity of the gospel for pragmatic purposes (i.e., to see church growth where we have had no success). A missionary with a C-5 mindset does not adequately represent the Seventh-day Adventist theology and message. We should be creative in our search and use of strategies, but they should be based on a solid foundation—faithfulness to the Scriptures.

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## **Slavery, Prophecy, and the American Nation as Seen by the Adventist Pioneers, 1854-1865**

Trevor O'Reggio

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Early Sabbatarian Adventist leaders<sup>1</sup> railed against slavery as a great evil in the United States and eloquently proclaimed the equality of all human beings. They wrote numerous articles in the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*<sup>2</sup> denouncing slavery. Their writings, however, revealed that the Adventists' understanding of America's role in prophecy shaped how and why they viewed slavery in the manner they did. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to provide an understanding of this unique Adventist position regarding slavery and its connection to America in prophecy

This study covers the period from 1854 to 1865, the time when the nation was preoccupied with the divisive issues of slavery and the Civil War. During this time, Adventists were seeking to recover from the failed expectation that Jesus would return in 1844. Calling it the bitter disappointment,<sup>3</sup> Adventists experienced tremendous despondency, and

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<sup>1</sup> While these individuals would eventually form the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the period between the failure of William Miller's millennial predictions in 1844 and formal organization in 1863, they were simply Sabbatarian Adventists, believing that the Advent of Christ was near and that the date, October 22, 1844, held prophetic significance. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 44 (Spring 2005): 155.

<sup>2</sup> This periodical, originally called *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, is now called *Adventist Review*. This has been the major periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the years and continues to function in that capacity.

<sup>3</sup> The failure of Christ to return as predicted on October 22, 1844, became known as the great disappointment to people within the Advent movement. See Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987). For a view of the lasting effects of Millerism and the great disappointment on the shaping of the Seventh-day Adventist

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many people left the movement. A small group among them began to seek for the reasons why God had disappointed them. During their disappointment and their attempts to organize, the United States of America was embroiled in a bitter debate over slavery, a conflict so fierce that it would lead to a bloody civil war.

Many of the early Adventist leaders were northern abolitionists, and their writings reveal that they followed the evangelical abolitionist tradition. Erin Reid argues that evangelical reformers aroused by the Second Great Awakening fitted their theology to embrace perfectionism and adopted a postmillennial eschatology that necessitated public and political action against the sin of slavery. Adventists, on the other hand, had different theological motivations that affected their moral instruction and ethical action. Even after their tremendous disappointment, they continued to believe and preach the soon coming of Jesus and the end of the world. Even in this post-1844 era, Adventists remained firmly entrenched in the pre-millennial camp. For them, the world was not improving but was becoming progressively worse. The “signs of the times” everywhere proclaimed the end of the world. Slavery was identified as a central sign of the corrupt human structure. The writers of the *Advent Review* argued that the proper ethical response of Adventists was not only to publicly denounce the sin of slavery, but to “disassociate themselves from fallen civil and ecclesiastical power structures,”<sup>4</sup> but it was their understanding of America’s place in prophecy that fired their passion for opposing slavery. Their opposition to slavery reflected their interpretation of America in prophecy as a lamb-like beast acting like a dragon (Revelation 13). They eloquently denounced the gross hypocrisy of the nation and pointed out that the evil of slavery revealed America’s dragon-like behavior, in spite of its lamb-like behavior—which was shown by its proclamation of freedom, justice, liberty, and a constitution that asserted the self-evident truth that all men are created equal.

The success of the revivals in the wake of the Second Great Awakening had led many clergymen to predict that America would be the site of the kingdom of God on earth, prophesied in Revelation in connection with the Christ’s second coming.<sup>5</sup> Adventists, unlike other Protestants of

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Church, see Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1944).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oakwood.edu/history/Ejah/Ereid.htm>.5.

<sup>5</sup> John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches 1830-1865*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 20.



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that era, rejected the notion that America was a God-ordained enterprise or that it could ever become one; they argued that while the nation was to be admired for its lofty constitution and republican principles, the practice of slavery was a manifestation of its ungodly nature or its dragon-like qualities.

**The Anti-Slavery Movement**

The mid-eighteenth century found the American nation embroiled in a fierce debate over the issue of slavery. The abolitionist movement led the charge against the institution of slavery. Through constant agitations, meetings, writings, petitions, drives, and lectures, abolitionists waged a relentless war against slavery. But slavery was only overthrown after a bloody civil war that resulted in the death of over 600,000 Americans. The steep price paid to crush slavery speaks of how deep-rooted and malignant was the cancer of slavery that had fastened itself onto American society. Nothing less than the shedding of blood could atone for America's original sin—slavery. The abolitionists who called for the immediate, uncompensated cessation of slavery were truly revolutionary. Slavery was the cornerstone of Southern society and the platform of its entire social structure. Slave owners dominated the branches of power—legislative, executive, and judicial—and they established and maintained the social order. They converted even poor whites who owned no slaves to the ideology of white supremacy that undergirded the system of slavery. Thus, campaigning for the overthrow of slavery was a call for the overthrow of the social order. Such a revolutionary idea met with fierce resistance from those in power. This resistance was felt not only in the South, but especially among those in the North who had a profitable interest in the continuation of slavery. “Merchants, manufacturers, and capitalists were against the abolitionist movement, for trade with the South was important. . . . In 1833, when the American Anti-slavery Society was founded by law-abiding people for the good morals, the nature of their meeting was regarded by Southerners and by the vast majority in the North as, ‘an assembly of anarchists.’”<sup>6</sup>

Some Americans understood the revolutionary nature of the abolitionists' call for the end of slavery. Immediate abolition in practical terms meant the transfer of millions of dollars in capital and investment from the ruling elite. The abolitionist movement, although possessing

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), xii.

this revolutionary element, formed part of a larger series of reforms that were sweeping the nation. These reform movements grew out of a great revival sweeping America at this time, called the Second Great Awakening.

