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The Editor's Page

Ed Christian

With this issue, our biggest ever, *JATS* concludes its first decade of publication. God has blessed! I want to thank the many scholars who have contributed their time, effort, and insight. I also want to thank our many subscribers for their support—and also for their patience as we struggle to publish late issues and move on to this year's issues. We couldn't do it without you. Indeed, we wouldn't do it without you!

This is the third of four consecutive double issues. This one includes papers from two ATS conferences: the Spring 1997 conference on postmodernism, held at Andrews University, and the Autumn 1998 conference on hot topics, controversial issues, held in Orlando. (Among these is a series of "hot topics" papers I've presented at the Spring 2000 conference of the Southern California Chapter of the ATS, at four overseas ATS seminars, and at other venues. Please forgive my publishing my own articles. They have all been thoroughly peer reviewed, and many people have asked that they be published.) Also included are a number of independent submissions, including an important series by Roy Gane on Old Testament topics and Alberto Timm's very useful history of SDA views on the nature of inspiration.

This is the second issue of *JATS* sent on a complimentary basis to 1500 theologians who are members of the Evangelical Theological Society, sharing our work with our professorial colleagues and fellow students of God's Word. ATS and ETS meet together for our fall conference.

The next issue of *JATS* will focus on Eschatology, the study of last day events and the soon return of Jesus Christ. It will be a tribute to the memory of Professor C. Mervyn Maxwell. Maxwell was a great teacher, a notable writer on Daniel and Revelation, a fine church historian, and an editor who helped see the first three issues of this journal into print.

Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament: A Fresh Look at Deuteronomy 24:1–4

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The wide range of OT passages related to the issues of divorce and remarriage includes at least six different Hebrew expressions referring to divorce occurring altogether some 27 times,¹ plus several references to remarriage.² Within the space constraints of this article I limit myself to the most seminal passage dealing with divorce and remarriage, Deut 24:1–4. I have found this passage to contain far-reaching implications for understanding NT passages on the subject and for properly recognizing the hermeneutical relationship between OT and NT divorce/remarriage legislation. In this fresh look at Deut 24:1–4 I will argue that crucial grammatical-syntactical and intertextual features of the legislation have been largely overlooked in previous studies of the passage, and that these features provides keys for understanding the continuity between the Testaments with regard to the subject of marriage and divorce.

I. Historical Background and Literary Context

The book of Deuteronomy encompasses Moses' farewell sermon to Israel, given about 1410 B.C. on the borders of Canaan just before Moses' death and Israel's entrance into the promised land. The address is framed in the overall

¹The Hebrew terms and their occurrences are as follows:(1) *šlh* "to send away, divorce," all in *Piel*: Gen 21:14; Deut 21:14; 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3, 4; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:1, 8; Mal 2:16. (2) *grš* "to drive out, cast/thrust out, banish, divorce," *Piel*: Gen 21:10; *Qal* passive: Lev 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:10 [Eng. 9]; Ezek 44:22. (3) [*sēper*] *k'ritūt*, "[document] of cutting off or divorce": Deut 24:1, 3; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8. (4) *yš* "to cause to go out = divorce" (*Hifil*): Ezra 10:3, 19. (5) *bdl* "to separate oneself = divorce," *Nifal*, Ezra 10:11. (6) *bgd* "to deal treacherously with, break faith with = divorce," *Qal*, Mal 2:14, 15, 16.

²See, e.g., Gen 25:1; Deut 24:1–4; 1 Sam 25:44; and perhaps Isa 7:14; 8:3.

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structure of a covenant renewal, following the essential outline of the international suzerainty-vassal treaties of the day:³

Preamble	Deut 1:1–5
Historical Prologue	Deut 1:6 – 4:49
General Stipulations	Deut 5–11
Specific Stipulations	Deut 12–26
Blessings and Curses	Deut 27–28
Witnesses	Deut 30:15–20
Deposition of text	Deut 31:9, 24–26
Public reading	Deut 31:10–13
Covenant Lawsuit	Deut 32
(against rebellious vassals)	

Within this overall structure, Deuteronomy 24 is situated as part of the specific stipulations of the covenant, Deuteronomy 12–26. A penetrating study of this section of Deuteronomy by Stephen Kaufman has shown that the whole body of material is arranged “with consummate literary artistry” as an expansion and application of the Decalogue of Deuteronomy 5, with the various laws grouped within topical units that follow the content and sequence of the corresponding commandments of the Decalogue.⁴ Kaufman proposes the following arrangement and sequence:

Commandment	Deuteronomy Passage	Description
1–2	12:1–31	Worship
3	13:1 – 14:27	Name of God
4	14:28 – 16:17	Sabbath
5	16:18 – 18:22	Authority
6	19:1– 22:8	Homicide
7	22:9 – 23:19	Adultery
8	23:20 – 24:7	Theft
9	24:8 – 25:4	False Charges
10	25:5–16	Coveting

What is particularly noteworthy for our study at this point is that Deut 24:1–4 is not placed in the section of the Deuteronomic law dealing with adultery, but in

³See especially P. C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 20–24 and *passim*, for bibliography and discussion.

⁴Steven A. Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law,” *MAARAV* 1–2 (1978– 1979): 105–158 (quotation from p. 125).

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the section dealing with theft. This fact must be kept in mind as we seek to understand the underlying purpose of the legislation.

II. Translation

Deut 24:1–4 reads as follows (RSV, with verse divisions marked):

- 1) “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,
- 2) and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife,
- 3) and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife,
- 4) then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance.”

III. Literary Form and Structure

Some earlier English translations of this passage (e.g., KJV, ERV, and ASV) are misleading, because they have the actual legislative portion beginning already with verse 1b, “then let him write her a bill of divorcement . . .” If such were the correct translation, then God indeed would be sanctioning divorce in this passage. But it is now universally recognized that the form or genre of this law and the details of Hebrew grammatical structure lead to a different understanding.

In the legal portions of the Pentateuch we find two major literary types of laws: apodictic and casuistic (case laws). In the former, there is an absolute command or prohibition, “Thou shalt . . .” or “Thou shalt not.” In the latter, the case laws, there is first the protasis, or description of condition(s), usually starting with Hebrew words best translated by “If . . .” or “When . . .” This is followed by the apodosis, or actual legislation, best signaled in English translation by the word “then . . .” Following the protasis and apodosis, a case law (as well as apodictic law) sometimes has one or more motive clauses giving the rationale for the law.

Deut 24:1–4 is a case law which has all three elements just described. In vv. 1–3 we find the protasis with several conditions: the grounds and procedure for divorce (v. 1), the remarriage of the woman (v. 2), and the divorce or the death of the second husband (v. 3). Only after describing all of these conditions in vv. 1–3, do we find at the beginning of v. 4 the Hebrew word *l’o* (“not”), signaling the start of the apodosis or actual legislation. The only legislation in this passage is in verse 4a, forbidding the woman’s former husband to take her back to be his wife under the circumstances described in vv. 1–3.

The implication is clear: God is in no wise legislating or even sanctioning divorce in this passage. In fact, the whole passage may be expressing tacit dis-

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approval although the divorce is tolerated and not punished. This will become more evident as we proceed.

Following the protasis and apodosis of Deut 24:1–4a, we find the third major part of the case law, the motive clauses of v. 4b, containing the multiple rationale for the prohibition: The woman has been “defiled,” it would be an “abomination” before the Lord, and “sin” should not be brought upon the land. These all call for attention in order to understand the purpose of the legislation.

We will take up each of the three main sections of Deut 24:1–4 in turn.

IV. Circumstances of Divorce/Remarriage: The Protasis (vss. 1–3)

A. Grounds for Divorce (vs. 1a). Deut 24:1 describes two conditions that lead the husband to “send away” (Heb. *šlh*) or divorce his wife. First, “it happens that she finds no favor [Heb. *hēn*, approval or affection⁵] in his eyes.” The phrase “to find/not find favor in one’s eyes” is the ordinary Hebrew expression for “like/dislike” or “please/displease.” It describes the subjective situation—the husband’s dislike, displeasure, or lack of approval/affection for his wife.

But the grounds for divorce are not limited to the subjective element. There are also concrete grounds for the disapproval: “because he has found some indecency [*erwat dābār*] in her, . . .” The Hebrew expression *erwat dābār* may be translated literally as “nakedness of a thing.” But to what does it refer? This question has been widely debated among scholars, both ancient and modern. The correct interpretation of this Hebrew phrase was at the heart of the Pharisees’ test question to Jesus in Matt 19:3: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” In Jesus’ day two interpretations of Deut 24:1 vied for attention. The School of Shammai emphasized the word *erwah* “nakedness,” and interpreted the phrase to refer to marital unchastity,⁶ while the School of Hillel emphasized the word *dābār* “thing,” and interpreted the phrase to refer to any indecency or anything displeasing to the husband, “even if she spoiled his dish [of food].”⁷

The word *erwat* “nakedness” elsewhere in the OT most often refers to the nakedness of a person’s private parts or genitals, which should not be uncovered

⁵Holladay, 110.

⁶Roy Gane, “Old Testament Principles Relevant to Divorce and Remarriage” (paper presented to Pacific Union Conference of SDA’s Divorce-Adultery-Remarriage Committee, 1993, revised 1995 for Syllabus for Andrews University Class in Law-Covenant-Sabbath), 162, I believe correctly argues that for Shammai *erwah* not only included illicit sexual intercourse, but also indecent [sexual] exposure.

⁷See Herbert Danby, translator, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), *Gittin*, 9.10: “The School of Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, ‘Because he hath found in her *indecency* in anything.’ And the School of Hillel say: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, ‘Because he hath found in her indecency in *anything*.’” The Babylonian Talmud expands the discussion of the two schools; see Jacob Neusner, translator, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, vol 18c, *Gittin Chapters 6–9* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 117–119.

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or exposed [*glh*] to be seen by those who should not see them; and the uncovering of one's nakedness usually has sexual connotations.⁸ The word *dābār* can mean "word [speech, saying]" or "thing [matter, affair]" in Hebrew,⁹ and in the context of Deut 24:1 surely means "thing" or "matter."

The phrase *erwat dābār* occurs only once in the OT besides Deut 24:1, and that is in the previous chapter, Deut 23:15 (Eng. v. 14). Here it clearly refers to the excrement mentioned in the previous verse which should be covered [Heb. *glh*] so that the Lord "may see no *erwat dābār* among you, and turn away from you." The "nakedness of a thing" is something that is uncovered that should have been covered, something that is repulsive, disgusting or shameful when left exposed.

It appears that the phrase *erwat dābār* in Deut 24:1 has a similar meaning as in the preceding chapter, but refers to the "nakedness of a thing" with regard to a wife. It seems probable, given the preceding context, and the usual sexual overtones of the term *erwah* when referring to a woman, that the phrase in Deut 24:1 describes a situation of indecent exposure [of private parts] on the part of the woman.¹⁰ Theoretically, the phrase could probably include illicit sexual intercourse (i.e., adultery), in parallel with the phrase "uncover nakedness" [Heb. *gillah erwah*] describing such behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20.¹¹ However, since adultery (and other illicit sexual intercourse) received the death penalty (or being "cut off" from the congregation) according to the law (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10–18), the indecent exposure referred to here in Deut 24:1 must be something short of these sexual activities,¹² but a serious sexual indiscretion none-

⁸See, e.g., Gen 9:22, 23; Exod 20:23; 28:42; figuratively, uncovering of one's nakedness in punishment: Isa 20:4; 47:3; Ezek 16:37; 23:10, 29. The term "uncovering the nakedness of" is often used euphemistically for sexual intercourse: Lev 18:6, 8, 10, 16; 20:17; Ezek 16:36. See BDB, 788–789, for full list of passages, and see Roy Gane, "Old Testament Principles," 153–162, for careful analysis of the meaning and usage of this word and the whole phrase *erwat dābār* in the OT.

⁹For all the nuances, see BDB, 182–184.

¹⁰Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Matt. 19.13[sic]–12 and 1 Cor. 11.3–16*, trans. by N. Tomkinson with J. Gray, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, 24 (Lund: Geerup; Copenhagen: Munsgaard, 1965), 26, concurs that the phrase is a euphemism for indecent exposure of the wife's private parts: "All other exposure of his wife's pudendum than that which the husband himself is responsible for arouses his loathing." See also Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 317: "The noun *erwah* bears the meaning of both 'nakedness' and 'pudenda' [i.e., the sexual organs], meanings no doubt to be combined here to suggest the improper uncovering of the private parts."

¹¹I agree with Merrill, 317: "Surely this circumlocution is to be understood as a euphemism that may or may not include adultery. . . . It is likely that *erwat dābār* is a phrase broad enough to include adultery but not synonymous with it." See also Gane, "Old Testament Principles," 160: ". . . *erwat dābār*, which can encompass not only illicit sexual intercourse, but lesser exposures as well."

¹²John Murray, *Divorce* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961), 10–11, gives six cogent reasons why Deut 24:1 cannot refer to adultery. The OT legislation is here in contrast with elsewhere in the ancient Near East where adultery under certain circumstances could provide legitimate grounds for divorce. See J. J. Rabbinowitz, "The 'Great Sin' in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts," *Journal*

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theless.¹³ I conclude that the phrase *erwat dāḥār* in Deut 24:1 describes some type of serious, shameful, and disgraceful conduct of indecent exposure probably associated with sexual activity, but less than actual illicit sexual intercourse.

What is the implication of this conclusion about the meaning of *erwat dāḥār* in Deut 24 for the answer that Jesus gives to the Pharisees in Matt 19 regarding the grounds for divorce? Jesus states only one legitimate ground for divorce: *porneia* (Matt 19:9; cf. 5:32). To what does *porneia* refer when used without any qualifiers in the context? I believe that its parallel usage (again without qualifiers) in Acts 15, and the intertextual allusions to Lev 17–18 in this latter passage, provide helpful guidance here. Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: “that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled [i.e. not drained of their blood],¹⁴ and from sexual immorality [*porneia*]” (vs. 29). Particularly striking is that this is the same list, *in the same order*, as the four major legal prohibitions explicitly stated to be applicable to the stranger/alien as well as to native Israelites in Lev 17–18. In these OT chapters we find (1) sacrificing to demons/idols (Lev 17:7–9); (2) eating blood (Lev 17:10–12); (3) eating anything that has not been immediately drained of its blood (Lev 17:13–16); and (4) various illicit sexual practices (Lev 18). In this clear case of intertextuality, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that the practices forbidden to the alien in Leviticus 17–18 were what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians in the church. The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15 labels *porneia* are those illicit sexual activities included in Leviticus 18. These activities may be summarized in general as illicit sexual inter-

of Near Eastern Studies 18 (1959):73; W. L. Moran, “The Scandal of the ‘Great Sin’ at Ugarit,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1959): 208–209; cf. Roy Gane, “Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Penalties for Sexual Misconduct,” Ph.D. preliminary examination in Biblical Law, University of Berkeley, November 1988, included in Gane’s syllabus for Andrews University course in Covenant-Law-Sabbath, 139–145.

¹³So S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1902), 271, concludes regarding this phrase: “It is most natural to understand it of *immodest* or *indecent* behavior. Gane, “Old Testament Principles,” 157, concludes that the “‘indecent exposure’ could be understood literally to mean that a wife improperly uncovers herself without physical contact of her sexual body parts with those of another person.” Following a suggestion pointed out to him by Raymond Westbrook, Gane, “Old Testament Principles,” 158, further suggests that it could be taken figuratively to mean “improper conduct with a man other than her husband.” See Gane, “Old Testament Principles,” 155–162, for extended discussion.

¹⁴The Greek adjective *pniktos*, usually translated “strangled” or “choked,” actually refers precisely to the situation described in Lev 17:13–16. H. Bietenhard, “πνικτος,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1975, 1:226, explains: “The command [of Acts 15:20, 29] goes back to Lev. 17:13 f. and Deut. 12:16, 23. An animal should be so slaughtered that its blood, in which is its life, should be allowed to pour out. If the animal is killed in any other way, it has been ‘strangled.’” Even more clearly in his article on πνιγω in *TDNT*, 6:457: “The regulations in Lv. 17:13 f. and Dt. 12:16, 23 lay down that an animal should be slaughtered in such a way that all the blood drains from the carcass. If it is put to death in any other way, it ‘chokes,’ since the life seated in the blood remains in the body.”

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course—including incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality. Various scholars have recognized this intertextual connection.¹⁵ The correlation between Acts 15 and Leviticus 17–18 seems to provide a solid foundation for determining what the early church understood by the term *porneia*.

This inner-biblical definition of *porneia* seems to me to be decisive in understanding Jesus' "exception clause" regarding divorce on grounds of *porneia* in Matt 5:32; 19:9. Jesus' "exception clause" is stricter than the grounds for divorce presented in Deut 24:1 (according to the interpretation of both the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel). Jesus' "exception" for divorce is *porneia*, which is not the exact equivalent of the *'erwat dābār* of Deut 24:1. *Porneia* is a much narrower term, referring exclusively to illicit sexual intercourse, which in the Mosaic law called for the offender being "cut off" from God's people (Lev 18:29).¹⁶ As Roy Gane summarizes: "Jesus says that whereas Moses allowed for divorce for indecent exposure without illicit sexual relations, He permits divorce only if illicit sexual relations take place."¹⁷

Furthermore, in this light Jesus' "exception clause" in Matthew 5 and 19 is not to be seen in contradiction to the Synoptic parallel accounts in Mark and Luke which contain no exception clause. Mark and Luke do not mention any exception clause, presumably because they do not consider the case of *porneia*, the penalty for which was being "cut off" or death. It was assumed that the death penalty or being "cut off" from the congregation meant a *de facto* dissolution of the marriage. Matthew apparently preserves the original intent of Jesus for read-

¹⁵For further support for this position on the parallel of Acts 15 and Leviticus 17–18 and the meaning of *porneia*, see especially H. Reisser, "porneuō" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (1975), 1:497–501; F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "πόρνη, πόρνς, πόρνεῖα, πόρνεύω, ἐκπορνεύω," *TDNT*, 6:579–595; and James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 95–106, 129–137. This is in opposition to those who equate the *porneia* of Acts 15 only with the incestuous relationships of Lev 18:6–18. This view fails to recognize that the entire chapter of Leviticus 18 is a unit describing the various illicit sexual activities carried out by the Canaanites (see the inclusio in vv. 3 and 30). Defenders of this latter view include Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 197–226; Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), 182–189; and others.

¹⁶This involved the death penalty at least in the case of adultery (Lev 20:10), some instances of incest (vs. 12), homosexual relationships (vs. 13), and bestiality (vss. 15–16). By the time of Jesus, the death penalty for illicit sexual intercourse had all but died out (both the Babylonian Talmud [*Sanh.* 41a] and the Jerusalem Talmud [*Sanh.* 18a, 24b] indicate that the death penalty was abolished forty years before the destruction of the Temple, i.e., about 30 A.D.), and therefore the School of Shammai could rightly include such sexual activity in the meaning of *'erwat dābār*, while also including indecent exposure in general.

¹⁷Gane, "Old Testament Principles," 160. Gane, "Old Testament Principles," 161–162, further points out that "in Matt 5:32, Jesus' Greek phraseology follows the syntax of the House of Shammai formulation: *logou porneias*, 'a matter of fornication.' The difference between the two formulations is the difference between the range of meaning of *porneia*, illicit sexual intercourse, and that of the broader term *'erwah*, exposure in general."

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ers after 30 A.D. when the death penalty for adultery was abolished (Babylonian Talmud *Sanh.* 41a).¹⁸

B. Procedure of Divorce (vs. 1b). According to Deut 24:1b, there were three major elements in the divorce proceedings. First, the husband wrote a “certificate of divorce,” literally “document of cutting off [*sēper k’rîtût*].” Other legal documents are mentioned in the OT,¹⁹ and the certificate of divorce is also alluded to in other passages that we will be examining shortly. Although there is no OT example of the actual wording of such a document, it has been suggested that the central divorce formula is contained in Yahweh’s statement of divorce proceedings against Israel in Hos 2:2 [Heb. v. 4]: “she is not my wife and I am not her husband!”²⁰ Such a statement would mean the legal breaking of the marriage covenant as much as the death of the marriage partner. The document no doubt had to be properly issued and officially authenticated, thus ensuring that the divorce proceedings were not done precipitously.

The bill of divorce may have also contained what in Rabbinic times was considered “the essential formula in the bill of divorce,” i.e., “Lo, thou art free

¹⁸For more complete discussion of this point, see R. H. Charles, *The Teaching of the New Testament on Divorce* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921). Charles summarizes (21–23): “When we recognise that Mark’s narrative takes no cognisance of the case of adultery, but only of the other and inadequate grounds advanced for divorce, the chief apparent contradictions between Matthew and Mark cease to exist. What is implicit in Mark is made explicit in Matthew. Both gospels therefore teach that marriage is indissoluble for all offences short of adultery. . . . Now, it was impossible to misinterpret the plain words of Christ, as stated in Mark, at the time they were uttered, and so long as the law relating to the infliction of death on the adulteress and her paramour was not abrogated. But, as we know, this law was abrogated a few years later. The natural result was that to our Lord’s words, which had one meaning before the abrogation of this law, a different meaning was in many quarters attached after its abrogation, and they came to be regarded as forbidding divorce under all circumstances, though really and originally they referred only to divorces procured on inadequate grounds—that is, grounds not involving adultery. Now, it was just to correct such a grave misconception, or the possibility of such a misconception, of our Lord’s words, whether in Mark or other early documents, that Matthew (v. 32, xix.9) edited the narrative afresh and inserted the clause, ‘saving for the cause of unchastity.’ . . . By the insertion of these clauses Matthew preserves the meaning of our Lord’s statements on this subject for all subsequent generations that had lost touch with the circumstances and limitations under which they were originally made. Matthew’s additions are therefore justifiable. Without them the reader is apt to misunderstand the passages on divorce.” It is also possible that Matthew preserves the original complete wording of Jesus (in translation, of course), and that Mark and Luke simply left out the reference to *porneia* in the Greek translation because Jesus’ original intent is clear without it (since *porneia* called for death or being “cut off” which implies a *de facto dissolution* of the marriage in those cases). In other words, one does not have to decide on the question of the Synoptic problem (which Gospel is prior, if any) to reconcile this apparent contradiction.

¹⁹See 2 Sam 11:14–15, the legal correspondence [*seper*] of David to Joab delivered via Uriah the Hittite; Jer 32:11, the purchase deed [*seper*] of Jeremiah.

²⁰In the discussion on this passage, we will argue, however, that most probably Yahweh did not divorce his “wife” Israel in Hosea 2.

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to marry any man.”²¹ This would provide for the freedom and right of the woman to be married again. The document would be indicating that although the woman had been guilty of some kind of indecent exposure, she was not guilty of adultery or other illicit sexual intercourse, and therefore not liable to punishment for such sexual activity. Thus she was protected from abuse or false charges by her former husband or others at a subsequent time.

Parallels from the Code of Hammurabi and the Jewish Mishnah indicate that the certificate of divorce would also contain mention of the financial settlement, unless the woman was guilty of misconduct, in which case no financial compensation was awarded her.²² Probably the latter (no financial compensation) was the case in Deut 24:1.

The second step of the divorce proceedings was to “put it [the bill of divorce] in her [the wife’s] hand” (Deut 24:1). She must actually receive notice of the divorce directly in order for it to be effective. The Mishnah tractate *Gittin* deals with various kinds of possible situations which might not qualify as actually putting the divorce certificate in the hand of the woman.²³ The effect, again, is the protection of the wife by ensuring that she has access to, and concrete notification of, the divorce document.

The third step is that the husband “sends her out of his house” (Deut 24:1). The word “send” [Heb. *šlh* in the *Piel*] is elsewhere in the OT the closest one comes to a technical term for “divorce.”²⁴ By sending the wife away is intended the effectuation of the divorce process. The break is final and complete.

C. Remarriage and the second divorce or death of second husband (vss. 2–3). The third condition specified in the protasis of Deut 24:1–3 is that the divorced woman remarries, and then her second husband either divorces her or dies.

Raymond Westbrook seeks to establish that the grounds for the second divorce are not the same as those for the first divorce. The second husband is said to “detest” or “dislike” [Heb. *šnʿ*, literally, “hate”] her, which term is not employed in the grounds for the first divorce.²⁵ However, the evidence Westbrook cites actually militates against his conclusion, for he shows that in ancient Near

²¹Mishnah, *Gittin*, 9.3. From the scattered references to the divorce document in the Mishnah, it is possible to reconstruct its hypothetical form, which closely resembles the form recorded in the 12th century by Maimonides (Treatise Gerushin, iv, 12). See D. W. Amram, *The Jewish Law of Divorce* (reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1975), 156–158, for reconstructed document.

²²See discussion of this, with citations of examples from ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Jewish Mishnah, in Raymond Westbrook, “The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in Deuteronomy 24:1–4,” in *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol 31: *Studies in Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 393–398.

²³For example, *Gittin* 4.1 states that if the bill of divorcement is intercepted by the husband before it reaches his wife, then it is void, but if he tries to intercept it after she receives it, it is not void.

²⁴This is already apparent in Deut 24:4, where the Hebrew term simply means “divorce.” We will examine the other usages of *šlh* with reference to divorce below.

²⁵Westbrook, 399–405.

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Eastern sources and later Jewish material (e.g., the Elephantine marriage contracts) the formula “I hate [*šn*] my husband/wife” is a summary of the longer standard divorce formula “I hate and divorce my husband/wife.” Westbrook’s argument that “hate/dislike” in Deut 24:3 refers to divorce without objective grounds in contrast to divorce with objective grounds in v. 1, while plausible, is not persuasive.²⁶ In light of the fact that *šn*’ is used elsewhere as the technical term to summarize the grounds for divorce, whatever they might be, it seems preferable to take this term “hate/dislike” [*šn*] as summarizing the same situation as the first divorce mentioned in v. 1.

The divorce procedure is the same as described in vs 1: The husband writes his wife a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away out of his house. Or, as an alternative situation, the second husband dies.

V. Legislation: The Apodosis (vs. 4a)

After the lengthy statement of conditions, the legislation itself is short and simple: “then her former husband who divorced her [Heb. *šilḥah*] must not [Heb. *lo’yûkal*] take her back to be his wife after she is defiled” (Deut 24:4a). While the legislation is clear, the rationale for this legislation is far less certain. Already in the legislation, however, one part of the rationale is given: “after she has been defiled.” Two additional aspects of the rationale for the prohibition appear in the motive clauses. We will examine all of these aspects in the next section.

VI. Rationale for the Legislation: The Motive Clauses (vss. 4b–d)

A. The explanation: “After she has been defiled” (vs. 4b). The first indicator of the reason for this legislation comes in the explanation why the first husband is not permitted to remarry: “she has been defiled.” The Hebrew for this clause is a single word *huṭṭammā’āh*, from the root *m^E* “to be or become unclean or defiled.” But the grammatical form employed in this verse is very unusual in the Hebrew Bible, used nowhere else with *tm*’ and only a very few times with a very few verbs.²⁷ This form is the passive of the *Hithpael*. Since the *Hithpael* normally conveys the reflexive idea (“she defiled herself”) and is used reflex-

²⁶Besides the elements of conjecture that he must introduce (the first divorce provided no financial compensation but the second divorce did), Westbrook’s thesis that the law is merely to prevent the first husband from profiting financially twice from the woman, while possible, does not seem to match the severe language used in the motive clauses to describe the “abomination” and “sin” of this action. See discussion below.

²⁷The standard Hebrew grammars list only four occurrences of the *Hithpael* with only three verbs: Lev 13:55–56; Deut 24:4; and Isa 34:6. All of these are in verse or technical priestly writing. See Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 432; E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 150 (par. 54 h).

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ively in its occurrences with *ṭm'*,²⁸ the passive or *Hothpael* in Deut 24:4 would probably best be translated as “she has been made/caused to defile herself.” The implications of this will become apparent after examining the nature of the woman’s defilement.

The word *ṭm'* in the reflexive occurring in the context of sexual activities leads us clearly to Leviticus 18, where we have not only the reflexive form of this word (vv. 24, 30), but the other two terms/concepts used in the motive clauses of Deut 24:4: the term “abomination” [*to'ēbah*] (vv. 22, 26, 29) and the idea of bringing defilement/sin upon the land (vv. 25, 27, 28). Leviticus 18 is the only other chapter of the Hebrew Bible that combines these three terms/ideas in one context, and seems undoubtedly to be alluded to by Deut 24:4. It is crucial to note that in Leviticus 18 one “defiles oneself” by having illicit sexual relations with another (v. 20, 24, including at least adultery, bestiality, homosexual practice). Deut 24:4 also probably alludes to Num 5:13, 14, 20, where the wife is specifically referred to as having “defiled herself” by having illicit sexual relationships with another man than her husband.

The implication of this connection between Deut 24:4, Leviticus 18, and Numbers 5 is that the sexual activity of the divorced woman with the second husband is tantamount to adultery or some other illicit sexual intercourse, even though she does not incur the death penalty or other punishment as in the cases of Leviticus 18.

Various commentators have recognized this implication. Keil and Delitzsch write on Deut 24:4: “Thus the second marriage of a divorced woman was placed *implicitae* upon a par with adultery . . .”²⁹ S. R. Driver concurs that “the union of a divorced woman with another man, from the point of view of her first husband, [is] falling into the same category as adultery . . .”³⁰ Similarly, P. C. Craige comments: “The sense is that the woman’s remarriage after the first divorce is similar to adultery in that the woman cohabits with another man.”³¹ Again, Earl Kalland remarks: “So here [Deut 24:4] it refers to whatever defilement is associated with adultery.”³²

If the sexual intercourse of the woman with her second husband defiles her and is tantamount to adultery, why is she free from punishment? The answer seems to be found in the meaning of the *Hothpael* form of *ṭm'*: she “*has been caused to defile herself.*” This apparently does not refer to the one she has had sexual intercourse with (i.e., her second husband) as the “cause” of defilement,

²⁸Lev 11:24, 43; 18:24, 30; 21:1, 3, 4, 11; Num 6:7; Ezek 14:11; 20:7, 18; 37:23; 44:25. See BDB, 379.

²⁹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes. Volume 1: The Pentateuch, Three Volumes in One* (Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 3:418.

³⁰Driver, 272.

³¹Craige, 305.

³²Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 3:146.

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as is the case when a *Nifal* or even *Hithpael* form is used.³³ By utilizing the rare *Hothpael* (passive reflexive) form, another cause than the immediate defilement with her second husband seems to be implied. This is highlighted by comparing this occurrence of the *Hothpael* with its other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, where the same dynamic is functioning³⁴: The ultimate cause, seemingly implicit in this rare grammatical form, is the first husband. The legislation subtly implicates the first husband for divorcing his wife. Even though his action is not punished, and therefore is tolerated, the law makes clear that his action does not have divine approval. His putting away his wife has in effect caused her to defile herself in a second marriage in a similar way as if she were committing adultery.³⁵

Thus, while Deut 24:1–4 does not legislate divorce or remarriage, and even tolerates it to take place within certain grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse, at the same time within the legislation is an internal indicator that such divorce brings about a state tantamount to adultery, and therefore is not in harmony with the divine will.

Recognizing the correct translation of Deut 24:4 (“she has been caused to defile herself”) throws light on Jesus’ words in Matt 5:32: “But I say unto you, whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality [*porneia*] causes her to commit adultery [presumably when she remarries]; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” Just as in the other “But I say unto you” sayings of Matthew 5, Jesus is not changing or adding something new to the Law, but showing the true and deeper meaning that is already contained in the Law, which had been distorted by later misinterpretation. Already in Deut 24:4 it is indicated that breaking the marriage bond on grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse causes the woman to defile herself, i.e., commit what is tantamount to adultery.³⁶

³³See, e.g., (*Nifal*) Lev 18:24; Num 5:13, 14, 14, 20, 27; (*Hithpael*) Lev 18:24, 30. Regardless whether one translates these passages reflexively (as I prefer) or passively (or a mixture of both), the person “defiles himself/herself” with or “is defiled” by the sexual partner.

³⁴So in Lev 13:55–56. In the case of “leprous garments,” the priest “commands that they wash the thing in which is the plague” (v. 54), and then the priest examines the plague after “it had been caused to be washed” [*Hothpael*] (v. 55–56). It was “they” who actually washed the garment, but the priest was the “cause.” Likewise in Isa 34:6, “The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is caused to be made fat [*Hothpael*] with fat [the fat of the kidneys of rams] . . .” The object that makes it fat is the fat of the rams’ kidneys, but the Lord [who wields the sword] is the one who causes it to happen. In each case another prior cause than what does the actual action (washing, making fat) is in view.

³⁵Cf. note 85 (and Luck, 62) for further arguments.

³⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 418, recognize this when they indicate that “the second marriage of a divorced woman was placed *implicitae* upon a par with adultery, and some approach made toward the teaching of Christ concerning marriage: [Matt 5:32 quoted].” My conclusion is in opposition to recent analyses of the relationship between Deuteronomy 24 and Matt 5:32 which conclude that the conditions/grounds for divorce presumed in Deuteronomy 24 are still the norm for today and that Matthew 5 and 19 are simply hyperbole and exaggeration and not intended to be exhaustive in providing the only guide for divorce. See especially Joe Sprinkle, “Old Testament Perspectives on Di-

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A further implication of this interpretation of Deut 24:4 is that Jesus, in pointing the Pharisees away from the divine “concession” in Deut 24:1–4 to God’s ideal “from the beginning” (Matt 19:8), was not arbitrarily shifting from the Deuteronomic law to the Edenic ideal. He was rather pointing to a conclusion that was already implicit in Deut 24:4: vv. 1–3 were a temporary concession to “hardness” of Israel’s heart, but they did not represent God’s divine ideal for marriage.

B. The reason: “It is an abomination” (vs. 4c). As we have already noted above, the term *to^cēbah* “abomination,” occurring in context with the other two rationales found in Deut 24:4, links unmistakably with Leviticus 18. As the various types of illicit sexual intercourse mentioned in Leviticus 18 are “abominations” [*to^cēbōth*], so is a woman’s returning to the first husband after having been married again. Craige rightly points out that if the woman’s remarriage after her first divorce is similar to adultery, remarriage to her former husband is even more so: “if the woman were then to remarry her first husband, after divorcing the second, the analogy with adultery would become even more complete; the woman lives first with one man, then another, and finally returns to the first.”³⁷

What is more, it appears that the prohibition does in effect bring indirect “punishment” upon the first husband for divorcing his wife. Even though his divorcing her is not directly censured, yet since she “has been caused [by him] to defile herself” through his action, he is indirectly punished by not being allowed to take her as a wife again. To do such would be an “abomination.” Though the punishment for failing to follow this prohibition is not given in the text, it probably may be assumed that such an abomination would not just be similar to adultery, but treated as adultery and punished accordingly.

C. The command: “You shall not bring sin on the land” (vs. 4d). This last motive clause once again brings us to Leviticus 18. The idea that illicit sexual intercourse defiles the land is mentioned three times in this chapter (Lev 18:25, 27, 28). Because the land is defiled, God says that “therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity [*āwōn*] upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitant” (Lev 18:25). This same concept is what is found in Deut 24:4b, even though the noun “iniquity” [Heb. *āwōn*] is replaced with the verbal idea of “sin” being brought on the land [Heb. *h̄t’* in the *Hifil*, “to bring sin”]. The verb “sin” [*h̄t’*, to “miss a mark, go astray”]³⁸ may have been substituted to imply a somewhat less serious infraction than the “iniquity” [*āwōn*, “crooked behavior, per-

divorce and Remarriage, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/4 (Dec 1997): 529–550, who argues that the grounds for divorce in Deut 24:1–4 (the *erwat dābār*) is “behavior fundamentally in violation of the essence of the marriage covenant” (p. 531) and such behavior is still valid grounds for divorce today. For Sprinkle, this includes “wife abuse, flat refusal of conjugal rights, lack of support of the wife financially, and so forth” (p. 549).

³⁷Craige, 305.

³⁸BDB, 306. Cf. TWOT, 2:638.

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version”]³⁹ of Leviticus 18, but it also may here have been considered virtually synonymous.

A man is not to remarry his wife when she has been married again to some one else for the same reason that Israel is not to engage in other illicit sexual intercourse. As we have already seen, to commit this abomination defiles the land and will eventually lead to divine punishment as He causes the land to vomit out its inhabitants.

An important implication of this motive clause for the contemporary relevance of this legislation arises from the direct linkage of Deut 24:4 with Leviticus 18 in the defiling of the land by the iniquity/sin of the sexual abominations. The “abominations” mentioned in Leviticus 18 (and re-iterated in Leviticus 20) are forbidden not only for the native Israelite but also explicitly for the non-Israelite “stranger” or “alien” (Heb. *gēr*) who sojourns among the children of Israel. Furthermore, these abominations caused the non-Israelite heathen who inhabited Canaan before Israel to be vomited out when they committed these acts. Therefore the “abomination” and “defiling” quality of these acts clearly are not simply ritual in nature, applying only to Israel, but timeless and universal, applying to whoever practices them. Since Deut 24:4 is placed in the same category as the practices of Leviticus 18, it may be assumed that the prohibition against marrying a former wife who has been married again is universal and of contemporary relevance in its application. Disregarding such prohibition will not only bring defilement and sin upon the land of Israel which God was giving to them as an inheritance, but will also defile any land where such practice is carried out.

VII. The Overall Purpose of the Legislation

A. Various Suggestions. There have been many suggestions as to the overall purpose of the legislation in Deut 24:1–4. Some eight major views may be categorized and summarized:⁴⁰

1) *To ensure the proper legal procedure of divorce.* This assumes the translation of the KJV and other versions that place the apodosis already in v. 1a.

2) *To discourage easy divorce.* This is the argument of John Murray⁴¹ and S. R. Driver⁴² among others. As Jay Adams puts it: “The whole point of the four

³⁹BDB, 730. Cf. TWOT, 1:278.

⁴⁰For a listing and critique of many of these views, see J. Carl Laney, “Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Issue of Divorce,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 9–13; Westbrook, 388–391, 404–405; and Luck, 63–65.

⁴¹Murray, 3–16.

⁴²Driver, 272.

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verses in question is to forestall hasty action by making it impossible to rectify the situation when divorce and remarriage to another takes place . . .”⁴³

3) *To inhibit remarriage.* Craige argues that the text treats subsequent remarriages as defilements similar to adultery. He regards the grounds for the divorce as possibly just some type of “physical deficiency in the woman.” The legislation restricts current divorce practices so that it does not become simply a “‘legal’ form of committing adultery.”⁴⁴

4) *To protect the second marriage.* R. Yaron suggests that the legislation inhibits the social tensions that might arise from a “lover’s triangle.”⁴⁵

5) *To prevent a “type of incest.”* Gordon Wenham argues that marriage creates a kind of indissoluble “kinship bond” between husband and wife, and thus after a divorce and remarriage to return to the first husband is a kind of incest which is forbidden in Lev 18:6–18.⁴⁶

6) *To “protect a stigmatized woman from further abuse by her offending first husband.”*⁴⁷ According to William Luck, “Deuteronomy deals not with a sinning wife but a sinning husband.”⁴⁸ In his view the wife’s action of *‘erwat dāḥār* was not a sexual offense at all but some “embarrassing condition,” and the husband was “so hard-hearted that he cast the woman from himself” and “so unrepentant that he allowed her to be sexually coupled to another man.”⁴⁹

7) *To recognize the “natural repulsion” or taboo against having sexual intercourse with a woman who has cohabited with another man.* This view has found support in Calum Carmichael, who seeks to show evidence that such an attitude did exist in ancient Israel.⁵⁰

8) *To deter greedy profit by the first husband.* Raymond Westbrook contends that this legislation is about property. In the first divorce (v. 1) since there were moral grounds the wife received no financial settlement, whereas in the second divorce (v. 3) there were no moral grounds so the wife received financial remuneration. The legislation is to keep the first husband from profiting twice, once to divorce her (and give her nothing) and once to remarry her (and get her financial settlement from her second husband). Westbrook notes how this interpretation fits nicely with the structural placement of this law in the section of Deuteronomic legislation dealing with theft.⁵¹

⁴³Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 62, cited in Laney, 10–11.

⁴⁴Craige, 305.

⁴⁵Reuven Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (1966): 1–11.

⁴⁶Gordon Wenham, “The Restoration of Marriage Reconsidered,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 36–40; Heth and Wenham, 105–111 and *passim*.

⁴⁷Luck, 57–67, and *passim*.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 60–63.

⁵⁰Calum M. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 203–207.

⁵¹Westbrook, 392–405.

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B. Evaluation and synthesis. In light of our exegesis of this passage, we may evaluate the above proposals, underscoring what is consistent with the text and critiquing those points that stand in tension with exegetical data we have gathered.

The first view (that the law ensures a proper legal divorce procedure) is based upon a misunderstanding of the structure of the passage. As we have seen, Deut 24:1–4 does not legislate divorce nor even sanction it. The actual legislation only deals with the prohibition of remarriage to the first husband after an intervening marriage. In fairness to this view, however, it must be said that the very mention of the certain conditions in the divorce proceedings does at least indicate that these conditions would have to be met in order for the legislation to apply. In the very tolerating of divorce under these conditions, some tacit recognition of a set procedure for divorce is made in the passage.

The second view (to discourage hasty divorce) has more to commend it. The mention of specific divorce proceedings in the protasis of the legislation would have some tacit influence to this effect (as mentioned under view 1), but the apodosis or actual legislation would have further underscored this point. When a divorce was contemplated by the first husband, he must reckon with the fact that such action would be final once she had remarried. He could never change his mind and try to woo her back. But Westbrook points out a weakness in this being the only purpose for the legislation: “the divorcing husband is hardly likely to have in mind the possible circumstances following the dissolution of a subsequent marriage by his wife.”⁵²

The third view (to inhibit remarriage), contains elements that find support in the text. We have found that Craige is correct to argue that the remarriage of the woman (after a divorce on lesser grounds than extra-marital sexual intercourse) is presented as tantamount to adultery in that she “defiles herself” (although she is not punished). He is also on the right track in seeing the legislation as curbing the excesses of divorce so that it becomes “legalized adultery.” But Craige broadens the meaning of *‘erwat dābār* far too much when he sees it probably referring to a “physical deficiency” in the woman and not “indecent exposure.” Craige also misses the implication that it is the first husband who is ultimately culpable for having caused his wife to defile herself by the second marriage relationship.

The fourth view (to protect the second marriage, not the first) also has merit. If the divorced wife who has married again knows that she cannot get back together with her first husband, she would certainly be discouraged from planning any intrigue against her second husband so he would divorce her. The first husband would likewise be prevented from trying to get his first wife back. Although these aspects seem to be part of what the law accomplished, Laney has correctly pointed out that this view “fails to explain why the rule would apply

⁵²Westbrook, 389.

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after the death of the second husband when the second marriage would no longer be in jeopardy.”⁵³

The fifth view (to prevent a type of incest), as we have already seen above, does not have the weight of evidence of the text and context to support it. As Laney remarks, “The major difficulty with this view is that it seems to reach beyond what is clear to the reader. One wonders how many Israelites would have seen the connection between the ‘one flesh’ of the marriage union and the incest laws of Leviticus 18:6–18.”⁵⁴ Westbrook moves closer to the main objection to Wenham’s “type of incest” view: “his [Wenham’s] analysis cannot possibly apply to the Deuteronomic law because it completely ignores the intervening marriage. The law does not, as Wenham assumes, prohibit remarriage as such, and there is no way that we can see of the second marriage being a factor in the creation of an incestuous affinity.”⁵⁵ The major problem of Wenham’s position, as hinted already by Westbrook, is that it is founded on an erroneous view of the marriage covenant. Wenham assumes that the “one-flesh” relationship in the marriage covenant is absolutely indissoluble, even by divorce and remarriage. Such position, as we have seen, is not supported in Genesis 1–3 or elsewhere in Scripture.

The sixth view (to protect a stigmatized wife from further abuse from her offending first husband) has many points that square with our exegesis. Luck is correct that the law implicates the first husband as the offending party (even though he arrives at this conclusion by a different route than we have suggested).⁵⁶ He states: “the stigma [of ‘defilement’] of the woman in Deuteronomy 24:4 does not so stigmatize her that the moral guilt hangs about her marriages to men other than her former husband. The stigma instead reflects back upon the man who caused the problem, that is, her first husband.”⁵⁷ In emphasizing the first husband’s culpability, however, Luck has tended to trivialize the grounds

⁵³Laney, 10; cf. Westbrook 390 for a similar critique. A possible rejoinder to this objection is that by including the death of the second husband as a possibility in which the law is still in force, there would be no attempt on the life of the second husband by his wife or her former husband. But this does not seem to cover clear cases of natural death on the part of the second husband.

⁵⁴Laney, 11.

⁵⁵Westbrook, 390–391.

⁵⁶Luck, 62, instinctively recognizes the importance of the word “defiled” in the *Hothpael*, correctly labels it (via Walter Kaiser) as a “reflexive passive,” and even states: “Moses went out of his way to make this form unusual!” But he does not draw out the implications of his observations.

⁵⁷Ibid. Luck’s argument rests on making an analogy with the rapist who causes his victim to be “defiled” even though she is an innocent party. “The ‘defilement’ of the woman reflects upon the rapist.” In a similar manner the “defilement” of the woman in Deut 24:4 reflects upon the one who caused her to get into this situation of being defiled, i.e., her first husband by divorcing her and refusing to remarry her. He also rightly and significantly notes (ibid., based on Murray’s observation) that “the defilement only seems to be taken into account with regard to the first husband—when the issue of a remarriage to that one, after a marriage to another has occurred.” This would be an additional support to the conclusions we reached earlier based on the *Hothpael* form of the word *tm*’ in Deut 24:4.

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for divorce by indicating that *erwat dābār* in Deut 24:1 simply refers to “embarrassing circumstances,” instead of “indecent exposure” as we have concluded.

The seventh view (that the prohibition reflects a “natural repulsion” or taboo against having sexual relations with one who has cohabited with another) does not stand up to a rigorous scrutiny. Westbrook reexamines Carmichael’s evidence for such a taboo in the OT and finds it wanting.⁵⁸ Westbrook concludes: “We would suggest that, far from there being a natural repulsion, both biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources find nothing untoward in a man resuming relations with his wife after she has had relations with another, even amounting to marriage, providing no other factor makes resumption of the marriage improper.”⁵⁹

The eighth view (to deter greedy profit by the first husband) points in a promising direction, although it appears to go beyond the evidence in its specifics. Westbrook’s distinction between two kinds of divorce functioning in Deut 24:1–3 finds its basis in a similar distinction in the Code of Hammurabi and the Mishnah,⁶⁰ but really has no basis in the biblical text. As we have already seen, the divorce formula of Deut 24:3 is probably an abbreviated version of the same type of divorce in v. 1. Westbrook’s view, in addition to being speculative, does not appear to take seriously enough the terms “abomination” and “sin on the land” (of v. 4). Furthermore, this view assumes that the first divorce is perfectly legitimate, contrary to what we have seen implied in the clause “she has been caused to defile herself.”

Aside from the weakness of Westbrook’s proposal in its details, he does seek to make sense out of the placement of this law within the section of Deuteronomy 12–26 dealing with “theft,” a point we made at the beginning of our investigation of Deut 24:1–4. If it does not deal with theft in the way that Westbrook suggests, Westbrook must be credited with attempting to wrestle with the larger issue of the theological context for this legislation.

Our exegesis has led us, I believe, to see the relationship between this legislation and theft in a much larger perspective than Westbrook proposes. The law of Deut 24:1–4 has prevented men from treating a woman as mere chattel, property, to be swapped back and forth at will.⁶¹ Her dignity and value as an

⁵⁸Westbrook, 392–393. Westbrook presents evidence from Scripture (Genesis 12 and the case of Pharaoh marrying Sarah, and the marriage of Michal to David and then Paltiel and then back to David) and several examples from the Code of Hammurabi and Middle Assyrian Laws.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 392.

⁶⁰The Code of Hammurabi, 141–142 (see James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with suppl. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969], 172), and Mishnah *Ketubot* 7.6 (cf. other regulations regarding giving the *Keubah* [financial settlement] in this tractate).

⁶¹As Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 255, puts it, she is to be protected from being “a kind of marital football, passed back and forth between irresponsible men.”

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individual person is upheld in this law, and the first husband who caused her to defile herself is implicitly shown to be at fault. The law is aimed, in its final placement within the larger context, to protect the woman from being robbed of her personhood.

This conclusion is reinforced by noticing the very next law in this section of Deuteronomy (24:5): “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” This law clearly indicates that its ultimate purpose is to enable the newly-wedded man stay at home “and bring happiness to his wife.” The law protects against robbing the newly-married couple of its intimacy and happiness, and especially protects the happiness of the wife.

We are now prepared to see how Deut 24:1–4 fits into the progression of thought in the section of laws dealing with the eighth commandment or “theft.” As Kaufman pointed out with regard to the organization of the various laws within the thought units of a given commandment, they “are arranged according to observable principles of priority.”⁶² Kaufman’s analysis of the Deuteronomic laws arranged under the eighth commandment is insightful. He notes how there are six paragraphs in this section (which he labels A through E). The structure of the section starts with the theft of property (paragraphs A [Deut 23:20–21], B [vv. 22–24], and C [vv. 25–26]). Then it moves to the theft of “life” [*nepeš* in a metaphorical sense (paragraphs D [Deut 24:1–4 and v. 5] and E [v.6]). Finally it deals with the theft of physical *nepeš* (kidnapping, paragraph F [v. 7]).

Kaufman, in my estimation, has rightly pointed out how Deut 24:1–4 and v. 5 belong together as one paragraph with a common theme. In a note he writes: “Perhaps the current position of paragraph D within Word VII [the eighth commandment] offers an insight into the compiler’s (or author’s) understanding of the very essence of the two laws which comprise it. Both, like paragraph E and F that follow, were apparently seen as preventing the theft of *nepeš*—of the services and devotion of a groom to his bride, and of the self-respect of a divorced woman.”⁶³

Therefore Deut 24:1–4, in its larger canonical context, serves to protect the rights of women, to protect their dignity and self-respect, especially in circumstances in which they may appear powerless. The law, in its self-expressed disapproval, although temporary toleration, of inequalities afforded women due to the hardness of men’s hearts—points toward the day when such inequalities will be resolved by a return to the Edenic ideal for marriage.

⁶²Kaufman, 115.

⁶³Kaufman, 156–157, note 109.

Conclusions and Implications for Today

1. Although Deut 24:1–4 tolerated divorce on the grounds of indecent exposure on the part of the wife, at the same time within the legislation the rare *Hothpael* (of *ht'*, vs. 4) is an internal indicator that such a divorce does not meet with divine approval. The husband's putting away his wife has in effect caused her to defile herself in a second marriage in a similar way as if she were committing adultery (although it is not punished as such because the blame is placed upon the first husband and not the wife). Thus already in Deut 24:4 it is indicated that the breakage of the marriage bond on grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse causes the woman to defile herself, i.e., commit what is tantamount to adultery [when she marries again.]

2. The correct translation of Deut 24:4 (“she has been caused to defile herself”) seems to illuminate Jesus' words in Matt 5:32: “whoever divorces his wife for any reason except *porneia* (illicit sexual intercourse) causes her to commit adultery [presumably when she remarries]. . . .” Thus Matt 5:32 is not an exception to the rule of Jesus' “But I say unto you” statements in Matthew 5. Here, as elsewhere in the chapter, He is not changing the OT meaning but recovering its full force from later misinterpretation.

3. The grounds for divorce in Deut 24:1 lie behind Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees in Matthew 19. The School of Shammai interpreted “the nakedness of a thing” to mean “indecent exposure [including adultery and other illicit sexual intercourse since these did not often meet the death penalty by the time of his day]” and the School of Hillel interpreted the grounds to be any indecency even as trivial as a wife's spoiling the husband's dish. Jesus' “exception clause” is stricter than both Shammai and Hillel, including only *porneia* as legitimate grounds for divorce.

4. In light of the precise structural and content parallels between the prohibitions of Acts 15:29 and Leviticus 17–18, we may define the *porneia* in Acts 15 (and presumably also Matt 5:32 and 19:9) as referring to illicit sexual intercourse (as detailed in Leviticus 18, including at least incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality).

5. Jesus' grounds for divorce (*porneia*) are the equivalent of those practices which in the OT met with the death penalty or being “cut off.” Therefore it may be stated that Jesus' exception clause in Matthew is not in contradiction to the lack of the exception clause in the other Synoptic gospels. Mark and Luke do not have the exception clause, presumably because such exception was assumed (via the death penalty or being “cut off” and thus *de facto* dissolving of the marriage) in OT law. Matthew has the exception clause to preserve the meaning of Jesus' words in a setting where the death penalty for *porneia* was no longer in effect.

6. The legislative part of Deut 24:1–4, which prohibited a wife to return to her first husband after she had subsequently married (and then the second husband had either died or divorced her), is linked by crucial terminology and con-

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cepts to the permanent and universal legislation of Leviticus 18, and therefore should be considered of contemporary relevance in its application today.

7. Deut 24:1–4, seen in its larger context in the book of Deuteronomy, constitutes legislation to promote and protect the rights of women and their dignity and self-respect. In its tolerance of, but self-expressed disapproval of, inequalities afforded women due to the hardness of men's hearts, this law points toward the day when such inequalities will be resolved by a return to the Edenic pattern for marriage.

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The God-Given Marital Mandate: Monogamous, Heterosexual, Intrafaith¹

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What are the two basic institutions established by God in Eden for the benefit of humanity? If a typical Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) were asked that question, the immediate response would invariably be: “Marriage and the Sabbath.”² Now, for many decades that response would have been considered sufficient. For instance, the term “the Sabbath” has readily and universally been understood by Adventists to refer specifically to the “seventh-day Sabbath,” as set aside by God at the end of the six days of creation.

What about the word “marriage”? What kind of conjugal relationship spontaneously comes to mind when this term is used? In the past it appeared that Adventists automatically assumed that a “proper” biblical marriage had to be a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith union. However, this historic view has recently been challenged and questioned by some SDAs.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this point. In 1992 an article appeared in *Ministry* magazine on how to share the Adventist message with people of other cultures. In discussing the thorny problem of plural marriage, the writer stated that to refuse to baptize a practicing polygamist into the SDA Church was a “serious example of cross-cultural confusion.”³ The author, a leading Adventist educator, regarded monogamy as merely one of “the optional variables of Western culture,”⁴ a practice which actually “hindered church growth.”⁵ Is mo-

¹This article is an edited and expanded revision of the second chapter of the author’s doctoral research (D.Min. project dissertation, Andrews University, 1993); published as Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993).

²A careful study of Genesis 1 and 2 supports this conclusion. See also, Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 46-48.

³Borge Schantz, “One Message—Many Cultures: How Do We Cope?” *Ministry*, June, 1992, 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

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nogamy simply one alternative among many, or is it a universal biblical standard for all marriages?

A second illustration relates to interfaith marriages. For decades the SDA Church has disapproved of marriages between Adventists and non-Adventists. In support of this position, the 1992 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* specifically states: "Adventist ministers should not perform the marriage ceremony of Adventists with non-Adventists."⁶ However, new trends are arising. At the 1993 Annual Council in Bangalore, India, an opposing perspective was proposed. A president of one of the divisions of the church pointed out that in his part of the world the women members far outnumber the men in the church. And, it was stated that "in many cases if a woman wanted to marry she would have to marry a non-Adventist."⁷ Another division president added that in some countries marriage could be conducted only by ministers or priests. Thus, if an SDA minister did not conduct the wedding for an Adventist marrying a non-Adventist, would Adventists be comfortable with a Buddhist priest conducting the marriage service for an SDA?⁸ As a result of discussions such as these a new position has been adopted and recently published in the 1997 *Minister's Manual*. Interestingly, this new statement concerning interfaith marriages still comes under the subheading, "When You Should Not Officiate." However, the former distinct prohibition has been somewhat attenuated, and now merely records that the SDA Church "strongly urges Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings."⁹ As can be observed, more and more SDAs are becoming increasingly open to this idea of interfaith marriages. As one pastor recently put it: To refuse to marry a non-Adventist to an Adventist "is religious bigotry."¹⁰

A third and final illustration relates to the issue of gender differentiation. A few years ago a vocal SDA feminist edited a book in which Adventist women tell of their lives and faith. One chapter is written by a woman who taught in two SDA academies, worked as a Bible instructor, and later went back to school and subsequently graduated in theology. This was all before what she calls her "Martin Luther experience."¹¹ She tells of her "unusual calling" from God, she feels, that came to her in a dream—a dream about being in love with another woman! She became involved with this woman who was studying to become an

⁵Ibid., 8.

⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 246.

⁷See the article by J. David Newman, "Marrying non-Adventists," *Ministry*, February, 1994, 5.

⁸Ibid.

⁹See *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997), 261.

¹⁰Jack Robinson, "To Wed Or Not to Wed . . . That Is the Question," Unpublished Manuscript, February, 1994, 10.

¹¹Lin Ennis, "Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality," in *In Our Own Words*, eds. Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, CA: Adventist Women's Institute, 1993), 229.

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SDA, and she describes this “love” as something that “felt right in a way that transcends moral argument.”¹² Talking about her new lesbian identity, she says:

Many people, mostly Christians of other faiths, have said how providential my meeting my first lover was, coming, as we did, from thousands of miles for a chance weekend. They say God used that experience to open my mind, that that first love had to be that powerful to convince me to break with the last vestiges of tradition cherished as truth. I was so devoted to my previous socialization that it took me years to see that this was God’s leading.¹³

Shocking, disturbing, perhaps even blasphemous words! Yet, this is an example of some of the thinking that is infiltrating into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This should come as no great surprise when one realizes that in the mid-1980s a leading SDA ethicist suggested that Adventist Christians should encourage homosexuals who do not believe they can change to live together in faithful homosexual unions.¹⁴

These three illustrations of polygamous, interfaith, and homosexual unions being accepted by some within Adventism make one acutely aware of the need to restudy the Holy Scriptures on the issue of marriage. While there is obviously a tremendous amount to be learned from the Bible on this issue, this article will be restricted to a few reflections on the specific marital structure as established by God in the beginning, as well as the implications that this has for all Bible-believing Christians.

The Pattern Established in Eden

The book of Genesis provides a concrete account of the institution of marriage. In the first two chapters of the Bible the question of human sexuality is directly dealt with. These opening chapters of Scripture are determinative for a biblical theology of sexuality, since here the pattern is established and pronounced “very good” (Gen 1:31) by God Himself.¹⁵

J. Kerby Anderson aptly observes: “Foundational to a Christian understanding of sexuality is God’s plan in creation found in Genesis 1 and 2.”¹⁶ While some information is to be found in Genesis 1, the primary focus of this section will be on Genesis 2, where most of the data relating to marital form is located. The passages that specifically relate to the institution of the first marriage are located in Genesis 2:18, 21-24 and 1:27, 28:

¹²Ibid., 231.

¹³Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁴David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984): 16.

¹⁵See Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 (Spring 1988): 5.

¹⁶J. Kerby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Ethical Issues*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 165.

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Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.

And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said,

"This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."¹⁷

Various biblical scholars have analyzed these passages and have come to several conclusions regarding the essence and meaning of marriage.¹⁸ In this study, however, only the factors relating to the actual structure of the marital relationship will be examined from the biblical record. Before addressing the actual form of the original marriage, the question as to whether marriage is simply a social custom or a fundamental divine institution needs to be briefly considered.

The Originator of Marriage

Some have posited that marriage is merely a societal or secular institution, or one of "the optional variables of Western culture,"¹⁹ as noted above. For example, J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson give the following definition: "Marriage is the state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group."²⁰ If this is so, then whatever form of marriage a society approves, whether monogamous or polygamous, heterosexual or homosexual, intrafaith or interfaith, must be considered acceptable.

¹⁷Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

¹⁸See, for example, Samson Osimbo Obwa, "Polygamy Among the Southern Luo of Kenya: A Critique of Both the Practice of Polygamy and the Reaction of Mission-Founded Churches to It in the Light of Biblical Teaching" (M.A. thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1978), 50-56; Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (Summer 1991): 309; Davidson.

¹⁹Schantz, 11.

²⁰J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson, "Marriage," *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), 786.

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However, beyond being simply a sexual relationship approved by society, marriage in the first chapters of Genesis involves a divine dimension. Genesis 1:27 says that *God* created them, “male and female,” and charged them to be “fruitful and multiply” (1:28). This conjugal relationship is explicated further in the following chapter. Genesis 2:18 records the words of God: “I will make him a helper.” In other words, it was *God* who decided to create “a suitable companion” (2:18, TEV) for the man. Then, it was *God* who “brought her to the man” (2:22) to be his wife. Thus, both passages specifically state that God is the originator of the marriage relationship.

Clearly, as Geoffrey Bromiley states, “God was the author of this union.”²¹ He was the one who instituted marriage in the beginning.²² Samuel Dresner notes that “the Midrash suggests that God Himself performed the first wedding ceremony for Adam and Eve.”²³ Or, as Ellen White observed, “God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe.”²⁴

The Number of Partners

From Genesis 2:21-24 it becomes clear that this marriage took place between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns in this passage is noteworthy: God decides to make “a helper” for “the man” (2:18); He selects “one” rib from “the man” (2:21), and fashions it into “a woman” whom He then takes to “the man” (2:22); “the man” says that “she shall be called woman” (2:23); thus, “a man” leaves his parents and is joined to “his wife” (2:24).²⁵ In this distinct way the original marital form can be seen to be monogamous. As John Calvin stated:

But though here no mention is made of *two*, yet there is no ambiguity in the sense; for Moses had not said that God has assigned many wives, but only *one* to one man; and in the general direction given, he had put the wife in the singular number. It remains, therefore, that the conjugal bond subsists between two persons only, whence it easily appears, that nothing is less accordant with the divine institution than polygamy.²⁶

²¹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3.

²²Gerhard Jasper, “Polygyny in the Old Testament,” *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969): 50; also, Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton, MD: Doulos Publishers, 1987), 3.

²³Dresner, 316.

²⁴White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

²⁵George Bush comments: “As for polygamy, it is clearly forbidden by the fact that a single pair only were created, and by the terms of the command, that a man shall cleave to his wife (not wives) *only*,” George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Genesis; Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction*, 2 vols. (New York: Newman and Ivison, 1852), 1:69 (emphasis original).

²⁶John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 136.

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Wright and Thompson correctly note that “monogamy is implicit in the story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam.”²⁷ O. J. Baab concurs, stating: “The creation account in Genesis writes of the first marriage in clearly monogamous terms.”²⁸ Even Eugene Hillman, who attempts to prove that polygamy was legitimate according to Mosaic Law, admits that “if we accept it as divinely revealed truth that our species started from only one pair of human beings, then certainly the original marriage must have been monogamous.”²⁹

Based on the fact that God made only one wife for Adam, Robert Hitchens suggests: “Had He intended for man to be polygamous He would have created several wives.”³⁰ Similarly, Mavumilusa Makanzu, aware that God “did not create two or more women, but one,”³¹ maintains that this divine institution of monogamy has been clearly expressed ever since creation.³² As Walter Wegner aptly remarks:

If we are correct in viewing the union of Adam and Eve of Genesis 1 and 2 as the family as God wants it to be, then there can be no doubt about the fact that the marriage held up for the emulation of ancient Israel was a *monogamous* one.³³

Thus, as Parrinder concludes: “The fact that the first human beings are represented as having been one man, with one wife, clearly sets up monogamy as the original intention of God for the human race.”³⁴ In Ellen White’s words: “This first marriage is an example of what all marriages should be. God gave the man one wife. Had he deemed it best for man to have more than one wife, he could as easily have given him two; but he sanctioned no such thing.”³⁵ Since

²⁷Wright and Thompson, “Marriage,” 787.

²⁸O. J. Baab, “Marriage,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 3:281.

²⁹Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975), 151.

³⁰Hitchens, 15.

³¹Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa, 1983), 58.

³²*Ibid.*, 58, 62. Furthermore, Makanzu notes, additional support for monogamy comes from the fact that the Song of Songs “cannot be understood in the context of a polygamous marriage;” 59.

³³Walter Wegner, “God’s Pattern for the Family in the Old Testament,” in *Family Relationships and the Church: A Sociological, Historical, and Theological Study of Family Structures, Roles, and Relationships*, Marriage and Family Research Series, ed. Oscar E. Feucht (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), 29 (emphasis original).

³⁴Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 30.

³⁵Ellen G. White, “Marriages, Wise and Unwise,” *The Youth’s Instructor*, 10 August 1899, 437.

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the first marriage is seen to be unambiguously monogamous, this marital form is thus understood as representative of the “will of God.”³⁶

The Gender Issue

From both Genesis 1 and 2 it becomes plain that this marriage took place between two people of the opposite sex. The repeated use of contrasting gender terms illustrates this: God creates a “male” and a “female” and charges them to be fruitful (1:27, 28); He fashions the rib He took from the “man” into a “woman,” and then takes “her” to the “man” (2:22); the man calls her “woman” because she was taken out of “man” (2:23); thus a “man” leaves his parents and is joined to his “wife” (2:24). In this well-defined manner it can be easily noted that the original marital form was heterosexual.

The obvious complementary anatomical differences serve to further illustrate this point. In addition, the fact that the commission to “multiply” (Gen 1:28) can only be fulfilled by means of people of the opposite gender additionally supports this view that the original marital pattern as set up by God was decisively heterosexual.³⁷

In commenting on the first biblical passage concerning the creation of the human species (Gen 1:27), Dresner recognizes the fact that “heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation.”³⁸ Though not as explicit, Andrew Dearman concurs with this assessment in his article in a book dealing with homosexuality and biblical ethics, saying: “In the Genesis accounts one finds the theological basis of marriage rooted in the complementary nature of humankind as male and female created in God’s image.”³⁹ Greg Bahnsen is much more direct, noting that the creation account reveals that sex is to take place only within the context of marriage, a marriage which is “exclusively heterosexual in nature.”⁴⁰ Thus, since heterosexuality is the “proper creation order,”⁴¹ “homosexuality is precisely a perversion of nature.”⁴² Or as Dresner put it: “Homosexuality is a violation of the order of creation.”⁴³

³⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 182; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 24; cf. Walter Trobisch, who calls monogamy “God’s original and final will,” Walter Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, “Here Is My Problem,” Series 1 (Kehl/Rhein, Germany: Editions Trobisch, 1980), 21.

³⁷See Andrew Dearman, who makes the same point; J. Andrew Dearman, “Marriage in the Old Testament,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 54-55.

³⁸Dresner, 309.

³⁹Dearman, 53.

⁴⁰Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 29.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 28.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 30. Anderson concurs saying: “Homosexuality is a violation of the natural process God intended for human sexuality.” 166.

⁴³Dresner, 309. See also, Bahnsen, 31.

The Faith Factor

Now while the above concepts of monogamy and heterosexuality can be quite plainly seen from the text of Genesis, the issue of the similarity of the religious faith of the marriage partners requires a deeper search.

Genesis 2:18 records God's words: "I will make him a helper suitable for him." The Revised English Bible (REB) states: "I shall make a partner suited to him." Similar to the REB, other versions interpret the crucial phrase as "a suitable companion" (TEV), "one like himself" (BBE), and "who is like him" (S&G). These Bible versions better capture the true essence of the Hebrew term *k'negdô*, which means a "counterpart,"⁴⁴ one "corresponding to him."⁴⁵ Obviously, for Eve to be a truly suitable partner to Adam, she had to have the same basic faith perspective as her spouse. Studies by Umberto Cassuto and others appear to bear out this contention that the Bible indicates a compatibility of ethical and religious beliefs as part of the original marital pattern.⁴⁶ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* suggests that the context of Genesis 2:18 shows that the woman is to be a partner with the man in the areas of both family and worship.⁴⁷

A second passage in the creation story that suggests this indispensable religious concord is located in Genesis 2:24. The man and woman are to cleave to each other and become "one flesh." This is a covenant partnership, a mutual dependence and a genuine reciprocity in all areas of life,⁴⁸ which is impossible for two who hold differing religious convictions.

Ellen White consistently spoke out against marriage between an unbeliever and a believer, which she defined as one who has "accepted the truth for this time."⁴⁹ These interfaith marriages are "forbidden by God,"⁵⁰ and are prohibited in the Bible.⁵¹ Thus, she admonishes that it is better to remain unmarried than to commit "sin"⁵² by violating God's clearly revealed will.⁵³

⁴⁴Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 591.

⁴⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 149. Further support for the corresponding nature of the relationship between man and woman can be seen in the "ring construction" of the entire creation account of male and female. See Davidson, 14.

⁴⁶See, for example, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, part 1, *From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1981), 127.

⁴⁷John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 48.

⁴⁸Davidson, 21-22.

⁴⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:364.

⁵⁰Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 500.

⁵¹See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:363, 364; idem, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 271.

⁵²Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1952), 351.

⁵³White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:507.

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Now that it has been reasonably demonstrated that the original marriage in Eden was a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith union, the question naturally arises: What significance does this first marital pattern have for believers? Is it merely a desirable, yet optional model? Is it simply an ideal? Or is this first marriage to be viewed as an unchanging standard, a biblical mandate?

Significance of the First Marriage

The passage in Genesis 2:24, which forms the closing statement about the first marriage, begins with the Hebrew term *‘al-kēn*. While in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) it is interpreted “for this cause,” several English Bibles render it “therefore.”⁵⁴ An investigation of the Pentateuch indicates that the Bible writer frequently utilized this concept when making explanatory statements about an occurrence. This happened when people or place names were being identified.⁵⁵

More importantly, this usage also occurs in passages where the writer explains the reason behind the observance of certain regulations and laws.⁵⁶ In this regard, Angelo Tosato points out the use of *‘al-kēn* in the fourth commandment of Exodus 20:11: “On the seventh day of creation he rested; for this reason [*‘al-kēn*] he ordered that the sabbath should be observed.”⁵⁷ Tosato recognizes that Genesis 2:24 is similarly structured.⁵⁸ He posits: “The initial *‘al-kēn* (‘therefore’), in fact, certifies beyond any doubt that he [i.e., the inspired Bible writer] intends here to explain something.”⁵⁹ Thus, he concludes that this passage “speaks of marriage in a normative way.”⁶⁰

Other scholars have likewise noticed the significance of *‘al-kēn* in Genesis 2:24.⁶¹ Nahum Sarna states that this term introduces an observation on the part of the writer in which some “fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God’s original creative act and seen as part of the ordained natural order.”⁶² Similarly, Herbert Ryle recognizes that this “sentence beginning with ‘therefore’ supplies the application, or relation, of the ancient narrative to later

⁵⁴See, for example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, and NRSV.

⁵⁵See, for example, Gen 19:22; 25:30; 26:33; 29:35; 30:6; 31:48; 33:17; Exod 15:23.

⁵⁶See, for example, Exod 13:15: Because God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, “therefore” (*‘al-kēn*), they were to celebrate the Passover. The “therefore” thus establishes the law. Other passages, such as the following, reveal a similar type of structure: Gen 32:32; Lev 17:11, 12; Num 18:24; Deut 15:11.

⁵⁷Angelo Tosato, “On Genesis 2:24,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (July 1990): 406.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 398 (emphasis original).

⁶⁰Ibid., 404.

⁶¹See, for example, James Comper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Cleveland, OH: F. M. Barton, 1903), 1:18; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1973), 37-38.

⁶²Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 23.

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times.”⁶³ Thus, it appears that just as God had instituted the monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage of the first parents of the human race, He intends that this pattern be normative for marital relationships for the rest of humanity for all time.

The significance of this first marriage is further underscored by the evidence that arises from a more intense investigation of the grammar of Genesis 2:24. The first verb, *ya^{ca}zāb* (“he will leave”), is in the imperfect tense, followed by two consecutive perfects, as normal. When this type of tense is understood as a frequentative imperfect, it is rendered, as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) has it, as something occurring customarily: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.”⁶⁴ However, the Hebrew imperfect can also be interpreted in other ways. It can express actions to be repeated in the future, as the American Standard Version (ASV) puts it:⁶⁵ “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

The imperfect tense may also be used to express a command, informing people of what ought or ought not to be done.⁶⁶ Genesis 2:24 could thus be legitimately translated: “Therefore a man should leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife, and they should become one flesh.” Robert Lawton concludes that when rendered this way, “the verse can be understood as a description of divine intention.”⁶⁷ Since this text begins with the introductory term “therefore,” the Hebrew imperfect would be more faithfully translated as expressing a command, thus indicating that here a standard is being set,⁶⁸ a norm established, a mandate given by God Himself.

Even though these words in Genesis 2:24 were evidently penned by a human being, since they are the utterance of divine revelation, “Christ could quote them, therefore, as the word of God (Matt. xix. 5).”⁶⁹ Therefore, since it is a clear expression of God’s will, this statement is of great import for all.

⁶³Herbert E. Ryle, *The Book of Genesis*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1921), 39. See also, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 70.

⁶⁴See Robert B. Lawton, “Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 97.

⁶⁵See also, KJV, NIV, NKJV, NASB.

⁶⁶S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, 3d ed. (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1892), 43. See, for example, Gen 2:17; 3:14; Exod 20:3-17; 21:12; Num 15:14.

⁶⁷Lawton, 98.

⁶⁸This type of construction can be found in passages such as Exod 22:30, Deut 22:3, and 2 Sam 13:12. For example, in Gen 34:7 the word *kēn* precedes the imperfect, and the phrase is rendered as a prohibition, “for such a thing ought not to be done.”

⁶⁹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:90. See also, Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 1:14; A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Surrey, England: Soncino, 1947), 12; Howard F. Vos, *Genesis* (Chicago:

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Gordon Wenham correctly understands this verse as “applying the principles of the first marriage to every subsequent marriage.”⁷⁰ According to Sereno Dwight: “This is the Great Original Law of Marriage binding on the whole human family.”⁷¹ Speaking about this first marriage, Ellen White said: “God gave to Adam one wife—showing to all who should live upon the earth, his order and law in that respect.”⁷² Thus, this first monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage becomes the only acceptable biblical pattern and model for all marital unions.

Before concluding this brief study, it would be instructive to consider the marital structure evident during the second “beginning” of this world—the story of Noah and the flood.

The Model Evident at the Flood

Even though a considerable amount of Genesis is devoted to the story of the worldwide deluge,⁷³ it is apparent that not much is directly recorded about the marital status of those involved in the narrative. However, the few facts that are mentioned need to be carefully examined.

Genesis 6:1-4, 11-13 describes the corruption of the antediluvians:

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

Moody, 1982), 25; F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), 1:227. For a more detailed study of Matt 19:5 see chapter 5 of the author’s *Polygamy in the Bible*.

⁷⁰Wenham, 70.

⁷¹Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Hebrew Wife: Or, the Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1836), 9.

⁷²Ellen G. White, “The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood,” *The Signs of the Times*, 27 February 1879, 66. See also, idem, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 75.

⁷³See Gen 6-9.

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Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."

The Genesis record is clear not only that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8), but that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; [and] Noah walked with God" (6:9). Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10). When God decided to destroy the earth with a flood because of its corruptness, God called upon Noah to build an ark to preserve selected animals and human beings. The record simply states that, when the ark and all the necessary preparations had been made, "Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (7:13). That there were precisely eight persons saved in the ark is clear from both Old and New Testaments (Gen 7:13; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5).

Some have felt that one of the contributing factors to the depravity of humanity was the practice of polygamy.⁷⁴ However, this conclusion has been challenged.⁷⁵ For example, Welch states that in the text it is neither stated nor implied that the marriages between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" were polygamous.⁷⁶ Thus, he maintains: "We must conclude that any attempt to establish a causal relationship between polygamy and the Flood is not warranted by the text itself."⁷⁷

The phrase in contention is located at the end of Genesis 6:2 and reads literally, "and they took for them wives of all whom they chose." Most versions render this clause similar to the NASB: "And they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose." But, as Robert Jamieson remarks, "the phrase 'took them wives of *all* which they chose' evidently implies something very different from the simple exercise of a free choice."⁷⁸ Jamieson concludes that this phrase indicates the practice of polygamy.⁷⁹ This understanding is clear in the Jerusalem Bible: "So they married as many as they chose."⁸⁰ This translation appears to be a legitimate rendering of the passage under consideration.

Other biblical scholars also understand this phrase as a reference to polygamy. For instance, David Clines renders it, "taking for themselves wives of as

⁷⁴See, for example, John Kitto, ed., *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, OH: Mark H. Newman, 1845), 2:306.

⁷⁵See, for example, Manas Buthelezi, "Polygyny in the Light of the New Testament," *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969): 59; Douglas E. Welch, "A Biblical Perspective on Polygamy" (M.A. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1977), 43-44.

⁷⁶Welch, 43.

⁷⁷Ibid., 44.

⁷⁸Robert Jamieson, *Genesis-Deuteronomy*, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 88 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰The NJB similarly states: "And married as many of them as they chose."

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many women as they chose.”⁸¹ David Atkinson concurs: “Here the ‘sons of God’ take as many as they choose.”⁸² Based on this phrase in Genesis 6:2, Emil Kraeling concluded: “A polygamous situation is implied in these words.”⁸³ Dwight goes a step further and says: “The fact that Polygamy became general, or that men took them wives of all whom they chose, is here obviously assigned as the cause of that universal corruption and violence, which occasioned the Deluge.”⁸⁴ Ellen White understood this passage similarly:

When men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, they took them wives of all which they chose. This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world, which brought the wrath of God upon them.⁸⁵ This custom was practiced after the Flood, and became so common that even righteous men fell into the practice and had a plurality of wives.⁸⁶

Walter Kaiser, in basic agreement with the above perspective, directly expresses the link between polygamy and the flood: “It was precisely because of man’s autocratic and polygamous ways that God destroyed the earth with a flood. That could hardly be construed as tacit divine approval of polygamy—it is the reverse!”⁸⁷

An examination of the scriptural account reveals that the marriages of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth were all monogamous unions at the time of the flood (Gen 7:13). Dresner observes that “Scripture takes pains to tell us that of those who entered the ark each male had a female companion.”⁸⁸ Then, warning that this monogamous element must not be overlooked, he states: “Noah and his sons

⁸¹David J. A. Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the ‘Primeval History’ (Genesis 1-11),” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (July 1979): 36.

⁸²David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 131. See also Bush (1:116), who says these men were “perhaps disdainful to govern themselves by the limitation of one woman to one man.” B. Jacob also sees this as a passage referring to polygamy; see B. Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, ed. and trans. by Ernest I. Jacob, and Walter Jacob (New York: KTAV, 1974), 45.

⁸³Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1-4,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (October 1947): 197.

⁸⁴Dwight, 6.

⁸⁵White does not say that this was the “only sin” which brought about the flood, but rather, that it was “one of the great sins” which precipitated the deluge. Among other factors, she also notes: “It was their abominations and horrible, idolatrous sacrifices which had called for their destruction;” White, *The Story of Redemption*, 67. In another of her writings, she states: “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God;” Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864; reprint, Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 3:64.

⁸⁶White, *The Story of Redemption*, 76.

⁸⁷Kaiser, 183.

⁸⁸Dresner, 312.

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each have a single wife.”⁸⁹ On the contrary, polygamists were judged and destroyed by the flood. Ellen White highlights this by discussing Noah’s monogamous marriage and his preservation in the ark in contrast to polygamy.⁹⁰ In fact, she notes that these antediluvians “would not leave off their sins, but continued in their polygamy,”⁹¹ and were thus exterminated. Thus, God’s direct judgment of polygamy by means of the flood, while saving only monogamous couples in the ark, makes plain His will concerning the number of partners in a marriage. An additional, yet less obvious matter concerning marital structures at the time of the universal deluge needs examination. The key verse considered here is Genesis 6:12, which notes that “all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” Dresner notes that the ancient rabbis interpreted the “flesh” corrupting its “way” as a reference to homosexuality, among other sexual evils.⁹² Thus, the rabbinic understanding of the flood story affirms that the wickedness of the antediluvians was essentially sexual.⁹³ Dresner concurs, noting that the “violation of the natural order of sexual life,” including that of heterosexuality, was the “crime” that brought about the flood.⁹⁴ Interestingly, Ellen White confirms this notion, stating: “The Sodomitish practices which brought the judgment of God upon the world, and caused it to be deluged with water, and which caused Sodom to be destroyed by fire, are fast increasing.”⁹⁵ In brief, the violation of the marital norm of heterosexuality was one of the reasons for the Genesis flood.

One final factor deserves consideration: How did the pre-flood population relate to the issue of interfaith marriages? Genesis 6:2 states “that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.” This passage has generated considerable debate, especially in recent times. The primary question revolves around who these “sons of God” were that married the “daughters of men.” The two main interpretations will be noted here. In discussing the “sons of God,” Joseph Hong

⁸⁹Ibid., 313. Some scholars have recognized something rather unusual in connection with the Hebrew terms used to refer to the clean and unclean animals taken into the ark. In Gen 7:2, instead of the normal words for male (*zākūr*) and female (*nēqēbāh*), the phrase *’išw’išō* (“a man and his wife”) is used to describe the animals. It has been suggested that this phrase, “male and his mate” (NRSV), was used by the writer to indicate that all living creatures that entered the ark, whether birds, animals, or human beings, were classified as being in a “monogamous” relationship. See Dresner, 313; A. O. Nkwoka, “The Church and Polygamy in Africa: The 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution,” *Africa Theological Journal* 19 (1990): 147. Cf. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, part 2, From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew U, 1964), 73-74.

⁹⁰See White, *The Story of Redemption*, 76.

⁹¹White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:67.

⁹²Dresner, 311. He references the *Genesis Rabbah* 27:3, as one of the places where the issue of homosexuality in this regard is noted.

⁹³See Dresner, 311.

⁹⁴Ibid., 310.

⁹⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989), 121. See also *ibid.*, 120, 121; *idem*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 82.

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claims that “when the term is used elsewhere in the Old Testament, it clearly has the meaning of ‘heavenly beings’ or ‘angels’.”⁹⁶ After citing passages in Job and Psalms,⁹⁷ he says, “today most interpreters of Genesis agree that the identification with celestial beings is the best suggestion.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Hong frankly admits that this understanding is not free of difficulty.⁹⁹

Subsequent to considering the “angel” interpretation, Ronald Youngblood points out some of the difficulties attending this view. For example, he notes that in Luke 20:34-36 Jesus informs us that angels do not marry, which “statement would flatly contradict Genesis 6:2, 4 if the ‘sons of God’ in that passage are angels.”¹⁰⁰ This is especially true since the text views these relationships as marriages, using the “standing expression for marital union.”¹⁰¹ Another problem is raised by John Willis, who challenges: “If indeed angels were intended by the author, then one is hard put to explain why God did not become grieved with them and destroy them rather than mankind.”¹⁰²

Various scholars have submitted considerable evidence which indicates that it is preferable to interpret the “sons of God” as referring to human beings rather than angels. Firstly, from a textual perspective, Willis makes the following point:

The sons of God could be the men that called upon the name of the Lord (see 4:26), and who *walked with God* (5:22, 24; 6:9; the OT and NT frequently refer to God’s people as “sons of God”—cf. Prov. 3:12; Isa. 1:2, 4; Heb. 12:5-9), and *the daughters of men* might be “worldly-minded or materialistically-minded women,” such as those condemned in Isaiah 3:16-4:1; 32:9-13; and Amos 4:1-3.¹⁰³

Correspondingly, Old Testament exegete H. C. Leupold, after referencing several texts,¹⁰⁴ states: “Hos. 1:10 is, if anything, a still stronger passage, saying specifically to Israel, ‘Ye are sons of the living God’.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶Joseph Hong, “Problems in an Obscure Passage: Notes on Genesis 6.1-4,” *The Bible Translator* 40 (October 1989): 422.

⁹⁷Hong cites Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; and Pss 29:1; 89:6.

⁹⁸Hong, 422.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 81. In agreement with Youngblood’s perspective, Jacob reminds us that “the Bible never thinks of angels as beings with sexual urges;” 45. Youngblood also questions: “Since this would be the first mention of angels in Scripture, why would the author not simply call them ‘angels’ in order to avoid all ambiguity?” 81.

¹⁰¹H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 253.

¹⁰²John T. Willis, *Genesis*, in *The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. John T. Willis (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1979), 165. See also, Jacob, 45. Leupold notes: “Here, then, would be the very queer sequence of thought: v. 2, *angels* sin; v. 3, *men* are punished;” 253-254.

¹⁰³Willis, 164.

¹⁰⁴Leupold (250) includes Deut 32:5, and Ps 73:15 here. Later (251), he refers to Ps 80:17 as well.

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Second, considering the immediately preceding passage, Leupold responds categorically to the question as to who these “sons of God” are: “Without a shadow of doubt, the Sethites—the ones just described in chapter five as having in their midst men who walked with God, like Enoch (v. 22), . . . men who publicly worshipped God and confessed His name.”¹⁰⁶

The third factor which supports this view is seen in the very next verse, which states: “My spirit shall not abide in *man* for ever” (Gen 6:3, RSV). Willis declares that this divine response of judgment on the people because of their mixed marriages (noted in vs. 2) confirms the notion that these “sons of God” are indeed human beings.¹⁰⁷ As demonstrated above, this interpretation makes the most sense, since it was mankind that suffered the destruction of the devastating deluge, and not angels.¹⁰⁸

Based on the textual evidence, Youngblood reasons that “from the standpoint of biblical usage, then, there can be no objection to interpreting ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6 as ‘men’.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, this understanding is preferred in the setting of the passage.¹¹⁰ Thus, as B. Jacob has concluded: “According to the whole context these ‘sons of God’ must be human beings.”¹¹¹

Taking this study of the illegitimate marriage between the righteous and the wicked one step further, Victor Hamilton remarks:

The sin, then, is a forbidden union, a yoking of what God intended to keep apart, the intermarriage of believer with unbeliever. . . . The order of the two remaining verses [3 and 4] in this pericope is interesting. That is, the word about the divine displeasure comes between the cohabitation scene (v. 2) and the reference to the children produced by the unions (v. 4). By placing the verse where it is, the author is making the point that this forbidden union itself is offensive to Yahweh, rather than the fact that such a union produced (hybrid) offspring.¹¹²

Analogously, Youngblood has explained that the action of these “godly men” “to intermarry with members of the wicked line of Cain,”¹¹³ resulted in the judgment from the Lord by means of the deluge.¹¹⁴ Ellen White hints at the

¹⁰⁵Leupold, 251. See also the following passages which have been referred to in order to show the way the concept “sons of God” has been used in Scripture: Deut 14:1; Isa 43:6; Luke 3:38; 1 John 3:1, 2, 10.

¹⁰⁶Leupold, 250.

¹⁰⁷Willis, 162.

¹⁰⁸See also, *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰⁹Youngblood, 82.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹Jacob, 45.

¹¹²Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 264-266.

¹¹³Youngblood, 82.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 82-83.

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same situation when she notes that the righteous descendants of Seth displeased God by intermarrying with the idolatrous Cainites.¹¹⁵

In contradistinction to those who were destroyed by the flood, when one looks at the biblical record it is clear that each of the four couples saved in the ark had a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marriage. Ellen White notes: “Noah had but one wife, and their united family discipline was blessed of God. Because Noah’s sons were righteous, they were preserved in the ark with their righteous father [see Ezek 14:14, 20].”¹¹⁶ Apparently, by preserving in the ark only those who were not involved in polygamous, homosexual, or interfaith conjugal relationships, God was conveying His divine approval on the marital pattern that He had originally established in Eden.¹¹⁷

When the flood waters subsided, “Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him” (8:18). Here was the beginning of the new world, with Noah as the second founder of the human race.¹¹⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx notes:

Yahweh, so to speak, set about doing his work all over again. Noah became the new “first man” and, like Adam, “walked with God” (vi.9). This creation was an explicit covenant (ix.9) and God gave a renewed blessing to the marriage of the new “first man and woman” (ix.7).¹¹⁹

The identical charge that God gave to the world’s first couple, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28), He now repeated to Noah and his sons (9:1), all of whose marriages complied with God’s original standard. Dresner posits that, “in this, the pattern of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is replicated.”¹²⁰ In choosing these monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith couples to be the progenitors of the new race on earth,¹²¹ God was in a sense repeating history.¹²²

Summary and Conclusion

By way of summary, the following should be noted: The illustrations mentioned at the start of this article demonstrate that new concepts are currently creeping into the Seventh-day Adventist Church—perspectives that seek to rec-

¹¹⁵White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:60-61.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 3:100.