### Impact of the Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was probably the most influential revival of Christianity in American history.<sup>7</sup> It started in the last decade of the eighteenth century and ended in the 1830s. Some scholars have identified three major phases of the Second Great Awakening. These were separate in space, time, and character.<sup>8</sup>

The first phase of this awakening was in New England with its epicenter in the congregational churches and Yale University in Connecticut. These reformers emphasized the moral character of God's government and a move away from original sin to an emphasis on the active role and responsibility of the individual.

The second phase of the Second Great Awakening occurred among Scotch-Irish pioneers of the Southwest, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Southern Ohio. Men like James McGrady, Barton Stone, and Robert Tinely, joined by Methodist and Baptist preachers, spearheaded the movement. Revivals were passionate, exciting, and highly emotional. The itinerant preacher and the camp meeting format grew out of this revival, becoming a part of frontier life.<sup>9</sup>

The third phase of this awakening fell somewhere between the first two phases. The greatest intensity of this revival occurred in upstate New York, which became known as the "Burned-Over-District."<sup>10</sup> It was here that the Shakers erected their distinctive communities, where John Humphrey Noyes sought to create a utopia, and where Joseph Smith allegedly met the angel Moroni who showed him the buried tablets of the book of

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<sup>7</sup> See William C. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.) See also Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 184.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 185, 186.

<sup>10</sup> See Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (New York: Harper, 1965). See also C. A. Johnson, *The Frontier Campmeeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1955); and D. D. Bruce, *And They Also Sang Hallelujah: Plain-folk Camp Meeting Religion* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1974).

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Mormon that would give birth to Mormonism.<sup>11</sup> However, the leader most identified with the upstate New York revival was Charles Finney, lawyer-turned preacher, whose preaching epitomized the shift in emphasis from the First Great Awakening, where revival was the work of God, to the new view that religion was the work of humans. Finney argued that a revival of religion was not a miracle, but the result of the right use of human action. The Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards in the First Great Awakening now gave way to the human ability to do what God wanted. This did not mean that human beings acted autonomously, but rather asserted a God-given ability to make right choices.<sup>12</sup>

Finney not only exalted human will in conversion, but also the ability to triumph over sin. During the 1830s, he began to link his moral reform campaigns against alcohol and slavery. Finney argued that when people were truly converted, they would not engage in either of these vices.<sup>13</sup>

How did the Second Great Awakening affect slavery? While the First Great Awakening focused on the conversion of individuals, the Second Great Awakening had broader aims. The goal was to bring about a "Christian America"; in order to do this; the revival had to be hitched to a new idea: Reform.

"Reform" became the watchword of early and mid nineteenth-century America. Reform movements sprang up everywhere. There were those who advocated the rights of women, the promotion of peace, humane treatment of the imprisoned, and the abolition of slavery. Many revivalists took on the mantle of reform, with the result that revival and reform became twin sisters.<sup>14</sup> No other reform crusade disrupted the churches more and shook the nation to its foundation than the antislavery movement. Various societies were formed for the abolition of slavery. What they advocated ranged from gradual abolition to immediate abolition. Some organizations, such as the Colonization Societies, campaigned for the removal of Blacks from America to Africa. However wide their differences were, they succeeded in making slavery a national issue. Through the instrumentality of revivalism and reform, the people of the North began to be swayed by a moral revulsion against slavery.

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<sup>11</sup> Williams, 187.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. See also Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Revell, 1835), 12.

<sup>13</sup> See Adrian Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 431.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, 191.

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Although many Northerners agreed with the South that Blacks were inferior and in need of paternal protection, they disagreed with those who argued that the protection was being provided through the system of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

Many northern Christian abolitionists agreed that slavery was sinful, but they did not all agree that slavery should be abolished immediately or gradually. At a convention of Christian abolitionists in New York in 1845, they resolved the following: "Those who admit the sinfulness of slavery . . . and yet vote for oppression, or for those who are connected with proslavery parties, are guilty of the most inconsistency; and are undeserving of the name Christian patriots, and unworthy to be recognized as true friends of the downtrodden Christianity."<sup>16</sup> These statements were intended to encourage Christian abolitionists to vote for antislavery political parties as a way of advancing the abolitionist cause.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's epic novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, which became one of the most widely read books of the period, indicted the system of slavery and America's role in it. The novel ended in an apocalyptic tone predicting cryptically the coming Civil War.

This is an age of the world when nations are trembling and convulsed. A mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world, as with an earthquake. And is America safe? Every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it the elements of this last convulsion. . . .

Christians! Every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates in dread fellowship, the *day of vengeance* with the year of his redeemed? A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian Church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved,—but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law by which injustice

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>16</sup> John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionists and the Northern Churches* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 147. See also Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1933); Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1961); and Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1969).

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and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty  
God!<sup>17</sup>

The slavery issue would split denominations and churches, especially the three great national evangelical denominations—Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. This division of denominations would foreshadow the split within the nation.<sup>18</sup> Of the reform movements that emerged from the Great Awakening, the anti-slavery movement had a profound impact on the issue of slavery. Adventists were deeply influenced by these developments, but the ethics and reasons that motivated their opposition to slavery were quite different from those that motivated the other evangelical abolitionists. Many Adventist leaders came out of the Millerite movement, so we must consider some of the prevailing views among certain key Millerite leaders in order to understand the background to their views on slavery.

**Abolitionist-Millerite Connections**

Ronald Graybill asserts that many of the early Millerite leaders<sup>19</sup> showed abolitionist tendencies of varying degrees. Although there is no record of Miller's active participation in the anti-slavery society, he was known to have revealed his attitudes toward abolition movements in a practical way. On one occasion, a fugitive slave was sent to Miller's farm with the hope that he would feed him and direct him to Canada. It seems clear that Miller actively helped this runaway slave.<sup>20</sup>

Joshua Himes, Miller's closest associate, was well known to William Lloyd Garrison, the most recognized abolitionist leader of that time, who described Himes as an "avowed abolitionist and faithful supporter of the anti-slavery movement." He was also a supporter of many of the other reforms sweeping New England at that time and was a counselor and contributor of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society until the end of 1842.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Literary Classics of the United States (New York: Viking, 1982), 476-77.

<sup>18</sup> John Corrigan and Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1992) 216-218.

<sup>19</sup> After the Great Disappointment some of the Millerite leaders would form the nucleus of the early Sabbatarian Adventists.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," in Numbers and Butler, 140.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

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However, as the expected date of Jesus' return drew near, Himes became more absorbed in preaching the Gospel, and his abolitionist activities diminished. According to Arthur Spalding, "Himes allowed his active interest in abolitionism to subside as he became more swallowed up in the all-absorbing task of promoting a movement which expected, shortly, to meet the Lord face to face."<sup>22</sup> Himes may have reasoned that soon the Lord would come and the slaves would be free, so that continual agitation for their freedom was no longer necessary. But after the Disappointment, Himes continued with his anti-slavery activities. The abolitionist leader Frederick Douglas noted that while attending the Convention of the Evangelical Alliance in London in 1846, Himes spoke vigorously against seating slaveholders. Douglas identified Himes as the American Adventist clergyman who was virtually the only American delegate who took this anti-slavery position.<sup>23</sup>

Charles Fitch, another important Millerite leader, was also well known in the abolitionist circle for his tract, "Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth and Its Comparative Guilt Illustrated." In that tract, he argued that slavery was as bad as or worse than liquor traffic, theft, robbery, murder, and treason. He warned of God's judgment on the oppressors. Although Fitch became one of Garrison's opponents due to his condemnation of Garrison's criticism of clergymen and the Sabbath, nevertheless Garrison still recognized Fitch as a well-known abolitionist.<sup>24</sup>

Chief among the less prominent Millerite leaders who embraced the abolitionist reform movement was George Storrs. Along with Orange Scott and Leroy Sunderland, Storrs led out in the anti-slavery cause in the Methodist church. Storrs was condemned by conservative bishops at the 1836 General Conference session in Cincinnati for speaking at a local anti-slavery society. He eventually left the Methodist ministry and later converted to the Millerite movement, becoming a powerful Millerite evangelist after 1842 and preaching extensively throughout Ohio and Indiana.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Francis D. Nichols, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1944), 176.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series 1: Speeches Debates and Interviews*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 1:421-422.

<sup>24</sup> Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946-1954), 4:533-534.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Graybill 142.

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These Millerite leaders who embraced abolitionist ideas stopped short of the latter Sabbatarian Adventist views of connecting slavery with America in prophecy. This connection of slavery with America's role in prophecy appears to be something that was their own unique interpretation.

**Sabbatarian Adventist Views on Slavery**

Early Sabbatarian Adventists held strong anti-slavery sentiments that extended beyond the views of their Millerite forbears and were different in motivation and ethics from the Protestant abolitionists' views, which focused on slavery as a societal sin that needed to be repented of and abandoned so that the perfectibility of human society could be realized. An example of this view of slavery can be seen in the admonition of the Reverend Amos Phelps, who advised his congregation that they must "assail slavery in its true character as moral evil for the existence of which moral agents are responsible and guilty." He further described it as sin—and a crime. These radical abolitionists did not see slavery simply as an abstract evil; it was sinful both in principle and practice. It was also a national sin in which everyone was equally implicated and equally guilty.<sup>26</sup> The Adventist pioneers agreed with many of these ideas about slavery, but they saw this as further evidence to support their interpretation of America as the fulfillment of Revelation 13. Adventists, who were still ardent believers in the soon return of Jesus in spite of their devastating disappointment of 1844, saw slavery as a central sign of the evil human structure and the end of the world. They viewed themselves as a people of prophecy, and this sense of prophetic destiny would shape their understanding of slavery within the American context. America was this two-horned beast, and slavery was an example of the dragon-like quality of this two horned beast.