¹¹⁷See Dresner, 313; Nkwoka, 147; cf. Cassuto, 73-74.

¹¹⁸See Obwa, 30; Samuel Ellis Wishard, *The Divine Law of Marriage, Or, The Bible Against Polygamy* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 13; David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (London: Epworth, 1953), 136.

¹¹⁹Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, vol. 1, *Marriage in the Old and New Testaments*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 72-73.

¹²⁰Dresner, 313.

¹²¹Wishard, 11.

¹²²*Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy?* [A Debate Between Orson Pratt and J. P. Newman] (Baltimore: John S. Dye, 1874), 15.

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ognize polygamous, homosexual, and interfaith unions as acceptable forms of Christian marriage. This study of the marital mandate, as established by the Creator God in the book of Genesis, however, radically challenges these opinions. First, it was seen that it was the Creator God Himself who originated and established the institution of marriage. Second, the original marriage was unambiguously monogamous, heterosexual, and intrafaith. Third, Genesis 2:24 establishes this form of conjugal union as the divine design, the only standard and an unchanging biblical mandate for all marital relationships. As was shown, this specific monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith marital pattern was in essence replicated and reinstated by God through Noah and his family at the start of the new world after the universal deluge.

In a recent “Family News” letter, James Dobson, talking about what is happening throughout the world, remarked: “There is a highly coordinated international effort to redefine marriage.”¹²³

In view of this current crisis, it would be well for all Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, to promote and reemphasize God’s original standard and pattern for marriage—that everyone needs to abstain from all polygamous, homosexual, interfaith sexual alliances, and to uphold the God-given marital mandate as set up in Eden: monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith conjugal relationships. As Ellen White indicated: “Heaven looks with pleasure upon marriage formed with an earnest desire to conform to the direction given in the Scriptures.”¹²⁴ Referring to the edenic original, she noted: “When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”¹²⁵ If conscientiously adhered to, this plan for marriage will prove to be “one of the greatest blessings ever given to the human family.”¹²⁶

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¹²³Family News from Dr. James Dobson (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, June 1998), 4. Though his primary concern was homosexuality, Dobson also addressed polygamy and noted that American citizens should get their individual states to “define marriage as being between one man and one woman,” 6.

¹²⁴White, *The Adventist Home*, 70.

¹²⁵White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46.

¹²⁶Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967), 202.

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1 Corinthians 7:10–16: Divorce of the Unbeliever or Reconciliation with the Unfaithful?

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“I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. . . . ‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,’ . . . Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband.” (Jer 3:8, 12, 14, NIV)

Even in the secular world, divorce is a catastrophe. About a third of the students at the state university where I teach come from broken homes, and from reading their papers and listening to their stories I know the effect of their parents’ divorce on them is often devastating, life-shattering. Yes, there are plenty who adjust well, love their new step-mothers, step-fathers, and step-siblings. Often there is relief that the shouting and fighting have stopped. But even these students would usually prefer that their natural parents would have been happy together and kept the family intact.

I’ve known women who were terribly abused by their husbands, children abused by their parents. It’s hard, after talking with these victims, to tell them they were wrong to leave an abusive situation.

I have a friend whose parents drive to church together every week, but they can’t stand each other, have as little contact with each other as possible, don’t talk to each other except when necessary. They are in their eighties and have been married sixty years. Perhaps they would be happier apart, but for them this is not an option. They’ve promised to stay together “till death do us part,” but they’ve somehow forgotten about “to love and to cherish.” Neither has committed physical adultery, but have they broken their wedding vows? Are they faithful to the oath they’ve sworn to each other?

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Sometimes people get married too young, then mature emotionally and intellectually in ways that separate them. Sometimes people seem very nice, but turn out to be monsters. I have a friend who unwittingly married a lesbian. The first he knew of it was when his new wife insisted on bringing her lover along to Hawaii on the honeymoon and made my friend sleep on the couch. He was deceived and his wife was unfaithful. The marriage was annulled, but it was a traumatic experience for him.

Is There a Loophole?

Jesus' statements on divorce have seemed crystal clear to centuries of Christians and hundreds of denominations—even though they have not always agreed on their meanings—but the marital problems cited above remain. Is there a way around Christ's uncompromising position which takes into account the real situation in the real and sinful world and offers solace and hope for the battered and unloved? Is there a loophole which might expand the grounds for divorce?

Certainly divorces are happening in the church as well as in the secular world. How should the church respond? Should those who divorce be disfellowshipped? If they sincerely repent, can they return to full membership? What about pastors? Should a divorced pastor ever be re-credentialed? What if the divorced person remarries? If this constitutes a permanent state of adultery, can we welcome into fellowship those who, according to Christ, are active and continual adulterers?

Yesterday I met a pastor who, after ten years of marriage, began an affair with a younger married woman in 1982. In 1983 his ministerial credentials were withdrawn. In 1984 he divorced his wife, and the next year, 1985, he married the woman with whom he had committed adultery. Now he has children by this second wife. He had a change of heart, however, around 1990, and began working as a lay evangelist, with great success. In 1998 his credentials were returned. Since then he has baptized over a thousand people.

Are these baptisms a sign that he has been born again, that the Holy Spirit is working through him, or is he simply a talented evangelist? Many pastors in his union are incensed that his credentials have been returned, and their dissension threatens church unity. Is there a time to forgive? Is there a time to recognize a changed life? But is this second wife really his wife, according to the Bible, or is he living in a state of continual adultery?

Some scholars think they have found a loophole in 1 Corinthians 7:10–16, in which Paul seems to allow divorce when an “unbelieving” spouse deserts the believing one, ostensibly on religious grounds. The implications of this “loophole” are unclear. Some fear it can be readily expanded to make divorce much more acceptable. Some see the changes as humane, loving, welcoming, making the church a place where the fallen can come to be lifted up.

The purpose of this paper is to explore 1 Cor 7:10–16 in the light of other biblical statements on marriage and divorce and offer an alternative reading

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which is, I think, more closely aligned with what Jesus says about divorce.¹ It is based on a sound, though unusual retranslation from the Greek text not found in any English translations, to my knowledge. I offer it to provoke thought and discussion, and it should be seen as a provisional approach, a sort of thinking things out in print.²

The Biblical Background

The Old Testament strongly condemns sexual immorality. The usual punishment is death, though in some cases the punishment is actually marriage (see, for example, Deut 22:29). In Acts 15:29, sexual immorality is specifically forbidden for Gentile Christians by the Jerusalem council. Paul states explicitly that the sexually immoral will not “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:3–6; see also John’s statements in Rev 21:8, 22:14–15). So there can be no grounds for arguing that adultery or fornication is acceptable, whatever its form, even though it can be forgiven.

The most important text on divorce in the Torah is Deut 24:1–4. Richard Davidson has recently written with great insight on this passage (see his article in this issue of *JATS*, 2–21). The rabbis developed from this passage many laws about divorce, and in Jesus’ day divorce was not infrequent, if we can judge from the evidence in the Gospels. However, Jesus also explicitly states, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives” (Matt 19:8; see also Mark 10:4–5. All quotations are from the NKJV or are my own translation, unless otherwise indicated).

¹ The biblical definition of divorce is clearly stated in the NIV translation of Jer 3:8 cited above. Divorce is the sending away or “putting away” of a spouse, ideally with a certificate of divorce (Deut 24:1–4), with the intention of a permanent severance of all physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual ties through the legal cancellation of the marriage vow or oath or covenant. Paul’s reference in 1 Cor 7:11 to a separation without remarriage which leaves open the possibility of reconciliation brings to mind something closer to what we would today call a “legal separation.” We may see something similar in Judg 19:1–3, where the Levite’s concubine departs from him and returns to her father’s house, and after four months the Levite, now called “her husband” (*anēr*, LXX), arrives to persuade her to return to him.

² Most of the views in this paper are in line with the new “Chapter 15: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” which will appear in the new edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and was printed in *Adventist Review*, July 20–27, 2000, 47–50 [1255–1258]. That book provides explicit guidelines, which I do not. This paper provides more discussion of implications and more textual analysis. Where the book and the paper differ are that the position taken here, in line with the position held by most of the early church fathers, is that Jesus offers divorce for spouses of adulterous people but does not clearly allow remarriage—though I provide a way of reconciling Christ’s “exception clause” with Rom 7:2–3 that allows remarriage while the guilty spouse is still physically alive. Also, I argue that 1 Cor 7:10–16 is not talking about unbelieving spouses, but unfaithful spouses, and explore the implications of that. Again, I am not suggesting a change in church policy or claiming that the church policy is in error—it is perhaps more likely that I am in error—but offering some possibilities that may help us think more clearly about the issue and avoid missteps as we seek to understand God’s Word.

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Should we say, then, that Deut 24:1–4 is not available to Christians as a sanction for divorce, as it was given especially to the Israelites because of their hard hearts, and our hearts are no longer hard? Most commentators agree that Jesus' teaching transcends this Torah rule by putting in its place a higher standard. By these words Jesus eliminates the entire body of rabbinical elaborations and speculations on the passage in Deuteronomy by reminding His listeners of an earlier, edenic covenant between man and wife instituted by God.³

Or should we admit that our hearts are still hard, and therefore, we still need access to divorce? If a hard heart is a sign that the Holy Spirit is not allowed in to soften it and bring it to love, then yes, we may well argue that those who choose to divorce their spouses are usually hard-hearted (though I have known otherwise loving, gentle, Spirit-filled workers for God who also have marital problems). But in the Torah the hard-hearted died in the wilderness, and in later books they suffered from famine and warfare and were taken into captivity. Perhaps we could argue that those who divorce do so because they are already suffering, and in doing so they cause more suffering, and so suffer a penalty for hardheartedness. They don't need extra suffering sent from God to call them to awareness of their sin, because suffering is inherent in their sin. Perhaps when the church sees this happen, it should try to soften those hearts and bring them to Christ. Perhaps the Church should assume that those who divorce are at the time turned away from God, or perhaps have never been born again. When one repents and turns away from sin, that sin is forgiven, even if it is divorce and the hardness of heart that led to it.⁴

Perhaps, though, in considering what Jesus means when He says, "Moses, because of the hardness of your heart, permitted you to divorce your wives," we do best to look at it this way. Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. They assume the provision for divorce in Deut 24:1–4 is righteous in whole because it is in the Torah. Jesus explains that righteousness lies in being one in heart and body with one's spouse, as intended at the creation. Divorce is not God's intention, but is allowed to us because we are sinful, we do not love as God would have us love, our hearts are hard.⁵ (This is similar to the laws regulating slavery.

³ But what about Jesus' statement, in the Sermon on the Mount, that He "did not come to destroy" the Law or the Prophets "but to fulfill," or His warning against breaking even "one of the least of these commandments" (Matt 5:17–19)? Some have argued that for Jesus the Law and the Prophets all went to explain the Decalogue by precept and example, and that He meant thus that the Ten Commandments are eternal. (See Keith Burton's "The Decalogue as Essential Torah in Second Temple Judaism," *JATS*, 9/1–2 (1998): 310–317.) We find Jesus taking a rather lax position on several Torah laws (cf. Exod 12:11 and John 13:23 NIV, where we find Jesus reclining with His disciples as He eats the Passover, rather than eating with His sandals on and staff in His hand).

⁴ These are in fact the recommendations in the *Church Manual*: marriage counseling, loss of membership for those whose hearts have grown hard, and rebaptism and reconciliation for the repentant.

⁵ See Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Divine Accommodation in Revelation and Scripture," *JATS*, 9/1–2 (1998): 221–229.

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Slavery was not God’s plan and is not good, but rather than abolishing it at that time God chose, knowing the unwillingness of the Israelites to obey Him, knowing their hard hearts, to regulate this evil.) The “certificate of divorce” lessens the trauma of divorce, but it is still not God’s intention, and in God’s eyes this breaking of the marriage covenant leads to adultery if there is remarriage and is always sinful, except perhaps when a righteous man puts away an adulterous wife, as God divorced Israel (Jer 3:8). By this light, Jesus is revealing that divorce is the result of sin and leads to sin, is the result of suffering and leads to suffering. It is never neutral or positive or good or righteous or acceptable, but always a defeat, a tragedy.⁶

Witness of the Latter Prophets. Of immense importance to our understanding of Deut 24:1–4 is God’s commentary on it through the prophet Jeremiah. Moses specifies that if a man divorces his wife and she then remarries and is divorced again, the first man may not marry her again. No exceptions given. Cut and dried. It’s an abomination. It defiles the land. In Jer 3:1 God paraphrases this passage. In v. 6 He accuses His wife Israel of multiple adulteries. In v. 8 He says, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (NIV). According to Deut 24:1–4 and Jer 3:1, God cannot now take her back.⁷ Leviticus 21:7 forbids priests to marry prostitutes or women who have been divorced because priests are “holy to their God” (NIV). Surely, then, a holy God will not marry a divorced prostitute, even symbolically. But in vs. 12–13 He pleads for “faithless Israel” to return. “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, ‘for I am your husband’” (v. 14). Whatever Deut 24 may say, whatever the defilement of the land, God wants His wife back. Here is our Example.

One of the most important Old Testament texts for understanding 1 Cor 7:10–16 is Malachi 2:14–16, where God reveals that “He hates divorce” (v. 16).

. . . the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly

⁶ In his article on “Divorce” in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 192, R. H. Stein writes, “All exegetes agree that Jesus saw divorce as a tragedy. Any divorce denotes a failure of the divine purpose, for those God joined together in marriage should not be separated. Thus there is no so-called good divorce.”

⁷ We could perhaps argue that Israel has not remarried but only committed adultery, but recall that the penalty for fornication was death. Surely we should see this continued fornication after Israel’s divorce as at least the equivalent of remarriage, so far as the consideration of defilement and abomination goes. After all, Jer 3:1 says, “If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers—would you now return to me?” declares the LORD” (NIV). Clearly God is equating remarriage and fornication after divorce as defilements. It is interesting to consider this verse in light of Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar.

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offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of your youth. “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce,⁸ for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

The idea here is that, as at the Creation, husband and wife are “one,” not only by covenant (i.e., vow, pledge, betrothal, marriage agreement), but by having a shared “spirit” or, in a sense, “breath.” There is a oneness which is real, even though we may use metaphor to describe it. Note that the “covenant” between man and wife is that they will be *companions*. (This of course takes us back to God’s statement in Gen 2:18 that it isn’t good for man to be alone.)⁹ Thus, unfaithfulness to the oath of betrothal is not limited to physical or even mental adultery. To stop being a companion is the equivalent of unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant. To be unfaithful to this covenant is similar to Israel, God’s bride, being unfaithful to Him (Jer 3 again, among many).

What Does Jesus Say?

Christ’s statements on divorce have been often interpreted to mean that if one spouse commits adultery, the other is free to divorce and remarry. Is that in fact what the texts say? According to the newly revised statement “Biblical Teachings on Remarriage” in the *Church Manual*,

*There is no direct teaching in Scripture regarding remarriage after divorce. However, there is a strong implication in Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:9 that would allow the remarriage of one who has remained faithful, but whose spouse has been unfaithful to the marriage vow.*¹⁰

Jesus says, in Matt 5:32,

“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

⁸ The Geneva Bible (1560), adopting Calvin’s reading, translates this sentence quite differently, but in line with Deut 24:1–4: “If thou hatest her, put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel.” It gives the following gloss on the text: “Not that he doeth allowe diuorcement, but of the two fautes he sheweth, which is the lesse.” This has been considered a very difficult verse.

⁹ The great Puritan poet John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, in his 1644 pamphlet *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (second edition, Book I, Chapter IV), writes, “The dignity and blessing of marriage is placed rather in the mutual enjoyment of that which the wanting soul needfully seeks than of that which the plenteous body would joyfully give away.” Milton argues that in 1 Cor 7:9, “It is better to marry than to burn,” Paul speaks not of lust, but of burning with loneliness for “joining to itself in conjugal fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly called love).”

¹⁰ 48 (emphasis added). The frankness of this statement is admirable, but still it gives one pause. Should church policy be based on “a strong implication” which many commentators have found ambiguous?

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We find similar sayings in Matt 19:9, Luke 16:18, and Mark 10:11–12, but we must note that Mark adds another aspect to what Jesus says which Matthew does not have:

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (NIV)

These passages may be difficult to accept, but are they difficult to understand? No! If a man divorces his wife *because* she has committed adultery, she is of course *already* guilty of adultery. Jesus recognizes this, merely adding that if he divorces her for any *other* reason and she *remarries*, then *both* she and her new husband commit adultery. Jesus says in Mark that *whenever* there is a divorce, *any* spouse who remarries commits adultery.

Jesus is saying, in effect, that the marriage covenant ordained in Eden is a sacred agreement in the eyes of God, that the husband and wife become one flesh. Paul tells us this covenant can be broken only by death.¹¹ Therefore, if a divorced wife remarries while the first husband is still alive, both she and her new husband are guilty of adultery. The same would be the case if a woman divorced a man, Mark reveals.¹² (Later in this paper I will provide a possible rationale allowing the sin-free remarriage of those whose divorce is a result of the “exception clause.”)

This is a hard saying! I have heard women say, “Why should I do without a husband’s love for the rest of my life because I’ve had a bum of a husband who ran off with another woman?” My heart cries out for them. If I were designing marriage for a sinful world, I wouldn’t do it that way. But God knows best and I don’t, and if I made the rules, there would be catastrophe. He is holy, and He understands holiness and requires it. Holiness is so much a part of His character that He had to send His Son to die in our place, bearing our sins, including our adulteries and divorces and remarriages. He had to do this because He could not give us a dispensation to sin freely, yet He wanted sinners to be able to repent and come home to Him. It is because God cannot give us a dispensation to sin that Christ had to condemn remarriage after divorce as adultery. The rabbis had

¹¹ Paul explains in Rom 7:2–3 that the covenant is not eternal but broken by death.

¹² R. H. Stein writes, of the view that “Divorce in the Case of Unchastity Is Permitted, but Not Remarriage,” “This was the view of the majority of the early church fathers. Exegetical support is found in the placement of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9. ‘Except for unchastity’ is interpreted as modifying only the verb ‘divorces’ and not the verb ‘marries.’ Thus the text is interpreted, ‘Whoever divorces his wife except for unchastity commits adultery and the one who remarries [without exception] commits adultery.’ The purpose of the exception clause is not to permit remarriage in cases of unchastity but simply to say that in such a situation, divorce, in the sense of separation from bed and board, is not adultery. (This idea of divorce as separation only, once thought of as unknown in Judaism, may be alluded to in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for in 11Qtemple 56:17–19; 57:17–19 and CD 4:20–21 polygamy and remarriage after divorce appear to be forbidden.) Divorce is permissible in cases of unchastity, but not remarriage” (193).

seen Deut 24:1–4 as a dispensation to sin, but Jesus said no, it was because your hearts were hard.

Is Jesus Exaggerating? One of Jesus’ favorite rhetorical devices is hyperbole, saying something so extreme, so exaggerated, that listeners will know He does not mean His words to be taken literally, but as signs pointing to a deeper meaning (though modern readers are not always perceptive enough to realize this). The Sermon on the Mount has several notable hyperboles. Think of Matt 5:29: “‘And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.’” Are the blind immune to lust? Of course not! Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point.

Is it possible that what Jesus says about adultery is also hyperbole?¹³ It is possible, but given that He cites the creation story as the support for His saying, it seems unlikely (Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9). He seems, rather, to be explaining the implications of marriage as sacred covenant. However, it is important to bear in mind that Jesus is not presenting “the bare minimum” for salvation. He is showing people, disciples, religious leaders that, as Isaiah writes, “‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (55:9).¹⁴

A Higher Standard of Holiness. In understanding Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage, on adultery and murder, on the cost of discipleship, on the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven, on the sheep and the goats in the last day, on giving to Caesar (bear in mind that most coins bore Caesar’s image, and so belonged to him!), or any other shocking ethical teaching, it is absolutely crucial that we understand that Jesus is deliberately holding up an unreachable standard of holiness which leads us to despair of our ever reaching it by our own works. (Yes, by God’s grace and the work of the Holy Spirit we may approach it, but never can we in our own right claim the holiness Christ models for us.) The Old Testament standard of holiness, on the other hand, seems at times to be somewhat lower.¹⁵ What God reveals to Job about

¹³ Milton argues for hyperbole in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, book II, chapter I. “So here he may be justly thought to have given this rigid sentence against divorce, not to cut off all remedy from a good man who finds himself consuming away in a disconsolate and unenjoyed matrimony, but to lay a bridle upon the bold abuses of those overweening rabbis; which he could not more effectually do than by a countersway of restraint curbing their wild exorbitance almost into the other extreme, as when we bow things the contrary way to make them come to their natural straightness.”

¹⁴ Stein writes, “Thus Jesus, in his great concern to show that divorce destroys God’s purpose in marriage and in light of the loose attitude of his audience toward divorce, expressed the will of God without exception. ‘God hates divorce! All divorce is wrong!’ (cf. Mal 2:16a). The very question of the Pharisees, ‘When is divorce permissible?’ witnesses to a decidedly wrong focus. This may at times be a legitimate question, and later Matthew and Paul would deal with that question, but in this particular instance Jesus used emotive and exaggerated language to emphasize the divine ideal and purpose in marriage” (197).

¹⁵ Look at the following texts, for example, to see where the Old Testament authors say that a person “did what was right in the sight of the LORD,” despite continuing to sin or neglecting to

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the height of His knowledge of and power over the natural world (Job 38–41), Christ reveals to His listeners about the height of God’s ethical standards and righteousness. Just as Job’s response is to “abhor” himself “and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6), we realize that “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa 64:6; cf. Phil 3:9–10). In the Old Testament world one could divorce one’s wife without committing adultery, or at least without realizing one was committing adultery.

Why does Jesus do this? He wants to show us that “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16 KJV). We think we’re righteous because we’re ten percent better than our neighbor. Jesus reveals that our neighbor is only twenty percent righteous, so we’re only thirty percent righteous. Jesus shows us what one hundred percent righteous would look like. Then He proceeds to be that for us, in our place, and call us to be like Him.

This does not mean that what Jesus teaches about marriage is wrong. Marriage is holy in God’s eyes. His plan was that husband and wife would be one flesh, one mind, one heart. God never condones divorce. How can a sinless God give us a dispensation to sin freely? He holds up the high view of marriage at which we are to aim. But He also offers forgiveness for those who repent, band-aids and hugs for those who fall and hurt themselves.

However, to say that Jesus allows divorce only for adultery is to miss what Matt 5:32 is saying. When does a divorced woman commit adultery? The mere fact of being divorced does not make her an adulteress. It is *remarriage* that makes her an adulteress and her new husband an adulterer.

Remarriage Is Adultery. One can fairly argue that according to a strict grammatical reading, Jesus is not calling divorce adultery, but remarriage. This does not mean He *approves* of divorce. The marriage vow, as instituted in Eden, requires lifelong commitment and companionship between partners. There are many ways in which a partner might be unfaithful to that vow without committing adultery either in the flesh or the heart, but when the partners are living together such unfaithfulness can be repaired, there can be reconciliation, and the covenant remains intact, though sinned against. If the partners decide they cannot get along and they separate, that too is a sin against the marriage oath, though not in itself adultery. In God’s eyes the covenant continues and can still be restored, though He grieves over their lack of companionship. However, if a partner remarries, adultery does take place, because in God’s eyes the original partners are still married. However, by that remarriage the partner not only commits adultery but cancels the original covenant, because, as Deut 24:1–4 shows, there is no longer a possibility of returning to the original partnership.

stamp out idolatry in the land: 2 Kgs 12:2–3; 14:3; 15:3–4; 15:34–35; 18:3–7 (cf. 20:14–19); 2 Chron 14:2; 16:7, 8; 20:31–33.

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Instead, a new covenant is entered into, even though it is entered into by way of sin.¹⁶

Christ is bound by the “one flesh” explanation of Gen 2:24 (He was, after all, there at the event), and He envisions no remarriage without sin, except, many scholars hold, in case of adultery. Why might remarriage be allowed when divorce follows adultery? I suspect (and I will argue that Paul reads Christ’s words the same way) that what Christ is envisioning is *porneia* followed by a breakdown of the marriage, a decision by the guilty spouse to leave, and a refusal to be reconciled. Thus, this *porneia* is not a single episode, but a persistent condition the adulterous spouse clings to, what in the Old Testament is sometimes called “rebellious sin” or “high-handed sin,” a sin that *cuts the sinner off* from God’s people. Even if the Jews since Solomon’s day rarely punished adultery by stoning the guilty parties, such “high-handed” adultery should be considered in the light of the appropriate punishment. Thus, the adulterer should be *considered dead in God’s eyes*, cut off, the contract of marriage cancelled, and the innocent spouse free to remarry without sin. As Mark points out, this prohibition of remarriage applies as well to the man whose wife has committed adultery. The verse says nothing that might lead one to think one is free to remarry, unless one assumes one’s adulterous wife has been stoned to death, in which case one could remarry, or adopts an explanation similar to the one above.¹⁷

But what if a couple *does* divorce and remarry? What should they do? Are they living in permanent adultery? Can they return to the church? Can they return to positions of responsibility and authority?¹⁸

My friend Ron du Preez has argued logically and biblically that a polygamist who wants to join the church must give up all wives but the first, because all the others are adulterous relationships. If he kept his youngest wife, he might have only one wife, yet still be living in adultery.¹⁹ I suspect du Preez would take a similar approach to this issue. By this light, the adulterous pastor men-

¹⁶ This is why the *Church Manual* is correct in prohibiting pastors from performing the marriage ceremony when one or both of those being married has been divorced without the use of the *porneia* exception clause. To do so would be to bless sin. However, the *Church Manual* is also correct to allow a couple married after divorce to be rebaptized following conversion and welcomed back into church fellowship.

¹⁷ But stoning for adultery is thought to have been very unusual in Jesus’ day. Note Matt 1:19, where Joseph decides to divorce his pregnant fiancée, breaking the contract because of adultery, rather than have Mary stoned as an adulteress. See also Prov 6:32–35; Hos 2:3, 10; Ezek 16:37–39; 23:29.

¹⁸ Again, the protocol in the *Church Manual* on these points is sound and should be followed, though even when it is there can be problems. For example, in the case of the adulterous pastor mentioned above, his credentials were returned after consultations at the top level of division administration, yet some pastors are still upset by the decision.

¹⁹ See his article “The Divine Marital Mandate: Monogamous, Heterosexual, Intrafaith,” in this issue, 23–40, and his book *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993).

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tioned earlier should not be returned to church membership until he has demonstrated his true repentance by giving up his second wife and living a celibate single life. His first wife remains unmarried, and so free of adultery, but on the basis of Deut 24:1–4 he cannot now return to her. While this passage may not be binding on us, surely if God calls it an abomination, we should pay attention.

Guidance from Bible Stories. Is there a possible alternative? Not if we go by the letter of the law. Are there hints we can draw from Bible stories? We find evidence in certain stories that God is merciful and forgives those who approach Him with humble and contrite hearts (Isa 66:2). We have already looked at such evidence in Jer 3.²⁰

When David commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband killed, God takes Bathsheba's child's life. Sin matters to God, and it is punished here in a heartbreaking way. But He does not tell David to give up Bathsheba; He

²⁰ I will argue in this paper that in 1 Cor 7:10–16 Paul is not dealing with the question of divorce from unbelievers but divorce from those who are unfaithful to their marriage covenant. 2 Cor 6:14 does forbid being yoked with unbelievers, however, as does Exod 34:16. Whether or not my thesis is right, thus, entering into marriage with unbelievers is forbidden. Some have argued that if believers do marry unbelievers, no real covenant of marriage can take place, for God has already forbidden it, so the marriage can be annulled. It is interesting to note, however, that if no marriage has taken place, then the couple are committing fornication, which was punishable by death. How odd that some are willing to admit to the sin of fornication in order to escape an unhappy marriage.

A couple months after Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, some finally came to him and revealed that a number of the people—even leaders and priests and Levites—had married local women (Ezra 9:1–2). This of course was one of the sins which led to idol worship and eventually to the Babylonian captivity (see Neh 13:23–30; Ezra 9:11–12). After Ezra recovered from his dismay and confessed the people's sins to God, the people too repented. One man said, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law" (Ezra 10:2–3 NASB). The men proceeded to divorce their unbelieving wives.

Is this an example for us? We might note that the men sinned by marrying these women, but if they continued with these women they were in great danger of also returning to idol worship. Nothing in the chapters suggests that these were not real marriages. Nowhere in these chapters did God tell them they were doing right or wrong by divorcing these wives. He had already told them to not enter into such marriages, so in doing so they sinned deliberately. In divorcing these wives they removed themselves from temptation, to some extent.

If 1 Cor 7:10–16 is talking about unbelievers, then in counseling reconciliation wherever possible is it going against the OT teaching? Is it contradicting 2 Cor 6:14, which forbids being yoked with unbelievers? Peter has written in 1 Pet 3:1–6 that believing women may by their actions help to draw their husbands to Christ, and Paul has done the same in 1 Tim 2:8–15 (see my article on these verses in this issue of *JATS*). Thus, we should see marriage with unbelievers as forbidden, but divorce of unbelievers as also a poor option, unless the unbeliever insists on leaving (whatever we make of 1 Cor 7:10–16). Certainly unbelieving spouses can lead their husbands or wives away from God, but evidently with much less certainty in Paul's day than in the days of Balaam or Ezra or Solomon.

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allows her son Solomon to take the throne; He allows Bathsheba and David to be ancestors of the Messiah. While God does not condone this adulterous marriage, He does forgive David after David sincerely repents (Ps 51:10–11; 2 Sam 12:13), even though He allows David to suffer the consequences as Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah do evil with impunity, knowing their father is no better than they. This seems highly pertinent to the case of the pastor described above. (One might argue that Bathsheba was free to marry because Uriah the Hittite was dead, but surely we would not condone murder as a way of avoiding adultery, and of course she was already an adulteress while her husband was still alive.)

By the light of 1 Tim 3:4, both Eli and Samuel should have resigned their positions because of their unruly and ill-trained sons. They both were punished for their failures, but neither was removed from office.

When Jesus meets the woman at the well in Samaria, He rightly tells her she has had five husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband. He tells her those who worship God “must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24), but He neither commands her to marry the man she is living with nor tells her she must remain unmarried and celibate. Perhaps He assumes that having received the Living Water, the woman will now digest it and in time do the right thing. But if He tells her what that right thing may be, the text doesn’t share that with us.

With the woman taken in adultery, Jesus refuses to condemn her, despite the laws in the Torah, but He does command her to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11). There is no evidence that He then tells her what that entails. Does she stop having adulterous affairs? If she obeys, yes. Does she remain unmarried, but celibate? We don’t know.

These stories are neither conclusive, nor sound bases for doctrine. They do, however, *suggest* that perhaps a truly repentant adulterer may be restored to his church, even though married to a new spouse.

Unbelieving or Unfaithful?

We turn at last to 1 Cor 7:10–16. My thesis, if I may be so brash, is that throughout the history of English Bible translation translators have erred in translating, in this passage, the word *apistos* (in its several forms) as “unbelieving” rather than “unfaithful.” When the words are translated correctly, a new reading emerges which solves several problems and harmonizes closely with Jesus’ statements on divorce.

The Linguistic Background. First we must look briefly at the relationship between faith and faithfulness.²¹ The verb *pisteuō* occurs 241 times in the

²¹ The introduction to the entries on “Faith” in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* includes the following sentences: “The words of the *pistis* group are derived from the same verbal stem. They denoted originally the *faithful relationship of partners in an agreement* and *the trustworthiness of their promises*” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 587–588 (emphasis

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New Testament and is nearly always translated by the word “believe” or a closely related word. In most instances it could be translated “have faith” just as easily, except that it would be a wordier verb and direct object. “Believe” and “have faith” are close synonyms. In many cases “trust” could also be an acceptable translation of *pisteuō*, but in some cases it would be a bit strained. “Trust” and “believe” are also synonyms, but not as closely related as “believe” and “have faith” (though it is interesting to go through these 241 occurrences and substitute “trust” for “believe”).

The noun *pistis* occurs 243 times in the New Testament, and in nearly every case it is translated as “faith.” In the NIV it is translated by some form of the word “believe” about a dozen times, and four times as “faithfulness.” In the Septuagint, however, the Greek translation of the Old Testament frequently quoted by New Testament authors, *pistis* is the word translated “faithfulness” in the English Old Testament versions. Hebrews 11 says “By faith,” but the Old Testament says “by faithfulness.” Only twice is a word which the LXX renders *pistis* translated “faith” in the KJV Old Testament: Deut 32:20, “children in whom is no faith,” and Hab 2:4, “the just shall live by faith.” But the NASB and the NRSV both translate as “faithfulness,” in Deut 32:20, what the LXX translates as *pistis*, and the New Jerusalem Bible more accurately and consistently translates Hab 2:4 as “the upright will live through faithfulness.”²²

To bring these two together, I would say faithfulness is the *evidence* of faith. Without faithfulness there is no evidence of belief or trust. In the New Testament there are a number of verses where *pistis* might well be better translated as “faithfulness.” I would suggest this hasn’t been done for imposed theological reasons, rather than solid linguistic reasons. The New Testament writers read and quoted the Septuagint, where they would find *pistis* used in many instances where “faithfulness” is the clear meaning. It would be odd if they all decided that *pistis* would now nearly always mean “belief” rather than “faithfulness.” But this is not the place to explore the issue.

The words *apistos* and *apiston* in 1 Cor 7 are simply negative forms of the adjective *pistos*, which occurs 67 times in the New Testament. In the NIV *pistos* is translated “faithful” thirty-six times and “trustworthy” (a synonym of “faithful”) thirteen times. Various forms of “believing” occur only thirteen times.

Not Unbelieving but Unfaithful. Beyond doubt the verse “be not unequally yoked with unbelievers [*apistois*]” (2 Cor 6:14) is correctly translated.²³ I

added). In the same article, O. Michel writes, “Hence, experience of faithfulness and unfaithfulness belongs to the idea of faith from the beginning” (594).

²² This is more accurate than the KJV, but consider the blow to the Reformation if Luther had more correctly read Romans 1:17 in his Latin Bible as “the righteous shall live by faithfulness”!

²³ This verse is not speaking specifically about *marriage* to unbelievers, but it certainly offers wisdom to those considering such an alliance.

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would suggest, though, that the translation of this verse has affected the translation of *apistos* in 1 Cor 7. While “unbelieving” is certainly a *possible* translation of *apistos* in 1 Cor 7, however, there is an alternative which is, I believe, a *better* translation, as I will now seek to demonstrate. The following is my own quite literal (and so rather wooden) translation from the Greek, with some explanatory notes in brackets:

- 10 But to the married I proclaim—not I but the Lord—let a wife from her husband not be separated
- 11 (but if indeed she is separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband) and let a husband not leave his wife.
- 12 And to the rest I say—not the Lord—if any brother has an unfaithful wife, and she consents to live with him, let him not leave her.
- 13 And if a woman has an unfaithful husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not leave the husband.
- 14 For [it has been known to happen that] the unfaithful husband has been brought to holiness by the [forgiving] wife, and the unfaithful wife has been brought to holiness by the [forgiving] brother. Since then [if you separate] your children are unclean, but now [if you reconcile] they are holy.
- 15 But if the unfaithful one separates, let him be separated—the brother or the sister in the matter has not been enslaved [two possible readings: either, “nothing’s keeping them from going,” if it speaks of the ones who leave; or, perhaps, “they aren’t required to remain married to a spouse who insists on remaining unfaithful and leaving,” if it speaks of the ones left behind]. But God has called you to peace;
- 16 for what knowest you, wife [i.e., how do you know], but that [by reconciling] you might save your husband, or how do you know, husband, but that you might save your wife?

The phrases “not I but the Lord” and “I, not the Lord” (vs. 10, 12) have led some scholars into the error of thinking Paul is saying that some of his writing is based on revelation from God and some isn’t. They then argue that what is only from Paul is of a lower level of authority. This translation of the passage yields a very different result.

In vs. 10 and 11 Paul gives a paraphrase of Matt 19:4–9 or Mark 10:5–12 which is very loose, yet cuts to the heart of what Jesus is saying: a husband and wife are not to divorce, but if they do they are not to remarry. Whether or not Paul had access to the Gospels, he had access to this saying of Jesus, and he understood it much better than we have.²⁴ Based on that understanding, he says, “Let her not remarry.”

When he says, “I, not the Lord,” he is simply adding his commentary on the implications of what the Lord has said decades earlier. He will now explain

²⁴ See R. H. Stein’s comments on this in his article on “Divorce,” 192.

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that while adultery may be grounds for divorce, it is not *mandatory* that adultery lead to divorce. There is a better way, and it is in harmony with the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness and reconciliation. “I, not the Lord” does not indicate a lower level of inspiration, but merely a change in attribution.

Be Reconciled. Jesus has said a man may divorce an adulterous wife, but He has also said, “be reconciled with your brother” (Matt 5:24), “love your enemies” (v. 44), and “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (6:14). God used Hosea’s search for and forgiveness of his prostitute-wife Gomer to reveal God’s own love for idolatrous Israel, and other prophets have sung this refrain, as well.

Paul draws on this rich heritage of forgiveness in counseling that a Christian husband or wife should forgive an unfaithful spouse, rather than seeking a divorce.²⁵ He seems to recognize that in some circumstances the adulterous affair continues or the unfaithful spouse may want to leave, even if the affair does not continue. Paul allows this separation, for marriage is a covenant, but not meant to be slavery for either party. He also recognizes that an intact family is better for the children.

Is Separation Divorce? When Jesus talks about divorce, the word used in the Greek New Testament is a form of the word *apoluo*, which literally means “to loose from,” meaning “to set free” or “to dismiss.” This was the usual word for divorce in New Testament times. However, Paul does not use this word. Instead, he uses a form of *aphiēmi*, literally “leave,” but with such synonyms as “let go,” “permit,” and “forsake”; or a form of *chōrizō*, meaning “separate,” or “put apart.” (This is the word the KJV translates as “put asunder” in Mark 10:9: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”) Both can arguably be seen as synonyms of divorce, even though not the usual words for divorce. However, their primary meanings of “leave” and “separate” should be kept in mind.

In v. 15, “But if the unfaithful one separates, let him be separated—the brother or the sister in the matter has not been enslaved,” the phrase “has not been enslaved,” *dedoulōtai*, makes more sense if we bear in mind that the word *apoluo*, which Paul does not use in this passage, means “to set free.” This setting free is possible because the marriage covenant is a vow before God to love, not a vow to perpetual slavery.²⁶ The sin comes less in the divorce than in the

²⁵ This is in line with the policy set forth in the *Church Manual*, even though it is not based on this reading of 1 Cor 7:10–16.

²⁶ It is true that 1 Cor 7:39 reads, “The wife is bound [*dedetai*, from *deō*, “bind,” also found in v. 27, but not the word used in v. 15] by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” KJV. However, though that binding is the equivalent of the marriage covenant, the unbinding by *death* is not the equivalent of *divorce*. The fact that the death of the husband frees a woman to lawfully remarry does not clearly mean that after a woman is divorced by her unfaithful husband she also may then lawfully remarry. If this were so it would contradict the teaching of both Jesus and Paul. It is also true that the audiences of both Jesus and Paul would have assumed that remarriage after divorce is accept-

breaking of the covenant by ceasing to love, because the divorce comes only *after* that covenant has been broken. Divorce is a legal matter, and emphasis on divorce as the sin, rather than on the true sin being the unfaithful heart which forsakes the covenant long before there is a divorce, is legalism of a sort much loved by the Pharisees. However, again, while the word for “divorce” does not appear in the passage, Paul’s readers would understand his words to include divorce, even though they also can include a separation which is not permanent.

To understand “Since then [if you separate] your children are unclean, but now [if you reconcile] they are holy,” it helps to look again at Mal 2:14–16, where it says, of God, “He hates divorce,” and gives, as a reason for His hating divorce, “He seeks godly offspring.” “Holy” children are “godly offspring.” By forgiving the adulterous spouse and saving the marriage, it becomes more likely that the children will grow up to be “holy.” If they grow up in an “unclean” environment with a father or mother who is a social pariah, it is less likely they will ever be the “godly offspring” God seeks.

New Testament Evidence. Is “unfaithful” a recognized translation for *apistos*? Yes, it is. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives “unfaithful” or “unreliable” as meaning “b.” in its survey of classical Greek sources (6:176).²⁷ Meaning “3.b.” for the noun *pistis* in the Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich *Greek Lexicon* is “solemn promise, oath, troth.” The marriage vow, of course, fits this definition perfectly.

The authors cite 1 Tim 5:11–12, which deals with young widows: “But refuse the younger widows, for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith [*pistin*].”²⁸ Paul is not saying these young widows give up their faith in Christ by marrying. Rather, by “growing wanton against Christ” through giving up their single-minded dedication to prayer (v. 5), they give up the essence of their faithfulness to the heavenly Bridegroom.

In the LXX Old Testament, we find *apistos* as “unfaithfulness” in Prov 17:6. Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton translates this verse, “Children’s children are the crown of old men; and their fathers are the glory of children. The faithful [*pistou*] has the whole world full of wealth; but the faithless [*apistou*, lit., according to the parallel, “unfaithful”] not even a farthing.”²⁹

able. However, given that Jesus and Paul specifically say it is not acceptable, the presumptions of the audience or culture are not valid arguments in favor of remarriage. Today as well most people consider remarriage after divorce to be perfectly natural, but their thinking doesn’t make it so.

²⁷ Among others, Euripides, in his play *Medea*, written centuries before Christ, refers to a husband who is faithful *pistin* to his wife (line 511).

²⁸ Bultmann refers specifically to this text as one which should be translated as “faithfulness” rather than “faith” (TDNT, 6:205).

²⁹ *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (n.p.: Hendrickson, [1851] 1986). Note that English versions based on the Hebrew do not have the second sentence, though it must have been in the Hebrew manuscript used by the Septuagint translators. My point is merely to establish that *apistos* can in fact be used to mean “unfaithful” in the Old Testament. Generally, the Old

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Unfaithfulness vs. *Porneia*. It is important to note that in translating *apistos* as “unfaithfulness,” I am *not* equating it with *porneia*, “fornication.” It is *porneia* that Jesus gives as a reason for divorce, not unfaithfulness. The NIV translates this, for some reason, with the euphemism “marital unfaithfulness.” Today we understand the phrase, but in the 17th century of King James it might have puzzled readers. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first clear use of the euphemism “unfaithful” for “adulterous” was in Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair*, published in 1848.

I do think Paul meant to include *porneia*, as used by Jesus, as *evidence* of “unfaithfulness,” but the *BAG* definition of *pistis* as “solemn promise, oath, troth” leads me to believe that in 1 Cor 7, the spouses are *unfaithful* to their *pledge of faithfulness*, whether by adultery or some other means. If Paul had meant only *porneia*—even though it is probably his primary intent—he could have used the term, but I think he meant more, and as noted, “unfaithfulness” simply wasn’t a simple synonym for fornication in Paul’s day.

A few verses away from where Jesus speaks of divorce in the Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of the commandment against adultery. He expands the commandment in a spiritual sense to include not only the action but the fantasy. I suggest that Paul is again drawing from the Sermon itself in Matthew or the sayings in his choice of *apistos* rather than *porneia*. In considering Matt 5:32, on divorce, in the light of Matt 5:28, on adultery, he is drawing from Christ’s words the idea that the heart of adultery is not the physical act, the *porneia*, but spiritual unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant. The covenant, the oath, is sacred, and if it is damaged in *any* way there is a breach which leads to misery unless there is reconciliation.

The implications of this idea are startling, indeed troubling. If a woman’s love for a boorish husband slips away and she remains with him, serves him, but without affection, she is unfaithful to her covenant to love him. If a husband’s real love is sports, his pals, or his career, he is unfaithful to his marriage oath. If a woman submits to nightly sexual intercourse but without joy, without a giving of herself, or while fantasizing about some other person, she is unfaithful. If a man abuses the wife he has promised to love, he is unfaithful. We find thus a much higher level of faithfulness required by God than merely avoiding physical adultery. I do not mean to imply that such unfaithfulness *constitutes*

Testament does not use “unfaithful” as an antonym of “faithful,” but a word such as “treachery.” This is a synonym of “unfaithfulness,” of course, but it is not a word which the LXX translates as *apistos*. Paul, much concerned with rhetorical effect, seems to use *apistos* as the antonym of *pistos* not only because it was a possible usage, but because it balanced beautifully.