Between 1854 and 1865, a series of articles in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* identified the United States as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. The following excerpt is typical of the many that described the character of the beast in these terms:

And he had two horns like a *lamb* and he spoke as a *dragon*, Rev 13:11. This animal has a dragon heart. His disposition, his motives, his intentions and desires are all like a dragon, his outward appearances, his horns . . . are lamb-like.

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<sup>26</sup> Loveland, Anne C. "Evangelicalism and Immediate Emancipation in American Antislavery Thought," *Journal of Southern History*, 32 (1966): 176-177,181,182.

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In appearance he is like a harmless lamb but when he raises his voice in acts of authority his dragon-like character is revealed. This is a two-faced hypocritical beast that first appears with mildness and equity but has the fierce prompting of a dragon heart. The institution of slavery most clearly reveals the dragon spirit of this hypocritical nation.<sup>27</sup>

This view was articulated by John Andrews, considered one of the most brilliant young minds of the movement, and who would go on to become the church's first official missionary and its third General Conference president. There was substantial agreement with Andrews's exposition by the other Adventist pioneers, and this was reflected in the writings of the leading figures of early Adventism. It was clear to them that slavery was a wicked and evil thing, but for them, slavery represented the dragon-like quality of the two-horned beast representing America. Their interpretation of slavery focused on pointing out how America fulfilled prophecy, and slavery was one more sign of the end of the world.

The identification of America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13 did not originate with, nor was it unique to, these Sabbatarian Adventists. According to Leroy Froom, earlier American writers saw in this two-horned beast a power representing a union of church and state involving Protestantism in America. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century Baptist historian Isaac Backus' "Protestant Beast" allusion in 1788 pointed primarily to Britain, but in part to America. There was also Judge John Beacon's identification of some Protestant clergy along with the papal beast. Elias Smith's definition of this power was applied not only to the pope, but also to the American established churches. Samuel M. M'Corkle applied this symbol to Protestantism.<sup>28</sup> These writers all predated the Millerites, and although they were not as explicit in their application of the two-horned beast to America, it can be seen that this was not a new idea. What was new was its connection to slavery as evidence of America's being this two-horned beast.

**Uriah Smith and Slavery**

Uriah Smith, the longest serving editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist

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<sup>27</sup> J. N. Andrews, "The Two-Horned Beast. – Rev. xiii. Are the United States a Subject of Prophecy?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 19 March 1857, 156.

<sup>28</sup> Froom, 1099.



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Church, was one of the major proponents who linked the practice of slavery in America to its dragon-like quality and condemned the evil of slavery in strong language. He described it as a black and revolting iniquity which any nation pretending to be civilized would repudiate. He condemned those who used the Bible to defend slavery and chided those who by their silence condoned slavery. Smith quoted from an article in the *American Missionary* to prove that Adventists were not alone in discerning the hypocritical and wicked character of the United States. He also pointed out that the issue at hand was not just slavery but also racism, the evil of mistreating both free and enslaved Blacks because of their color:

The free and enslaved people of color have suffered, and are suffering grievous wrongs at the hands of the white inhabitants at the hands of the Church and those who minister at God's altar. Although the revolutionary patriots and statesmen asserted that all men were equal before the law, and founded the government upon that noble principle, although some of them protested against the dogma that man can hold property in man; although the Declaration of Independence asserts, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—and although the Constitution declares that it was, among other things, ordained to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves (the people of the United States, white and colored) and our posterity," yet, from the foundation of the government to the present time the free people of color have been maltreated and scorned, in the North as well as in the South, and their enslaved brethren inhumanly peeled and goaded in the South, aided in the inhumanity by the North.<sup>29</sup>

The writer also asserted that the South was not the only guilty party, but that the North was just as culpable:

The North has joined hands with the South in oppressing the colored man throughout the whole country. Exulting in their own freedom the whole inhabitants of this country have trampled upon the rights of the poor and needy, and practically

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<sup>29</sup> Uriah Smith, "National Sin," *American Missionary*, 20 August 1861, 941. Quoted in *Review and Herald*, Vol. XVIII.

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given the lie to the principle of equality engraven upon the cornerstone of our political edifice. The world has been witness of this, and the enemies of a Republican government have taunted us with our hypocrisy or indifference “to the opinion of mankind.” Professing to be a Christian nation, the people—we allude to the masses—have set at naught the precepts of Christianity, in their treatment of their colored brethren, forgotten the exhortations of God, and unheeded his warnings, until the patience of the Father of all appears to have been exhausted, and he has come out against us in judgment. His voice to the American people is this: “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thought test that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”<sup>30</sup>

Smith exposed the blatant hypocrisy of the American nation using its own freedom to enslave others and daily trampling upon the fundamental principle of equality that was the foundation of its political structure. His words also struck a prophetic note, for like the other Adventist pioneers, he predicted coming judgment upon the American nation. God would not be silent forever. But even as Smith predicted judgment upon the American nation, he seem to offer the nation a way out. This judgment was not inevitable. Smith’s words convey an opportunity for repentance as he said, “consider this ye that forget God.”