Lael Caesar has pointed out to me, in an e-mail, that in Wisdom 14:25, part of the Apocrypha, *apistia* is generally understood as “unfaithfulness.” He adds that in 4 Macc 12:4, also part of the Apocrypha in the Greek versions, the Alexandrinus MS has the word *apeitheian*, “disobedience” or obstinate rejection, whereas the Vaticanus [B] and Sinaiticus [S] MSS use *apistian*, “unfaithfulness.” This suggests that several centuries after Paul’s day, obstinate rejection and unfaithfulness could be seen as synonymns.

adultery. It is, however, a sin against the marriage vow. It is not only after fornication that husband and wife may need to be reconciled.

Observe that we have gone beyond the black and white of Jesus' "except for fornication" and entered the realm of marriage counseling! Should we then see Paul as a proto-counselor, urging reconciliation—a true reconciliation based on mutual forgiveness and repentance and change? Evidently!

I find myself much moved by the way my translation reveals Paul's compassionate advice that unfaithfulness needn't lead to divorce, but should be followed by reconciliation if possible, for the sake of all involved. Is it harder to forgive your husband than to love your enemy? How can it be, when at worst they are one and the same?

Some will be saying, at this point, that what I've actually done is to present "alienation of affection" as a synonym of adultery, which means "I just don't love her anymore" is now a valid biblical reason for divorce.³⁰ Again, no, "alienation of affection" is *not* a synonym of adultery, but a synonym of unfaithfulness. Adultery is a kind of unfaithfulness which certainly can lead to "alienation of affection" and sometimes springs from it, but they are not synonyms. This unfaithfulness or "alienation of affection" is a sin against the marriage covenant which may lead to divorce, but God's desire and Paul's teaching, I believe, is that husband and wife should be reconciled. If the unfaithful spouse leaves, the one remaining is not "bound" to the person, but God's desire is reconciliation, just as He longs to be reconciled with His unfaithful people.

I suspect many divorces would never happen (indeed, as the disciples pointed out, many marriages!) were remarriage following divorce clearly presented not as a sin-free option for Christians, but as a choice which always begins with the sin of adultery.

More New Testament Support. Let's look at a few other New Testament verses where *pistos* or *piston* is translated as "faithful."

2 Tim 2:13 reads, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." The KJV actually reads, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful," a possibility, but missing the point. I suggest that the best literal translation is, "If we are *unfaithful* [*apistoumen*], that one [Christ] remains *faithful* [*pistos*]." This reveals the parallel better: we unfaithful and He faithful. Again we are left with the need for reconciliation following unfaithfulness. My point, though, is that here *pistos*, the opposite of *apistos*, is translated as "faithful."

The relevant phrase in Heb 2:17 reads, "that He might be a merciful and faithful [*pistos*] high priest." Hebrews 3:2 speaks of Christ, "who was faithful

³⁰ G. F. Hawthorne writes, in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), "Is it possible to extrapolate from this that other such marital travesties, although not identical to these (e.g., cruelty, desertion, physical abuse, the systematic psychological destruction of one's marriage partner, and the like), might also have been included as exceptions to the ideal had only authoritative responses to such abuses been written down and preserved by the church?" (599).

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[*piston*] to Him who appointed Him.” Hebrews 3:12 reads, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [*apistias*] in departing [*apostemai*] from the living God.”³¹ If *apistias* were translated “unfaithfulness” here, it would better reveal the unfaithfulness to the covenant which is at issue.

Of the word *apistias*, Bultmann writes, “This means ‘unfaithfulness’ in R. 3:3, 2 Tm. 2:13” (TDNT, 6:205). We’ve already examined the latter text. Romans 3:3 reads, “For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?” My own translation is in line with Bultmann’s comment. “What if some were unfaithful [*ēpistēsan*]? Will their unfaithfulness [*apistia*] nullify God’s faithfulness [*pistin*]?” The balance between unfaithfulness and faithfulness here flows naturally. If the translation should actually read “did not believe” or “unbelief,” then why shouldn’t God’s “faithfulness” also be translated as “belief”? This is translation based on theology at the expense of linguistics, yet without a sound reason for it.

Conclusions

Ron du Preez would say there is no moral dilemma here, and he is essentially correct. What is right and what is wrong are clear. Jesus says don’t divorce, but if you do, don’t remarry, because you can’t do it in God’s eyes without committing adultery. Paul advises reconciliation with unfaithful spouses. These answers may be difficult to bear, but do these things and you will not have sinned. It’s that easy. No dilemmas.

The difficulty lies in what to do with those who *have* sinned, who have broken their vows of faithfulness in thought or action, in emotional unfaithfulness or the unfaithfulness of physical abuse or the more obvious sexual unfaithfulness. What to do with those who have brought suffering on themselves and their families? What to do with those who have dishonored God and His church and perhaps by that dishonor given someone another reason to say no to God’s call to salvation, refusing to join with a church full of sinners and hypocrites? What to do with those who cause dissension as they see these problems permeating the church they love?

Examples. With secret sins there can be secret repentance and secret forgiveness. If a man is led into an adulterous fantasy by something he sees, Jesus says he has become an adulterer. Would we say, then, that as an adulterer he must resign his pastoral credentials? No, we would say he must repent in secret and be forgiven. If a woman flirts with a handsome colleague, perhaps she commits adultery in her heart, and worse, perhaps she causes her colleague to lust for her, as well. Here she has led someone else into temptation and sin! Would we say that her husband can now divorce her as an adulteress? (If we take

³¹ It is interesting that in the LXX reading of the sentence in Jer 3:8, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce” (NIV), the Greek for “certificate of divorce” is “*biblion apostasiou*,” tying together in these two verses divorce and apostasy.

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Matt 5:28 seriously, then the answer, of course, is yes.) Or would we say she should repent, perhaps apologizing to her colleague, and seek forgiveness.

I know of a middle-aged woman who began giving a man Bible studies and ended up in his bed. For a year she continued this affair, while continuing to be active in the church. Eventually she broke off the affair and confessed her sin to her husband, and like God with His bride, there was reconciliation. No one else in the church knew of this. Then, in retaliation, the jilted lover sent copies of her love letters to everyone in the church directory. Now it was public! What to do? But the next day was the Sabbath, and the husband insisted that his wife brave it out and accompany him to church. During the testimony period he stood and thanked God for his wonderful blessings and his wonderful family. What an advocate! The church has taken no action against the woman, in light of the public reconciliation, such a powerful type of the love of Christ for His church. Was this correct?

I know of a prominent church official who committed adultery. In remorse, before anyone else knew, he confessed to his union president and resigned. His wife also forgave him, and they were reconciled. His credentials were not removed, but he was removed from administration and assigned to a dying church. That church is now bursting at the seams. This man understands forgiveness and grace firsthand. Was this solution correct?

There is a case (1 Cor 5:1–5) of Paul ordering that a conspicuous adulterer be expelled from the church until he cease his sin, which was intercourse with his step-mother (probably after his father died). If 2 Cor 2:2–7 is also talking about this man after his punishment “inflicted by the majority” (v. 6), then we do well to note v. 7: “you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.” In 1 Cor 7, Paul’s counsel is not that unfaithful spouses be expelled, but that they be forgiven and reconciled if possible, but allowed to separate themselves and go their way if they insist. We must not accept divorce and remarriage as sin-free, yet we must also recognize that our tendency to shun those guilty of this sin often drives them away from the church and even from God and His forgiveness.

Different Sins: Divorce and Adultery. There is also an ambiguity in the parenthetical comment in 1 Cor 7:11—“(but *if* indeed she *is* separated, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband).” Some commentators believe Paul was recognizing that there were already separated couples in the church, so he was giving them extra instruction. This is probably correct. It is also possible, however, that Paul is assuming some will separate despite the Lord’s command, and so providing additional guidance—as shown above, based strictly on Christ’s own teaching: reconcile or remain single.³²

³² Hawthorne writes, “Paul, while holding to the ideal situation—“no divorce”—nevertheless concedes (as did Jesus) that it is possible that a divorce will take place in spite of any command against it. What then? Once more Paul advocates the same standard that was set forth by Jesus under similar circumstances; if divorce does take place (is permitted) then there is to be no re-

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Both Jesus and Paul take a high view of marriage as a sacred, life-long covenant. Though realizing marital discord may occur in a sinful world, neither offers remarriage as a sin-free option for believers if the spouse is alive (whether literally or symbolically following persistent *porneia* and refusal to be reconciled). If their marriage becomes bondage, they may be free of it, they may live apart, and perhaps they will be reconciled, but they may not re-enter that bondage with another without sin.

Thus, both divorce and remarriage after divorce needs to be treated as sin, but they are different sins—either the sin of unfaithfulness to the covenant or the sin of adultery. Forsaken sin can be repented of and forgiven. However, with remarriage, should it be treated as a single sin or group of sins, as a single instance of adultery followed by a new covenant to a new partner? Or should it be seen as continual sinning, continuing until those who have remarried separate? Bear in mind that if it is continual and cherished sinning, then so long as it continues this couple cannot fully surrender to the Holy Spirit and so cannot be born again. Thus, they stand outside of salvation and should not be baptized or admitted to church membership. Likewise, as evidence of this state, we will not find in them a burning desire to serve God and bring the lost to Christ. Is this in fact the case? Do we ever find the divorced and remarried filled with the Spirit? In fact, sometimes we do!

Perhaps we can find in the compassion of Christ and in the stories cited above sufficient license to welcome home the divorced and remarried and work with them, bringing them back to fellowship with church and Saviour. I'm not comfortable with basing *doctrine* on stories, hints, and hopes. Perhaps, though, these might be adequate as guides to *policy*.

Learning from Suzereignty Covenants. We might do well to consider the nature of a contract or covenant, especially the sacred covenant of marriage. Explicit in the marriage covenant is a term limit: “till death do us part.” When a man dies, leaving his wife a widow, he has not broken his covenant with her, but successfully fulfilled it and concluded it. This entails no sin for either party. Thus, the widow can remarry without sin.

If in Old Testament times a vassal was unfaithful in his heart to his suzerain without being discovered, he could return quietly to faithfulness. If he were discovered, he might have to pay a penalty. If his unfaithfulness were common knowledge, that penalty might be severe, lest other vassals be encouraged to rebel. But if both parties decided they wanted the covenant to continue, even though one had been unfaithful to it, then it remained in effect. This was the

marriage (so as to avoid committing adultery, cf. Mk 10:11–12; Mt 5:31; 19:9; Lk 16:18). The divorced person must remain unmarried. And if this state of affairs cannot be endured, then the apostolic authoritative command is for the parties to be reconciled, she to her husband and he to his wife (1 Cor 7:11). This then is the goal for marriage set out by Jesus (preserved for us in Mark's Gospel) and toward which Paul emphatically encouraged all Christians to strive: No divorce, but if divorce occurs, then no remarriage to a different partner” (598).

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situation between God and Abraham. Abraham was unfaithful to the covenant in his dealings with Hagar, Pharaoh, and Abimelech, but he reaffirmed his desire to continue in the covenant by his obedience in offering up his son, Isaac.³³ Israel was repeatedly unfaithful to the covenant and paid a steep price for that disobedience, but the covenant remained for them because God was faithful. However, it was certainly possible for vassals or suzerains to renounce or break or sever the covenant between them. Perhaps sometimes this was done peaceably. Often, however, it led to war.

Similarly, if a man is unfaithful to his marriage covenant in his heart through committing adultery by lustful fantasies, the covenant continues. It is not broken or dissolved. But he has been unfaithful to it. If he repents and returns to faithfulness, the covenant continues. If a man is physically unfaithful with another person, the covenant may also continue, but reconciliation is required, and there may be great pain involved. The covenant is not broken in that it is severed or revoked, but it is greatly sinned against.

The nature of the marriage covenant is "till death." If a husband and wife separate without remarrying, whether or not this is called divorce, in effect the covenant continues, even if not in spirit, for they may reconcile. If there is remarriage, however, the previous covenant is completely severed because a superceding covenant has been made with another, and this severing is also adultery, as Jesus says.

However, if a vassal severed a covenant with one suzerain by forming a covenant with another, did the first covenant continue? No, for "no man can serve two masters." Generally, it was the secret forming and implementing of a new alliance that *constituted* the severance of the old covenant, rather than a notice of intent served to the suzerain.

By analogy, remarriage constitutes a single act of unfaithfulness combined with a final severing of ties, rather than the beginning of a state of continual adultery. One stops being unfaithful to one and begins being faithful to another.

Jesus could not recommend or condone adultery, and neither could Paul, for adultery is sin. Thus, neither can the church, nor can we. But they could forgive those who were repentant, and so should we. Hard hearts can be softened. Mistakes can be patched up, though not without pain and suffering. We long for a land where all will be faithful forever. Until then, may we make all possible efforts toward reconciliation.

³³ See Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "The Ultimate Test," *Adventist Review*, 11 March 1999: 16 [312].

Biblical Authority and Moral Responsibility: The Word Cannot Be Silenced, But Must Not Be Made Void

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I

In his book *Spirit of Protestantism*, Robert McAfee Brown struggles with a question of Protestant identity. “Who are Protestants?” he asks. What does Protestantism stand for? While Catholicism has well defined-boundaries, discernable practices, and infallible dogmas, Protestantism appears “all over the place.” It does not have recognizable boundaries, and consequently it is extremely difficult to know when an individual or a church has ceased to be Protestant, and whether all who claim the title either deserve or honor it.¹

In an attempt to answer these questions, Brown identifies seven “Central Protestant Affirmations”, which, in his view, form the Spirit of Protestantism: Centrality of Grace and Life of Faith, Authority of Scriptures, Sovereignty of God, Priesthood of All Believers, The Calling, Loving God with the Mind, and Worship of God.

Of the seven, Scripture occupies a unique place.

The Reformers read their Bibles and discovered enormous discrepancies between its message and the teachings and practices of the Church. They discovered with dismay that human traditions were invested with authority which should belong to the Bible alone. Tradition both defined and interpreted the meaning of the biblical message. For Reformers, this development meant retrogression of a fatal kind. They insisted that the Church must be *a listening Church*, “which does not mean listening to its own interior monologue, but listening to the voice it hears in Scripture—the voice it dares to call the voice of God . . .” (Brown 69).

¹R. M. Brown, *The Spirit of Protestantism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), XIX.

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But the degree of consistency and enthusiasm of Protestant claims about Scripture are slowly disappearing. In many circles, the Bible is no longer the only source, standard, and test of faith and practice. As *Sola Scriptura* (the locus of authority and central identifying mark of the Reformation) fades away from many Protestant minds, the concept of authority vanishes as well, and thus the sense of identity is lost. This, in Dr. Brown's view, is the Achilles' heel of Protestantism. Ambiguity about authority is its vulnerable spot. This is also, in our view, the reason many churches grow increasingly more timid and Christianity less attractive.

Reasons for the Crisis

The reasons for the loss of biblical authority as formulated by the Reformers can be expressed in three points.

1. Biblicism. The rejection of tradition as a source of authority for Christian faith and practice created a vacuum. Reformers, but especially their followers, endeavored to compensate for the lost support of tradition. Scripture became less and less human in their eyes. Soon the Holy Spirit was credited for everything written on its pages. The dictational theory of inspiration reduced biblical writers to mere instruments. The claims of the Holy Spirit's exclusive authorship could not tolerate even a single error, real or apparent, without threatening the entire system of faith. In the place of an infallible pope emerges an infallible book, and denial of the human element in production of Scripture yielded a docetic Word.

2. Criticism. Reaction to this way of thinking was quick and vigorous. Several unusual questions came to the fore. There are errors in the Bible. The question is, how many, and what kind of errors are they? On what basis do we recognize them as such? If there are errors, then are we not duty bound to explain them to the contemporary mind? And finally, what happens then to biblical authority? The rise of critical scholarship charged itself to answer these and other questions by following several steps.

a) The emphasis shifted away from the Bible to Jesus. From the cradle to the Baby, as Luther would say.

b) The Bible was no longer perceived as the Word of God, but rather as a bearer of witness to the Word made flesh.

c) In the process of interpretation, the Bible as a document has been subjected to the same scrutiny as any other book.

d) The accounts of miracles and supernatural events received a serious make-over. The interpreters endeavored to explain biblical concepts and judge their validity by applying the twentieth century scientific, empirical criteria of truth.

"Can we retain a Protestant emphasis on the certainty of Scripture, and still do justice to the fact that we live in the twentieth century?" asks R. M. Brown (73). Yes, we can, he insists. However, there are conditions. First, the Bible can

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remain an absolute authority if the domain of that authority is reduced to a size appropriate for any document: to be a witness. The Bible is unique and authoritative only because it testifies of Jesus, not because it has been inspired. It does not tell us how to live, or what God's will is for us today. Only as we grasp who the Jesus of the Bible is can we receive daily guidance from it.

Second, the authority of Scripture is located in the meaning of the message, not in the words or propositions, claim critical scholars. The truth is not contained in the literal meaning of sentences. Consequently, we need not be disturbed as we read about the sun standing still (Josh 10:12-14), or Saul slaying the women and children of the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:3). With Bultmann, we will recognize the exact meaning of these and similar events as myths. Scripture is invested with the authority of a myth.

Third, the Protestant reader is particularly encouraged by the belief that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Scripture today. *He* speaks, not the words of Scripture. The words are only a vehicle. Only earthen vessels. He, the Spirit, gives the meaning at the very moment of our reading.

Finally, the same Spirit actualizes the recognition of the biblical message as authority. Through His influence we become more than just readers. We become participants in the unfolding drama of salvation. Reinhold Niebuhr observes that as we read the Word and look at the world around us, we discern the shallowness and inadequacies of non-biblical ways of looking at life, and thus we can discover some sense of life's meaning (Brown 79).

3. Alternative Loci of Authority. If we say, with Brown, Barth, and like-minded theologians, that Jesus, not the biblical statement, is authoritative, we then beg the question: who guarantees the claims of Jesus on me? With time, several answers emerged in Protestantism: personal experience, tradition, and in these postmodern times, the autonomous individual.

Personal experience of an encounter with God covers the span from mysticism to neo-orthodoxy. The claim is that the believer must look within for the authentication of his faith. Only an encounter can make biblical messages relevant, compelling, and authoritative.

The *reappearance of tradition* in Protestantism is a curious phenomenon. Its role in the Roman Catholic Church was one of the cardinal reasons for the rise of the Reformation. To be sure, the Protestant version of tradition and the consciousness of its influence on theological minds differ from the pre-Reformation times. Nevertheless, a Lutheran theology can be recognized and distinguished from an evangelical Baptist or a Methodist position. Often, the reason why certain doctrines occupy cardinal positions is based not on the testimony or the preponderance in Scripture, but simply on the particular heritage. There is, too, a recent return to the study of the Church Fathers by a number of prominent conservative scholars, such as Thomas Oden and Wayne Grudem.

The postmodern stress on the *autonomous individual* represents the latest challenge to biblical authority. Instead of relying on the Bible or ecclesiastical

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authority, there is a growing belief in the power of individual minds, guided by methods of observation, experience, and reflection, to attain the truths needed for the guidance of life. J. R. Middleton and B. J. Walsh observe:

No longer dependent on the superstitions of the past or the Bible as an external source of authoritative revelation, modern man champions his secular independence . . . And armed with the tools of modern science and technology the heroic modern individual can transform the world of objects into *subjects* of the human kingdom, serving the human sovereign and yielding its riches for human economic self-aggrandizement.²

II

Instead of rehearsing the often repeated arguments against theologies which attempt to diminish or virtually maim the authority of Scripture, I would like at this point to engage in a different exercise. The ethical discipline can be a nasty, even nosy science. It calls human beings, including theologians, to critical self-examination. What follows is a reflection on the risks and responsibilities of being right, of taking the Word of God seriously, and of handling the truth we love so dearly.

There are some serious risks to theology, to theologians, and even to Scripture, coming from conservative and liberal scholars alike.

1. Apologetic Frame of Mind. Things happen to our psyche when we constantly operate in the apologetic frame of mind where “we” are right and “other theologians” are, of course, wrong. (These attitudes may occur even when we are right about “their” wrongness.)

a) Humility may be first to suffer. Pride attacks from inside. No one knows. No one suspects. We have learned how to sound concerned and even *be* genuinely concerned. And yet, the venom of pride numbs us to the slow and imperceptible creeping in of disunity.

b) A compulsory apologetic frame of mind creates ditches and ramparts. “They” are not “us.” “We” want to come closer, but then so much may be at stake! If “we” try to reach out to “them,” it does not work. Somehow it does not come across well.

c) There is only one step between an awareness that *truth* or the *Church* are in danger—that we must act to enlighten or save—and a realization that our personal insecurity can somehow profit from the defensive posture. So we join forces, we combine efforts for a common goal, and at the same time we cater to our private, personal hurts, needs, and agendas. When that happens, conservative scholarly societies become conservative clubs. The liberal scholarly societies function as a liberal lobby. The result is not just separation and disunity. We engage in a heated “*cold war*” of sorts. A race for who can gain more influence in the field, the office, or the decision-making layers of the church.

²*Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 49.

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d) An additional risk comes when our suspicious mode of thinking leads to innocent people getting hurt. The danger is that our repentant and remorseful feelings may lead us to give up some legitimate stance as a bargaining chip for compromise and peace.

Thus the biblical authority becomes dependent on the fortunes and misfortunes of a compulsory apologetic *modus operandi*.

2. The False Protestants. The second risk comes from misconceptions about Protestantism. We return to Robert McAfee Brown's insightful analysis.

a) Protestantism as protest against something or somebody is a most common misunderstanding. Protestants protest against popes, against indulgences, against Mariology.

b) Protestantism as diluted Catholicism is the way some Catholics see their prodigal brothers and sisters. Since Protestants reject papal authority, worship of the saints, and retain only two of seven sacraments, etc., they are impoverished Catholics.

c) Protestantism as believing certain things that others do not hold is the third possible misreading. The Bible as the Word of God, the plenary inspiration, believer's baptism, righteousness by faith, the second coming of Christ, these are identifying marks of Protestantism. Identifying marks they may be, but description is not the same thing as definition. These characteristics describe; they do not identify.

d) Protestantism as the right of private judgement is the fourth possible misconception. At the onset of the Reformation, when the faithful had to believe what they were told, when personal Bible study represented a civil offence, freedom of conscience and belief loomed large. But Protestantism is more than that.

3. Reactive Theology and Belief. An apologetic frame of mind, as well as a polemic/protesting mode of thinking, create both reactive theology and reactionary belief, and these also threaten biblical authority.

a) Reactive theology is necessitated by the spread of unorthodox or dissenting views. Response to such teachings is a part of the work described in Isaiah 21 and 62 as the duty of a watchman on the walls of Zion. But should reactive work consume our entire time, determine our mood, be the sole motivator for writing and speaking? I think not.

b) By reactionary belief, we mean assent to a certain set of teachings in reaction to some opposing alternative; for example, becoming or remaining a Protestant on the basis of disenchantment with Catholicism or Orthodoxy. It will take only a short time to find good reasons for discouragement with Protestantism, and with disillusionment the power of biblical messages may be put in doubt as well.

4. My Brother's Keeper. If we believe, teach, and preach orthodox doctrines, if we are faithful in our service and ministry, if we sow the right and good seeds, God will bless us. If, on the contrary, the marriage of the "other" theo-

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gian is in trouble, if his kids rebel, if he becomes guilty of serious misconduct . . . Conclusion? Oh no, we do not *say* anything. But the thought just might cross my mind: “He is too conservative. Legalistic. The kids cannot stand it.” Or we might say to ourselves, “Oh, he is too liberal. Anything goes in his home. What can you expect?”

Am I my brother’s keeper? But who is my brother? Cain and Abel disagreed on theological issues: on atonement. The same school, identical teachers, parents, home for both of them. They were brothers and mutually keepers of each other. Disagreement on theology is unlike any other conflict. Truth is dear to us! We would die for it. *But we should not kill.*

III

The Word of God cannot be silenced. No fetters can confine its influence (2 Timothy 2:9). Yet strangely enough, Jesus called the theologians of His day to task: “So for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God” (Matthew 15:6). Impossible to bind, but possible to “make void” (RSV), make “null and void” (NEB), make of “none effect” (KJV), “nullify” (NIV). What a power! What a risk for a student, a teacher, a preacher of the Word! This is where our moral responsibility for biblical authority becomes evident.

So how do we fair?

1. Biblicism. Are we biblicists? Yes and no. Yes, if we flirt too closely to a dictatorial theory of inspiration. Yes, if we close our eyes to some fingerprints of the human mind and ways of thinking in the process of inspiration. However, we are not biblicists because we confess that God used human beings, communicated His message to them, and let them express it in their own words. The work of the Holy Spirit consisted in guiding and guarding the authenticity of the message. Thus we have the Word of God expressed in human categories, just as we have divine *logos* manifested in human flesh. If biblicism divinized the Bible, the critical liberalism humanized it excessively.

2. Criticism. We may rightfully object to Historical Criticism for approaching the interpretation of the Bible as one approaches any other book. Inevitably, the authoritativeness and the sense of relevance diminished. Once we removed the supernatural, all the uniqueness vanished and it became easier to show Scripture as a piece of old literature, dated and “pre-scientific”.

But the desire to make sense out of the biblical message to the modern mind is a very important concern. This task must not be left to critical scholars alone. It is not enough to say that Scripture is relevant, nor to prove its authoritativeness on the basis of internal biblical claims. The evidence of inspiration of the Bible can *shown, demonstrated* so that non-believers can become interested. While we defend and protect the Cradle, to use Luther’s comparison again, we must show that its content, the message, speaks to the modern and the post-modern mind.

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For example, the Bible reveals the *true* condition of society. It presents the fundamental principles of behavior which transcend technology and time. The post-modern marriage faces similar stresses, and post-modern youth many of the same temptations and vices, as in biblical times. This is not a myth. This is the *truth which we possess in the earthen vessel*. Other books cannot match. Other books are not divinely inspired. Period! The Bible speaks today to the problems of AIDS, sexuality, marriage, violence. If we rehearse and expound on the issues of biblical times (idolatry, levirate, promiscuity, or cultic purity) without connecting the essence of these issues with contemporary problems, we make God's Word of no effect indeed.

This Word is the Word of Life because it presents the One who is victorious over death: Jesus. And of course, if the Bible is reliably giving us Jesus, if it is true and not mythological on that point, then why would it not be reliable on every other point concerning the human condition? Why would it not be relevant for today's life issues?

3. Alternative Loci of Authority. Personal experience (encounter) as the final criterion of biblical authenticity? No. But, the work of the Holy Spirit in enlightening the reader? Yes!

Tradition as the perimeter of theological inquiry? No. But when we write, can a non-Adventist understand us? Are we equally eloquent on grace (Lutheranism) and the second coming? Moreover, can we speak convincingly about justification by faith without falling into the ambiguity of "assurance of salvation" or universalism? Is our theologizing as free of denominational bigotry as the Bible is, while still captive to the unique message of truth given us for this generation? Is our content rich and focused, universal and particular, eternal and contemporary in the same way the Word of God is? If it is not, we again risk undermining biblical authority. The pharisaic tradition is not worse than our own idiosyncracies.

4. Apologetic Frame of Mind. As soon as we take our stand, we are categorized. These classifications are extremely simplistic and exaggerated when others try to place us. But when we classify, we think we are accurate. We use such labels as conservative, liberal, pro-ordination, against ordination of women. Yet everyone sees her/himself as "centrist". It becomes easy to see a label and not a person. "We" are not right or wrong. Rather, "we" hold certain truths that are either in or out of harmony with Scripture. "They" are not right or wrong. "They" are people who may have right or wrong ideas. If ideas are categorized easily, people are not. Consequently, our war must not be against flesh and blood, but more about the truth we hold dear, and about the Word given to us in trust. The unchristlike attitude towards those who disagree makes pluralism more appealing, and that undermines the authority of Scripture. Jesus was right and kind, firm yet gentle, uncompromising yet concerned for His opponents.

5. Are We Protestants? Yes, we are, but on condition that we understand the meaning of this term. The word "protest" comes from the Latin *pro + testari*.

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The prefix *pro* means “forth”, and *testari* stands simply for “to affirm”, “to testify”, hence *pro + testari* means “to testify *on behalf of* something”. The first two meanings of the word “protest” in Webster’s Dictionary are: “to make a solemn declaration or affirmation of; to state positively . . . or to call as a witness in affirming or denying, or to prove an affirmation.”³ Only the third meaning has the negative sense, i.e. objection to something.

So yes, we are Protestants. We feel called to affirm certain truths in our generation. If we stand against something, it is only because we are *for* something. The Reformers did not start a revolt. Their goals did not provide for, include, or plan a new church, another denomination. It was only when they had been expelled or anathematized because of their beliefs that the necessity for organization became evident.

The Seventh-day Adventists share a similar heritage. Our pioneers stood up for certain biblical truths that had remained forgotten or obscured. We must remember the days and nights these men and women spent on their knees and in the study of the Word. It was their stance that “protested” and testified. It was their testimony that became unbearable. It was due to the eloquence of their witness and the firmness of their conviction that they were unwelcome.

This has been the Bible’s lot as well. Throughout history it, too, has been persecuted, burned at the stake, exiled from among the humans. And yet it is not to be compared to the *Communist Manifesto*. It did not entice the masses to rise; it did not call to violence for truth’s sake. We release the full potential of God’s creative Word when we present the message with clarity, protesting by example, by testifying for truth in word and actions.

6. Reactive Theology. True reformation is not revolution, nor is it a reactive stance. The intentions and plans of those who witness include only a proactive testimony. Reformation comes when we build up the edifice of truth, when we live and incarnate that truth, and when we stand faithful for that truth. My old professor of evangelism at Collonges, Paul Tieche, advised us not to demolish the synagogues, the mosques, or the cathedrals in our preaching or teaching. “Build the churches, the true biblical churches in the minds of your hearers. Let the power, simplicity, and beauty of Scriptural testimony compel them to move. Then they will stay.”

7. Our Brother’s Keeper. Disagreements in theology are unlike any other disagreement. It is especially so among committed Christians. I remember how, following an incredible discussion (a dispute really), the members of the faculty at McGill would go for a cup of coffee, their conversations now friendly, as if ten minutes ago they had not quarreled. We have mixed feelings about such an attitude. Either my professors did not hold the truth they professed dear to their hearts, or they had mastered the art of disagreeing agreeably. Perhaps they had learned how to separate the human being from his/her ideas.

³Webster’s *New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

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Truth is dear to us. We would die for it. But we would not kill, not hurt, not malign, not doubt the “other’s” honesty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can affirm that biblical authority is not the Achille’s heel of true Protestantism.

We release biblical authority to its optimum when we accept it as the Word which God spoke to us through human agencies.

We affirm biblical authority if we take God at His Word, rather than deciding its authenticity through our preconceived criteria.

We win people’s trust in Scripture when we make it speak to their immediate needs. Such an approach is stronger than any amount of argument from the internal testimony of the Bible.

We liberate the authority of the Bible when we express its message in terms of human beings, rather than using the jargon of theology or our own religious idiosyncracies.

We allow the exercise of biblical authority when our testimony is positive and caring. Reactive, combative, and debative modes place obstacles to Scripture’s ministry.

We allow Scripture to heal and correct erroneous convictions when we learn to care for our opponents and when, through longsuffering and patience, we give room for the influence of the Spirit of truth.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

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The Issue of Suffering: Nine Christian Responses

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On the question of suffering, atheism shares certain common ground with most world religions. Holocaustic misery being prerequisite to evolution, directed or otherwise, pain is evidently not a problem to the authentic evolutionist. C. S. Lewis shares this cynical view of life, reflective of his pre-Christian mind set:

And what is it like while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of it can live only by preying upon one another. In the lower forms this process entails only death, but in the higher there appears a new quality called consciousness which enables it to be attended with pain. The creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die.¹

Other world religions respond hardly any differently to the inescapability of pain. *Dukka*, the first of the four noble truths which undergird the nontheistic religion of Buddhism, posits “that life inevitably involves suffering.”² Similarly, and in a context as polytheistic as Buddhism is nontheistic, pain is close to the heart of Hinduism’s vedic worship. Vedic sacrifices are calculated to keep the world in “proper order” by mirroring “the original personal sacrifice by which the universe was created, namely the dismemberment of the *Purusha*, the primal Being, by the gods.”³

In a context which holds pain to be so normal, there exists only limited justification for describing it as evil or problematic. How could that be wrong or evil which is deemed so essential to life’s processes? Indeed, James Stewart’s discussion of “God and the Fact of Suffering” includes the observation that

¹C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 1, 2.

²Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 3rd ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 132.

³*Ibid.*, 76, 75.

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“There is no real *problem of evil* for the man who has never accepted the Christian revelation.”⁴ Stewart may be referring here to the biblical position that God is nothing if not love (1 John 4:8). Outside of such faith, moral and ethical perplexity remain essentially alien notions, given the presupposed chaos and accident of the naturalistic view of existence, the irrelevant God of deism, and the brutal deity of theistic evolution. Thus, it must be something of an irony that unbelief should contribute any arguments on such an ethical dilemma as the problem of suffering. And yet, humanity’s collective inadequacy before great tragedy has expressed itself, upon occasion, as conviction against the adequacy of deity. If God is, then he must be in some sense incompetent. More probably, he is neither competent nor incompetent. He simply is not. Stewart’s radical disagreement with such thinking is expressed in the following incisive comment upon the different reactions to pain of believer and unbeliever. “I,” says he,

as a believer in God, have to face—as the unbeliever does not—the mystery of the existence of evil. I admit that. But here is the other side of it: the unbeliever has to face—as I, who believe in God, do not—the mystery of the existence of good. And his problem is definitely more insoluble than mine.⁵

In this essay Stewart is one of more than half a dozen Christian apologists whose responses to the issue of suffering provide a focus for reflection and discussion.

Eight Christian Answers

Stewart’s treatment of the issue of suffering appears in a series of four sermons entitled “God and the Fact of Suffering,” which address several popular explanations of suffering.⁶ He begins by offering three negations: He denies 1) that all suffering is traceable to God; 2) that all suffering is traceable to sin; and 3) that all suffering is explainable as an illusion. At the same time he affirms the following: 1) that suffering derives from the beneficence of inexorable law—we could not reasonably play any game if the rules kept changing or if the boundary line kept shifting; 2) that suffering is a function of our mutual dependence—we miss one another when separated only because we belong to each other; 3) that it is the evidence of the impartiality of God—all sense of morality would disappear if certain behaviors were consistently rewarded; 4) that it arises from the need for the awakening of humanity’s conscience, upon which depends the development of character—suffering contributes to the moral development of its victim; 5) that [because of the cross] God shares the sufferer’s pain;⁷ and 6) that

⁴James Stewart, “The Burden of the Mystery,” in *Classic Sermons on Suffering*, compiled by Warren Wiersbe, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 63–73; 66; emphasis original.

⁵*Ibid.*, 68.

⁶In Wiersbe, *ibid.*, “The Burden of the Mystery,” 63–73, “Lights in the Darkness,” 75–84, “Wearing the Thorns As a Crown,” 87–97, and “The Cross of Victory,” 99–107.

⁷*Ibid.*, 103.

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by the same token, “you are in it with God, sharing His redemptive activity and His victory.”⁸

Stewart’s views on character development attract further comment: He holds, in common with most, that the greater a given misery, the more meaningful the Christian’s service in the midst of that need, and the clearer the revelation of Christ’s character. It is but a restatement of the claim that suffering betters personal morality. However, Stewart also finds it true that multiplied problems provide better satisfaction of the human hunger for danger. As he states, “it takes a world with trouble in it to satisfy man’s demand for a dangerous universe.”⁹ In his thinking, any question of the logic of suffering must be answered in context of this given of “a dangerous universe.” For him, the ethical dilemma of a universe inherently perilous finds no resolution. On the contrary, the problem is simply aggravated. Stewart seems to overlook the fact that a universe divinely designed as fundamentally dangerous offers less than comfort to minds in search of a satisfactory answer to the question of suffering, whether it be of trilobites, of dinosaurs, or of human beings. The Christian obligation must then be to believe in a God whose purpose cannot exclude pain.

Often enough, Christians must discharge this obligation even as they struggle to relate to a context of pervasive pain. In the words of Nathan A. Scott:

Of the myriad issues of life which the Christian pulpit is required to handle there is none so pressing, so inescapable, and so burdensome for the preacher as the problem of suffering, the mystery of iniquity, the strange and brutal haphazardness with which, as seems at times, acute misfortune is distributed amongst men.¹⁰

Scott’s sense of the burdensomeness and prominence of this issue nevertheless allows him to warn the Christian preacher against what he calls “the great mistake”:

Now the great mistake, of course, that is made by the pulpit when it risks any sort of rational account of evil is that of permitting itself a view of things *sub specie aeternitatis*. For this is precisely where the preacher never stands, under the aspect of eternity: his view of the world, like that of everybody else, is always *sub specie temporalitatis*. And thus what is perhaps always the wisest course for him is that of carefully forswearing any and all attempts at explaining why tribulation and suffering overtake us, or how they are ultimately to be fitted into the total economy of an “engodded” world. For the gospel is found to be good news not because it explains how we come to be in what popular existentialism used to call “the human predicament”

⁸*Ibid.*, 105.

⁹*Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰Nathan A. Scott, “The Burdens and Temptations of the Pulpit,” ed. Henry J. Young, *Preaching on Suffering and a God of Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 7–13; 7.

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but rather because it proves itself to be an effective way of practically coping with that predicament.¹¹

So whereas for Stewart, peril is a universal given, even a satisfaction for excitement-hungry humanity, for Scott, the question “why” were better not raised. Scott’s gospel constitutes not a cosmic clarification of the mystery of iniquity and an absolute deliverance from all its consequences, but a coping mechanism for those inescapably damned to be part of the predicament of existence:

So a great reticence needs to be practiced about the issues of ‘cosmology,’ about how the fact of evil requires to be reconciled with a faith in the sovereignty over the world of a gracious and providential Presence.¹²

The concept of “a gracious and providential Presence” proves particularly troublous to Christian thinkers who desire to exculpate the deity while being unable to dispense with the eternity of pain. George W. Truett, a Christian theologian considered “one of the greatest preachers of his time,”¹³ suggests a biblical answer for those who would lay the guilt of sin upon the Christian sufferer:

The Word of God is not that cruel. The Word of God does not teach that doctrine. That doctrine is as false as it is cruel, and as cruel as it is false. When you turn to the Word of God, it is perfectly clear. Listen . . .¹⁴

Whereupon, Truett quotes Heb 12:6–9 and “the beautiful words of Jesus” in Rev 3:19.¹⁵ The difficulty is that both these passages describe God as “chastening” and “scourging.” Truett thus succeeds in reiterating the refrain upon pain as the producer of betterment, but his effort to deliver the deity from blame cannot be considered very successful.

George Morrison’s affirmation of the profit of pain goes even further than those already considered (Stewart, Truett) when he places pain “at the root of life and growth.”¹⁶ This optimistic statement of pain’s virtue potentially credits it with the production of all progress, and includes at least three remarkable submissions: First, “our capacity for pain is deeper than our capacity for joy.” This proves “that we are so fashioned by the infinite, that the undertone of life is one of sorrow.”¹⁷ Second, self-flagellation and self-abuse give evidence that pain is either pleasing, or at least acceptable, to God, offering

¹¹*Ibid.*, 11.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴George W. Truett, “The Ministry of Suffering,” in Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 131–143; 133.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶George H. Morrison, “The Problem of Pain,” in Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 145–152; 148.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

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some hope of fellowship with heaven. You may despise the hermit, and you may flout the saint when the weals are red upon his back but an instinct which is universal [practiced by Romans, Indians, Christians, and savages] is something you do well not to despise.¹⁸

Finally, Morrison asserts that

though the fact of death troubled [Jesus'] soul, there is no trace that the dark fact of pain did so—and yet was there ever one on earth so sensitive to pain as Jesus Christ? Here was a man who saw pain at its bitterest, yet not for an instant did he doubt His Father.¹⁹

It is not altogether surprising that, absent a perception of any divine capacity to banish pain, Jesus Christ himself should be characterized as accepting it by faith. In the words of Cecil Wayne Cone, “The Christian answer, too, is in harmony with the answer Habakkuk received: ‘The just shall live by faith.’”²⁰ And William E. Sangster insists that as a child of God “I can wait until I get home and He'll tell me Himself.”²¹

A Comparison With Heathen Responses

A review of the proposals of Stewart, Scott, Truett, Morrison, Cone, and Sangster, as considered thus far, yields the following Christian responses to the issue of suffering, all encompassed by Cone's invocation of the refrain of Habakkuk, “the just shall live by faith”: 1&2) Stewart's discontinuity between suffering and either God or sin, as well as 3) his sense of its integrity with existence, given his sense of the universality of peril; 4) Morrison's sense of pain as fundamental to growth and progress; 5) Scott's insistence on the inappropriateness of the question “why”; Morrison's contention, on the one hand, 6) that pain offers fellowship with heaven, and, on the other, 7) that our question did not in fact trouble Jesus; and 8) Sangster's consolation that God, who understands, will explain it by and by.

Despite the satisfaction that these positions might provide, to some, independently or in combination, a single objection remains sufficient to expose

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 150, 151.

²⁰Cecil Wayne Cone, “Why Do the Righteous Suffer,” in Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 47–53; 52.

²¹William E. Sangster, “When Worn With Sickness,” in Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 193–201; 197. Sangster supports this position with an account from his son's childhood. As a child of three he milled with other small children in a waiting room, as all waited their turn for the same operation to remove a nasal growth. Sangster's son could hear the cries of those who preceded him and see the blood as they emerged from the doctor's office. “Must I go in there?” he asked his father. “Will the nurse be coming for me? Will it hurt? What is it all for?” “Well, what can you say to a child of three and a half? You cannot talk about tonsillitis, or lymphoid tissue, or septic infection. You must just fall back upon generalities. You say: ‘I must not save you from it, dear. You will understand someday. You must trust my love.’ And when the moment comes, you put him firmly in the nurse's arms for an experience which you know will be painful and nauseating, but which, for the child's sake, you are determined to see through. That seems a fair parallel of how God deals with us” (*ibid.*).

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their unacceptability. It is their disturbing similarity to that ancient heathen thinking from which Christianity is generally expected to deliver the believer. In the first instance, they impose severe limitation on Christianity's moral authority. If the Bible offers no explanation of the mystery of misery, then Christianity is hard pressed to prove itself a better religion, and indeed owns small right, if any, to existence as a distinct religion.

In the second instance, the answers thus far considered offer no advance over the concepts of Israel's neighbors of the second and first millennia before Christ. W. C. Gwaltney's analysis of ancient Babylonian laments exposes a popular or cultic mindset of equivalent despair: Human tragedy was accompanied by "a pervading sense of helplessness before the gods' power."²² Again, in terms of causality, "ultimate causation lies in the largely unseen world of the gods . . . The emphasis of the laments is upon the power of the divine, not upon the rightness of the decision."²³ The spiritual alternatives of brute and arbitrary fate or the callous caprice of gods who need give no account, condemn humanity to the curse of senseless existence. Should Christianity's consolations offer no more than a continued sense of earnest trust and mysterious ignorance in a universe of immortal pain, then its optimistic rhetoric upon the hope of heaven still competes with the escapist's dream. Finally, Morrison's note on the virtue of self-flagellation as marking "fellowship with heaven" recalls the action of desperate ninth century B.C. prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. In an effort to establish contact with their divinity, undoubtedly the equivalent of Morrison's "fellowship with heaven," they found it necessary to slice themselves with knives and spears until the blood flowed (1 Kgs 18:28).

Looking Elsewhere for Answers

William M. Clow's attempts at an answer to the question of suffering focus directly on Jesus. Like Morrison he believes that though keenly wounded by the world's agony, Christ accepted pain:

To see Jesus moving in the midst of a world of pain, keenly conscious of it and yet forbearing to heal, is, at first sight, both a marvel and a mystery. There were many widows in Israel who mourned for their children, but the Son of man did not regard Himself as sent to them. There were many lepers who prayed for cleansing, but Christ did not heal them. There were more sisters than Martha and Mary who wept beside their brother's grave, but Christ had no word for them. There were lame and crippled and blind in every village

²²W. C. Gwaltney, Jr., "The Biblical Book of Lamentations in the Context of Near Eastern Lament Literature," in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 191-211; 207.