Smith’s blistering words against slavery and its connection to America in prophecy are best revealed by excerpts from this poem that appeared in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*:

*With two horns like a lamb a beast arose—  
So with two leading forms a power has risen,  
Two fundamental principles, than which  
in all the earth none can be found more mild,  
More lamb-like in their outward form and name.  
A land of freedom, pillared on the broad  
And open basis of equality;  
A land reposing ‘neath the gentle sway  
of civil and religious liberty.  
Lamb-like in form, is there no dragon-voice  
Heard in our land? No notes that harshly grate  
Upon the ear of mercy, love and truth?  
And put humanity to open shame?  
Let the united cry of millions tell—*

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

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*Millions that groan beneath oppression's rod,  
Beneath the sin-forged chains of slavery,  
Robbed of their rights, to brutes degraded down,  
And soul and body bound to other's will  
Let their united cries, and tears, and groans,  
That daily rise, and call aloud on Heaven  
For vengeance, answer; let the slave reply.  
O land of boasted freedom! Thou hast given  
The lie to all thy loud professions, first,  
of justice, liberty and equal rights;  
And thou hast set a foul and heinous blot  
upon the sacred page of liberty;  
And whilst thou trafficest in souls of men,  
Thou hurl'st defiance, proud, in face of Heaven  
Soon to be answered with avenging doom.<sup>31</sup>*

Uriah Smith's dissection of America as the lamb-like beast is revealed in a series of articles he wrote comparing and contrasting the American lamb-like profession with its dragon-like works.

**Lamb-like Profession**

Early acts of the government  
Declaration of Independence  
Constitution

**Dragon-like Behavior**

Slavery  
Religious Intolerance  
Corruption and Oppression

Smith, true to his premillennialist views, expressed pessimism about the future and predicted that the dragon-like voice of America would be developed further and would speak louder as the end of time drew near.<sup>32</sup> Smith identified slavery as an example of the dragon voice of America and asserted that even after the abolition of slavery, the spirit of slavery would live on through political necessity. Little did he know how accurate his prediction was, for although legal slavery died on the battlefield of the Civil War, its spirit lived in the oppressive sharecropping system that Blacks were subjected to. He also argued that if the people of the South, along with their allies in the North, had the power, they would reinstate slavery. He described it as a disease gone underground but not cured and predicted that it might be the source of serious trouble later on.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Uriah Smith, "The Warning Voice of Time and Prophecy," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 23 June 1853, 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

**James White and Slavery**

James White, another of the founding fathers of the Seventh-day Adventist church, also railed against slavery, but his connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy was not as explicit as in Smith, Andrews, or Loughborough. He used very strong language to denounce slavery, and like his fellow expositors, he sought to expose the blatant hypocrisy of the nation. White described slavery as the thing America held most sacred. In other words, slavery was America's greatest object of worship. It was America's god. White compared many of the things America considered sacred and concluded that slavery trumped them all. This assertion by White seems rather extreme, but I think he wanted to make the point of showing the supreme regard with which slavery was held in American society.

Many things are esteemed sacred in America; the most sacred thing is slavery. The Constitution is held sacred, but not so sacred as slavery. When the two come in contact it is the Constitution that has to give way. When the Constitution is found to be against slavery it is the Constitution that is to be "amended." . . .

Liberty is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. Where slavery appears, liberty hides her head and vanishes, of course . . .

The Bible is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. Its Decalogue, its golden rule, its law, its gospel, are all revised and set aside by the code of slavery. It annuls marriage, withholds the Bible, enforces labor without wages, and sells the temple of the Holy Ghost as a chattel, and remains a Bible institution still! . . .

Nationality is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. When slavery calls for secession, nationality is cast off as an abhorred thing.<sup>34</sup>

James White pointed to slavery as the cause of the Civil War and argued that the federal government's aims could not be achieved unless it

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<sup>34</sup> James White, "The Sacredness of Slavery," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 11 June 1861, 17. Note that this was written about two months after the attack at Fort Sumpter, after the South had seceded, and during the naval blockade, but before Lincoln issued a call for troops and before the Civil War fighting began in earnest, a time of intense agitation both for war and for peace. White may have been referring to the Democrats in the North who wanted to protect Northern workers' jobs and wages by keeping Blacks in the South.

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removed the diabolic iniquity of slavery. He interpreted the Civil War as chastisement from God upon the North for their complicity in the great evil of slavery. He urged the North to repent and cleanse its hands of the stains of slavery and take a bold and uncompromising position and seize every opportunity to abolish and crush slavery. Only when this was done would divine help be granted. In November of 1861, White criticized the practice of Union troops returning runaway slaves to their former masters. He warned of disaster, defeat, and disgrace upon them if they continued this practice.<sup>35</sup>

In his famous editorial, "The Nation," in August of 1862, White revealed America's place in prophecy and identified slavery as the "darkest and most damning sin upon the nation." He predicted that the nation would drink of God's wrath as punishment for the sin of slavery. He even encouraged Adventists to vote for Lincoln, interpreting that vote as a decision against slavery and against the secession of the South. However, he cautioned against military involvement in the war to free the slaves. Adventists were noncombatants, and although they were willing to wage war against slavery with their pens, they were unwilling to kill for the sake of abolishing slavery. Like Uriah Smith, he predicted that slavery would survive to the end of time,<sup>36</sup> but he did not explain in what form it would occur.

**Loughborough and Slavery**

John Loughborough, another early Adventist leader, also identified America as the lamb-like beast of Revelation 13 and like his mentor John Andrews made a strong and explicit connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy. He described the lamb-like appearance as its republican and Protestant roles. The two horns were identified as Protestant ecclesiastical power and republican civil power. The Declaration of Independence was cited as an example of its lamb-like profession: "We hold these two truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Loughborough argued that if the people lived out this declaration, then they would all love their neighbor as themselves and all persons would be on an equal footing.

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<sup>35</sup> James White, "The War and Its Cause," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 12 November 1861, 188.

<sup>36</sup> James White, "The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 12 August 1862, 84.

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But in accordance with what John the Revelator sees, the lamb-like beast speaks as a dragon. He cited the bondage of three and one-half million American Black slaves as proof of this dragon-like voice. He derided the Declaration of Independence by suggesting it should have a clause that states “all men are created free and equal except 3,500,000.”<sup>37</sup>

Loughborough condemned America as the boasted land of freedom whose soil is cursed with the damning sin of slavery. He attacked the hated Fugitive Slave Law that demanded the return of runaway slaves to bondage and punished those who aided the slaves in their flight to freedom. He excoriated the self-righteous Protestants of the North for their coddling of the evil of slavery. He cited two examples: A Virginia woman was convicted of the crime of teaching a Negro child to read, and a slave burning in Mississippi because a slave raised his hand against a White man was witnessed by 4,000 other slaves from nearby plantations. Loughborough described numerous speeches by magistrates and ministers of religion warning slaves of the same fate if they should prove rebellious to their master. Loughborough mockingly declared: “Here is a specimen of the scenes that are transpiring in the boasted land of liberty—‘all men created free and equal.’”<sup>38</sup>

Loughborough further lambasted those clergymen who tried to justify slavery from the Old Testament, arguing that the American form of slavery cannot be compared with patriarchal slavery. He pointed out that certain principles governing that form of slavery (e.g., the freeing of slaves at jubilee) were not followed by American slaveholders. He challenged the masters to carry out this practice and to observe its outcome.<sup>39</sup>

One reader responding to Loughborough supported him by describing America in these words:

America is the most degraded at present, morally and religiously of all free and Protestant countries. “It is the reproach of evangelical Christendom . . . Her slave holders defy God and man, and the freemen of the free states sacrifice their political freedom and the personal rights of the Negro to a low and noisy political party. The United States are to us a greater grief than heathendom and popery for the names of Christianity and Protestantism, of civil and religious liberty are blasphemed through them. Oh, that the free states may burst their

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<sup>37</sup> J. N. Loughborough, “The Two Horned Beast of Revelation XIII, Symbol of the United States,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 March 1854, 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.

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fetters, get rid of the accursed thing and join the mother country in leading the march of Christianity and civilization.”<sup>40</sup>

Loughborough described the character of the lamb-like beast in these terms:

*Its Character.* This is all revealed to us in one sentence, short indeed, but abundant in meaning: [Rev. xiii, 11:] “And he had two horns like a *lamb*, and he spake as a *dragon*.” Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; therefore the animal has a dragon’s heart. His disposition, his motives, intentions, desires, are all like a dragon; his outward appearance, his horns, which must of course be prominent objects to the beholder, his open profession, are all lamb-like. His appearance is good enough, and we might be led to look upon him as a whole, as quite an amiable creature, were it not that when he raises his voice in acts of authority, he speaks as a dragon: like the old fable of the ass in the lion’s skin; if he only had not brayed, his fellow-beasts would have taken him for a lion.<sup>41</sup>

Loughborough argued that the demands of slavery are imperious and unquenchable.

The demands of Slavery are imperious, and must be complied with. It began, in 1793, by asking more territory. The territory is purchased and surrendered to its service. Again, it asks for more slave States to equalize its power in the Senate; and to soothe it into quiet, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi are successively opened to its foul embrace. It wants more privileges still. The slaves, though mere chattels, must have some influence in the ballot box. A compromise is effected by rendering five slaves equal to three white men in political influence; in other words, a slave on election day becomes *three-fifths* of a man! On all other days he is a *thing!* . . . But the grasping ambition of slavery is unquenchable. Texas is wanted to consummate its purposes. The imbecile North bows assent, as ever, to the dictates of the usurper; and Texas is gained to slavery, to say nothing of Utah and New Mexico.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sel, “What is Said of Us,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 8 April 1858, 167.

<sup>41</sup> Loughborough, 167-168.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

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The Fugitive Slave Bill was described as “that monster of human iniquity.”<sup>43</sup> Loughborough did not mince words in his denunciation of America as a slave-holding nation. Like Uriah Smith and John Andrews before him, Loughborough was unequivocal in identifying America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. Slavery was not the only sign, but was among a constellation of signs that pointed to America as this two faced beast.