²³*Ibid.*

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through which Jesus passed, but they were lame and crippled and blind to the last chapter of their lives.²⁴

Clow’s is an astonishing, eloquent, and quite awkward conviction, as is Morrison’s. It is difficult to know how these interpreters read Christ’s personal mission statement as outlined in Luke 4:16–18, 21. In this passage, Christ expresses his own self-understanding through the deliberate selection of a clearly messianic passage as his manifesto and *raison d’être*. According to Luke’s report, Christ receives the scroll from the hands of the *chazzan*, unrolls it almost completely, and proceeds to read a portion near the end of it which, in all likelihood, he has himself selected. In a sequence of four aorist infinitives, the passage, evidently from the LXX version (the phrase “recovery of sight to the blind” is found in the LXX but not in the Hebrew text), lists five tasks which his messianic ministry will accomplish. The following tables outline these tasks, indicating their origin in OT Scriptures and commenting briefly upon the significance of each:

Table 1: Task & OT Source

Task	OT Source
1) preach good news to the poor	1) Isa 61:1
2) proclaim deliverance to captives	2) Isa 61:1
3) proclaim recovery of sight to the blind	3) Isa 61:1 (only LXX)
4) liberate the oppressed	4) Isa 58:6
5) proclaim the favorable year of the Lord	5) Isa 61:2

Table 2: Task & Significance

1) preach good news to the poor	The poor—those who crouch and cringe, like beggars—“the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, those held back from progress and amelioration by people or circumstances” ²⁵
2) proclaim deliverance to captives	Liberation from captivity
3) proclaim recovery of sight to the blind	Restoration of that which has been lost, in this case, vision
4) liberate the oppressed	Sending away in liberty those shattered, crushed by cruel oppression
5) proclaim the favorable year of the Lord	Announcement of the year of the Lord, the jubilee

This messianic announcement of the year of the Lord is both unmistakable and sensational. The main OT passage behind Christ’s statement of purpose at the Nazareth synagogue, Isa 61:1, 2, includes a double reference to this semi-centennial phenomenon of incomparable marvel in human chronological history. The year of the Lord is the jubilee year (Lev 25:10; Jer 34:8ff). It is a celebra-

²⁴William M. Clow, “Christ in a World of Pain,” in Wiersbe, *ibid.*, 38–45; 40.

²⁵J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 500.

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tion of such social and economic emancipation as no proclamation of human liberation can equal. For all the land and people of Israel, it marks the end of starvation and dispossession, debt and enslavement. More than this, it authorizes to every former debtor and slave the cancellation of every account due, and the liberation from servitude, the restoration of his once forfeited inheritance, and joyous reunion with beloved family members once torn from him by the tragedy of personal financial failure, of subjugation by less than compassionate creditors.

Upon closing the scroll Christ announces to his synagogue audience, mysteriously captivated by his manner (v. 20): “This Scripture is fulfilled today as you hear it read” (v. 21). Through the sermon which follows, he proceeds to represent himself as the healing, liberating power predicted in Isaiah. Though Luke does not report the full text of this sermon, it is apparent, from Christ’s use of Isa 61:1, 2, that he considers the unmodified categories of the jubilee year an apt metaphor of the liberation he has brought to earth:

As the maladies under which humanity groans are here set forth under the names of *poverty, broken-heartedness, bondage, blindness, bruisedness, (or crushedness)*, so Christ announces Himself, in the act of reading it, as the glorious HEALER of all these maladies;²⁶

The views of Morrison and Clow cannot easily be reconciled with this pronouncement on the part of Christ, for Morrison contends that pain did not trouble Jesus,²⁷ and Clow, that he had no word for most sufferers of his day.²⁸ But Christ does appear to speak, by word as well as service, to all sufferers of his day. His Isaianic manifesto shows him to be both aware of their pain and concerned for their well-being. Moreover, he explicitly offers himself to all life’s victims, as the agent and source of liberation from all exploitation, whether spiritual victimization, physical oppression, or social injustice, to which they may be subject. He “announces Himself, . . . as the glorious HEALER” of “all the maladies under which humanity groans.”²⁹

Nor does his ministry fail to confirm the truthfulness of this claim. Physically, he touches and heals lepers, Jewish and Samaritan (Matt 8:1–3; Luke 17:12–16), and raises little girls and grown men from the dead (Matt 9:18–25; Luke 7:11–15; John 11:1–44); socially he calls on and feasts with publicans (Matt 9:9–11; Luke 15:1, 2; 19:2–7), gives to and receives affection from those known as prostitutes (Luke 7:37–50), recognizes and elevates local and foreign women (John 4; Mark 7:25–30); spiritually, he crushes the head of the serpent whose venom of sin once brought us death (Gen 3:15). At the cost of his own

²⁶Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, & Practical, on the Old & New Testaments*, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 3:238, emphasis original.

²⁷Morrison, *ibid.*

²⁸Clow, *ibid.*

²⁹Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *ibid.*

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life, he purchases authority over death and hell (Rev 1:18) and gives those who believe in him new right to “more abundant” life (John 10:10) in a land where all things will be new (John 3:16; Rev 21:1–5). Morrison and Clow notwithstanding, Christ’s ministry exhibits neither unconcern with pain nor acceptance of suffering. His life indiscriminately opposed all manifestations of sin, of which pain is surely a conspicuous consequence.

Let us recall Morrison’s understanding of pain as fundamental to growth and progress. Let us, further, concede his consistency in claiming that death troubled Christ while pain did not. Next, let us note what follows from such logic. We are led to conclude that whereas Christ’s death would disarm the devil, the master of death (Heb 2:15), it would, equally, guarantee for those redeemed from death a life of perpetual pain, the fruit of continuous growth and development of our moral personality. Such reasoning would link the human life to pain more permanently than does Hinduism’s karma-run wheel of reincarnations. For while Hinduism’s upward-striving incarnations may result in *moksha*, or liberation from life’s miseries,³⁰ human progress, barring some concept of imperfectible perfection, rests upon the dubious foundation of undying pain.

Fortunately, the Christian interpretation need not immortalize pain. Clow’s eloquent observation upon the sufferers Jesus forbore to heal need not be explained on the basis of the Master’s acceptance of suffering. Far from ignoring pain and suffering, he is described as going through “all the cities and villages . . . healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness” as he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom while bearing his burden of deep compassion for the crowds he served (Matt 9:35, 36). Given his crusade against pain, some further reason must be proposed for the existence of suffering. The notion of God’s original sympathy to pain is unacceptable.

An option which hews more consistently to the Bible’s foundational thesis that God is love appears in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ parable of the tares (Matt 13:24–30): When conscientious servants discover that in the midst of their good seed a crop of tares is emerging, the master explains, “an enemy has done this” (v. 28). Later, in private clarification, Jesus tells the disciples, “the enemy . . . is the devil” (v. 39). Jesus’ answer and explanation appear to suggest that the devil may be properly identified as the architect of contradiction not simply of Christ’s gospel preaching, but generally of programs of good such as God has set in place in the universe.

The Devil [Satan] As an Answer

Taken together, 1 Pe 5:8 and Rev 12:9 indicate that *the devil*, *the adversary*, *the ancient serpent*, *Satan*, and *the dragon* are all names which may be applied

³⁰The goal of the Hindu believer is not so much the most ethical of lives as something beyond this, “a clean escape from the karma-run wheel of birth, death, and rebirth, which is called samsara. To escape from **samsara**, is to achieve **moksha**, or liberation from the limitations of space, time, and matter through realization of the immortal Absolute.” Fisher, *ibid.*, 78, bold type original.

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to the same entity, the being who, defeated by Michael and his angels, “was thrown down to the earth,” where he is now said to get the whole world in trouble (Rev 12:10, 9, 12). This view is not necessarily uncontested. Elaine Pagels considers Satan to be a fairly recent invention. Pagels asserts that

Satan, along with diabolical colleagues like Belial and Mastema (whose Hebrew name means “hatred”), did not materialize out of the air. Instead, . . . such figures emerged from the turmoil of first-century Palestine, the setting in which the Christian movement began to grow.³¹

Pagels explores a variety of Jewish apocryphal stories which propose demons as being produced when angels mate with women, or Satan as becoming the adversary after spurning divine orders to bow to the newly created Adam [sibling rivalry], then continues.

At first glance these stories of Satan may seem to have little in common. Yet they all agree on one thing: that this greatest and most dangerous enemy did not originate, as one might expect, as an outsider, an alien, or a stranger. Satan is not the distant enemy but the intimate enemy—one’s trusted colleague, close associate, brother. He is the kind of person on whose loyalty and goodwill the well-being of family and society depend—but one who turns unexpectedly jealous and hostile . . . Those who asked, “How could God’s own angel become his enemy?” were thus asking, in effect, “How could one of *us* become one of *them*?”³²

Pagels’ admirable insights into the nature of Satan contrast with her explanation as to his origins. He is, as she detects, the intimate who becomes the enemy, the one next to God, who, as we later show, becomes his archrival. As to origins, however, he surely antedates Jewish first century apocalyptic. The twenty-seven OT usages of the term *śtn* display at least four nuances of meaning:

1) Agent of Justice—prosecutor, raised up against Balaam (Num 22:22, 32) and Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14, 23, 25) as these men determinedly contravene God’s will.³³

2) Lover of Cruelty—sadist. In this definition the adversary stands against God’s people—individuals whom God approves of (Job, chaps. 1, 2) or wishes to protect (Joshua, in Zech 3:1–5).³⁴ In both of these passages the role appears to

³¹Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Random House, 1996), xviii.

³²*Ibid.*, 49, emphasis original.

³³The psalmist’s *śtn* 109:6ff) also fits into this group. The psalmist’s request is that God appoint a *śtn* to condemn the wicked and let havoc follow him, his family, and his possessions.

³⁴The language of Zech 3 and that of Ps 109 reflect a court scene; less so does the prologue of *Job*. But *Job* and Joshua differ from the psalmist’s enemy. The adversary of Ps 109 must stand at the man’s right hand. He also does in Zech 3:1, “to accuse.” He does not in *Job*. He cannot, because

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include a slanderous dimension, as those whom God declares good are accused of moral inadequacy.³⁵

3) Agent of Crime—murderer. The Philistines speak in this sense when they fear for their lives at the hands of David, as Achish takes him out to war against Saul (1 Sam 29:4). Later, after crushing Absalom's rebellion, David worries aloud about the bloodthirstiness of his nephews (2 Sam 19:23).

4) Evil Inspiration. In 1 Chr 21:1, a postexilic rendering of the story of 2 Sam 24:1, Satan works on the "pride and ambition" of David³⁶ and incites him to number Israel, an event of disastrous consequence to both king and nation.³⁷

These cases show both a titular (*a/the satan*) and a nominal (*Satan*) usage of the term *śtn*. In the majority of instances (18/27, 67%) the OT entity identified as *śtn* works against God and his people. In all other cases, as in all four functions listed above, the term stands for disruption of order, or for threat to life and limb. In Num 22:22, 32, where the angel of the lord opposes Balaam, 'adversary' is used only as simile, "I have come out *l'śtn* ["like Satan" or "as an adversary"]" (v. 32). The simile concedes that while God's judgment upon the wicked may resemble the work of the adversary, it is to be distinguished from the latter's. The psalmist's request in Ps 109:6 is perhaps a further corroboration of this consciousness that destruction and havoc are actually the work of the adversary, for it is a wicked man whom he expects will repay his enemy evil for evil. The hostility and destructiveness which characterize the term *śtn* help explain why Satan, as a personal being, may be seen as personifying those properties which the term *śtn* possesses.

The book of Job, perhaps the best known OT case of satanic activity, offers effective testimony to the mystery of his operations. The devastation of Job's herds and flocks, donkeys, servants, camels, and children, may be blamed on Sabeans or Chaldeans, desert wind or fire from God, but never on Satan (Job 1:13–19). Interpretation of the book's message has frequently been made to depend upon cooperation rather than hostility between God and Satan. The latter is held to be in God's employ, as the prosecuting attorney functions in the service

while the psalmist's enemy is wicked, and Joshua is clothed in garments of guilt, Job is a paragon of virtue.

³⁵On slander as a dimension of the biblical *sātān*, particularly through study of the six occurrences of the root *śtn* (Ps 38:21 [Eng., 20], 71:13, 109:4, 20, 29), see Victor P. Hamilton, "Satan," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols., (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:985–989; 985.

³⁶Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1913), 747.

³⁷The Bible records no specific command, "Thou shalt not number." But it is clear that all concerned were aware of God's will in the matter. Joab opposed it (2 Sam 24:3). David admitted sin (v. 10). God's destroying angel slew 70,000 people in the plague that followed David's disobedience (v. 15). That God and Satan should both instigate the same action (2 Sam 24:1; 1 Chr 21:1) suggests either coincidence (the accident of common action), collusion (a scheme for common action), or ultimate responsibility (an inferior who acts by permission of a superior).

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of the state.³⁸ Divine acceptance of ultimate responsibility (Isa 45:5–7) and the adversary’s skill in preserving his hiddenness combine to promote the categorical position that “The OT does not see the satanic aspect as forming part of its theodicy. A ‘satan’ is not portrayed as the origin or cause of evil.”³⁹ Rather, he is held to emerge as a negative personal force only as a result of Israel’s sixth century contact with the Persians, under the influence of Zoroastrian dualism. The towering monotheism of Isa 45:5–7 allegedly contravenes any possibility of a prevailing challenge to divine sovereignty during most of the OT pre-exilic period.⁴⁰ As D. E. Hiebert acknowledges, “It is a remarkable feature of the theology of the OT that so little mention is made of Satan as the great Adversary of God and His people.”⁴¹ The argument for a sixth century satanic materialization is principally supported by reference to 1 Chr 21:1, as compared with its parallel account in 2 Sam 24:1. The first of these, a post-exilic passage, describes an action which the pre-exilic book of 2 Samuel attributes to God. In Chronicles, Satan tempts David to do that which, in Samuel, God moves him to do. The comparison is intended to show that before the exile Israel knows of no conflict between Yahweh and a personal archenemy called Satan. The divine monopoly over both good and evil (2 Sam 24:1; Isa 45:5–7) betrays this unawareness of distinctly evil agencies. Once Persian influence has contributed the notion of ontologically separate and malevolent powers, so it is argued, this comes to be reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures in such a passage as 1 Chr 21:1.

Nevertheless, the theory falters upon the ground that those OT books most expected to reflect such Persian religion do so not at all. Apart from 1 Chr 21:1, post-exilic works of history (Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther), as of prophecy (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi), are equally devoid of dualistic sentiment. Added to that, the intertestamental Qumran texts, famous, *inter alia*, for their depictions of a confrontation between sons of light and darkness, between the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness, refer only thrice to any kind of satan, and never as a personal name.⁴² Beyond this, the post-exilic location of Satan’s personal emergence disregards the antiquity of the Zoroastrian texts, which may date as early

³⁸See N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 42; Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 5; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job & Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago, London: U Chicago P, 1965), 233.

³⁹Bruce Baloiian, *štn* [in Hebrew], in *New International Dictionary of OT Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1231–1232; 1231.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* Others have seized upon just such passages as proof of a light/darkness Zoroastrian dualism. See Motyer, *ibid.*, 359.

⁴¹D. E. Hiebert, “Satan,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 5:282–286; 282.

⁴²Hamilton, *ibid.*, 988.

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as the end of the 13th century B.C.⁴³ In addition to these considerations, a study of this being's actions, when he is specifically exposed, permits sufficient character identification. He is sometimes explicitly identified as "the Adversary" by OT delimitation of the term *sātān* through the use of the article.⁴⁴ Such is the case in the book of Job where he personally contributes at least three explanatory points upon the issue of the presence of suffering in the world. These three are 1) his name, the adversary, in context of 2) the object of his opposition (a God who is love—1 John 4:8), and 3) a relation of his activities (unwarranted assaults against human and animal life with their tally of holocaustic destruction).⁴⁵ Finally, the rarity of cognate occurrences of the Hebrew term *sātān* among ancient Semitic languages⁴⁶ underlines the distinctiveness of theological insight which in yet another way sets the Hebrew Bible apart from other religious documents of its ancient environment. Satan may be more explicitly delineated in the NT, but it would be misleading to speak of him as unknown in or absent from either pre- or post-exilic OT Scriptures. Lewis' reflection on the doctrine of Satan is instructive:

... the doctrine of Satan's existence and fall is not among the things we know to be untrue: it contradicts not the facts discovered by scientists but the mere, vague "climate of opinion" that we happen to be living in. . . .

It seems to me, therefore, a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene: and that when man fell, someone had, indeed, tempted him.⁴⁷

Lewis' subscription to theistic evolutionary cosmology allows for the working of decay before the fall of man. On the other hand, Scripture teaches that all earth's material and spiritual decay is a consequence of human failure (Gen 3:14–21). Lewis' sequence notwithstanding, he is accurate in his insight into the presence of some mighty power for evil as influencing humanity's re-

⁴³Motyer, *ibid.* The antiquity of Zoroastrian material may also have implications for accurate dating of the book of Job. The presence of the *satan* in Job is sometimes cited as proof of the book's late origins.

⁴⁴Hiebert, *ibid.*: "With the article, 'the Adversary,' it becomes a proper name and denotes the personal Satan."

⁴⁵Dhorme describes him personally: ". . . it is Satan, the ancient enemy of mankind, who will perform the nefarious deeds." Dhorme, *ibid.*, xxxiii.

⁴⁶The evidence is uncertain: Hamilton, *ibid.*, 985, finds no cognate for *satan* in any of the Semitic languages, while Baloian, *ibid.*, proposes Arab. *shaitān*, Eth. *s/shaitan*; Tigr. *shētān*; W. Kirchschläger, "Satan (et démons)," *Supplément au dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928–), xii:1–47; col. 1, suggests Akk. *shattānu*, "to attack," which is rare, as Ludwig Koehler & Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958) observes, and *may* [*shatānu*] mean just that; see s.v. *štn*, where, as with Hiebert, *ibid.*, Judeo-Aramaic *štn*? [in Hebrew] is also suggested.

⁴⁷Lewis, *ibid.*, 122, 123.

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bellion against God (Gen 3:1–6).⁴⁸ The origins of that mighty power and the story of his own initial rebellion may be discovered in such biblical passages as Isa 14:12–14, and Eze 28:12–19. The first of these, with its reference to the light bearer, son of the morning (*hêlêl ben shahar*, v. 12), has often been linked to and compared with a Ugaritic epic which relates the birth of twins, Shaḥar & Shalim, to the supreme Canaanite deity El.⁴⁹ An examination of Isa 14:12–21 shows it to be much more dense in meaning and significance than is the epic, encompassing far more than the birth of a child to a Canaanite god, or a portion of an ancient theogony accounting for the existence of the morning star. As John Oswalt states, “despite . . . vigorous investigation there is no single mythical story which can be said to be the prototype for Isa 14:12–15.”⁵⁰ Isaiah’s subject and subject matter are readily recognizable as being significantly more awe-inspiring and terrible. The breadth of the prophet’s narrative encompasses the unbridgeable chasm between native creatureliness and the heights of autodeification. His subject is a being of such splendor and exaltation that its predicted destruction will rivet both the gaze and the mind of those who behold (v. 16). And the prophet’s subject matter is a scheme, hidden within the heart of this great one (v. 13), to “seize the throne beyond the stars which stands upon the mountain of God, and upon which the destinies of the whole world are decided.”⁵¹ This is the astonishing rebellion by one next to the throne whose intrigue evokes Pagels’ remarks on the intimate who becomes the enemy.⁵² It is small wonder that this passage has long been recognized as a cryptic description of the ambition and fall of the originator of evil.⁵³ Amplifying this insight, NT passages such as 1

⁴⁸The *Diccionario de la Biblia* (Barcelona: Herder, 1981) is unequivocal, dealing with Satan as one of the devil’s two OT manifestations, the other being the serpent in Eden. See s.v. “Diablo,” cols. 465–467.

⁴⁹See J. C. L. Gibson, “Shaḥar & Shalim,” in *Canaanite Myths & Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977), 123–127, particularly ll. 30–54; see also 28, 29.

⁵⁰John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 321.

⁵¹Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary*, OT Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al., (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 41.

⁵²Pagels, *ibid.*

⁵³For a parallel account of his self exaltation and expulsion from God’s presence, see Eze 28:12–19. Ilana Goldberg, “The Poetic Structure of the Dirge Over the King of Tyre,” *Tarbiz* 58/2 (1989) 277–281, provides [in Hebrew] a good analysis of the structure of this passage. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation With Introduction & Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series 22A (NY: Doubleday, 1997), 579–593, is among those who read the passage as a mythical version of the fall of a Tyrian king. But interpreters who resist the identification of Ezekiel’s monarch with this once perfect celestial being are still hard pressed to provide a credible explanation for any of the following three elements of the passage: 1) his unparalleled physical excellence; for this creature originally bore “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (v. 12); 2) the pristine setting which he initially occupies (“Eden, the garden of God,” v. 13; “the holy mountain of God,” v. 14); 3) the moral irreproachability which characterized his primordial state (“blameless in your ways from the day you were created,” v. 15). While none of these may with much reason be applied to Tyre’s literal king, they all support the theory of a gifted but ultimately rebellious intelligence being expelled from the presence of God when selfishness enters his heart, and self-

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Pet 5:8, Rev 12:9, and 20:2 leave little doubt as to either this creature's identity or his current activity. He is the devil and Satan. And it is he who is both author and prime agent of all earth's misery.

Unlike the escapism which denies the existence of pain and the pagan acceptance which seeks God through human sacrifice, the Bible admits the reality of suffering and rejects it as incompatible with the character of God. Pain, in proper biblical understanding, is not eternal. It originated when the adversary became the adversary. Danger and adversarial relationships are not inherent to the universe. They originated when one created perfect, designed for the flawlessness of God-ordered eternity, undertook to dispute known concepts of perfection. When this Day Star, Son of the Morning, the anointed covering cherub, elected to dispute the supremacy of his Creator, aspiring to transcend him in position and glory (Isa 14:12–21), his attempt at betterment produced chaos instead. Humanity's choice to follow him (1 Tim 2:14; Rom 5:12) cursed the race, the ground, and all nature (Gen 3:7–24; Rom 8:19–22). The deceptions by which he wrested authority from Adam over this earth now entitle him to such titles as “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30)—Jesus' own attribution—or “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). The misery of natural disasters and nature's cruelty against itself testify to his incompetence to improve on God's way of doing things or carry out the boast of making himself like the Most High (Isa 14:14). The pain and suffering that pervade the animate creation result from the contamination of sin, the biblical name for Satan's rebellion and the state of things it produces. Sin's current impact is capricious, uncontrollable, and global (Eccl 9:2, 3, 11; Luke 13:1–5), except by specific divine interruption (John 9:3), and its ultimate consequence is death (Eccl 7:2; 8:8; Rom 6:23; 5:12; 1 Co 15:56). As God is eternal, as God is life and truth, and the source of life and all good (John 1:1–3; 14:6; Acts 17:25; James 1:17), so his adversary is death and the cause of death and all evil (John 8:44).

Briefly: God's Answer to Suffering

Far from being the cause of suffering in the world, God has undertaken to guarantee that its presence will not be permanent. The horror of the means he has devised gives insight into the offence which sin and suffering are to him and also the value he places upon the safety and happiness of his creation. Jesus Christ, who at his first advent announced himself “as the glorious HEALER” of

glorification takes the place of glory to God. John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale OT Commentaries, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), p, 196, observes that the being is clothed in attire reminiscent of the High Priest's breastplate (Ex 28:17–20). This supports the sense that the roles of these individuals may have involved common elements, e.g., presentation before the presence of God. Seeing Satan as portrayed in Isa 14:12–14 and Eze 28:12–15 “throws much light on the question of Satan's origin and is in harmony with the scriptural picture of Satan's close relations with world governments (Dan 10:13; John 12:31; Eph 6:12).” Hiebert, *ibid.*, 284.

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“all the maladies under which humanity groans,”⁵⁴ has, by the awful sacrifice of himself, exchanged humanity’s doom for heaven’s original bliss. Those who believe in him are neither doomed to a blighted and abbreviated existence of pain, nor to suffering in perpetuity for the sake of or in the name of self-improvement. Instead, they may participate in an eternity of joy in a land where there shall be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain, because, through Christ, the former state has passed away (Rev 21:4). By bearing, in Christ his son, all the misery he himself so abhors, God has restored the universe to the bliss in which he created all (Heb 5:8; 2 Co 5:21). In Christ’s suffering is our healing (Isa 53:5). The suffering of the perfect one has neutralized sins’s sting, destroyed the destroyer, and swallowed up death in victory (Isa 25:8; Gen 3:15; 1 Co 15:54–57). God has done this for the sake of his creation, because sin cannot stop God from being love.

Conclusion

The continuing presence of pain and suffering in our world may be heard as a challenge to Christ’s claim to victory over sin and Satan. The challenge may also remind us of Clow’s observation that Christ did not heal all the afflicted of his day.⁵⁵ It may tempt us to return to some interpretation of Scripture which teaches the inevitability, eternity, and fundamental morality of pain. But in the end any such recourse would reflect too limited an understanding of the conflict between God and Satan. Even while here on earth, Christ was sometimes inhibited from works of wonder by the unbelief of those he wished to bless (Matt 13:58). Christ’s victory is not mine to share against my will (John 1:12; Rev 3:20). Again, the resurrection of Lazarus produced such hostile reaction (John 11:46–53) that one wonders what might have transpired should Christ have performed more resurrections. Thirdly, Jesus was convinced that such miracles as he did perform were sufficient proof of the truth of all his claims (John 10:37, 38). This is also John’s opinion (20:30, 31). That children, men, or women still suffered and died in Christ’s day or in our time is no proof that pain is unconquerable, inescapable, or acceptable to him. Christ’s claim is that the victory of Satan has been completely won, that the battle is over, that “It is done” (John 19:30). His own earthly ministry, the success of his immediate followers (Matt 10:1, 7, 8; Luke 10:1, 2, 9), the work of his church to this day, and his own climactic action at his second advent (1 Thes 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–57; Rev 20:14; 21:3–5), all form part of God’s response to the experience of suffering brought on by Satan and sin. That the adversary still goes about seeking victims (1 Pet 5:8) is no proof that he is not already a defeated foe (Rev 12:10). When the bankruptcy of his satanic lies is clearly exposed to all eyes concerned, then God will, once and for all, purge the earth and universe of every last vestige of his

⁵⁴Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *ibid.*

⁵⁵Clow, *ibid.*

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tainting rebellion and reestablish his own kingdom of eternal peace, sanity and wholeness: “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20, NASB). As surely as suffering, and all of Satan’s kingdom, did have a beginning, so sure must it be that God will bring them, one and the other, to an end.

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The Great Controversy and Human Suffering

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Why do we suffer? The question haunts humanity. The Bible gives six reasons for suffering, even though it's not easy (or sometimes even possible) to figure out which reason is at work in a given situation.

Many Christians shy away from what the Bible teaches about suffering. Sometimes when we're hurting it's easier to accept whatever comforts us, whether or not the Bible supports it. However, Prov. 3:5 says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." If we want to learn God's will for us, we need to understand the Bible's six reasons for suffering and make sense of them. Explaining them away—essentially saying the Bible as it reads is wrong—won't lead us to truth.

The Bible also reveals a framework into which we can place suffering and make some sense of it. We might call this framework a "warfare model" or a "battlefield paradigm." I prefer to call it "The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan."

Revelation 12 is a summary of this Great Controversy. In Isaiah 14:12–15 and 25–27 or Ezekiel 28:11–19 we can find out more about what led Satan to revolt and how he seduced a third of the angels. Rev. 12, though, is the best concise explanation of the war as we experience it and of God's strategy for winning the war and ending suffering.

Rev. 12:1–6 and 14–17 deal with Satan's war against God's people. Why is this war happening? Why are we suffering? We find the answer in Rev. 12:7–9 and 12–13. There was war in heaven between Christ and Satan. Satan was hurled to the earth, along with a third of the angels. Now he attacks God's people.

What is God doing about the suffering caused by this warfare? We find a two part answer in Rev. 12:10–11. First, God's solution to human suffering is salvation through Christ (v. 10). Second, though the war continues, God's peo-

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ple are already able to “overcome” Satan by “the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” This gives them the courage to face death bravely.¹

How can the Great Controversy model help us? The answer is simply this: There’s a war on!²

The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan is a real war. It’s been going on for a long time, though it’s nearly over. When we look at suffering in the light of how we know war works, especially a world war, we can understand why there are six different reasons why we suffer.

Let’s look at the six reasons for suffering we find in the Bible and how the Great Controversy idea, the warfare model, helps us understand them. Some of these reasons for suffering are better supported than others, but all are revealed truth and not meant to contradict each other. The Great Controversy framework helps us fit them together so they make sense.

Reason 1: A Sinful World

Death entered the world with Adam’s fall (Rom. 5:15–16), and with it the suffering that leads to death and is caused by death. From the fall come briars, blight, drought, and plague (Gen. 3:17–18, though drought and plague may also be sent by God—Deut. 28:22). From the fall come the pain and disease and wearing down and aging which is the human condition in a sinful world. Indeed, “the whole creation has been groaning” under the weight of sin as it awaits the birth of the Kingdom of God (Rom. 8:20–23). This suffering is not usually *from* God, though He warned us of it and *uses* it.

We suffer because we live in a place where suffering happens. We often suffer not because of sinning but because of poor choices, such as walking into a dangerous but avoidable situation (Prov. 22:3). We may also suffer when others’ sins affect us when we are “innocent bystanders.” This may be the case when a drunk driver runs into a school bus and injures children, or when a grandmother is shot unintentionally in a gang war. However, we may be sure that even in situations such as this, God will try to bring as much good as possible from the suffering.

When Jesus healed, he sometimes liberated a prisoner of Satan, who had caused a person’s suffering (Luke 13:11–13, 16). When a disease was due to sin or possibly a punishment for sin, Jesus forgave that sin before healing (Matt.

¹ What I’m describing here is a chiasm. Rev. 12:1–15:4 is a division of Revelation made up of several interesting chiasms which help us understand the Great Controversy. For more information, see William H. Shea and Ed Christian, “The Chiastic Structure of Rev 12:1–15:4: The Great Controversy Vision,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, to be published Fall 2000. If you do not have access to this journal, I will send you a copy if you contact me at christia@kutztown.edu or by mail at Dept. of English, Kutztown Univ., Kutztown, PA 19530.

² Among the important references to spiritual warfare in the New Testament, many of them tied to suffering and perseverance, are Eph. 6:10–18; Luke 21:12–19; 1 Pet. 5:8–10; Heb. 10:32–39; 2 Cor. 6:1–10, 10:2–5; Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Tim. 1:18–19, 6:11–12; and 2 Tim. 4:6.

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9:2–7). Jesus even revealed that a man had been born blind so God’s character could be revealed when the blind man was healed (John 9:2–3). Usually, however, there was no mention of such reasons for sickness when Jesus healed. It seems likely that most of the people Jesus healed were suffering because they lived in a world of sin. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time, as we all are. When Jesus healed all the sick in a village or a crowd, He revealed a glimpse of what a world without sin would be like.

Jesus said that when Pilate killed a group of Galileans who were sacrificing to God, or when the tower of Siloam fell, crushing eighteen people, it was not a result of the victims’ sins (Luke 13:4–5). We cannot eliminate the possibility that Satan made the tower fall in order to cause suffering. However, it seems that sometimes towers fall because of loosened stones and gravity.

Gravity is not a result of sin. There was gravity before there was sin, even though so far as we know, it is only in our sinful world that accidents happen and towers fall. Accidents are often due to carelessness, but not always. Satan may benefit from accidents as people respond by doubting God. God may benefit from accidents by making them “work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). Still, one reason for suffering seems to be people being in the wrong place at the wrong time—i.e., in this world while Satan claims to be its prince (John 12:31).

In a War Zone. How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? It tells us we are in a war zone. When there’s a war on, you have to expect that both people and land will suffer, even civilians, even when they are not the enemy’s target (and they sometimes are). Life is more dangerous in a war zone. Crops are ruined, forests destroyed, water poisoned, roads and fields mined. Bombs fall in unexpected places. Bullets ricochet. People starve.

The effects of sin on the world are similar to the effects of war. This entire world is a war zone. In this war zone there are drunk drivers and bad neighborhoods, because war can drive people crazy, so the innocent suffer. In a war zone people are more susceptible to disease. In the midst of war, people die from freak causes seemingly unrelated to the war, and yet if the war had not been going on, perhaps a saving treatment would have been available, a vaccine or antitoxin or antibiotic.

What is worse, our spiritual enemy has used germ warfare. The earth is still poisoned with its effects, and because of the war our resistance is low. This is usually why farmers die of tetanus, or why women die in childbirth. This is usually why babies die of leukemia. When we get cancer, it may be merely because radon gas is percolating into our house from the ground. That’s what happens in a war zone. The Bible tells us the effects of sin, the earth’s groaning, can be removed only through burning the earth with “fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10) and recreating life on it (Rev. 21:1).

The Great Controversy model suggests that much suffering happens simply because of the nature of things in a war zone. However, God promises that if we

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love Him and trust Him He will bring good from it, even though we may see no sign of that good in this life.

Reason 2: A Devouring Devil

Peter warns that the devil is seeking to devour us, much as he tried earlier to “sift” Peter “like wheat” (I Pet. 5:8–9; Luke 22:31). Thus, much suffering is due to Satan, in his anger and hatred (Rev. 12:12, 17), trying to hurt us—whether it serves his purpose or whether it works against him by thrusting us into the arms of God. His target may be humanity in general, a group such as a church, or an individual (Luke 13:16). Sometimes, as with Job, he makes us suffer in hope that we will curse God (Job 2:5–6).³ At other times, it seems, he merely revels in causing a suffering which is the opposite of the nature of heaven.

Under Enemy Fire. How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? It tells us we are under enemy fire. In the Great Controversy model of Rev. 12, the dragon is attacking God’s people. God’s people are His soldiers, sent into battle against the forces of evil to rescue the perishing (2 Cor. 10:3–5). Should soldiers be surprised if the enemy shoots at them? No! Facing bullets is part of the job! Of course, unlike most soldiers, if they are wounded or killed in action, God’s troops can look forward to full restoration and great reward (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

Experience shows us that sometimes enemies don’t only shoot at soldiers. Some enemies shoot or bomb civilians, too. That’s what Satan does.

Thus, sometimes suffering is due to the enemy attacking God’s soldiers. More often—as most people are not “soldiers of the cross”—suffering is due to the enemy attacking those who do not belong to God, perhaps in hope that they will blame God, or perhaps merely because the enemy hates them.

Unfortunately, only God’s soldiers have been assured that they will be healed when the great General appears in person to end the battle (Rev. 22:2, 14). In World War II governments rationed tires, gasoline, butter, wool, chocolate, sugar and more. Soldiers got all they wanted, but civilians never got enough. Similarly, God bestows more grace, more blessings on those who serve Him. Other things, such as new cars, were not available to those not active in the war effort. In the Great Controversy model, the assurance of eternal life is reserved entirely for those who are faithful soldiers in the Lord’s army.

Reason 3: “God Gave Them Up”

The Bible teaches that suffering is sometimes due to God allowing us to suffer the natural effects of our sin (Rom. 1:18–32; “God gave them up . . .”). In this case God is not punishing us for our sins, but allowing our sins to punish

³ In this case God has *allowed* Satan to make Job suffer—for a reason—but Satan asks God’s permission to try to devour Job. Job’s suffering is not God’s idea, nor is the mode of suffering Satan inflicts.

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us—sins we have freely chosen, despite His warning.⁴ His desire is that the ill effects of our sins will bring us back to Him. If this is why we are suffering, we can often determine it by asking ourselves if we are doing anything on the list of reasons why “God gave them up.”

Danger! Landmines! How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? It warns us to beware of dangerous places. If the General has a sign posted warning that a road has been mined, is He to blame if I choose to walk down that road and get blown up? If the General tells you how to avoid an enemy machine gun nest, but you go to have a look, is it His fault if you are shot? If the General says the enemy has poisoned the river, but we drink from it, should we blame Him when we get sick?

In World War I many thousands of soldiers contracted syphilis from visiting prostitutes, even though they were warned to avoid them. Were their commanders to blame when the disease ruined their lives? Should the officers have imprisoned or shot their soldiers for disobeying?

The Great Controversy model shows us that God has posted warnings: “Enter at your own risk.” He has given us a code of military conduct, a training manual, a handbook of strategy, a map of mined areas and safe roads and bridges. Have we read it?

He has also, however, allowed both His troops and civilians to decide for themselves whether or not to heed those warnings. He has allowed them to suffer if they choose to disobey, in hope that they will learn their lesson and come back to Him.

Reason 4: The Wrath of God.

The Bible also clearly teaches that sometimes God’s wrath is poured out on the enemies of His people or on His people themselves if they turn away from Him and commit “adultery” with false gods by serving them.⁵ At times God seems to do this Himself.⁶ At other times He sends or allows someone else to pour out His wrath for Him—sometimes even human armies.⁷

When God’s wrath is poured out on a country or an army, this needn’t mean that there are no righteous people there. If righteous citizens of a country die, due to being in the wrong place at the wrong time (reason #1), God knows who they are and won’t forget them in the resurrection. Nevertheless, He often says, “Come out of her, my people,”⁸ and if we suffer after failing to obey, we can’t blame God for it.

⁴ See Jer. 2:17, 19.

⁵ Eph. 5:3–6; Rev. 2:21–22; Deut. 28:20; Rom. 1:18–32; Num. 14:33–34; Lam. 1:12; Exek. 22:17–22;

⁶ Gen. 3:15, 16, 6:7, 15:14; Exod. 3:20; Jer. 15:7, 14, 18:7–10, and many more.

⁷ Exod. 23:28, 33:2; Lev. 26:22, 25; Jer. 18:17, 24:10, 43:10–13, 51:2, 53,

⁸ Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8, 51:6–9, 45; II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4.

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Deserters Will Be Shot! How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? It reminds us that during wartime, those who oppose an army must expect to be punished if caught. In war, deserters and traitors are often shot. So are enemy spies. Rebel forces are wiped out.

When British soldiers shot at German soldiers during World War I, no one was surprised. That's what they were supposed to do. If you are fighting for the enemy, getting shot is one of the risks.

When the Allied forces bombed Berlin during World War II, this was not unexpected. There was a war on, and Berlin was the enemy capital. Those who chose to stay knew they would be bombed.

If God is truly at war with Satan, those who choose to fight under Satan's command should not be surprised if God's wrath is turned on them and they suffer. When God sent an angel to kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who dared take up arms against the people of God (2 Kings 19:35), it was part of the war effort. The Levites killed with their swords three thousand Israelites who had rebelled against the God they had sworn to obey and worshipped a golden calf. Then God sent a plague on the rebels (Exod. 32:27–35). The rebels received appropriate penalties, no less than many generals would mete out.

The suffering of Babylon in Rev. 18 is due to her rebellion against God and her harlotry with “the kings of the earth” (v. 3). This harlot Babylon stands for a church composed of people who claim to be God's people, but are actually in love with the world.⁹ (And we mustn't forget that this woman is also “the mother of harlots” [Rev. 17:5]—she has spawned many unfaithful churches.)

God's wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners, against the enemies of His people, against traitors and rebels, and the suffering that results from that wrath, is simply what we should expect from the Commander in Chief of the great war.

Some people refuse to believe in the wrath of God because it doesn't seem very loving. Yet they call God “Father” and ask Him to deliver them from evil! If a father catches enemy soldiers torturing his children, won't he fight to rescue them, or die trying? The seven trumpet judgments of Revelation and the final judgment on Babylon occur after “the prayers of the saints” have been presented to God and in response to the persecution of the saints.¹⁰ Those who hurt God's children are God's enemies *because* He loves His children so much.

Also, in some countries those who are able to help someone in an emergency and fail to do so can be prosecuted. Society is outraged when a doctor fails to help an accident victim who is bleeding to death. God is also outraged when people who claim to be His soldiers refuse to rescue those held captive by the enemy (Matt. 25:31–46).

Reason 5: A Harvest of Righteousness

⁹ See Jer. 3:8–10, 5:7; Rev. 2:20–23.

¹⁰ See Rev. 5:8, 8:3–4, 11:18, 16:5–6, 17:6, 18:20, 24.

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When God's people suffer, God may be sending or allowing the suffering to train or strengthen them. This isn't a pleasant or popular idea, but the Bible teaches it.¹¹ Many who claim to be Christians would forsake God if He sent suffering to them. Others are faithful servants, though they seldom suffer. God knows hearts and knows what it will take to make us effective and faithful.

Basic Training. How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? Soldiers must be trained. It makes no sense to send scrawny, weak-kneed wimps into battle against giants. This is why soldiers are sent to boot camp for basic training before they are sent into battle. They run for miles and exercise for hours while their sergeants shout at them. They get by with little sleep and uncomfortable quarters. They are being hardened, being prepared to face the enemy. They learn the enemy's tricks. They learn to fight and survive.

This is one reason why God lets His people suffer. He is preparing them to face the enemy. He is making them strong through suffering. He is making them better soldiers, ready to serve Him in the war against Satan and his troops, ready to rescue the captives. We might not like it, but He knows best.

Reason 6: A Spectacle to the Universe

Finally, God sometimes allows His people to suffer because their faithfulness in the face of persecution or other suffering brings people to Him or reveals the righteousness of the saints and of God Himself to the watching universe.¹²

In 1949 there were about a million Christians in China. Today, after fifty years of persecution, there are at least fifty million, and some say twice that. In China Christians suffered faithfully so others might see and turn to a Christ worth dying for.

The pain of watching loved ones suffer and die can test our faith, but after the resurrection, when we find that the brief but untimely separation means that someone who would have been lost has now received eternal life, will we say God was unfair? I think not. Witnessing with words is not the only way to make disciples, and making disciples is, after all, what Christ requires of us (Matt. 28:18–20).

War Heroes. How does the Great Controversy model help us understand this? It reminds us of war heroes. Remember the parades and parties held to welcome home war heroes during World War II? The whole country celebrated those willing beyond the call of duty to suffer and face death. Heroes were sent on speaking tours around the country to sell war bonds and encourage enlistment. Thousands of boys joined up because they wanted to be like their heroes. Thousands of soldiers fought harder because they had heard about the bravery of these heroes.

¹¹ See Rom. 5:3; 2 Thes. 1:3–5; Heb. 2:10–11; Heb. 12:5–11; Rev. 3:19; Isa. 48:10; Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9.

¹² See 1 Cor. 4:9; Job 1:6–12, 2:3–7; 2 Thes. 1:3–6, 12; 2 Tim. 1:8, 11–12, 2:8–10; Acts 5:41, 9:15–16; 1 Pet. 4:12–13, 16–17, 19; Rev. 1:9; John 11:4; Phil. 1:27–30; 2 Cor. 1:5–6; Jer. 15:15.

CHRISTIAN: THE GREAT CONTROVERSY AND HUMAN SUFFERING

Here is the final reason for suffering. God allows His faithful soldiers to suffer in order to gain more recruits for the fight against Satan, the fight for human souls. Civilians see this heroism and enlist. Even those who are AWOL, absent without leave, may turn themselves in and return to faithful service in the trenches.

Good generals don't want their troops to die. Many hesitate before sending them into battle. However, generals know that the sacrifice is necessary. Some must suffer that others might live.

The Great Controversy model reveals that God sends his faithful ones into battle because within His strategy He knows that their suffering and death are necessary to the war effort. Yes, the "once for all" victory was won at the cross (Heb. 9:26)—but by their heroic action God's faithful soldiers may gain the individual rescue of civilians held captive by the enemy.

Their suffering, however, is temporary, and the hero's welcome that awaits them will be worth the sacrifice. "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life," Jesus says (Rev. 2:10).

So Why Am I Suffering?

The Great Controversy helps us make sense of these six biblical reasons for suffering. However, it doesn't reveal beyond doubt which of these six is the reason for our own suffering or that of our loved ones.