**Joseph Bates and Slavery**

Joseph Bates, another founder of Adventism, not only spoke against slavery, but was an ardent abolitionist. He wrote in his autobiography of his support of the oppressed. He confessed that he could not be a consistent Christian if he stood with the oppressor. He wrote of praying for and remembering “them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” He prayed also that God would save his country from the curse of slavery.<sup>44</sup>

Bates wrote of the tremendous opposition he received due to his anti-slavery principles. He described resolutions denouncing him and his fellow anti-slave comrades in severe terms.<sup>45</sup> Bates mocked the colonization societies for their opposition to abolition and accused them of being the worst enemies of the free people of color. He also pointed out that they labored to perpetuate slavery in the slave-holding states.<sup>46</sup>

Bates’ abolitionist activities predated his conversion to the Millerite movement. In 1839, he first made contact with Millerism and was converted to the movement in 1840. Francis Nichol noted that as Bates became more active in promoting the teaching of the Second Advent, he gave less time to reform organizations like the antislavery society, where he held membership.<sup>47</sup>

Bates explained his reason for focusing more on preaching in this way:

My reply was, that in embracing the doctrine of the second coming of the Savior, I found enough to engage my whole time in getting ready for such an event, and aiding others to do the same, and that all who embraced this doctrine would and must necessarily be advocates of temperance and abolition of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Bates, *Autobiography of Joseph Bates*, 1868 (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1970), 236.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>47</sup> Francis Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1944), 182.



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slavery; and those who oppose the doctrine of the second advent could not be very effective laborers in moral reform.<sup>48</sup>

Bates was not turning his back on the abolitionist movement, for he went on to say that he was now “working at the fountainhead” of reform. He still believed in temperance and abolition, but he was attacking the problem at its very source. Like Himes, Bates must have reasoned that preparing men and women for the second coming of Jesus was a more exalted work, and ultimately all true reform would find its fulfillment at the coming of Jesus. Unlike the other Adventist expositors, Bates made no connection of slavery to Americas’ fulfillment in prophecy.

**J. N. Andrews and Slavery**

J. N. Andrews, another noted Adventist leader of the period, also attacked slavery and like his fellow Adventist contemporaries identified America as the lamblike beast of Revelation 13 and connected slavery to America’s fulfillment in prophecy. He mocked the American Constitution’s lofty claims of equality by asserting that

the same government that utters this sentiment in the face of this declaration will hold in abject servitude over 3, 200, 000 humans, rob them of their rights with which they acknowledge that all men are endowed by their creator. . . . In the institution of slavery is more especially manifested thus far, the dragon spirit that dwells in the heart of this hypocritical nation.<sup>49</sup>

Years before the outbreak of the Civil War, Andrews warned of impending catastrophe by quoting a certain Erdix Tenny:

We may sleep over the encroachments of Slavery, but we sleep upon the mouth of a volcano. When its general dominion, which seems approaching in mad haste, is perfected, an Egyptian darkness covers us—an Egyptian retribution has overtaken us. The experience of other nations, the divine rebukes of similar sins far less aggravated, warn us of a hastening catastrophe, more signal and terrific than was visited upon those nations, as our guilt is deeper. Our only hope of preserving our children, our civil and religious institutions, and our country from the debasing, destructive influences, the tyranny of Slavery, is in God; and without speedy, manly, determined

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<sup>48</sup> Bates, 182.

<sup>49</sup> J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 19 March 1857, 156.

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resistance of its encroachments, even this hope is presumption.<sup>50</sup>

**Ellen White and Slavery**

Ellen White, considered the most influential voice and one of the founders of Adventism, had very strong views against slavery. Like the other Adventist expositors of her time, she also identified America as the fulfillment of the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. In her own words she wrote: "Here is a striking figure of the rise and growth of our nation. And the lamblike horns, emblem of innocence and gentleness, well represent the character of our government as expressed in its two fundamental principle, republicanism and Protestantism."<sup>51</sup> In 1889, a quarter century after the Civil War, she identified the beast as Protestantism and the speaking as a dragon as a satanic force propelling the Sunday movement.<sup>52</sup> She did not make a direct connection of slavery to the fulfillment of America in prophecy as the two-horned beast in Revelation 13; however, she pointed out that the defense of slavery by some of the churches was proof that they were a part of Apostate Babylon. "God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned and themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise." She warned that God's anger would not cease until America drank from the cup of God's fury. She equated America with Babylon, who would be given her reward for all the sins that she committed. Mrs. White described in graphic language how heaven beholds with indignation the terrible degradation of slavery and how the Savior is moved with compassion for the slaves. She described slavery as a grievous and enormous sin, using much stronger language than the most radical abolitionists. It can be argued that although she did not make an explicit connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy, she agreed with their sentiments concerning America's dragon-like behavior, as she used similarly harsh terms to describe America's culpability in slavery.

Her counsels on slavery focused more on the immorality of slavery and the responsibility of the church towards the slaves. She repudiated the idea of slaves being the property of their masters, an idea that formed

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek: Steam Press, 1870), 4:277.

<sup>52</sup> Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 1 January 1889, 275.