Sometimes we simply can't know for sure. As God reveals to Job, there are many things God knows which we can't yet understand. Nevertheless, in many cases, by searching our hearts or peeking into the hearts of others we can guess at the reason for suffering.

Perhaps we know that we are in rebellion against God, even though we are in church every week, and sense that God may be fighting against us because we are fighting against His saints.

Perhaps we know there are evil habits in our lives which will keep us from heaven because we cherish them more than we cherish the God who asks us to give them up.¹³ Is it possible that we are suffering because God has "given us up" to them so their effects will bring us back to Him?

Perhaps we know we are active in the fight against evil, clothed in "the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:10–18). We might be suffering because God is making us "a spectacle to the whole universe" (1 Cor. 4:9), revealing our faithfulness. Or we might be suffering because Satan is trying to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8).

Perhaps a loved one has died, tragically, unexpectedly. If we search, do we find that someone who has long rejected God has now come to the cross as a

¹³ See Eph. 5:3–6; Gal. 5:19–21; Rev. 22:14–15.

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result? Are we willing to make the trade—a few years in this life for someone else’s eternal life?¹⁴

Perhaps someone has died as the result of a freak accident. It may be no more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or perhaps Satan was trying to strip us of our faith, or perhaps there is another reason. Can we comfort one another with these words and trust that God knows hearts and we don’t?

Perhaps a child is born with a birth defect, or a young mother develops a terrible cancer. Is it possible that this is simply what sometimes happens in a world in which sin has been active for so long?

All we have are hints, guesses. The Bible gives us the outline of the Great Controversy, and it gives us reasons why suffering occurs, but it doesn’t tell us which reason is at work.¹⁵

One thing we know for sure, though, is this. For those who love God, for those who belong to God, for those who are faithful, there is always a happy ending in the long run (Rom. 8:28).

We also know this: God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Although there’s a war on, God is doing everything He can to save as many as possible, and He asks us to help Him, even if we suffer for it.

Are you willing?

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¹⁴ Forbidding Ezekiel to complain, God took away his wife—as an object lesson—in an attempt to bring His people back to Him (Ezek. 24:15–27).

¹⁵ Some readers who prefer a more Calvinistic framework may say that the warfare model does not adequately account for the sovereignty of God. In fact, one could fit these six reasons for suffering and the Great Controversy warfare model within what God permits or decrees (what is called His “permissive will” or His “decretal will”). Thus, God permits Satan to attack His creatures, permits accidental suffering, permits the effects of sin on His creation, and permits people to suffer from their wrong choices because such suffering fits into His sovereign will, into the strategy for destroying evil and rescuing sinners which He has always known. He decrees His own children’s suffering in order to strengthen them or in order to use them to win the war in the way He has determined it must be won.

The Sanctuary, the Gospel, and the Law

Thomas A. Davis

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Although not always kept in perspective, the issue around which the Bible has been written is law—law breaking, law keeping, and the result of each. The tragic, drawn-out drama of sin began with law breaking. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4) encapsulates the definition of sin no matter how one may express it if that expression is compatible with Scripture.

The whole plan of redemption, the great sacrifice of Jesus, the wonders of grace, revolve around God’s desire to rescue humanity from the predicament resulting from law-breaking. This theme, the heart of the gospel, is reflected in the sanctuary service which God gave to ancient Israel as a learning tool to help them, and us, understand the working of the plan of salvation. And the sanctuary model revealed to Moses, following which the tabernacle was made, was patterned after the heavenly (Heb 8:1–5) not merely in its physical aspects, but in the deep significance of the ceremonies to be followed (Heb 9:1, 23–26; 10:1–4).

An analysis of the sanctuary service reveals that the law, by which we here mean the Ten Commandments, is implicit in each phase. All other Biblical laws, statutes, ordinances are, in some way, designed to illuminate and support the Decalogue. As Patrick Fairbairn observes, “The Levitical code [with] . . . its divers washings and ever-recurring atonements by blood bespoke existing impurities, which [impurities] were such because they were at variance with the law of righteousness imposed in the Decalogue.”¹

The record of these things is not to be regarded as about historical curiosities or dead issues, for “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Rom 15:4 RSV).

Before we go through the sanctuary to demonstrate our thesis, we have three vital observations to make: First, *The symbols and rituals of the sanctu-*

¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 139.

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ary contribute to or move toward the ark of the covenant, or testament, in the Most Holy Place. The ark is the ultimate goal, **the place of resolution**, of the whole service, as our diagram illustrates (see fig. 1, 106).

Our second observation is: *The ark, the repository of the law, the Ten Commandments, toward which the entire ritual moves, is the heart of the whole sanctuary.*

Our third observation is the most important: *While every aspect of the sanctuary service has to do with the law—and therefore judgment, for law and judgment cannot be separated—its involvement is from the redemptive viewpoint.* It has to do with Christ's forgiveness, cleansing, justification, and sanctification—the gospel. It must be recognized, of course, that judgment is evaluating on the basis of law and includes condemnation for those who fail to avail themselves of the redemptive measures offered (Heb 2:3).

We propose to look at the rituals and symbols of the sanctuary from three perspectives: The ritual itself, its fulfillment (in the gospel), and the significance of the ritual or symbol to the law of God.

Propitiation

The Ritual. Logically, we begin our analysis of the temple ritual and its significance with a sinner who, because he has in some manner transgressed the law, brings his sin offering to the sanctuary (Lev 4, 5) to find escape from condemnation. Near the entrance to the sanctuary complex is the altar of burnt offerings (Heb, literally, "place of sacrifice"), which symbolizes all sin sacrifices. Near this altar the sinner places his hand on the animal's head, thus ritually transferring his sin to the animal. He then slays the victim.

If the offerer is a priest, the blood is caught in a basin and sprinkled before the veil separating the Holy and the Most Holy Places (Lev 4:1-4). In this way sin is ritually transferred to the sanctuary, and thus the sinner is forgiven. If he is a layperson or a ruler, the officiating priest is required to eat some of the flesh (Lev 6:26). By this ritual he assumes the confessed sin, which is ultimately eradicated on the Day of Atonement.

The Gospel. While propitiation is often, and rightly, associated with the ark in the Most Holy Place (the cover of the ark is sometimes called the place of propitiation), the *Sacrifice* which made propitiation possible took place at the cross (1 Pet 2:24; Rom 3:25), which was typified by the altar of sacrifice. At the cross ritual was replaced by reality, type by antitype. They were a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (see Col 2:17). On the cross the true Sacrifice, the Lamb of God (John 3:16), became the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2).

With the slaying of the sacrifice at the ancient tabernacle the active role of the sinner ended. The rest was carried out by the priest, for the offerer had no access to the tabernacle and no further part in its service. His faith had to be in

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the ministration of the priest to bring his sacrifice to fruition. Likewise, our faith must be in the ministration of Christ.

The Law. The penalty for breaking the law deposited in the ark is death (Rom 6:23). “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). But while the law demanding death for sin was *within* the ark, *above* that law was the mercy seat, or place where the merits of the sacrifice were eventually applied. Propitiation, the provision of the gospel, meets the requirements of the law; Christ died because of the transgressed law. So the ark was the complement of the altar of sacrifice.

Purification

The Ritual. Before the priest could enter the holy place, he was required to purify himself by washing his hands and feet with water from the laver located between the altar of sacrifice and the tabernacle (Exod 30:17-31).

Often the Bible does not explain its types. Their significance is to be understood by reference to ways in which they are applied or alluded to in other contexts.

The Gospel. The washing at the laver, and all other washings required by the ceremonial law, were types, teaching us the necessity of heart purification. Paul writes of spiritual washing in Titus 3:5,6—“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” which comes “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Whereas in the Mosaic system only the priest could participate in this rite, now the priesthood is extended to all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9). All who repent may, by faith, be cleansed (1 John 1:9). Of course the ancient worshiper’s faith, going beyond the mere ritual, made available for him what is available for us.

With this washing we are finished with the ceremonies of the courtyard where sin and uncleanness is dealt with. Now the penitent has been forgiven and washed. Now he may have a different attitude than he had upon entering the courtyard. Then he came with guilt, feeling condemned. Now he may enter even the sanctuary joyfully, boldly, because he is forgiven, cleansed (Heb 4:16).

The Law. The law demands purity of heart to stand in the holy place (Ps 24: 3, 4). It requires purification, but it cannot purify. In the Mosaic ceremonies the purity was largely cultic, and was satisfied by external, cultic, cleansing. But the Decalogue requires a spiritual cleansing, a purity of *heart* (Ps 53: 6; 24: 4; Matt 5:8; 1 Tim 1:5). If we come to Christ in sincerity, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse (purify) us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9), and to give us His Spirit for obedience (Rom 8:1-4). We are then pure in the sight of the law.

Illumination

The Symbol. As in other cases, Scripture makes no direct spiritual application of the seven-branched lampstand set in the first apartment or Holy Place and kept burning twenty-four hours a day. It has been suggested that it was for

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utilitarian purposes only. But every other item had a clearly symbolic meaning, so we may accept that it did also.

The Gospel. An obvious lesson may be drawn from the fact that a lampstand is intended to give light. In Scripture light is, among other things, symbolic of God's truth: "Oh send out your light and your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to . . . your tabernacle" (Ps 43:3), and His Word is a light (Ps 119:105). A spiritual application would be that God's Spirit continually illuminates His people. In Zechariah an angel explains that the seven lamps represent "the eyes of the Lord which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (Zech 4:10).

The Law. Because God's law is an expression of His character, it is moral and spiritual light. "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light" (Prov 6:23; cf. Ps 19:8). Paul, enlightened by the law, understood what sin is (Rom 7:7). "In thy light [law] shall we see light" (Ps 36:9).

Sustentation

The Symbol. Shewbread, the Bread of the Presence, which was constantly to be in the Holy Place (Lev 24: 5-8), was a reminder of the Israelites' constant dependence on God for sustenance, temporal and spiritual. It was broken and eaten by the representatives of the people, the priests (Lev 24:9).

The Gospel. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* observes, "It is but a short step from the table of the Lord in the sanctuary to the table of the Lord in the NT. The priests partook of the bread representative of Him who came down from heaven; we eat of the bread Christ says is His body (1 Cor.11:24)" (1:808).

The Law. The law does not only make claims upon us, it does not only require heart cleanliness and provide illumination. It also nourishes. In this sense the Psalmist wrote that the godly man meditates on the law day and night (Ps 1:2). He is spiritually fed by it. And Jeremiah wrote, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

Intercession

The Symbol. The function of the altar of incense (Exod 30:1-10) was primarily intercessory. On it a special "perpetual incense," directed toward the mercy seat in the most holy place, was to be burned before the Lord (v. 8). Although it was situated in the Holy Place, in front of the veil (Ex.30:6), it is intimately associated with the ark in several places in Scripture. In 1 Kings we learn that it "belonged to the inner sanctuary" (1 Kgs 6:22 NIV). And in 1 Kings 9:25 we are told it was "before the Lord." Doubtless for these reasons, it is in Hebrews related to the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:3,4). These facts, and the further fact that it was pronounced "most holy" (Exod 30:10), suggests that, next to

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the ark of the covenant, it was the most important piece of furniture in the sanctuary.

In Rev.8:3 we have incense given to an officiating angel to be added to the prayer of the saints. The incense was added to the prayers, apparently to make them acceptable, but did not symbolize the prayers themselves. The only thing that can make us, or anything we bring to God, acceptable is the merits of Christ. Thus there would seem to be little else the incense could represent.

This altar was the nearest a priest could approach to God, represented by the ark of the covenant, except for the high priest once yearly, on the day of atonement.

The Gospel. The psalmist associates prayer and worship with the incense. "Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps 141:2). As noted, Revelation 8:3, 4 also associates incense with prayer, so we may conclude that prayer and worship were acceptable because of the incense.

Again, the psalmist's associating incense with sacrifice reminds us that only the incense recipe given by God Himself was acceptable (Exod 30:9). We have remarked on the probability that the incense represents Christ's merits. Thus, man's prayers, and his obedience, can be made perfect only by the incense of Christ's merits.

The Law. "One who turns away from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Prov 28:9). To seek to approach God insincerely, heedless of His will expressed in His law, is to offer strange fire, as the sons of Aaron offered strange fire (Lev 10:1). The relationship of prayer with the burning of incense is seen from Revelation 8:4: "The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand" (Rev. 8:4). But one's prayers are acceptable to God only as he is in accord with God's law.

Investigation

We can merely remind ourselves that this subject brings us to the Jewish Day of Atonement, for it was on that day, symbolic of the great antitypical Day of Atonement, that the matter of sin (thus involving the law) was dealt with (See Lev 16; Heb 9,10).

The Symbol. Solitary in the Most Holy Place, the most sacred room of the sanctuary, was the most sacred piece of furniture, the ark of the testimony, or law (Exod 25: 22, 23), constructed especially to contain the law (Deut 10:1-5). From the Israelite viewpoint the ark was the very presence and glory of Jehovah (the Shekinah atop the ark. See Exod 40:34-38; 2 Sam 6:2), and the ground of His rulership (the tables of the law within the ark. Exod 25:10-22).

The Law. Every ritual, every item of furniture connected with the Mosaic sanctuary is symbolic, including the ark. (The office of the high priest was also symbolic, but space prevents this being included directly in this article.) Not so with the tables that are in the ark. While there may be some uncertainty about

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the significance of some of the rituals and furniture, this is not so with these tables. On them, inscribed with the very finger of God (Exod 31:18), was the law of God expressing His will—literal, succinct, clear, unambiguous, unmistakable, and eternal (Ps 111:7, 8; Luke 16:17). God would not entrust the recording of His Ten Words to the hand of man, even to Moses. There must be no room for questioning. And by judgment based on that law the eternal destiny of all mankind is decided (Jas 1: 11, 12; Rom 14:10).

At this stage our focus is exclusively on the law as the basis of investigation or judgment. As God is impartial (Deut 10:27; 2 Chr 19:7), He applies His law with impartiality. For the moment justice has its day until we come to the determinative final transaction at the mercy seat.

We earlier observed that the law demands purity, but cannot purify. We may further add, the law demands obedience, but cannot make one obedient. The failure is not in the law but in sinful man. Sin has confronted man with a terrible conundrum. He must keep the law impeccably to be saved, but on his own he cannot do so. The law is “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7: 12) but the rigor of that law is expressed by both Paul and James. “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law’” (Gal 2:10 NIV). James asserts, “Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, is guilty of all” (2:10). In other words, it is as if one writing a comprehensive test covering a lifetime gets less than one hundred percent, and consequently has failed the test. He has lost salvation.

So it is at this point that the sinner’s relation with Christ becomes compelling. Have the demands of death for sin (Rom 6:23), and the demands of the law for perfection been met for him and in him?

Exoneration

The Ritual. For the Israelite of old, exoneration, the confirmation of his forgiveness of sin and blame, came on the Day of Atonement. It was on that day that the benefits of the rituals that had, as it were, flowed all year to the Ark on a stream reddened by the blood of sacrifice, came to ultimate realization and resolution.

The Gospel. And so on that stream, originating in the blood of the Sacrifice, and merged with the water of cleansing, the spiritual light and sustenance and intercession, we come to the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place with its changeless, eternal law and, above it, the mercy seat. The approach to the Most Holy Place is possible only as we are conducted by Christ, our High Priest, our Sacrifice and Surety (Heb 10:19; Rom 8:1,34; John 3:18). Thus, as William Temple has put it, the mercy seat is “the meeting place of God’s holy love and man’s sin.”

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The Law. “The only way out of the world of law is by death,” wrote H.E. Guillebaud “*in which all obligations to it are discharged.*”² We ourselves should die that death, the death whose hold upon us would be eternal. There would be no release forever. But the law has been fulfilled by Christ, who has made His perfect obedience available for all who receive Him as Sacrifice, Substitute, and Lord. So, for the one who has found forgiveness, cleansing and regeneration through the blood of the Sacrifice, on this great antitypical Day of Atonement the record of the sins that would condemn is forever expunged, his forgiveness has been ratified, he is seen by God as though he had never sinned. So the great problem of sin has been resolved. “Righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps 85:10), the Son has made us free so we are free indeed (John 8:36).

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² H. E. Guillebaud, *Why the Cross?* (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1961), 194. Italics in original.

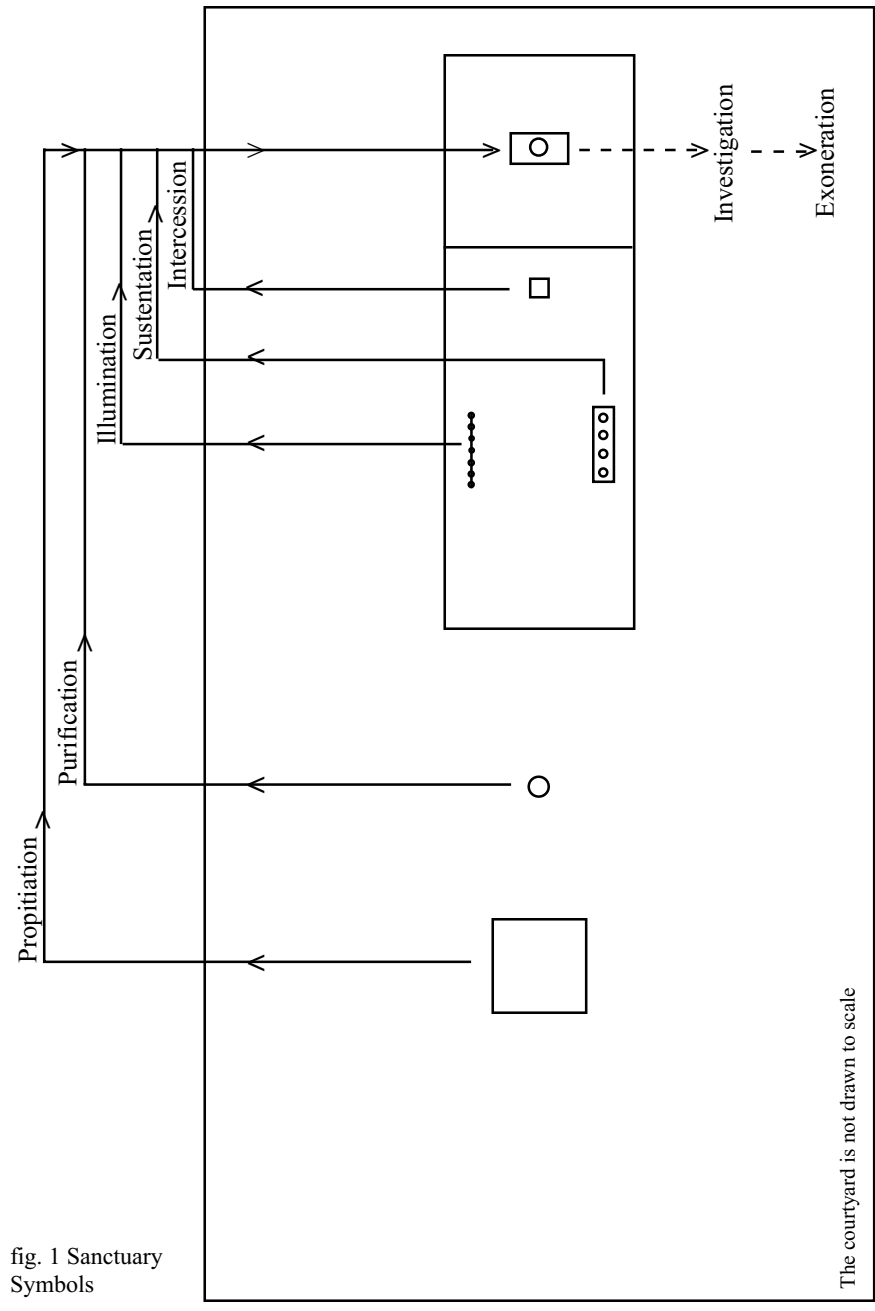


fig. 1 Sanctuary Symbols

Epics & Ethics: Vital Biblical Principles for Interpreting Scripture Stories¹

Ron du Preez
Solusi University

I sat riveted to the television screen as a Special Report suddenly interrupted the program I was watching. The *NBC News* anchor announced that the long-anticipated document prepared by the Office of the Independent Council had just been officially released for distribution to members of the United States Congress, and then to the general public as well. It was Friday afternoon, the 11th of September 1998, and news reporters wasted no time in reading and then revealing the detailed allegations of an extra-marital sexual affair between the President of the United States of America and a former White House intern. Incredulous, I wondered why the findings of the Special Prosecutor were being put on the Internet for everyone to read. At the rate of 300,000 hits per minute on the website, the public rushed to gloat over or blush over the appallingly pornographic 445-page report.² But, what was the purpose of making these obscene accounts known throughout the country, and indeed the whole world?

I lay awake long and late that Friday night, musing and meditating on many stories of the Bible. Why were they recorded? What was the purpose for including these narratives, especially such embarrassing tales as that of King David, the monarch with multiple wives, who sexually seduced the stunning spouse of one of his most admired military men, who “conveniently” happened

¹Throughout this document, the names of living SDA authors whose works I evaluate have been intentionally omitted. This has been done to help the reader focus on the perspectives being addressed, rather than on the proponents of these views. In other words, since scholarship requires it, specific references have been provided; however, the authors’ names have purposely been excluded so all vital concepts can be seriously considered without the reader being distracted by the personalities who promulgate these views.

²This document became the basis on which the United States House of Representatives voted on the 19th of December 1998, to impeach the president, the first time ever that an elected president has been impeached in the United States of America.

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to be away on official business? And what about Abraham, the “father of the faithful,” shading the facts so as to save his own skin? Or Samson, the Scripture’s superman, the politician who propositioned a prostitute? Or Rahab, a heathen harlot, who fabricated a string of falsehoods when concealing Israelite spies?

As I have, over the years, read and studied both the published and unpublished materials produced by Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), I have become increasingly aware of some of the rather novel ways in which Bible narratives have been and are being interpreted. Though more subtle and less obvious than other current “hot potatoes” in the Adventist community, I believe that several of these procedures for understanding and applying Scripture stories³ are having a pernicious yet profound impact on our perception of ethical issues which will invariably influence the practice of morality in our personal lives.

Allow me to illustrate: In November 1998, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a long-distance call from a good friend of mine, a former student missionary who had been my roommate 20 years earlier. For an hour I listened as he told me about his personal perusal of the Scriptures, his investigation of stories of the marital practices of God-fearing men, and his conclusion that polygamy is permissible for a committed Christian. In fact, in subsequent e-mail communication, he has proposed that it might be “the moral duty of a godly man” to “take the responsibility of husbanding” and “providing for more than one wife.”⁴ Now, he has made it plain to me that, while he is not proposing that one should take any woman already married, one of his major concerns is the need to provide a direct father-figure and husband for the many less-than-ideal single-mother homes which exist today. In fact, he writes: “What if God has in mind, as a hitherto unrecognized part of the last days Elijah message,” a “resurgence of men” who “are willing to shoulder the responsibility of being husbands to more than one woman?”⁵

And, by the way, this is not an isolated incident among SDAs in the USA. Several years ago, while I was still researching and writing my project dissertation on polygamy in the Bible, someone from the General Conference of SDAs contacted me with a request to assist with a “problem” they were having with a person, who turned out to be an academy teacher, who had produced a lengthy document in which he concluded that plural marriage is a fully acceptable practice for contemporary Christians. In our subsequent communication this man indicated that he believed that this teaching was actually part of “present truth” for Adventists.

³In this article, the terms “story,” “narrative,” “chronicle,” etc., are used interchangeably. It is significant that the titles of three of Ellen White’s prominent books all start with the phrase “the story of”: *The Story of Redemption*, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets*, and *The Story of Prophets and Kings*.

⁴Personal e-mail received 3 November 1998.

⁵Personal e-mail received 2 November 1998.

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This issue of novel interpretations of Scripture stories is not confined simply to the manner in which people have dealt with the accounts of polygamy in the Bible, even though examples of plural marriage seem to be frequently utilized.⁶ On the contrary, it appears that numerous biblical narratives are now being retold in radical ways.⁷ Meticulous analysis of these materials reveals some significant trends. While critiquing some of these reinterpreted chronicles, I will briefly outline these strategies, together with their concomitant ethical ramifications. Since it is now being recognized that “stories are a key means by which scripture communicates,”⁸ I will present alternative Scripture-based principles which should provide a dependable, coherent interpretation for a practical application of biblical narratives.

Basic Biblical Presuppositions

Before proceeding with this task, however, one vital methodological matter needs urgent attention, and that is, to demonstrate that the Bible itself does furnish distinct strategies for reliably understanding and appropriately applying its narrative portions. Note this well-worded biblical concept: “No serious interpreter of the Bible can fail to recognize the significance of the principles by which the NT writers interpreted the OT. Although the principles are seldom explicitly stated, they can be derived by careful analysis.”⁹ Admittedly, even though an attempt has been made to “safeguard the importance of objectivity in

⁶See, for example, “A Christian Consideration of Polygamy” (D.Min. project report, Andrews U, 1981); “The Adventist Church’s Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa” (D.Min. project report, Andrews U, 1979); “Between the Ideal and the Actual,” *Adventist Review*, 29 May 1986, 4-5; *Marriage, Divorce, and . . .* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1987); “How Melanesia Shaped My Hermeneutics and Theology: Some Personal Reflections,” in *Avondale and the South Pacific: 100 Years of Mission* (Cooranbong, NSW, Australia: Avondale Academic P, 1997), 93-105.

⁷See, for example, the following materials in which narratives have been utilized, evidently in an attempt to prove or establish specific ethical theories or lifestyle standards: “It’s a Sin to Tell a Lie,” *Insight*, 24 November 1981, 5-8; “In Defense of Rahab,” *Adventist Review*, December 1997, 24-26; “Rahab Revisited,” *Adventist Review*, March 1998, 5; “When the Truth Is a Lie,” in *Lyrics of Love: God’s Top Ten* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988), 79-86; *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991); *Samuel: From the Danger of Chaos to the Danger of Power*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995).

⁸John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 71.

⁹“Inspired Writers’ Interpretation of Inspired Writings,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 128. Several times in the New Testament, narratives from the Old Testament are told; see, for example, Acts 7; 13; Heb 11-13; 2 Pet 2; Jude. Furthermore, the proper method of interpreting inspired narratives was already evident in Old Testament times; see, for example, Deut 9; 10; Neh 9; Isa 7; Hos 12.

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interpretation,”¹⁰ there is no doubt that “different people can come to different legitimate interpretations of a story.”¹¹ Nevertheless, as this research will demonstrate, “there are limits to what can [authentically] be read out of a story.”¹²

Two of the most prominent New Testament passages that undergird the above declaration regarding the derivation of interpretational principles are found in the writings of the apostle Paul. Romans 15:4, which states that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning,”¹³ indicates that the moral truths of the Old Testament are of permanent value.¹⁴ The same basic truth is reiterated in 1 Corinthians 10:11, the first part of which reads: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition.” Based on this passage, some have claimed that the manner in which Old Testament people lived provides us with “God-approved examples of how He wants us to behave in similar moral conflicts.”¹⁵ Thus, it is concluded that stories such as those of Rahab and of the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah have been included in the Bible so that believers will know what to do under comparable circumstances. In other words, it is specifically argued that these stories demonstrate that lying to save life is not only perfectly legitimate but actually the morally right thing to do, without any need for repentance or forgiveness, since this kind of lying is purportedly not considered a sin by God.¹⁶

But is this what the Bible is really saying in 1 Corinthians 10:11? This verse is, in effect, the summary of the preceding passage, in which Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, “Now these things became our examples, *to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*” (1 Cor 10:6; emphasis added). Then Paul enumerates some of these evils, such as idolatry and sexual immorality (1 Cor 10:7, 8), together with some of the judgments meted out by God (1 Cor 10:8-10). Thus, rather than merely blindly following Scripture stories, the immediate and broader contexts need to be taken into account in order to distinguish between what the Bible actually teaches and what it simply

¹⁰*Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, 51. Goldingay indicates that the following factors help to explain the reasons for these divergent interpretations: the openness, ambiguity, and complexity of the texts, as well as the fact that there could be many applications of a story; *ibid.*, 51-53.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references in this document will be from the New King James Version (NKJV).

¹⁴“Inspired Writers’ Interpretation of Inspired Writings,” 129.

¹⁵Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 417.

¹⁶See *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective*, 425; Norman L. Geisler, *The Christian Ethic of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 75; Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 136; Norman L. Geisler, “In Defense of Hierarchical Ethics,” *Trinity Journal* 4 (September 1975): 87. For a comprehensive response to these theories see my “A Critical Study of Norman L. Geisler’s Ethical Hierarchicalism” (Th.D. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1997), available at the James White Library, Andrews U, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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reports so as to portray how far God's people drifted from Him and His holy law.¹⁷ In other words, there *are examples* in Scripture that we should *not follow*. Therefore, far from suggesting that the actions of Bible characters should be uncritically emulated, 1 Corinthians 10:11 is a summons to all believers to "avoid the evils recorded and imitate only the righteousness of those who served the Lord."¹⁸

Recognizing the dangers of simplistically imitating Scripture stories, the following two biblically sound cautions have been suggested:

- (1) Commendation of a person or notable action need not imply commendation of every element of the men and women cited.
- (2) Reporting or narrating an event in Scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative for emulation by all subsequent readers.¹⁹

Hence, each narrative needs to be analyzed with regard to literary progression, dramatic structure, and stylistic features.

"Though their communication is indirect, narratives nevertheless speak God's truth powerfully when they are *properly interpreted*."²⁰ In brief then, a contextual reading of Scripture shows that "the NT writers saw in the OT a precious storehouse of materials for moral instruction in Christian living."²¹

However, it is not only the Old Testament that provides information and inspiration for moral transformation. The well-known passage in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 indicates that "*all Scripture is given by God and is useful*" for "showing people what is wrong in their lives," and "for teaching how to live right" (NCV; emphasis added).²² Indeed, John the Beloved tells us the very reason he recorded the "story" of Jesus was so that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). This is ultimately the central purpose of all of the Bible, including the narrative portions—to point to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, as well as the Lord of all life; One who not only reclaims and redeems from sin (John 1:29), but One

¹⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 283.

¹⁸Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:12.

¹⁹*Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 283.

²⁰William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., with Kermit A. Eckleberger, consulting editor, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1993), 261 (emphasis added). These authors state that narratives are the most common type of literature in the Bible, the most familiar forms being: reports (anecdotes, battle reports, construction reports, dream reports, epiphany reports, historical stories, and memoirs); heroic narratives (cosmic epics and ancestral epics); prophet stories; comedies; and farewell speeches; *ibid.*, 261-271.

²¹"Inspired Writers' Interpretation of Inspired Writings," 139.

²²When Paul uses the term "Scripture" we know that he includes both Old and New Testament material, since this is the way he uses the term in his earlier letter to Timothy; see 1 Timothy 5:18, where he quotes from both Deuteronomy 25:4 (the Old Testament), and Luke 10:7 (the New Testament).

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who also reforms and transforms the sinner (2 Cor 5:17). Thus, only when the stories of Scripture are seen as focusing on the Savior can they be appropriately understood and correctly applied.

One more component of these chronicles needs to be highlighted: the irrefutable fact that “biblical narrative is replete with realistic figures seen in all their human frailty.”²³ For example:

Literary scholars have long noted the amazing transparency of biblical portraits. Samson’s carnality, David’s lust, Solomon’s political and religious compromise or Elijah’s cowardice in running from Jezebel are all presented with remarkable forthrightness. . . . There was no attempt to hide the human frailty of biblical heroes.²⁴

While it is true that characters such as Elisha and Daniel model perseverance and faithfulness in the face of tremendous pressure,²⁵ “God, not the biblical heroes, is magnified throughout.”²⁶ This adoration is nowhere better exhibited than in the book of Judges. “Every victory wrought is a triumph of God and of the faith of those who place their trust in Him.”²⁷ Thus, rightly understood, Bible stories are to bring praise and honor to the God of the universe.

Six Interpretational Strategies

Now that we have established and highlighted vital fundamental truths of Scripture, we can proceed to catalog the kinds of problematic procedures utilized by some in their explication of biblical narratives, as well as to recommend an alternative methodology which is scripturally sound.

A. Contradictory Reinterpretations or Consistent Renderings. An eloquent and compelling article was recently published concerning the subject of deception. Attempting to prove that “the Old Testament is saturated with examples of [allegedly appropriate deceptive] undercover activities in the accomplishment of the divine purpose,”²⁸ it states:

Jochebed’s strategy to protect the baby Moses might be cited as a case in point. One can argue that every day the lad was kept concealed, Jochebed lived a lie as she went about her regular duties in the community. For, in effect, she was representing herself as standing in compliance with the Egyptian edict when, in fact, she was not.²⁹

²³Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 159.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 267.

²⁶*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 160.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸“In Defense of Rahab,” 25.

²⁹*Ibid.*

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A simple reading of the actual narrative in the Bible, one which is consistent with the record itself, quickly dispels the unsubstantiated assumptions advanced in the above assertion. Exodus 1:22 notes that after the failure of his plans to exterminate the Israelites, both through brutal taskmasters and God-fearing midwives, “Pharaoh commanded all his people,”³⁰ i.e., “the whole nation”³¹ of Egyptians,³² to drown every newborn Israelite boy in the Nile river. Thus, when it is rightly recognized that the command was given specifically to the Egyptians and not to any Israelites, it becomes obvious that the characterization of Jochebed as one who “lived a lie”³³ clearly contradicts the Word of God, which indicates that she was not violating any command at all. Incidentally, there is nothing innately immoral in the simple act of hiding. This can be observed from a consideration of the various times when Jesus Christ, our sinless Savior, and one in whom there is no “deceit” (1 Peter 2:22), concealed Himself. This includes an occasion when His life was at stake (John 8:59), as well as when He simply wanted to hide away in a house in order to rest and recuperate (Mark 6:30-7:24).³⁴ Since there does not appear to be a shred of evidence that Jochebed, this devout mother in Israel, was involved in any deceptive activity in protecting Moses’ life, it would be unfair and illogical to suggest that this case study supports the hypothesis that it is justifiable to utilize deception “in the accomplishment of the divine purpose.”³⁵ This is especially true in light of Jeremiah’s statement: “Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully” (Jer 48:10a).³⁶ While the above-mentioned imaginative, but erroneous, reinterpretation emerges as *contradictory* to the inspired record, the facts that are *consistent* with the biblical narrative exonerate Jochebed and show how God worked through her to attain His divine plan.³⁷ This narrative, rather than offering an excuse to deceive when under distress, inspires us to discover discrete, yet ethically appropriate, ways of obeying God’s absolute moral norms even while living in a hostile environment.³⁸

³⁰Emphasis added.

³¹Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 242.

³²J. Cheryl Exum, “‘You Shall Let Every Daughter Live’: A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10,” *Se-meia* 28 (1983): 75, concurs, noting that “‘all his people,’ v. 22, appears to mean only the Egyptians.”

³³“In Defense of Rahab,” 25.

³⁴See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 399.

³⁵“In Defense of Rahab,” 25.

³⁶The second part of this verse must be understood in light of the fact that at that time Israel was a theocracy, under the command of God, the Creator of all life.

³⁷This is the kind of thing that happened in the early Christian church: “God used Paul to do powerful special works” (Acts 19:11 NLV).

³⁸Commenting on the parables told by Jesus, it has been observed that “He told true-to-life stories to make clear to His hearers the true meaning of life,” with the primary purpose of getting “a commitment from His hearers to a new life experience;” “Interpretation of Symbols, Types, Allego-

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Another illustration of discrepant renderings of the biblical record can be seen in the writings that promote the propriety of practicing polygamy under certain circumstances. For example, completely misreading the genealogical listings, it is asserted that the God-fearing Lamech, “the father of Noah, had two wives (Gen 4:19).”³⁹ Then, further misrepresenting the scriptural data, it is claimed that “Abraham had a principal wife Sarah and two lesser wives (Gen 16:3; 25:1).”⁴⁰ Based on life histories as reinterpreted here, it is then concluded that “polygamy was accepted as a legal form of marriage by most of the Old Testament writers.”⁴¹ A quick look at the Bible itself, including the specific references provided in these statements, reveals that the above information *contradicts* the plain facts on record. For example, Genesis 4:16-19 indicates that the man named “Lamech,” the world’s first polygamist, was a descendant of Cain, and not the father of Noah in the godly line of Seth, as claimed above. Also, contrary to the charge that Abraham had three wives at the same time, the Genesis account indicates that, at God’s instruction, he terminated his relationship with Hagar (Gen 21:12), and then married Keturah only subsequent to the death of Sarah (Gen 23:1, 2; cf. 25:1). Thus, when this narrative of Abraham is interpreted in a manner *consistent* with the inspired account, it becomes obvious that the above allegation, that Abraham had a “principal wife” and “two lesser wives” simultaneously, cannot be corroborated by the Scriptures.

Adventists are not unique in this kind of narrative manipulation. Consider for a moment the perspective of a prolific evangelical who holds that it is morally right to violate one of the Ten Commandments as long as in so doing one keeps a so-called “higher law.”⁴² As part of the vindication for this view, the following statement is made: “David and his men who *broke* into the temple and *stole* the consecrated bread were declared guiltless by Christ (Matt. 12:3-4).”⁴³ Then, based on this comment, the following moral tenet is suggested: “Perhaps ‘stealing’ bread from the temple (that is, taking it without permission of the proper authority) is not morally wrong when starvation of God’s servant is the other alternative.”⁴⁴ The original story, found in 1 Samuel 21, illuminates the brief comment made by Jesus in the New Testament. David had been fleeing for his

ries, and Parables,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 219.

³⁹“The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 1981, TMs [photocopy], p. 24, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews U, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 24-25.

⁴²Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 119.

⁴³*Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*, 120 (emphasis added). See also, *ibid.*, 109; Norman L. Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 78-79, 88; Norman L. Geisler, “Conflicting Absolutism,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Philosophical Society* 2 (1979): 6.

⁴⁴*Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*, 107.

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life from Saul when he arrived at Nob. Hungry, he asked the priest, Ahimelech, for some food. Even though the only available food was the consecrated bread that was to be eaten by the priests exclusively, David requested this bread for himself and his men. Ahimelech, after receiving guidance from God (1 Sam 22:10), decided to give them the bread because they were ceremonially clean.

In the entire story, as recorded in both Old and New Testaments, there is no indication that David “broke into the temple,” as has been alleged. Rather, as Jesus says, “he entered the house of God” (Matt 12:4). Moreover, *consistent* with the biblical account, there is no evidence that David “stole the consecrated bread,” as charged above. Instead, he was given the bread by the priest who had consulted God on the matter. Clearly, only by flatly *contradicting* the scriptural account can David be inaccurately cast in the role of one who “broke” into God’s temple to “steal” food in order to survive. Accordingly, this inaccurately rendered incident cannot rightly be used to sustain the unbiblical theory that certain moral laws can be broken without any moral culpability. Incidentally, this matter of who was allowed to eat the consecrated bread was not a moral, but merely a ceremonial law, which was “overturned by Christ showing it is not absolute in application.”⁴⁵ As has been recognized: “In the instance of David and his men, a ritualistic law was being violated for the sake of maintaining human life. These laws of the cultus obviously were temporal in nature.”⁴⁶ Thus, when this chronicle of the consumption of the consecrated bread is comprehended in a manner *consistent* with the complete scriptural account, it becomes clear that “this incident cannot be used to show that Christ approved of breaking Old Testament [moral] laws because of expediency.”⁴⁷ Hence, this incident serves to reinforce the concept that, while ceremonial regulations were of limited scope and restricted duration, God’s moral laws are eternal, immutable, and applicable in all situations.

B. Conjectural Interpretation or Contextual Implications. One of the more perilous strategies employed by some in the retelling of stories, especially of brief narratives that seem to omit some details,⁴⁸ is the method of conjectural interpretation. Take, for example, the “frightful and delightful”⁴⁹ account of Elisha and the Syrian army (2 Kgs 6:8-20). Speculating that the prophet must

⁴⁵Chris Brown, “A Brief Analysis of Geisler’s Hierarchical Proof Texts,” 1985, TMs [photocopy], p. 15, Center for Research and Scholarship, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

⁴⁶O. Palmer Robertson, “Reflections on the New Testament Testimony Concerning Civil Disobedience,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (September 1990): 334. For biblical evidence of this, see for example, Col 2:14-17.

⁴⁷Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Morality Gap: An Evangelical Response to Situation Ethics* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), 77.

⁴⁸It has been noted that in all narratives there “are the gaps, the things left unsaid,” for “one never receives a step by step, sequential presentation of everything;” Terrance O. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1985), 102-103.

⁴⁹“When the Truth Is a Lie,” 84.

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surely have known that the enemy were out to capture him, it has been alleged that Elisha misled the troops. Based on such *conjecturing* it is then submitted that this is one of the “incidents that illustrate how God’s people understood the limits and proper application of the ninth commandment.”⁵⁰ Put plainly, it is posited that this Scripture story teaches that it is not only legitimate to lie to save life, but that this is what it means to live ethically in God’s kingdom.⁵¹

Others too have charged that “Elisha deceived his would-be captors in order to save his life,”⁵² and that this narrative proves that there is “divine approval of falsification for life-saving.”⁵³ While on the surface it might appear that Elisha was involved in deception, the question must be asked as to what can be learned from the actual text and surrounding context. In brief, the narrative is about an attempt by the Syrians to kill the king of Israel. Their efforts failed when God informed Elisha, who then warned the Israelite king. When the Syrians discovered the reason for their failure, they changed their plans and set out to capture Elisha. Though the reader of the Bible story obviously knows about this new development, there is no evidence that Elisha himself was aware of this. Thus, fearless of the foe, and with confidence in his Creator’s protection, Elisha asked God to temporarily blind these military forces. Then, still apparently under the impression that these Syrians wanted the Israelite king as previously, Elisha took them as captives to the capital, presented them to the king, and treated them with incredible hospitality. If the story is interpreted on the weight of internal evidence, Elisha stands out in this incident as a man of truthfulness; as one who operated non-deceptively within the limits and boundaries of the information at his disposal. There is no proof at all that Elisha deceived his foes in order to save his own life.⁵⁴ Rather, this chronicle teaches that Elisha believed in loving

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 83-86.

⁵² *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective*, 417. See also Richard Higginson, *Dilemmas: A Christian Approach to Moral Decision Making* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1988), 64.

⁵³ *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective*, 417.

⁵⁴ In fact, when one studies the entire story and realizes how close to God Elisha was and how much he trusted in His divine power and protection, it seems rather unreasonable to assume that Elisha knew the enemy was after him and that therefore he stooped to using deception to protect himself. However, if one insists on assuming that Elisha did know that the Syrian king was now after him, and that he therefore actually did lie, this still does not “prove” that deception is acceptable to God. What it would show is that, even after God had provided superior supernatural forces to protect him, and after God had miraculously blinded the enemy, Elisha’s faith somehow faltered when facing a blinded and essentially conquered foe. Obviously this does not make much sense at all. But, if this is what happened, it must be remembered that no human being is to be held up as an example. The only example to be unquestioningly followed is Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:21). Other biblical characters are to be emulated only as they imitated Jesus, and acted in faithfulness and loving loyalty to God’s clearly revealed will in Scripture. As Paul states: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1 NCV). For those who contend that we do not know whether or not Elisha knew that the Syrians were now after him, the most that can then be concluded from this incident is nothing about truth-telling or deception, but rather that kindness is more powerful than the sword.

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and doing good to his enemies (see Luke 6:27, 28). Solomon put it this way: “If the one who hates you is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him water. If you do that, you will be making him more ashamed of himself, and the Lord will pay you” (Prov 25:21, 22 NLV). And this is the lesson for us as well: To treat those who hate us with kindness and love.

Another example of this type of speculative interpretation appears in an article dealing with evangelizing polygamous peoples. Without any supportive scriptural evidence, it is *conjectured* that in the Bible the levirate custom “was a major cause of polygamy.” It is alleged that the biblical “levirate is a binding obligation,” which makes polygamy “inevitable.”⁵⁵ Based on this unprovable postulation, it is then categorically concluded that the Old Testament levirate law “was one of the two major foundation pillars of polygamy.”⁵⁶

Admittedly, there are few examples in Scripture of the custom outlined in Deuteronomy 25:5-10,⁵⁷ in which the dead man’s brother or nearest relative actually marries his widow. Careful *contextual* analysis of this actual legislation indicates that the levirate was established as a regular marriage, for the purpose of raising up a male heir to perpetuate the lineage of the childless, deceased man. According to the implication of the text, this optional custom was to be practiced only if the brother were not already married, thus excluding the possibility of coercing anyone into polygamy. Furthermore, an examination of every case of the practice of the levirate in its immediate and broader *contexts* in Scripture,⁵⁸ demonstrates that there is no proof whatsoever that this convention ever caused or resulted in polygamy.⁵⁹ As has been concisely stated: “The interpretation of a story thus emerges from the story itself.”⁶⁰ Thus, while *conjectured* assumptions about the levirate practice may appear to promote polygamy, a proper *contextual* approach to biblical accounts indicates that this divine regulation “harmonized well with the model of monogamous marriage as instituted by God at creation.”⁶¹

As an additional attempt to bolster this argument of accepting practicing polygamists into the church, suppositions connected with Elkanah’s marital practice have been indulged in. After hypothesizing that Elkanah was “apparently an ordinary peasant farmer,” it is then contended that “it can be inferred from this story that most ordinary households in Israel were probably monoga-

⁵⁵“Must Polygamists Divorce?” *Spectrum* 13 (September 1982): 47.

⁵⁶“The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 28.

⁵⁷See my *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1998), 97-112.

⁵⁸See Gen 38; Ruth 1-4; Matt 22:23-38 (cf. Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-33).

⁵⁹See my “Does Levirate Law Promote Polygamy?” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology/Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 271-289.

⁶⁰*Models for Interpretation of Scripture*, 22.

⁶¹“Does Levirate Law Promote Polygamy?” 284.

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mous but that quite a few may have been bigamous or even polygamous.”⁶² Based on this *conjecture*, among other factors, it is presumptuously concluded that “polygamy was clearly accepted as a valid form of marriage.”⁶³ The *context* of the biblical narrative suggests that, in contrast to the above speculation, Elkanah was not simply one of the common people.⁶⁴ When his son, Samuel, had been weaned, he was taken to be dedicated to serve in the house of the Lord. Part of the sacrifice consisted of “three bulls” (1 Sam 1:24).⁶⁵ This “very expensive offering”⁶⁶ indicates that Elkanah had resources not generally available to a common Israelite.⁶⁷ In the words of Ellen White, Elkanah “was a man of wealth and influence.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, there might be some significance to the fact that, in the text immediately following the mention of Elkanah’s polygamy, the two sexually immoral priests, Hophni and Phinehas, are introduced (1 Sam 2:22). Recognizing that even the spiritual leaders of the Israelites were promiscuous, it comes as no surprise to learn that the wealthy and influential Elkanah chose to become polygamous in those days when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25b).⁶⁹ Ellen White observes that Elkanah’s choice of taking in a second wife was “prompted by a lack of faith in God,”⁷⁰ and was “a

⁶²The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 24.

⁶³Ibid., 27; see also, *ibid.*, 24-25.

⁶⁴According to 1 Chronicles 6:33-38 Elkanah was a Levite, though not of the Aaronic priestly line.

⁶⁵Compare this with the sacrifice the poor were permitted to bring, “two turtle-doves or two pigeons” (Lev 12:8), which is what the poverty-stricken parents of Jesus brought to the temple (see Luke 2:22-24).

⁶⁶Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 32.

⁶⁷David Michael Hall, “Polygamy in the Bible and the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study” (M.Th. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 30.

⁶⁸White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 569. Elkanah is included as one of the “wealthy individuals” who were polygamists, according to *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1986), s.v. “Polygamy.”

⁶⁹The existence of similarities between the books of Samuel and Judges is well recognized. “A reading of the Books of Samuel shows that they are the same type of literature as that found in the Book of Judges. The same motifs are to be found;” Eric Charles Rust, *The Book of Judges; The Book of Ruth; The First and Second Books of Samuel*, The Layman’s Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 77. See also Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), 2:448; James Conper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Cleveland, OH: F. M. Barton, 1903), 1:693; David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), 1; Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1899), xii. It has been rightly recognized that “the conditions reflected in the opening chapters of Samuel are those of the period of the Judges;” S. Goldman, *Samuel*, Soncino Books of the Bible Series (London, England: Soncino, 1951), x. Bearing in mind the similarities between these books, the final statement of the book of Judges (ch. 21:25b) is thus significant. Such was the environment in which Elkanah lived.

⁷⁰White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 569.

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course which God did not sanction.”⁷¹ Thus, when understood in its appropriate scriptural *context* the story of Elkanah’s violation of God’s monogamous marital standards fails to provide a positive model for the Christian to emulate. When correctly rendered, according to the actual biblical *contexts*, these examples of the practice of polygamy become a summons for all to live life in accord with the Creator’s monogamous marital norms.

This type of *conjecturing* in connection with biblical narratives surfaces in other ethical literature. As part of the attempt to prove that lying to save life is right, it is asserted: “No doubt Obadiah the prophet engaged in some deceptive activity to save the lives of one hundred prophets of God (1 Kings 18:13).”⁷² Thorough investigation of the entire biblical record indicates that there is no evidence whatsoever that Obadiah was involved in any “deceptive activity,” as has been alleged.⁷³ The passage, in light of its *context*, reports that during the time that Jezebel was murdering the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah “hid one hundred men of the Lord’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water.”⁷⁴ If one is to assume, as has been proposed above, that Obadiah doubtless engaged in some type of deception in order to protect the lives of these men, then one could also surmise that he most likely stole the bread and water for these innocent victims, since commodities were certainly in short supply during the famine. But all this groundless groping beyond the textual testimony is a reading into the account of one’s own suppositions, rather than accepting the passage just as it reads. This type of distorted eisegesis seems to be a desperate bid to find support for a non-scriptural theory. The chronicle itself reveals how God worked through the courageous efforts of a self-sacrificing servant to provide protection for His own prophets, and by implication it challenges all to be willing to selflessly support legitimate leaders in the Lord’s work (see 2 Chr 20:20; cf. Matt 5:12; 23:29-35).

By way of summary, while avoiding the construction of theories upon mere *conjecture*, the careful student of Scripture will take into account all *contextual implications* and relevant factors before drawing any conclusions.

C. Convoluted Descriptions or Conventional Definitions. Recently, a new trend seems to be emerging in the interpretation of Scripture stories: the construction of novel meanings for well-known terms. Consider for a few moments the following rationalistic reasoning in response to the question, “What should the Christian do, when telling the naked truth can result in the direct loss

⁷¹Ellen G. White, “The Birth of Samuel,” *Signs of the Times*, 27 October 1881, 469.

⁷²*The Christian Ethic of Love*, 79.

⁷³Moreover, there is no textual evidence that Obadiah was a “prophet,” as alleged. It appears as though Obadiah is referred to as a “prophet” in an attempt to further bolster the case about the supposed rightness of lying to save life.

⁷⁴1 Kgs 18:13. While the issue considered above is whether or not it is ever right to lie, it must be noted that Obadiah’s action can be seen as an act of biblically-justifiable civil disobedience (see, for example, Dan 1; 3; 6; cf. Acts 5:29).

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of innocent human life?”⁷⁵ First, the following subtly sarcastic statement is made: “If a lie is the simple utterance of an untruth, then the student who writes on a test paper that London is the capital of Japan is lying.”⁷⁶ Quickly crushing this creative caricature, it is alternatively proposed that, “Common sense would dictate that *intent* and *motive* must come into the equation.”⁷⁷ Finally, in place of the fraudulent formulation of a “lie” given above, the following concept is then promulgated: “To lie, as I see it, *is to make a false statement, with wicked or malicious or selfish intent to [impress,] deceive or mislead.*”⁷⁸

On the surface, this description might appear appropriate and even accurate. But careful consideration reveals at least the following three serious problems:

1. Contrary to the Biblical Definition. To begin with, let’s consider the Bible’s own definition of deception. There has been some debate as to the actual meaning of the ninth commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod 20:16). It has been stated that the language of this law “is clearly legal, forbidding malicious perjury.”⁷⁹ Consequently, it is concluded that “this commandment by itself, strictly interpreted, hardly constitutes a prohibition of any and every kind of deception.”⁸⁰ Accordingly, at times any type of deception has been promoted in order to preserve human life.⁸¹ While some

⁷⁵“In Defense of Rahab,” 26.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid. The word “impress” was added in a subsequent article, in which an attempt was made to clarify the position taken in the earlier article. See “Rahab Revisited,” 5. A similar emphasis on “motives” is seen in *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*, 130; and *Samuel: From the Danger of Chaos to the Danger of Power*, 200, 255 (in this latter passage it is claimed that “intention becomes crucial for a correct understanding and application of the command against bearing false testimony [Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20]”).

⁷⁹“The Ten Commandments and Ethical Dilemmas,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology/Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 269. That this is not necessarily so, is evident from the way in which the term is used in various passages (see, for example, 2 Kgs 9:12; Isa 9:15; Jer 14:14), to prohibit deception in general, and not merely in court. The Hebrew lexicon confirms that this word means “deception” in a more general sense; see *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1055.

⁸⁰“The Ten Commandments and Ethical Dilemmas,” 269. In basic agreement with the above concept, it has been stated: “The command against bearing false witness, when we ‘narrow the letter’ [i.e., ‘look rigorously at the letter of the law in its original context’], clearly refers to the telling of falsehoods with the *intent to injure* innocent people;” *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*, 117. After “broadening the spirit” to include the “heart,” the conclusion is drawn that “circumstances may arise when telling the truth . . . could mean disobeying the letter of God’s law;” *ibid.*, 118. This reasoning is understood as follows, in a supportive way: “Depending on the context, he [i.e., the author of *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*] considers that circumstances might arise where lying or killing would constitute obedience to God;” “A Practical Theological Perspective on Adventist Theology and Contextualisation,” *Journal of Adventist Thought in Africa* 1 (November 1995): 142.

⁸¹See “The Ten Commandments and Ethical Dilemmas,” 271.

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modern linguists may endorse and promote this restricted view of the so-called literal meaning of the ninth commandment,⁸² it is profoundly more significant to determine how the divinely inspired Bible writers themselves understood and interpreted this moral requirement.

While a superficial reading of Exodus 20:16 may admittedly appear to prohibit only lying in court, Leviticus 19 paints a much broader picture. Even a casual look at this levitical legislation reveals that virtually every one of the Ten Commandments is reiterated here, though in a different format.⁸³ Verse 11, which contains both the eighth and the ninth commandments, states: “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.” The Hebrew term used here, *kāḥaš*, is an expression found throughout Old Testament writings that encompasses and prohibits different types of deception, and is not simply restricted to legal issues.⁸⁴ Indeed, it has been recognized that “this text in Leviticus does prohibit ‘any form of lying or deception.’”⁸⁵ This is the identical word found in the charges of law-breaking brought against the people of Israel by Hosea, the mid-eighth century B.C. prophet. Hosea 4:2 notes that the Israelites were “lying (*kāḥaš*), killing and stealing and committing adultery.” The Hebrew terms employed here for “killing,” “stealing,” and “committing adultery,” are identical to the ones in the Ten Commandments. However, in connection with the ninth commandment, instead of using the supposedly limited expression found in the Decalogue, Hosea selected the word *kāḥaš*, which includes deception in general.⁸⁶ Thus, it becomes evident that the divinely-inspired Old Testament writers understood the ninth commandment as prohibiting perjury as well as all other kinds of deceit.

An analogous situation emerges from an overview of the manner in which New Testament writers perceived the meaning of this law. Perhaps best known of these references to the Decalogue are the statements made by Jesus. In His response to the rich young ruler’s question as to which commandments he needed to observe, Jesus said, in part: “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness’” (Matt

⁸²Not all agree on this restricted view; see, for example, Martin A. Klopfenstein, *Die Lüge Nach dem Alten Testament* (Zurich & Frankfurt: Gotthelf, 1964), 17, quoted in Ora Horn Prouser, “The Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative” (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1991), 24.

⁸³In brief, here is how the first nine of the ten commandments are outlined: The first, in vs. 2, 14; the second, in v. 4; the third, in v. 12; the fourth, in vs. 3, 30; the fifth, in v. 3; the sixth, in v. 16; the seventh, in vs. 20, 29; the eighth, in vs. 11, 13, 35; and the ninth, in v. 11.

⁸⁴See, for example, its use when people lie to other people: 1 Kings 13:18; Jeremiah 5:12; and when people try to deceive God: Genesis 18:15; Joshua 7:11.

⁸⁵T. Barr, “Women Who Lied for the Faith,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson* (USA: Scholars Press, 1989), 35.

⁸⁶Interestingly, when Jeremiah, the late seventh century B.C. prophet of Judah, similarly castigates God’s people for violating His laws, he uses all four of the same terms as found in the decalogue, including *šeqer*, the word for bearing false witness: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely?” (Jer 7:9a).

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19:18; cf. Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). The Greek expression, *pseudomartureō*, which the lexicon defines as to “bear false witness,” or to “give false testimony,”⁸⁷ is the term used for the ninth commandment, and it appears to approximate the same sense of the original Hebrew expression. This is the identical word used in Matthew 15:19, where Jesus comments: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Interestingly, when Mark records the same story in his gospel account (7:22), he utilizes a different Greek expression, *dolos*, one which includes deception of every shape and form.⁸⁸ A comparable example of the interchangeability of these two terms is seen in Paul’s writings. While he uses *pseudomartureō* in Romans 13:9, where he enumerates several of the commandments, in Romans 1:28-32 he uses *dolos* in a long catalog of vices. And it is this expression which is employed in 1 Peter 2:22 to describe an evil trait not found in our “example,” Jesus Christ: “Nor was deceit (*dolos*) found in His mouth.”⁸⁹ Thus, similar to their Old Testament counterparts, New Testament writers viewed the ninth commandment as including more than merely a prohibition against perjury in a legal setting.

Furthermore, examination of the ninth commandment, in its original setting in Exodus as well as in its multiple occurrences throughout Scripture,⁹⁰ reveals that this ethical obligation is always stated in a categorical manner, without any exceptions, exemptions, or reservations: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod 20:16); “And do not lie to each other” (Col 3:9 NJB). None of the texts forbidding falsehood suggests that lying is justifiable or at least excusable depending on the predicament one might be in, or the motive for telling the lie. All of these passages simply prohibit deception without any qualification whatsoever! As succinctly summarized in a doctoral dissertation on deceivers in Scripture: “The motivation of the liar, positive or negative, is not relevant.”⁹¹

It seems quite significant, then, that under divine inspiration, Bible writers of both Testaments understood this moral law as forbidding all forms of falsehood, under all possible conditions, irrespective of projected consequences, and regardless of purportedly pure motives. Ellen White’s extensive explication of this ethical norm comports favorably with the scriptural definition delineated above. She comments:

⁸⁷William F. Arndt & F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1952), 900.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 202. Note the use of this term in this manner in Acts 13:10.

⁸⁹Since “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34), it is clear that not only did Jesus never speak a deceptive word, but He also never acted deceitfully either. Interestingly, this identical term, *dolos* (deception), is used in Revelation 14:5 to describe an evil trait completely absent from the redeemed ones who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”

⁹⁰See Exod 20:16; Deut 5:20; Matt 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom 13:9; cf. Matt 15:19.

⁹¹“The Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative,” 19.

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False speaking in any matter, every attempt or purpose to deceive our neighbor, is here included. An intention to deceive is what constitutes falsehood. By a glance of the eye, a motion of the hand, an expression of the countenance, a falsehood may be told as effectually as by words. All intentional overstatement, every hint or insinuation, even the statement of facts in such a manner so as to mislead, is falsehood.⁹² This precept forbids every effort to injure our neighbor's reputation by misrepresentation or evil surmising, by slander or tale-bearing.⁹³

As Ellen White astutely notes: "Truth is of God; deception in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan."⁹⁴ And, according to Ellen White, this includes lying to save life: "Even life itself should not be purchased with the price of falsehood."⁹⁵ Hence, instead of adopting a fallacious, humanly formulated view of falsehood, it would be prudent and the only safe course for the committed Christian to embrace the divinely designed definition of deception, for only in so doing will there be opportunity for an accurate understanding and an appropriate application of God's royal law of liberty (Jas 2:8-12).

2. *Conflict with the Dictionary Definition.* The novel concept that a "lie" is "a false statement, with wicked or malicious or selfish intent to [impress,] deceive or mislead,"⁹⁶ does not correspond with the conventional understanding of the word. A painstaking investigation of three major English dictionaries covering the last century, from 1897 through 1997,⁹⁷ reveals an amazing unanimity regarding the essence of words which address the issue of misleading someone. Whether it be "deceit," "deceive," "falsehood," "lie," or "prevaricate," the same basic idea emerges: It is a deliberate distortion of the truth, by word or deed, with the objective of misleading. Thus, there are two, and only two, essential elements in this dictionary definition relating to any kind of deception: (1) an action perverting the truth; and (2) an aim to purposely misinform. Significantly, for at least the past one hundred years, there has never been even the remotest

⁹²Consider, for example, the following anecdote of an automobile race held in the former Soviet Union. Only two cars participated—one made in the USA, the other in the USSR. The American car won. The next day the official press briefly reported: "Yesterday, there was a car race, in which a Russian car came in second, and an American car second to last." Now, while the facts were technically correct, they were told in such a way as to deceive.

⁹³White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 309.

⁹⁴Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 68 (emphasis added). Notice that Ellen White also holds to the biblical view of obedience regardless of circumstances, reasons, or results: "We should not follow impulse, nor rely on the judgment of men; we should look to the revealed will of God, and walk according to His definite commandment, no matter what circumstances surround us. God will take care of the results;" White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 622.

⁹⁵White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:336.

⁹⁶"In Defense of Rahab," 26.

⁹⁷See the *New Revised Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, 1897; the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged Edition*, 1966; and the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2d ed., 1997.

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hint that the idea of “motive” forms a part of the proper meaning of terms describing deception. Concurring, it has quite correctly been recognized that Christian behavior cannot really be judged “by motive (which is truly known only to God) or by end result (which can humanly never be foreseen with complete accuracy and completeness), but [only] by conformity to precepts that Christians believe came from God.”⁹⁸

Thus, rather than accepting the above *convoluted description* of a “lie,” which was apparently devised to justify some form of deception, it is best to utilize the *conventional definition*, which accords well with the true biblical meaning of these terms.

3. *Confusion of Other Moral Regulations.* The above phrase “with wicked or malicious or selfish intent” implies, by contrast, that a false statement, told with benevolent, altruistic, or compassionate motives, is not a lie, even though its purpose is to deceive or mislead. If any of the other Ten Commandments are modified in this manner, the results would be ludicrous and morally catastrophic. For example, the eighth commandment would then read: “Stealing is to take another person’s possessions, with wicked or malicious or selfish intent, without their permission;” meaning, by contrast, that you may swipe someone’s goods, as long as it is done with noble intentions! Or consider a similarly revised seventh commandment: “Adultery is when one is motivated by wicked or malicious or selfish desires to have sex outside of marriage;” meaning that extramarital sex is justifiable, if done “lovingly,” “kindly,” or “magnanimously.” This is sometimes euphemistically labeled “sacrificial adultery.” Obviously, since the Decalogue simply calls for loving, loyal obedience to its absolute imperatives, irrespective of so-called virtuous motives, we need to observe them faithfully “even unto death” (Rev 2:10b KJV).

Frankly, there are several other instances of convoluted descriptions being used to dazzle and disorient people. For instance, apparently uncomfortable with using direct language to describe deception, various individuals have employed subtle, “user-friendly” phrases such as “a diversionary tactic,”⁹⁹ an “imaginative strategy,”¹⁰⁰ a “playful trick,”¹⁰¹ or “a very practical solution.”¹⁰² Whatever happened to the challenge to “call a spade a spade”? Ellen White charges us: “Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to *lying*, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil.”¹⁰³ Indeed, while there might be a tendency to euphemize expressions as a way of excusing actions,

⁹⁸“The Ten Commandments and Ethical Dilemmas,” 266.

⁹⁹“Letters,” *Adventist Review*, May 1998, 3.

¹⁰⁰“Rahab Revisited,” 5.

¹⁰¹“When the Truth Is a Lie,” 84.

¹⁰²“Letters,” *Adventist Review*, 11 September 1997, 3.

¹⁰³White, *The Desire of Ages*, 806 (emphasis added); see also Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 57.

“this is a time for Christians to stand tall for truth—in the midst of a forest of lies.”¹⁰⁴

In Colossians 2:8 (NIV) Paul cautions: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”¹⁰⁵ That’s the choice: “Human tradition” or “Christ.” In fact, in this same book, Paul stresses the vital necessity of a dynamic relationship with our Creator, Jesus Christ, as the key to the issue of truth-telling in any Christian’s life (see Col 3:9, 10).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, recognizing that “it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth,” Ellen White says that “we cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth.”¹⁰⁷ All of us must make a pivotal decision: Either we will choose to follow Satan, “the father of lies” (John 8:44 ICB), or we will elect to emulate Jesus Christ, who declares of Himself: “I am the truth” (John 14:6 ICB)!

D. Conflationary Reconstructions or Chronological Readings. Scholars who have carefully studied the Scriptures have rightly pointed out that biblical narratives are not complete stories, recording every detail. Rather, what we find in the Bible are “selective, emphasized, and interpreted accounts of historical events.”¹⁰⁸ For instance, John explicitly admits that his gospel does not include “many other things that Jesus did” (John 21:25). Nevertheless, he “indicates that the selective nature of his account did not impinge on its truthfulness.”¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, some have conflated various Scripture stories in such a manner that crucial information is distorted. Take the case history of David. Frequently, in the discussion on polygamy one hears the argument: “David had many wives; yet, the Bible records that he was a man after God’s own heart.”

According to 1 Samuel 13:8-14, it was immediately after Saul had presumptuously officiated as priest in offering up a burnt sacrifice at Gilgal that Samuel informed him that he would lose his kingdom. In this context Samuel stated: “The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14). This young shepherd David, selected by God to replace Saul, was handsome, healthy, and living in harmony with the will of God (1 Sam 16:7, 12). The narrative, when read chronologically, indicates that it was while David was yet an unmarried man, and before he became embroiled in polygamy, that God

¹⁰⁴“A Forest of Lies,” *Adventist Review*, 16 April 1998, 20.

¹⁰⁵Peter also sounds a caution about those who “will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Pet 2:3).

¹⁰⁶“And do not lie to each other. You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress toward true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:9, 10 NJB).

¹⁰⁷White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 68.

¹⁰⁸V. Philips Long, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 149. See also *ibid.*, 154, for more on the phenomenon of “omission” in narratives.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 149. See John 21:24.

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called him “a man after His own heart.” Concurring with the biblical data, Ellen White comments at length:

Skeptics have assailed [C]hristianity, and ridiculed the Bible, because David gave them occasion. They bring up to Christians the case of David, his sin in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba, his polygamy, and then assert that David is called a man after God’s own heart, and if the Bible record is correct, God justified David in his crimes.

I was shown that it was when David was pure, and walking in the counsel of God, that God called him a man after his own heart. When David departed from God, and stained his virtuous character by his crimes, he was no longer a man after God’s own heart.¹¹⁰

In other words, David was chosen by God as the next king of Israel when he was living within God’s will. It was clearly at this time, and not when David departed from following God’s moral requirements, and started indulging in polygamy and other sins, that God considered him “a man after His own heart.”¹¹¹

A similar conflation of scriptural data is evident in the manner in which Acts 15 has been used in connection with the issue of women’s ordination.¹¹² In an otherwise excellent presentation on the importance of unity in the church, the crucial fact that the Jerusalem Council decision was founded upon a solid biblical rationale, rather than merely cultural considerations, has been omitted.¹¹³

¹¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864; reprint, Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 4a:87. See also Lewis Grout, *A Reply to Bishop Colenso’s Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Cases of Polygamy as Found Already Existing in Converts from Heathenism* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: May & Davis, 1855), 11.

¹¹¹A similar caution needs to be sounded about the use of other passages of Scripture. Some may point out that 1 Kings 15:5 says that, “except in the case of Uriah,” David “did what was right in the sight of the Lord.” This seems to imply that his polygamy was accepted by God. However, this verse also overlooks David’s sin of numbering Israel, which cost the lives of 70,000 men (1 Chr 21:1-27). As one writer noted concerning this text and 2 Chronicles 24:2: “The phrase, therefore, means only, that their conduct was generally acceptable to God; but furnishes no evidence of the lawfulness of any one specific act;” Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Hebrew Wife: Or, the Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836), 28. Interestingly, 1 Kings 14:8 says that David did “only that which was right,” completely ignoring any of his sins. The context of these passages reveals that these statements were made in order to contrast David with Jeroboam, who led the Israelites into idolatry (see 1 Kgs 12:26-33). Moreover, generalized eulogistic statements must not be taken as fully explaining the whole life of a Bible character. See Samuel Ellis Wishard, *The Divine Law of Marriage, Or, The Bible Against Polygamy* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 36-39.

¹¹²Incidentally, I am not personally opposed to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry if the arguments for this practice can be shown to be based upon sound biblical principles. But I am concerned about the misuse of scriptural materials to prove this or any other issue.

¹¹³See “United in His Salvation,” *Adventist Review*, 3 July 1995, 5-7. While it is not readily apparent, merely from the reading of this article, what the real thrust of this presentation was, an awareness of the significance of women’s ordination at the 1995 General Conference session, an understanding of the strategy of the North American Division to obtain permission to ordain women

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When all the complete chronological information is considered, it becomes clear that this passage cannot rightly be used to promote or prohibit the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. Instead, just like the early church, we need to utilize reliable principles of biblical interpretation to address this matter, as well as any other contemporary issues not directly mentioned in Scripture.

E. Conspiracy Theories or Character Themes. Not only does the story of King David occupy a pivotal place in the corpus of Scripture, but, as already observed above, it appears to be one that has often been reinterpreted in a variety of ways. For instance, arguing that “God was not in the business of breaking up polygamous marriages,”¹¹⁴ it has been asserted that it was actually God Himself who was responsible for David’s multiple wives.¹¹⁵ This claim is based on the prophet Nathan’s words to David in 2 Samuel 12:7, 8:

“Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘I appointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.
‘I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!’”

Based on this passage, others have similarly claimed that “the Lord had given David the wives of Saul,”¹¹⁶ and that the Bible speaks of David’s “polygamy as sanctioned by God.”¹¹⁷ This type of conspiracy theory, in which God is blamed for the questionable actions of Bible characters, is becoming more and more prevalent among Christians. Admittedly, on the surface, the above passage does appear to say that God was responsible for David’s plural marriages. However, when studied in its direct and wider contexts such a conclusion proves to be untenable.

First, it must be recognized that Scripture sometimes uses “active” terms to express that which God merely allows to happen. A clear illustration of this appears during the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, where it is said that “the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Exod 9:12; cf. 4:21; 7:3; 7:13; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). However, in the same story, the text also says that “Pharaoh hardened his [own] heart” (Exod 8:32; cf. 8:15; 9:34), and simply that “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened” (Exod 7:22; cf. 7:14; 8:19; 9:12, 35). From an examination of passages such as these, careful Bible students have rightly realized that, since God is ultimately in control of the universe, the Scriptures

in its own division, together with a personal knowledge of the writer’s own convictions, make it plain that this approach to Acts 15 was aimed at promoting the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

¹¹⁴“How Melanesia Shaped My Hermeneutics and Theology: Some Personal Reflections,” 99.

¹¹⁵Ibid. This is the same view espoused by my former roommate, mentioned at the start of this article.

¹¹⁶“Polygamy in the Bible, and the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study,” 32.

¹¹⁷Trygvve Kronholm, “Polygami och Monogami i Gamla Testamentet: Med en Utblick over den Antika Judendomen och Nya Testamentet,” *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 47 (1982): 60.

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sometimes ascribe to God the choices made and actions taken by human beings. However, recognizing that human beings have been created as free moral agents (see, for example, Gen 2:15-17; cf. Deut 30:19; Josh 24:15; 1 Kgs 18:21), it has been rightly concluded that Pharaoh, of his own free will, chose to harden his heart against God's directions.

A serious investigation of the 2 Samuel 12 passage indicates that a similar utilization of language occurs here, this time with the word "gave" or "give." Part of the judgment from God stated: ""I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor"" (2 Sam 12:11). Since it is clear that this prophecy was fulfilled when David's son Absalom had sexual relations with his father's wives (2 Sam 21, 22),¹¹⁸ it is obvious that the term "give" does not here indicate that God prompted these acts of wickedness.¹¹⁹ Rather, since Absalom's was clearly an incestuous act according to Leviticus 18:8, the word "give" must be understood here as the permissive will of God. When it is remembered that God originally established monogamous, heterosexual marriage as the standard for all humanity (Gen 1:27, 28; 2:21-24), and that He prohibited the practice of polygamy (eg., Lev 18:18 YLT; Deut 17:17),¹²⁰ it becomes plain that He would not have violated these norms by actually "giving" David these wives. David, following the custom of the kings of other nations, personally chose to take as many wives as he wanted, since he had the freedom of choice. As a result, God displayed His "displeasure at David's having a plurality of wives by visiting him with judgments, and permitting evils to rise up against him from his own house."¹²¹

In short, a careful study of the passage, together with a correct understanding of the character of a God who tempts no one (Jas 1:13), indicates that when these verses are examined in context,¹²² it becomes clear that it is inaccurate and even blasphemous to blame God for David's immoral choices.

A second example of an apparently God-endorsed controversial action is recorded in 1 Samuel 16:1-4a (NASB):

Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons."

¹¹⁸White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 739.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰See Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984): 199-214; Ron du Preez, "Does Leviticus 18:18 Deal with Incest or Polygamy?" *Journal of Adventist Thought in Africa* 3 (November 1997): 7-19. The NASB alternate rendering, more in accord with the original Hebrew, expresses Leviticus 18:18 as follows: "And you shall not take a wife in addition to another to be a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness."

¹²¹White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4a:87.

¹²²See, for example, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 190-192.

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But Samuel said, “How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’”

“And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you.”

So Samuel did what the Lord said.

The story of the anointing of David as the new Israelite king has quite frequently been discussed and debated in connection with the issues of truth-telling and deception. It is a pericope which does not appear to have an easy resolution. As has been challenged:

Don’t jump around this story—face it. Don’t charge “situation ethics”—this is Bible. Don’t suggest heathenism—this is God talking. Don’t cry “Old Testament” —the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New. Would we have the temerity to accuse God Himself of lying? What are we to make of this story?¹²³

While not directly accusing God of lying, this story is presented as an acceptable “practical” method of using deception to resolve the problem that Samuel faced. The statement made by God in verse 2 has been called “God’s command to Samuel to mislead Saul.”¹²⁴ Others have been more direct, labeling this as “clearly an authorized deception,”¹²⁵ or “at best a half-truth” which had “divine authorization.”¹²⁶ Is it true that “God guides people even in human intrigues,”¹²⁷ and that “Yahweh will lie, if necessary”?¹²⁸ In fact, in more contemporary language, God’s response to Samuel has been paraphrased as follows: “‘Good grief, man, lie a little. Tell them something to divert their attention.’”¹²⁹ What are we to make of this story?

The passage immediately preceding 1 Samuel 16 contains the sad record of how Saul “rejected the word of the Lord” (1 Sam 15:26), and of how God had subsequently “torn the kingdom of Israel” from him (1 Sam 15:28). Describing God as consistent and trustworthy, Samuel then says: “And also the Glory of Israel will not lie” (1 Sam 15:29a NASB). It is significant that this affirmation of the total truthfulness of God comes a mere seven verses before the problematic passage under consideration. Thus, it forms the proper contextual background

¹²³“Rahab Revisited,” 5. See also, “Letters,” *Adventist Review*, 11 September 1997, 3.

¹²⁴*Samuel: From the Danger of Chaos to the Danger of Power*, 159.

¹²⁵Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 121.

¹²⁶*Dilemmas: A Christian Approach to Moral Decision Making*, 64.

¹²⁷Gnana Robinson, *Let Us Be Like the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 95.

¹²⁸*First and Second Samuel*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 121.

¹²⁹Walter Brueggemann, *David’s Truth In Israel’s Imagination & Memory* (USA: Fortress, 1985), 26.

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for correctly interpreting what has been dubbed a “divinely directed deception.” Furthermore, the fact that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; cf. Heb 6:18) and does not deceive (Num 23:19) must be taken into account when dealing with the unchanging character (Mal 3:6) of the God whose “words are truth” (2 Sam 7:28).

One of the solutions proposed relates to the manner in which the first king had been anointed. According to 1 Samuel 9:22-10:1, Saul’s anointing had been done in secret by Samuel.¹³⁰ Likewise, since it was apparently not in the public interest that the anointing of the next king be known at once, God told Samuel to withhold this information from all except Jesse’s family. Moreover, it was customary for Samuel to offer sacrifices on his visits (see 1 Sam 9:11-14; cf. 11:14, 15).¹³¹ “The Lord therefore reminded Samuel of an accompanying (if secondary) reason for making the journey: to sacrifice a heifer.”¹³² Thus, though it is held that there is “explicit authorization of the Lord as to the method of concealment,”¹³³ it is maintained that “there was no untruth in what the Lord authorized.”¹³⁴

Further analysis of this chronicle has revealed a rather unusual, and auspiciously more satisfactory, solution to this perplexing passage. Is it possible that the first part of verse 2, which reads: “But Samuel said, ‘How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me’” (NASB), is actually an interruption by Samuel in the middle of God’s instructions? When one recognizes that Samuel was not averse to interrupting someone (see 1 Sam 15:15-17), and when one removes this apparent interjection, the entire set of divine directions forms a cohesive unit. This is precisely what Ellen White, under divine inspiration, has done:

“And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. . . . Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake.”¹³⁵

When the narrative is thus understood, after the removal of Samuel’s interruption, the list of instructions from God can be seen to naturally flow quite smoothly from one point to the next. In summary, when *character themes*, such

¹³⁰See *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:529.

¹³¹See Charles R. Wilson, *Wesleyan Bible Commentary, Joshua-Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 166; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:529.

¹³²Frank E. Gaebel, ed., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 3:683.

¹³³John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 140.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 637. The ellipsis noted above “. . .” is just as recorded in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 637, the only place Ellen White deals in depth with this story.

as the veracity and trustworthiness of God, are appropriately considered, the *conspiracy theory* that God fosters falsehood is shown to be both unbiblical and even sacrilegious.

F. Consequential Speculation or Commandment Substantiation. One final time we need to return to that persuasive article on the controversial case of Rahab, who lied while hiding two Israelite spies. In setting the framework for this story, note was made of the strategic importance of Jericho, a fortress city, which happened to be the first challenge the Israelites had to face as they prepared to enter Canaan. It was then alleged that “a failure here *would* spell psychological disaster for the invading forces. But a decisive victory *would* send shock waves throughout the entire area, unnerving less-protected leaders.”¹³⁶ Later on, expressing a similar concern for avoiding undesirable results, it was argued that, had Rahab remained silent when asked about the spies, such refusal to speak “*would* have been fatal to the spies, for it *would* have triggered an exhaustive search of the premises.”¹³⁷ Then it is contended: “On the other hand, to have disclosed the whereabouts of her visitors *would* have led to their certain imprisonment or death at an exceedingly critical time in Israel’s history.”¹³⁸ Accordingly, reasoning that these consequences had to be rigorously avoided, Rahab is applauded for her daring deception.¹³⁹

This type of consequential speculation is evident in the debate surrounding whether or not practicing polygamists should be baptized and permitted to continue their plural marriage as members of the Christian community. Arguing in favor of this, it has been claimed that “fatherless children, destitute women, prostitution and suicide”¹⁴⁰ have resulted from a church policy which requires the polygamist to become monogamous before baptism. Asserting that “in most of the existing tribal structures they [i.e., the women who have been set aside] would be left without any ties or protection whatsoever and in most cases delivered over to prostitution,”¹⁴¹ it has been proposed that “existing polygamous marriages may be allowed to continue when a person is baptized.”¹⁴²

¹³⁶“In Defense of Rahab,” 24 (emphasis added).

¹³⁷Ibid., 26 (emphasis added).

¹³⁸Ibid., (emphasis added).

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Joseph Adebisi Ola, “Polygamy and Seventh-day Adventists in West Nigeria,” 1978, TMs [photocopy], p. 1, Document File 2211, Ellen G. White Research Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

¹⁴¹Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 3, *Sex* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 181.

¹⁴²Ibid. Responding to this view, it has been stated: “You can’t preach against polygamy and at the same time accept polygamists into your midst. It is a contradiction. You can’t be for and against at the same time. Neither do I believe a temporary attitude of tolerance will lead to the disappearance of polygamy. Such a policy would, on the contrary, serve to perpetuate it. . . . The church can no longer make exceptions and special cases. If it does, Christians and non-Christians alike will be confused.” Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers, 1983), 74.

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While it is not possible to enter into a detailed investigation of the biblical view of polygamy in this study,¹⁴³ the important issue to note here is the manner in which the decision to baptize practicing polygamists is arrived at—essentially by means of what I have termed *consequential speculation*. To make it more relevant for American Adventists, consider a different marital matter that may all too soon confront the SDA Church in North America. In December 1997, in a landmark court case, Jon Holden and Michael Galluccio won a settlement giving homosexual couples in New Jersey the right to jointly adopt children, just like married couples.¹⁴⁴ If, similar to polygamists, this gay couple had gotten into their relationship ignorant of the SDA understanding of the Bible’s marital standards, should they upon conversion to Adventism be baptized as practicing homosexuals, so as to avoid the trauma of breaking up the family, or in order to prevent the discarded partner from suffering “cruel hardship”¹⁴⁵ and entering into a life of crime and misery?

That seems to be the problem with so many of us when confronted with perplexing ethical difficulties or life-or-death dilemmas—we attempt to project “what would happen if . . .”; and then we make decisions based on these *consequential speculations*. However, Jesus Christ plainly states: “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. . . . But be faithful, even if you have to die, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10 NCV). This identical principle is evident in Ellen White’s admonition, that “Christ’s ambassadors have nothing to do with consequences. They must perform their duty and leave results with God.”¹⁴⁶ How then should we make moral decisions? Essentially echoing Revelation 2:10, Ellen White reminds us: “In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God.”¹⁴⁷ *Consequences* or *commandments*, that is the question!

This was the choice that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, had to make. When faced with either the fiery furnace or forsaking their heavenly Father, they bravely, yet politely, informed Nebuchadnezzar: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king” (Dan 3:17 NIV). Then they added: “But even if He does not, . . . we are not going to serve your gods” (Dan 3:18 NIV). Commenting on such unswerving allegiance, Ellen White observes: “True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences.”¹⁴⁸ These were men who acted out of supreme love

¹⁴³Those interested in this issue should see my *Polygamy in the Bible*, as footnoted above.

¹⁴⁴See Letter from “Concerned Women for America,” (1998), 3.

¹⁴⁵*Theological Ethics*, 3:118. This is the statement regarding what is believed to happen when the additional wives of a polygamist are set aside.

¹⁴⁶Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1939), 609-610.

¹⁴⁷White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 634.

¹⁴⁸Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1937), 39.

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for God, and therefore, they were radically obedient to His *commandments*, regardless of *consequences*.¹⁴⁹

Admittedly, statements such as these run counter to a culturally-conditioned, results-oriented, rationalistic mind. As has been astutely noted: “We want to be like the most High, subject to none.”¹⁵⁰ Then this challenge is made: “But can we calculate the eternal results or the rightness of our actions? We cannot predict even the next five minutes, much less the future.”¹⁵¹ Thus, instead of speculating about possible *consequences*, we are to live our lives in complete conformity to the *commandments* of the Creator of the universe.

Incidentally, some have noted that the Bible nowhere directly condemns Rahab for her falsehoods. However, it is equally true that throughout the Word of God these lies are never commended either. Careful study of the Scriptures reveals that a lack of any direct commendation or condemnation of actions is no indication of the rightness or wrongness of the deeds performed. For example,

¹⁴⁹Besides biblical narratives there are several 20th century stories of Christians who have acted out of faith in God the Father when faced with life-threatening circumstances. Note the following: Living in Austria during the Nazi occupation, Mrs. Hasel and her son Gerhard were looking after a 12-year-old Jewish boy, when the Gestapo showed up at her door. When asked whether she had Fritz in her house, she looked the soldier straight in the eye and, trusting in God to bring about the best results, said: “As an officer of the German army you know what your responsibility is, and you are welcome to carry it out.” With the culpability of the evil of his action now fully on his shoulders (where it rightly belonged), the Nazi turned on his heel and left that home undisturbed. A second story comes from Poland, also during World War II. Mrs. Knapiuk and her daughter Marion were living in a room in a two-story apartment, when a Jewish girl being chased by German soldiers ran into their place and hid under the bed. Now, they were well aware of how dangerous this could be; for in the adjacent house a bakery owner and his daughter had been arrested and taken to a concentration camp simply because he had sold bread to a Jew. Mrs. Knapiuk was a woman of great faith, but since things had happened so fast, she had had no time to figure out what to do. So she sat down at the table, opened her Bible, and started to pray and read. When a German soldier entered their room, he immediately recognized what she was reading. He uttered only two words—“good woman”—and promptly left the room. A more recent incident, which occurred in the mid-1990s, was indirectly obtained from a former classmate of mine, Dr. Robert Wong. With some editorial adjustments, let me share the story, as it came via e-mail: “In China, the people work under the watchful eye of the government. On one occasion quite a large number of people were to be baptized, so they hired two trucks as transportation. Since they had never been to the lake before, they stopped at an intersection to ask for directions. Too late they realized that they had actually asked for information from the state security forces. Before they could leave, the officer in charge asked: ‘What are you going to do at the lake?’ Now, what should they say, since conducting a baptismal service was strictly illegal? Because they trusted in God, and did not want to lie, they honestly replied that they were on their way to have a baptism. As soon as they left, three police motorcycles swung in after them to make arrests when the time came. But just then, a sudden rainstorm erupted; miraculously the rain fell only behind the trucks soaking the motorcyclists, and making the road muddy and insurpassable for the police. The result? The people got to the lake unmolested, were baptized without further incident, and went home safely.” Yes, indeed, we still serve a miracle working God!

¹⁵⁰Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Necessity of Ethical Absolutes*, Christian Free University Curriculum Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 75.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*

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nowhere is there any condemnation of the rape and incest of the daughters of Lot with their father, as recorded in Genesis 19. Since the oldest daughter had a son named Moab, who became the ancestor of Ruth, and ultimately of Jesus,¹⁵² should one conclude that this incestuous rape was actually a good thing? Obviously, just as in this case, so the deception practiced by Rahab “violates a clear commandment of God”¹⁵³ and needs to be assessed on this basis.

Let’s return briefly to the argument used above, which says that Rahab’s use of deception was justifiable, for without it the spies *would* certainly have been captured or killed, resulting in disaster for the Israelites. This type of logic contradicts Romans 3:8, which “warns us not to say ‘Let us do evil that good may result.’”¹⁵⁴ Incredibly, the article on Rahab never once mentions that it was at God’s direct command that the Israelites were to cross the Jordan River, “to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel” (Josh 1:2).¹⁵⁵ Thus, totally ignoring God’s pivotal role in the lives of His people, the Rahab incident was approached from a thoroughly humanistic perspective.

Instead of adopting such a godless or “atheistic” view of life, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that “God is faithful,” and that He “will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” In other words, God will never permit anyone to be in a situation where that person is forced to practice deception; there will always be a morally correct way out of the problem. Ellen White informs us that, as a free moral agent, mankind’s loyalty must be tested, “but *he is never brought into such a position that yielding to evil becomes a matter of necessity*. No temptation or trial is permitted to come to him which he is unable to resist.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, “God requires of all His subjects obedience, entire obedience to all His commandments,”¹⁵⁷ as He states in Deuteronomy 5:29: “*Always keep all My commandments*,” from the “heart” (emphasis added). Furthermore, “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3), for the Christian “can do all things through Christ” (Phil 4:13). Jesus Christ—He is really the “secret” to this entire issue of truth-telling! For “those who have the mind of Christ will keep all of God’s commandments, irrespective of circumstances.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵²Compare Gen 19:37, Ruth 1:4, 4:13-22, and Matt 1:5, 16.