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the legal basis of American slavery: "Their Maker alone is their master. . . . Those who degraded slaves will experience God's wrath."<sup>53</sup>

She affirmed the equality of all people regardless of status:

The religion of the Bible recognizes no caste or color. It ignores rank, wealth, worldly honor. God estimates men as men. With him, character decides their worth. And we are to recognize the Spirit of Christ in whomsoever it is revealed. No one need be ashamed to speak with an honest black man in any place or to shake him by the hand. He who is living in the atmosphere in which Christ lives will be taught of God and will learn to put His estimate on men.<sup>54</sup>

She proclaimed that God died for all people, but has special pity for the downtrodden:

The Lord has looked with sadness upon the most pitiful of all sights, the colored race in slavery. He desires us, in our work for them, to remember their providential deliverance from slavery, their common relationship to us by creation and by redemption, and their right to the blessings of freedom.<sup>55</sup>

Mrs. White encouraged the church to work especially for the oppressed. "God loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black, except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others."<sup>56</sup>

For her, pro-slavery sentiments came from the devil: "Some have been so indiscreet as to talk out their pro-slavery principles—principles which are not heaven-born, but proceed from the dominion of Satan."<sup>57</sup> She called slavery an accursed sin in the sight of heaven:

Satan was the first great leader in rebellion. God is punishing the North, that they have so long suffered the accursed sin of

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<sup>53</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:388.

<sup>54</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:223.

<sup>55</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:486.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

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slavery to exist; for in the sight of heaven it is a sin of the darkest dye.<sup>58</sup>

She asserted that those who are converted would view slavery as something evil.

You have never looked upon slavery in the right light, and your views of this matter have thrown you on the side of the Rebellion, which was stirred up by Satan and his host. Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. You must yield your views or the truth. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart, for they are at war with each other.<sup>59</sup>

She called slavery a blot upon the nation's history:

God saw the foul blot of slavery upon this land, he marked the sufferings that were endured by the colored people. He moved upon the hearts of men to work in behalf of those who were so cruelly oppressed.<sup>60</sup>

She viewed the Civil War as God's punishment for the high crime of slavery.<sup>61</sup> She argued for reparations to the slaves: "The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past."<sup>62</sup>

Those Americans who made no effort to fight against slavery were not spared her indictment. Even though many Whites took no active part in slavery, they were still held responsible for helping to improve the conditions of Blacks:

Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ellen G. White, "An Example in History," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 17 December 1895, 801-802.

<sup>61</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 264.

<sup>62</sup> Ellen G. White, "Am I My Brother's Keeper," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 January 1896, 33.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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Ellen White counseled the church to remove from their membership those who held and promoted pro-slavery views:

Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. You must yield your views or the truth. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart, for they are at war with each other. . . . But notwithstanding all the light given, you have given publicity to your sentiments. Unless you undo what you have done, it will be the duty of God's people to publicly withdraw their sympathy and fellowship from you, in order to save the impression which must go out in regard to us as a people. We must let it be known that we have no such ones in our fellowship, that we will not walk with them in church capacity.<sup>64</sup>

It seems clear that Ellen White detested slavery and counseled the church repeatedly about reaching out and ministering to the slaves to ameliorate their condition. She indicted the nation for permitting this terrible evil to exist and held it accountable for reparations. She repudiated decisively the prevailing theories on race and affirmed the common humanity of all people.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Most of the leading voices among the Adventist pioneers identified America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13 that spoke as a dragon and pointed to slavery as one of the strongest evidences of America's dragon-like quality. This was a view that was held by Uriah Smith, James White, J. N. Andrews, and John Loughborough; all prominent leaders in early Adventism. While their views on the immorality and evil of slavery were similar to those held by anti-slavery evangelical leaders of their time, they differed significantly in how slavery was related to the American nation. This can be explained by how they viewed the state of society and the world. It was not uncommon at that time for many prominent religious leaders to view America as a kind of utopia that needed cleansing, especially from the evil of slavery, so it could become a prototype of the future kingdom of God. In other words, they saw America as God's special experiment, different from all other earthly kingdoms that preceded it. The Adventist pioneers, being students of the prophecy of Daniel that described the rise and fall of great powers, saw America as another one of the great earthly powers that would rise and

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<sup>64</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 1:359.

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fall as did Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. They had no illusions about the ultimate destiny of America, for this nation was governed by sinful men, as other nations were, and was therefore doomed to ultimate failure.

By pointing out slavery as a fulfillment of America in prophecy, they were simply repudiating any notion of America being some type of the kingdom of God. These men were not unpatriotic or disloyal to America because of this damning critique of America. On the contrary, their frank words regarding America's "original sin" revealed their courage and bravery.

What was the central point of these Adventist pioneers? The end of the age was at hand; things would not get better, not even in America. America was not the answer to the problems of humanity. They wanted to put to rest the popularly held belief of America's divine origin and destiny. Even though they believed America was guided by providence, America was a man-made experiment and therefore a sinful enterprise. The distinct feature of the nation was its deceitful and hypocritical nature. It gave the impression of a gentle, harmless lamb, but beneath that lamb-like pretension was a fierce dragon heart. It was a dragon beast at its core; it did not evolve into one. This pessimistic view of the future did not cause the pioneers to remain silent on the great social ills of the day. They spoke out against them and encouraged the nation to change.

The pioneers also believed that this dragon-like quality would become more evident as we approach the end of time. In other words, its lamb-like quality would recede as its dragon-like quality predominated. Is it possible that the pioneers may have been predicting a time in America's future when the nation will repudiate its lamb-like qualities of democracy, freedom, and justice and evolve into a totalitarian police state? In the present climate of fear and uncertainty, it is not inconceivable that in the name of security and safety many of the freedoms that we now enjoy will be suspended. The government may be forced to choose between freedom and security and will almost certainly choose security with the view of preserving the nation. That time may be upon us sooner than we imagine and will make the words of these Adventist pioneers startlingly relevant.

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