¹⁵³Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 97.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁵⁵See, for example, the following passages that talk about the “promised” land: Exod 12:25; Deut 6:3; 9:28; 27:3.

¹⁵⁶White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 331-332 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁷Ellen G. White, in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), 6:1072.

¹⁵⁸White, *The Sanctified Life*, 67.

Postscript: The Alteration of Adventist History

Unfortunately, a tendency similar to the fallacious reinterpretation of Bible narratives has begun to show up in published materials on SDA history (i.e., the “story” of our denomination). Generally, this trend to creatively reconstruct the past seems to center on controversial contemporary concerns.

I. The Ordination of Women and the 1881 General Conference. Consider, for example, the debate over whether or not women should be ordained to the gospel ministry. Referring to this issue in the Adventist church in the nineteenth century, it has been argued:

Did you know that the General Conference in session actually voted the ordination of women back in 1881? Unfortunately, the officers neglected to implement this official action of the church body. Now, more than a century later, the time may be ripe to move forward.¹⁵⁹

Is this claim correct? A careful reading of the published report of the business proceedings of the 1881 General Conference session, reveals that on December 5, seven matters were brought up for discussion.¹⁶⁰ Issues were dealt with generally in the following manner: First, a resolution was put forward; then, this proposal was discussed; and finally, a vote was taken.¹⁶¹ While most of the recommendations were adopted, none were directly denied. Those that were not approved were either deferred to a later date, or referred to another committee, an action that appears to have been an indirect manner of turning down a proposal. This seems to be the case concerning women’s ordination: It was proposed, discussed by several, and then referred to a committee, from whence it never appeared again. As correctly noted in another book: “That resolution [i.e., the recommendation to ordain women] was referred to the General Conference Committee and never came to a vote.”¹⁶² And what do we learn from this? That, especially on controversial issues, it can be dangerous to rely on secondary sources. So, wherever possible, the best thing to do is to go back to the original records, study them personally, and then draw conclusions.

II. German Adventists and World War I Military Service. A second contentious question that has come under the influence of historical revisionism has to do with the SDA perspective on war. An intriguing article about the life of L. R. Conradi, the controversial leader of the Adventist church in Germany in the early 20th century, was recently produced. In this article, the following statement appears:

¹⁵⁹*Wrestling with Reality* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁶⁰See “General Conference,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 20 December 1881, 392.

¹⁶¹Investigation of other subsequent meetings at this same session reveals essentially the identical process.

¹⁶²George R. Knight, *Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 87 (emphasis added). Interestingly, this book was published the same year by the same publishing establishment that produced *Wrestling with Reality*, in which the history of this event has been distorted.

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Informed in 1915 that some believers were choosing death over bearing arms, Ellen White told her son Willie, "I do not think they ought to do that." In March Conradi and other German leaders wrote to the commanding general of the Seventh Army, stating that all Adventist inductees would indeed bear arms and do Sabbath duties.¹⁶³

Did Ellen White really speak out against those who would rather die than kill others in warfare? And was this statement, as attributed to her, the reason Conradi and others promoted killing and Sabbath-breaking, as so clearly implied in this article? The original documents on which this article was based reveal that Conradi had officially informed the German army of his pro-combatant, anti-Sabbath views¹⁶⁴ more than 11 weeks before Ellen White was even reported to have made the statement which supposedly authorized Conradi's action. In fact, it was in August 1914, fully nine months earlier,¹⁶⁵ that Conradi had first publicly promoted his personal view, that killing and Sabbath-breaking were acceptable for Adventists because it was wartime. But what did that statement, "I do not think they ought to do that," as attributed to Ellen White, have to do with Conradi's aberrant views? Here are the facts: Ellen White was 87 years old and very feeble at this time. She was so weak that she herself wrote no letters at all that year. The above statement is part of a discussion that her son, Willie, himself 60 years old,¹⁶⁶ wrote down as best he could recall, the day after they had talked. Furthermore, this short sentence is so unclear and ambiguous, that in 1962 the Board of Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate took the following official action:

We take the position that this report, representing a recollection of a conversation with Ellen White on May 24 [1915] and presenting fragments of her statement in response to certain information relative to the situation of our brethren in the war *should not be put in the category of testimony material or that which has come to us from the inspired pen of Ellen G. White presented under the compelling influence of the Spirit of God.* The statement is obscure and it is difficult to know just what the true meaning of Ellen White was. We must recognize that the conversation took place within just a few weeks of her death, and the statement appears in a framework indicative of the

¹⁶³"The Amazing Life of L. R. Conradi," *Adventist Review*, 18 January 1996, 11.

¹⁶⁴See copy of manuscript letter written to the War Ministry, Berlin, Germany, August 4, 1914, Advent Source Collection, p. 38. quoted in "The History of the Advent Movement in Germany" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1958), 258; part of this dissertation is available from the Ellen G. White Research Center, Document File DF 320, James White Library, Andrews U, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

¹⁶⁵"The History of the Advent Movement in Germany" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford U, 1958), 257.

¹⁶⁶He was born August 29, 1854.

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fact that her mind passed readily from periods of clearness to periods of confusion.¹⁶⁷

So, instead of quoting an ambiguous, obscure, fragmentary, second-hand statement, something that Ellen White is simply reported to have orally made during her final illness when her mind alternated between clarity and chaos, the people entrusted with preserving and promoting her work recommend utilizing the voluminous material on the matter of military service, documents which have been verified as written and produced by Ellen White herself while under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁸

III. James White’s Original Position on Participation in War. Ironically, while Ellen White has been erroneously caricatured as the one responsible for the fateful pro-combatant position that was at least partly to blame for the later split in the church from which the SDA Reform Movement developed, historical revisionism has inaccurately credited James White with the prudent early Adventist position on warfare. Toward the end of 1998 a rather informative article on Operation Whitecoat was published. In briefly recapping the Adventist church’s initial years, it was observed that during the US Civil War “different perspectives about military service” were being taken.¹⁶⁹ On the one side “abolitionist Adventists maintained that compulsory military service would aid a righteous cause—the destruction of slavery.”¹⁷⁰ On the other side Adventist pacifists pointed out “that any participation with the military constituted a violation of the sixth commandment—’thou shalt not kill’ (Ex. 20:13).”¹⁷¹ Then, the following comment is made: “James White, editor of the weekly *Review*, suggested a third and middle way in a landmark editorial in August 1862.”¹⁷² Though this article does not directly state what this “middle way” was that James White purportedly proposed, in the following paragraph a “middle way” is defined as “refusing to bear arms but participating in the military as noncombatant medical personnel when legally required to do so.”¹⁷³ As any knowledgeable Adventist is aware, this did become the official SDA position in the mid-1860s. But, was this the position taken by James White in that “landmark editorial,” as the article suggested? Let’s go back to that 1862 article. In it, James White first reminded his readers that,

¹⁶⁷“W. C. White Statement to Guy Dail, May 25, 1915,” Document File DF 320, Ellen G. White Research Center, James White Library, Andrews U, Berrien Springs, Michigan (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹“A Coat of Many Colors: Looking Back at Operation Whitecoat,” *Adventist Review*, 24 September 1998, 8.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*

¹⁷²*Ibid.*

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 9.

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The position which our people have taken relative to the perpetuity of the law of God contained in the ten commandments, is not in harmony with all the requirements of war. The fourth precept of that law says, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy;" the sixth says, "Thou shalt not kill."¹⁷⁴

Then, James White made this bombshell assertion: "But, in the case of drafting, *the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God.*"¹⁷⁵ This explosive editorial sent shockwaves throughout the fledgling denomination. A barrage of letters to the editor flooded in, some of which, as James White himself admitted, "virtually charge us with teaching Sabbath-breaking and murder."¹⁷⁶ In response to the request for "well-written articles"¹⁷⁷ on this subject, Henry Carver submitted a lengthy letter, in which he addressed, among other things, James White's idea of blaming the government for any killing or Sabbath-breaking an Adventist draftee might be called on to do in time of war. Carver reasoned:

This seems to me to be untenable and dangerous ground; for if the government can assume the responsibility now for the violation of two of these holy precepts, and we go clear, why may not the same government assume the responsibility for the violation of the Sabbath law and we go clear when the edict goes forth that all shall observe the first day of the week?¹⁷⁸

As one reviews the historical records, it becomes blatantly obvious that the perspective proposed by James White was not the moderate "middle way" of a medic, a compassionate conscientious cooperator, as intimated in the Operation Whitecoat article. Rather, it was an extreme opinion, a radical departure from the basic biblical view of accepting blame for our own actions, even decisions made under duress or distress.¹⁷⁹ Thankfully, in time James White apparently moved away from this perilous proposal toward what soon became the historic official noncombatant position of the SDA Church.

What do we learn from all this? Just as Scripture stories have been and are being radically reinterpreted, our own Adventist history is at times being imaginatively rewritten. Instead of merely bemoaning this disturbing distortion of sacred stories and denominational documents, we can take the following steps: (1) Personally search the Scriptures and our church's historical records as far as possible, instead of simply relying on others to do our reading and thinking for us; (2) Encourage diligent, intelligent, and committed Adventists, young and old, male and female, to get involved in reading, researching, and reliably writ-

¹⁷⁴"The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 12 August 1862, 84.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁶"The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 26 August 1862, 100.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸"The War," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 October 1862, 166 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁹See, for example, 1 Sam 15:10-26, esp. v. 24; Exod 32:7-35, esp. vs. 22-24; cf. Josh 24:15.

ing up relevant materials that will make a positive contribution, as we carry out Christ's commission of sharing the Good News of His second coming with people all around us and throughout the world; and (3) Pray for those who have been blessed with writing abilities, that they may produce truth-filled articles and books, which will help people to live, not out of fear of the future, but by faith in our Heavenly Father.

In Conclusion: Distorting Scripture Stories Can Be Deadly

David had just returned from a successful battle against the Amalekites, when he was brought news about his old nemesis, King Saul (see 2 Sam 1). A young man who had managed to escape from Saul's camp, eagerly, yet with appropriate humility, reported the death of Saul. Now, according to the immediately preceding chapter, 1 Samuel 31, and as confirmed in 1 Chronicles 10, Saul had been badly wounded while fighting against the Philistines. When his armor-bearer refused to kill him, Saul ended his life by throwing himself on his own sword.

Notwithstanding these facts, and apparently hoping to secure special favors from the new monarch, the young Amalekite escapee gave Saul's crown and bracelet to David, and then distorted the story. He claimed he had come across the injured Saul on the battlefield, who had then said to him: "Please come here and kill me. I am badly hurt and am almost dead already" (2 Sam 1:9 NCV). Concluding this fabricated account, he then said: "So I went over and killed him" (2 Sam 1:10 NCV). David's response was to have the young man killed. So, instead of being lauded, he lost his life; in place of being exalted, he was executed. Yes, *distorting Scripture stories can indeed be deadly!*¹⁸⁰

While the Amalekite's falsifying of the facts resulted in his own physical death, the cunning reconstruction of biblical narratives will have devastating and debilitating ethical, moral, and spiritual implications. Therefore, the challenge to every committed Bible believer is to always be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15), for it is these "Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). In other words, while distorting Scripture stories can be deadly, a Christ-centered, consistent, contextual, and chronologically coherent interpretation of the chronicles of the Bible will contribute to the development of a Christlike character, a personal ethical transformation essential for life in God's kingdom.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰This story of Saul's death has been misconstrued in yet another way, this time in an attempt to find guiding principles regarding euthanasia: "Although the Bible does not specifically speak to the issue of euthanasia, the story of the death of King Saul (2 Sam. 1:9-16) is instructive. Saul asked that a soldier put him to death as he lay dying on the battlefield. When David heard of this act, he ordered the soldier put to death for 'destroying the Lord's anointed.' Though the context is not euthanasia per se, it does show the respect we must show for a human life even in such tragic circumstances;" J. Kerby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Ethical Issues*, Swindoll Leadership Library (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 29.

¹⁸¹See, for example, 2 Tim 3:16, 17.

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Born a Gay and Born Again? Adventism's Changing Attitude Toward Homosexuality¹

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim
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It is no secret that the attitudes of some Seventh-day Adventists are changing on the question of homosexuality. One does not need to follow Adventist discussions on the internet or at annual professional meetings of Bible scholars to be aware of this fact. The changing attitude is reflected in articles that have been published in some of our church publications during the past twenty years.² Also, this changing mood was reflected in discussions at the General Conference (GC) sessions in Indianapolis (1990), Utrecht (1995), and Toronto (2000) over the wording of certain portions of the *Church Manual*. Apparently, because the women's ordination debate eclipsed all other deliberations at these two GC sessions, few people were fully aware of the issue of homosexuality.

A retired theology professor and former dean of the SDA Theological Seminary has aptly captured the reason for this changing attitude in the Christian church. He writes:

¹In this article, the term "homosexual" or "gay" will be applied to any person (male or female) who, for whatever reasons (genetic, hormonal, environmental, situational, etc.), has an erotic attraction to, or sexual preference or desire for, members of the same sex; "lesbianism" refers to a female homosexual. While a "bisexual" is one who has an erotic attraction to members of both sexes, a "heterosexual" is a person who has an erotic attraction to members of the opposite sex. Gay or homosexual theology refers to the attempt to make homosexuality compatible with biblical Christianity.

²At my last count, no less than 135 published works (articles and letters) on the subject of homosexuality have appeared in Adventist publications during the past 20 years (1978-1998). For a detailed discussion of published Adventist views on the subject from the early '50s to the mid '80s, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), 240-265.

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The gay crisis has come to church. Some homosexuals are coming to church not only for forgiveness and mercy but to say to the church, as they have to the world, 'Homosexuality is not sinful; it is natural to me. God made me this way. He accepts me and my homosexuality as good. Therefore the time has come for the church to accept me as I am and join me in saying that gayness is good.'³

It is this desire to make homosexuality compatible with the Christian lifestyle that has made the issue of homosexuality a "hot potato" item on the theological menu of many churches, including our own Seventh-day Adventist church. The issue of homosexuality is so "hot" that anyone attempting to touch it today is bound to be "burned"—in one way or the other. For this reason, many Adventist thought-leaders have chosen to be silent (or at most ambiguous) on this subject.

I have, however, accepted this invitation by the Adventist Theological Society to address this "hot potato" issue, not because I enjoy being burned, but because, sometimes, it is a betrayal of Christ and His gospel when, for reasons of political expediency, we choose to remain silent or neutral on established biblical teachings that are being undermined.⁴ Moreover, since the advocates of homosexuality are freely disseminating their opinions in the church, it is not out of place for Bible-believing Adventists to also express their views on the subject.

The Need to Address Issue. The need for the church to understand and address the crucial issues raised by gay theology also arises from the fact that the issue of homosexuality is creating some confusion and hurt in the church. On the one hand, those who consider themselves homosexual in orientation are hurt because they often feel misunderstood, discriminated against, and even persecuted. On the other hand, those who believe that homosexuality is a violation of the teachings and norms of Biblical Christianity are also hurt because they feel that the church has betrayed their trust by accommodating itself to the objectionable practice of homosexuality, thereby encouraging and exposing its members to gross sexual deviations. A truly caring church cannot refuse to respond to an issue that is creating so much confusion and hurt.⁵

³Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry* (September 1988): 14.

⁴I am aware that, in today's climate of theological pluralism, it is almost suicidal for anyone to speak out against homosexuality and other disputed theological or ethical issues. Already, in certain quarters of the church, those who forthrightly express their views on such issues as racism or tribalism, women's ordination, contemporary higher-criticism, and homosexuality are considered "divisive," "controversial," and "extreme fundamentalists." For my views on the other issues, see my "Saved by Grace and Living by Race: The Religion Called Racism," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/2 (Autumn 1994): 37-78; *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995); my three chapters in *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry*, ed. Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 17-44, 179-218, 287-312; and *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs, MI: Berean Books, 1996).

⁵Cf. Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex and Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 107.

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Purpose of this Paper. This presentation, “Born A Gay And Born Again?” is only a first step in what should be a comprehensive response to gay theology. My intention is threefold: (1) Attempt to explain why Adventist attitudes are changing on the issue of homosexuality; (2) summarize the three major options for the church’s dealing with homosexuals and homosexuality; and (3) briefly respond to some of the main arguments being put forth by those attempting to reconcile their “born a gay” experience with the Bible’s “born again” theology. A future work should address the question of how to deal redemptively with homosexuals seeking help to overcome their sin.

I. Changing Attitudes to Homosexuality

Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon of sexual behavior that has suddenly burst upon our modern culture; the practice has been present in almost every human society. Not unexpectedly, the Bible also deals with the subject in such texts as Gen 19 (cf. Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-10); Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:8-11.

If there is anything new about the practice of homosexuality, the “newness” lies in the fact that unlike the past centuries of Christian history, many churches in our day are accepting homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle. The favorable disposition of some toward the practice of homosexuality may be attributed to a number of factors.

1. Campaigns by Pro-Homosexual Groups. The successful campaigns by various homosexual lobbying and civil rights organizations to end not only discrimination against homosexuals generally, but also to decriminalize homosexual practices between consenting adults and to liberalize public opinion, attitudes, laws, and policies on homosexuality, have contributed to the favorable attitude of some on homosexuality.

For example, in 1973 the American Bar Association voted that laws which had in the past placed homosexuality in the category of *crime* should be abolished. That same year, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental *illness*, and the American Psychological Association also decided that homosexuality was no longer an *abnormal* behavior. Once homosexuality was removed from the categories of crime, illness, and abnormal behavior, it did not take long before Christian churches began to hear calls from pro-gay advocates urging the church to remove homosexuality from the category of *sin*.

In the effort to remove homosexuality from the category of sin, advocates of gay theology have often presented testimonies of homosexuals and “latest research findings” (scientific and biblical) in such a manner as to silence or challenge the Bible’s negative valuation of homosexuality. They argue that biblical texts which have been understood historically as condemning homosexuality are either obscure or refer to the *abuse* of homosexuality, i.e., to certain kinds of

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homosexual practices, notably gang rape, idolatry, promiscuity, and prostitution, and not genuine homosexual orientation as we know it today.⁶ Finally, some Bible characters are put forward as examples of alleged healthy and loving homosexual relationships.⁷

2. Departure from Biblical Revelation to Empirical Research: The changing attitude toward homosexuality may also be attributed to the skepticism in certain quarters of the church about the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible. Under the influence of contemporary higher-criticism, the Bible's sole authority is being replaced by other sources: reason, tradition, and experience. If the Bible is not authoritative in matters dealing with science, history, psychology, etc., why should it be relied upon in dealing with homosexuality?⁸

Thus, those who seek to neutralize the biblical witness against homosexuality often do so on the basis of alleged research findings (scientific, statistical, etc.), or on the basis of testimonies by homosexuals of their happy, healthy, and

⁶It should be noted that in the literature on homosexuality, a distinction is often made between "constitutional" and "situational" homosexuals. "Constitutional" or "true" homosexuals (also referred to as "inverts" or "ontological" homosexuals) are those who are believed to have been born gay, and therefore are considered to be genuine homosexuals. Because their *condition/orientation* is said to be a permanent part of their constitutional make up (and not a transitory phase of life nor an accommodation to situational pressure), it is maintained that those who are "ontological" homosexuals should not be held morally responsible for their condition. In and of itself, homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral, like the normal condition of heterosexuality. On the other hand, "situational" homosexuals (also referred to as "perverts") are not true homosexuals but are heterosexuals who are forced by circumstances (e.g., restrictions on their sexual expression, such as is the case in prison, military camps, boarding schools, monasteries, and other single sex environments) to resort to homosexual practices to gratify their sexual needs. Because situational homosexuality is believed to be a transitory phase in their lives (i. e. they engage in homosexual practices merely to accommodate to situational pressure), their homosexuality is regarded as a perversion of true sexuality; those who engage in these practices are culpable for their actions. See D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955), xi; H. K. Jones, *A Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), 20-23.

⁷Thus, the friendship love (*philia*) between Bible characters like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4), and David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18-20) is interpreted to mean a sexual love (*eros*), and consequently, these Bible characters are presented as Christian models of lesbian and gay relationships. Others consider Joseph and Potiphar (Gen 39) as well as Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Dan 2, 4) as genuine models of homosexuality. In the case of Ruth and Naomi, it is often argued that they exchanged their lesbian marriage vows when Ruth said to Naomi: "Wherever you go, I will go with you, wherever you stay I will stay with you; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. . . . *Till death do us part*" (Ruth 1:16-17; my translation). As far as David and Jonathan are concerned, the argument goes like this: Jonathan "loved" David (1 Sam 18:3), David declared publicly that Jonathan's love was "wonderful"—passing even "the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:23), Jonathan "stripped" in David's presence (1 Sam 18:4), they "kissed" each other (1 Sam 20:41), and they "exceeded" (1 Sam 20:41)—a term taken to mean ejaculation! (Readers may like to read the Scriptural account of the relationship between David and Jonathan to ascertain what the Bible actually says).

⁸In *Receiving the Word*, I have attempted to show how higher-critical assumptions and conclusions are shaping discussions on homosexuality, the use of alcohol, creation, etc. See chapter 5 of the book, 101-194.

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fulfilling relationships, instead of on Scripture. For example, on the basis of a highly questionable study showing that homosexuals in the San Francisco Bay area who are involved in reciprocal, permanent, and sexually exclusive relationships tended to be the happiest, healthiest, and most well-adjusted people of the entire group being analyzed, an Adventist ethicist concluded: “Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form Closed-Coupled homosexual unions.”⁹

Notice that the reason given for endorsing closed couple homosexual unions is not Biblical revelation, but rather an empirical finding regarding the experience of homosexuals. This new way of knowing truth (epistemology) is also illustrated in the testimony of one lesbian who describes herself as an “Adventist-connected” theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher turned minister.

She speaks about her naiveté in blindly following the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist church that “told me that my own nature was sinful, so looking to myself would be my downfall. . . . It did not tell me to look at the rest of the natural world and discover that same-gender nesting occurs in many species.” She explains, however, that following “an unusual calling” or “Martin Luther experience” (the “ecstasy and torment” of her lesbian encounter), she came to value the importance of “inner knowing”—listening to “the voice of God within me.”¹⁰

The above examples illustrate the increasing departure from Biblical revelation toward empirical experience as an authority base on religious issues. Not only does this trend raises questions for Bible believing Christians regarding the starting point for discussions on homosexuality—Should it be *observation*, *introspection*, or biblical *revelation*?—but it also explains why some will jettison biblical teaching for the “latest research findings.”

3. Impact of Behaviorist Philosophy on Recent Research Findings. Another factor that is shaping the homosexual debate is the impact of behavioristic

⁹David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984):16.” For a detailed challenge to the dubious research of Kinsey, see, for example, Judith Reisman and Edward W. Eichel, *Kinsey, Sex, and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People* (Lafayette, La.: Lochinvar-Huntington House, 1990).

¹⁰Lin Ennis, “Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality,” in *In Our Own Words: Women Tell of Their Lives and Faith*, ed. Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, CA: Adventist Women’s Institute, 1993), 237, 238, 230-235. She explains: “I was so naive about God, so blind to the real needs of human beings, so willing to be led as a sheep, mindlessly following, not thinking for myself, except just enough to afford me the illusion of independence of thought. Far more than I cared to admit, I did what the church said, what the *Church Manual* said, what the ministers and evangelists I had worked with said” (ibid., 234). But after she discovered the truth about God by looking at herself (apparently, the “inner knowing” of listening to God “within me” [p. 234]) and “the rest of the natural world,” and after she claimed to have rightly understood “the Bible,” “I realized that to continue to be active in the Adventist Church in the way I had always been before would not work for me” (237).

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philosophy. This philosophy, which has adherents among biologists, zoologists, physicists, and other social scientists, simply states that individuals have practically *no choice* in their moral actions, and therefore may not always be held morally accountable for their actions. Human behavior, it is said, is largely, if not exclusively, *predetermined* by one's environment and one's genetic code.¹¹

Given the impact of the behavioristic philosophy, it is not coincidental that researchers are discovering that some are "born gay," that is to say they hold their homosexual orientation or identity from birth.¹² Although the findings of genetic research are at the present time inconclusive, already some Adventist writers are making the following deductions from the "new light" of scientific research: (a) homosexuals are born gay, (b) homosexuality is a normal or "natural" condition, (c) what is "natural" cannot be immoral, and (d) "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong."¹³

Observe that while perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, have questioned the value of these "born a gay" discoveries, and while others have exposed the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this "outmoded ver-

¹¹*Time* magazine (August 1, 1977):54-63 alerted the world of the growing impact of another version of this behavioristic philosophy when it devoted its cover article—"Why You Do What You Do"—to *sociobiology*, a new theory which maintains that social behavior has a biological basis. One leading sociobiologist at Harvard University is quoted in the *Time* article as making this prediction: "Sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology." In partial fulfillment to this kind of prediction by the prophets of sociobiology, "discoveries" are being made in recent times by researchers that what in the past were considered as habitual sins are actually of biological origin. Thus, it is said that some individuals are "born to smoke," "born alcoholics," and even "born murderers"; such persons cannot legitimately be held accountable for their moral actions. According to a *Time* magazine cover story, even infidelity may be due to our genes! (See Robert Wright, "Our Cheating Hearts," August 15, 1994, 44-52.)

¹²The studies often cited as evidence that homosexuality is inborn include: (1) the 1991 study of neuroscientist Dr. Simon LeVay on the brain structures of 41 cadavers; (2) the 1991 research by Northwestern University psychologist Michael Bailey (a gay rights advocate) and Boston University School of Medicine psychiatrist Richard Pillard (who is openly homosexual) on homosexual twins; and (3) the 1993 study by Dr. Dean Hamer of the National Cancer Institute on the genetic markers on 40 non-identical gay brothers. But these oft-quoted "research findings" have been shown to be misleading and exaggerated (at best inconclusive). For a succinct review and evaluation of the findings of the above cited researchers, see Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 107-131.

¹³According to the then editor of *Insight*, a homosexual orientation may be so much a part of one's persona that it seems like "a way of *being* and *feeling*—whether or not those feelings are ever translated into sexual acts." Thus, for this Adventist scholar, "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong." "Being a homosexual [in tendency or temptation] is not a sin," he asserts, though he considers homosexual lust, whether in thought or action, just as sinful as heterosexual lust outside marriage and insists that the Bible demands chastity, purity, and celibacy of everyone not married. See Chris Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 6, 7, 11.

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sion of natural law,”¹⁴ for some Adventist advocates of homosexual theology, these research findings validate their new “understanding” of “the truth about homosexuality.” They argue that “whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person *chooses*.”¹⁵ Another writer approvingly explains the “born a gay” argument using the words of an Adventist homosexual (notice her emphases):

“As God is in His heaven I did not *choose* this orientation, this lifestyle. Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that’s kept me from following my choice of profession? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that’s kept me from marrying any of several girls who offered me a “normal” lifestyle with a home and family? Why would I *choose* to live in a world that thinks I am disgusting, repulsive, and totally unacceptable? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that can lead to loss of employment, friends, family, and love? If I would *choose* this, then I truly need to be put away! . . . What I am saying is that I did not *choose* this lifestyle. God allowed it, though He did not give it to me. I cannot change, because I have tried.”¹⁶

¹⁴Perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, reject this “born a gay” discovery because they fear that other research findings showing some unacceptable conditions (like alcoholism, schizophrenia, cerebral palsy, etc.) as genetically related will soon make homosexuals look like they are “abnormal,” or less than human (cf. *World* 6 [September 14, 1991]:11). J. B. Nelson exposes the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this “outmoded version of natural law” which seeks to make a fine distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior. Responding to the view that “while homosexuality as an *orientation* is contrary to God’s created intention, the homosexual *person* ought not to be adversely judged or rejected by the church,” Nelson counters that while some may deem such a position a more tolerant and compassionate view than outright condemnation, “it places gay men and lesbians in at least two impossible binds”: “One, of course, is the individual’s recognition that her or his own sexual orientation is as natural and as fundamental to identity as is the color of the skin. It is both naive and cruel to tell a lesbian or gay man, “Your sexual orientation is still unnatural and a perversion, but this is no judgment upon you as a person.” The individual knows otherwise. The other bind concerns churchly pressure toward celibacy. When the church presumes to be non-judgmental toward orientation but then draws the line against genital expression, it is difficult to understand how the sense of guilt—even in the celibate—will be significantly alleviated.” See J. B. Nelson, “Religious and Moral Issues in Working with Homosexual Clients,” in *Homosexuality and Psycho-therapy, a Practitioner’s Handbook of Affirmative Models. Journal of Homosexuality* 7, Nos. 2-3, ed. J. C. Gonsiorek (New York: Haworth press, 1982): 168-69.

¹⁵Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, 26 (emphasis hers); cf. *idem*, “A Homosexual in My Congregation?” *Ministry*, November 1996, 10-11, 29.

¹⁶Suzanne Ryan, “When Love Wasn’t Enough,” *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 3 (emphasis hers). While not condoning homosexuality, Chris Blake agrees: “nobody chooses to be homosexual. . . . Whether a person is born with the orientation or it develops as a result of his or her upbringing, or it’s a complex combination of both (which is most likely), it is *not* a matter of choice. A child chooses neither how she is born nor how he is raised. We shouldn’t hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature) or how a preschooler is dressed (nurture)” (Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation, 6-7; emphasis his). Blake is frequently mentioned in this article not because he is a crusader for homosexual rights—he isn’t—but because by devoting an entire issue of *Insight* to the problem in hope of helping teenagers

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The belief that homosexual orientation, like the color of the skin, eyes, or hair, is inborn—i.e., the homosexual was “born gay,” and has no choice over his/her homosexual condition—is one of the main reasons for the changing attitudes within Adventism on the question of homosexuality. Some go so far as to say that if God has allowed some people to be born gay, why should we not accept the person’s sexual orientation? More, probably, see homosexuality as an unfortunate birth defect, like a hare-lip, crossed eyes, or Down syndrome, to be corrected if possible. My contention, however, is that if we accept homosexual orientation as something inherited or acquired rather than *chosen*, it is *inevitable* that we will soon be called to see it as natural, then normal, then acceptable, and finally laudable. (Consider, for example, how those with AIDS are now valorized for their courage.)

4. New Sexual Paradigms. The acceptance of homosexuality as a morally legitimate sexual expression in certain quarters of the Adventist church should also be seen as a reflection of the growing challenge to traditional Adventist views on human sexuality. In what is emerging in the church as a “new sexual paradigm,” permissible sex is no longer limited to sex within the biblically prescribed monogamous, heterosexual, marriage relationship. Instead, it is one which is engaged in by consenting individuals, according to their own self-imposed boundaries. Accordingly, premarital sex, masturbation (also known as solo sex, self sex, or partnerless sex), and homosexuality are all viewed as morally justifiable.

For example, one former Adventist chaplain and teacher who argues for pre-marital sex and masturbation writes that “sexual exploration and experimentation before marriage” is acceptable as long as a person does not put his or her unmarried partner “in the position of feeling guilty or sinful.”¹⁷

Another Adventist, a professor of psychology, defines sexual sin as “*behaving* in a way that *harms* yourself or others.” Among the “radical reforms of the Adventist sexual paradigm” that he recommends to the church is this: “The pleasures of occasional guilt-free orgasm ought to be available to all post-pubescent parishioners.” The “guilt-free” sex includes sex with “myself”

show more compassion and helping young homosexuals feel more support in their struggle against temptation, he inadvertently provided the most quotable Adventist defense for the born a gay theology that differentiates between homosexuals and homosexual practice.

¹⁷Steven G. Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, OR: Better Living Publishers, 1993), 298. According to Daily, the Seventh-day Adventist church’s negative valuation of pre-marital sex and masturbation arises from “our Victorian heritage, which has been well preserved through the work of Ellen White. Most Adventists are not aware of what bizarre and extreme views of sexuality were commonly held by our nineteenth century ancestors. Books like *Messages to the Young People* have served to perpetuate such baggage throughout much of the twentieth century as well” (ibid., 296-297). At the time he wrote his book, Daily was a chaplain and teacher at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in California.

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(masturbation), with “a person of the same gender” (homosexuality), and with “someone [‘not-yet- married’] of the opposite gender” (pre-marital sex).¹⁸

5. Climate of “Enlightened” Ethical Sensitivity. Our generation is painfully aware of the existence in our world of injustice and bigotry—slavery, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia¹⁹ (fear, hysteria, disgust and/or hatred of the homosexual), etc. Because ignorance and religious bigotry have often played a part in these oppressive acts, it has become potentially harmful to quote the Bible when questioning anyone’s sexual conduct—however objectionable it may be. Thus, the condemnation of any of today’s “new sexual paradigms” is perceived as a judgmental act that may hurt the ethical feelings of “sexual minorities”—individuals with alternate sexual preferences or orientations.

In the desire to appear more “informed” and “compassionate,” those who have adopted this posture of “enlightened” ethical sensitivity are treating biblical prohibitions of certain sexual deviations as culturally-conditioned or offensive relics of a “pre-scientific” (or puritanical) morality.²⁰ Additionally, biblical virtues such as love, compassion, and acceptance are emphasized in such a way as to counter any efforts not to accept the “new sexual paradigms.” Bible-believing Christians who speak against homosexuality are accused of being *judgmental* (as in the case of Christ’s disciples, who condemned a congenitally blind person as a sinner [John 9]) and un-Christlike (Didn’t Jesus say, “Judge not, lest ye be judged?” And didn’t He also say to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee?”²¹).

Given today’s climate of “enlightened” ethical sensitivity, anyone who does not accept homosexuality as morally justifiable is looked upon as being legalis-

¹⁸John Berez, “About Orgasms and Other Things,” *Student Movement* [Andrews University Newspaper], February 26, 1997, 9, 11. A few weeks later Berez published another article in the *Student Movement* in which he offered “suggested boundaries to Christian solo sex [masturbation].” See his “An Essay on a Sensitive Subject,” *Student Movement*, April 2, 1997, 5.

¹⁹“Homophobia” is an irrational fear of homosexuality which leads to hostility toward homosexuals and others who seek to give them help.

²⁰Thus, morally neutral expressions are now being employed for once forbidden sins: fornication is now premarital or nonmarital sex; adultery is referred to as an extramarital or co-marital affair; permissiveness is euphemized as sexual variation; the promiscuous is multifriended; and homosexuality and sodomy are now alternate lifestyles (See, for example, John Leo, “Cleansing the Mother Tongue,” *Time*, December 27, 1982, 78). In this “politically-correct” age, sin is no longer perceived as sin but rather as sickness, and habitual sin is now regarded as an addictive or compulsive behavior. Thus, not too long ago, a newspaper had an article about a 34-bed clinic that had just opened in Southern California to treat “Christian sex addicts.” See, Nicole Brodeur, “Center Aids Christian Sex Addicts,” *Orange County Register*, February 13, 1989, 1.

²¹It seems that Jesus’ statement, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11), has been abused by all classes of Christians in their attitude to homosexuality. On one hand, strong advocates of pro-gay theology would read the statement as: “*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin . . .*” On the other hand, some strong opponents of gay-theology would adopt the attitude: “. . . *I condemn thee: go!*” A true Adventist position does not condemn the sinner (“neither do I condemn thee”), but it does condemn the sin (“Go, and sin no more”).

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tic, insensitive, hypocritical, and in our case, bigoted and homophobic—characteristics that are incompatible with acceptable Christian behavior. This strategy exerts a powerful psychological pressure on Christians to either endorse the homosexual lifestyle, or at a minimum, remain silent on the issue.

6. The AIDS Crisis. During the early phases of the AIDS epidemic, when it was discovered that AIDS is largely a sexually transmitted disease, the disease came to be perceived as a judgment from God against all forms of sexual perversion—of which homosexuality was the chief. Since many Adventists viewed homosexuality as *the* “unpardonable sin” of sexual immorality—the one sin that sealed the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, and which would signal “the end of time,” AIDS became associated with homosexuality and the disease came to be seen as a “gay disease.”²²

But as heterosexuals and non-promiscuous individuals started coming down with AIDS, Christians were forced not only to rethink their judgmental stance toward victims of AIDS, but also to reconsider their negative valuation of homosexuality. The reasoning was: If both homosexuals and heterosexuals fall to AIDS, perhaps homosexuality is not as sinful as it was traditionally pictured.

Also, when compassion for victims of the AIDS disease soon turned into compassion for homosexuals, it was not long before compassion for the struggling homosexual turned into an acceptance of homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle. This seems to be the unspoken message in an article in *Adventist View*, titled “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I Have AIDS.”²³

7. Kinship’s Pro-Gay Theology. Another major reason for Adventism’s changing attitude toward homosexuality is the influence of the work by the pro-homosexual organization known as Kinship. Billing itself as “a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists,” Kinship has been quite successful in converting some Adventists to its belief that “God can bless a committed homosexual relationship.” As a result, an increasing number of homo-

²²This prevalent understanding is reflected in a 1977 *Sabbath School Lessons*: “Jesus said that one of the signs of His near return would be a condition of morality similar to that among the antediluvians and Sodomites. Not only have the same deviant sexual patterns become prominent in our times, being pursued with open boldness, but some professed ministers now defend such practices, organize churches for persons of this lifestyle, and ordain some to the ministry. Such sinful brazenness indicates again the eroding morality of our times and the approaching end of the age” (*Sabbath School Lessons*, October 1977, 48 [British edition, 330]; cf. Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 1:232).

²³See the story of Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story,” *Adventist View* (Winter 1993), 9, 15. Cf. Ron (pseudonym), “A Cry from the Valley of Death,” *Ministry* (November 1996):23-25, 29; Beth Schaefer, “Homosexual Warfare,” *View* (Special 1999 issue):18-21 (*View* is a quarterly publication by the Young Adult Ministries of the North American Division of SDA; this special 1999 issue has the theme, “Is There Room for Me in Your Church?”).

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sexuals are coming out of the closet and demanding that their homosexuality be accepted as either natural, or a “gift from God.”²⁴

This may explain why in the 1993 Adventist Women’s Institute’s book referred to earlier, an “Adventist-connected” theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher-turned-minister, writes that her lesbianism is “an unusual calling” from the Lord and why her lesbian partner also felt that the lesbian relationship was “God’s gift for her conversion.”²⁵

A year earlier the November 4, 1992, issue of the Andrews University student newspaper (*Student Movement*) created a sensation on campus when it published a letter from an Andrews university homosexual couple pleading for acceptance.²⁶ In the center-page article of that issue, some anonymous staff members and students discussed their homosexual and lesbian relationships. Among them was “Ann,” a 28-year old lesbian who was seeking the transfer of her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University. Speaking about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role, Ann summed up the basic belief of Kinship: “I am a lesbian because God knows that that’s the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual.”²⁷ (Dare we hear God’s response in Malachi 2:17): “You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ In that you say, ‘Everyone who does *evil* is *good* in the sight of the LORD, and He *delights* in them,’ or, ‘Where is the God of justice?’” [NASB, emphasis added])

8. 1980 Declaration by Some Scholars. Within the Seventh-day Adventist church, the most significant event that signaled the changing attitudes toward homosexuality occurred when, in August 1980, the church commissioned six

²⁴According to Elvin Benton, “in early January 1977, a handful who had responded to a newspaper ad placed by a gay Adventist met in Palm Desert, California. It was the beginning of Kinship, and by April there were 75 members, a temporary chairman and four committees: membership, educational, social, and spiritual. . . . The organization was incorporated in March 1981 as Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Incorporated. Its mailing list in 10 countries now approaches 500 and includes a broad spectrum of occupations. The ratio of professional people is disproportionately high. A significant number are denominational employees, most of whom, understandably, use pseudonyms in their relationship to Kinship. Almost all are or have been Seventh-day Adventist church members. Several are friends of Adventists and would become church members except for what they perceive to be the church’s negative attitude toward their homosexuality” (Elvin Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” *Spectrum* 12/3 [April 1982]: 33). Because the pro-gay stance of Kinship is at variance with the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the SDA church has dissociated itself from Kinship. For a discussion of the relationship between Kinship and the SDA Church, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 256-265.

²⁵Lin Ennis, “Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality,” 227-239, 232.

²⁶The entire issue of the November 4, 1992, *Student Movement* was devoted to homosexuality. The letter from the homosexual couple is found on page 15 of that issue.

²⁷Yoonah Kim, “The Love that Dares Not Speak Its Name,” *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, 9

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well-known representatives to attend a camp meeting (or “*kamp* meeting”) organized by the pro-homosexual group Kinship.²⁸

Although the church representatives consisted of six influential Bible scholars and pastors,²⁹ to the surprise of many, the biblical and theological scholars at the Kinship camp meeting concluded that the teaching of Scripture on the subject of homosexuality is not sufficiently clear to settle the question of the morality of homosexual acts or relationships in our world. The three scholars, all of whom were then teaching at the church’s leading theological seminary at Andrews University, declared: “A simplistic English reading of the few scriptural references to homosexual acts would not suffice to determine the Lord’s will for homosexual persons today.”³⁰

Given the ensuing civil-war between liberals and conservatives over the legitimacy of contemporary higher-criticism in biblical interpretation, the declaration by the church’s authorized scholars at the Kinship camp meeting has been understood by some as another indication of the flourishing of the liberal methodology in the church.³¹

In any case, declarations such as the one above, and the official opposition to such a position by the church in the volume *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (1988)³² and in the GC Biblical Research Institute’s book *Homosexu-*

²⁸The idea of having a special camp meeting (or *kamp* meeting) for homosexual Adventists was born at an early 1980 Kinship board meeting. According to Benton, the August 1980 camp meeting “was a major event in the long story of Adventist homosexuals” (Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” 32, 33).

²⁹The six scholars and pastors consisted of three biblical and theological scholars (James J. C. Cox, Lawrence Geraty, and Fritz Guy), two representing pastoral concerns (James Londis and Josephine Benton), and one, an outspoken opponent of Kinship, who had run a recovery ministry for homosexuals for many years and disagreed with the majority conclusion (Colin Cook). For a summary of the meeting, see Elvin Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” *Spectrum* 12/3 (April 1982):32-38.

³⁰Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” 35. At the time of the 1980 Kinship camp meeting, James J. C. Cox was professor of New Testament at the Andrews University Theological Seminary; he has since served as president of Avondale College in Australia. Old Testament scholar Lawrence T. Geraty was professor of archeology and history of antiquity at the Seminary at Andrews University; he has since served as president of Atlantic Union College and currently serves as president of La Sierra University. Fritz Guy was professor of systematic theology at the Seminary; he currently teaches theology and philosophy at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

³¹See my *Receiving the Word*, chapters 4 and 5 (part 1), 75-113.

³²*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 303. Produced by some 194 SDA thought leaders around the world, this “carefully researched” volume is to be received “as representative of . . . [what] Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim,” and as furnishing “reliable information on the beliefs of our [SDA] church” (*ibid.*, vii, iv, v).

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ality in History and the Scriptures (1988),³³ have made the issue of homosexuality a hot potato item within Adventist scholarship.

9. Troubling Views in Church Publications. At the same time that homosexuals have demanded that the church accept their homosexuality as natural or a “gift from God,” and at the same time that the church’s Bible scholars have been quietly debating the issue, the homosexual issue has come out of its academic closet into the mainstream Adventist debate. This has taken the form of carefully written yet troubling articles in such church publications as *Ministry*, *Adventist Review*, *Insight*, and *Adventist View*. These articles, sometimes by anonymous authors, have called for new “awareness and understanding on the subject of homosexuality.” A careful reading of some of these works reveals a subtle shift from the church’s categorical rejection of homosexuality to its qualified acceptance.³⁴

The vexing questions raised by these articles can best be illustrated by calling attention to the December 5, 1992, issue of *Insight*, a publication for Seventh-day Adventist youth. This particular issue is devoted entirely to the subject of homosexuality. While the then editor of the magazine maintains that “there is no scriptural support for practicing homosexuality,” he nevertheless asserts: “There’s a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality”; “Nobody *chooses* to be homosexual”; “Changing one’s homosexual orientation is difficult and rare”; “Homosexuals can be genuine, model Christians” [if celibate], and “Being a homosexual is not a sin” [if it is not practiced].³⁵

Perceptive readers will recognize that the above position differs from the church’s traditional understanding but is in accord with what the 1995 *Church Manual* states: the church has officially condemned “homosexual *practices* and lesbian *practices*” as examples of “the obvious perversions of God’s original plan,” and *made these practices a basis for church discipline* (see the note below).³⁶

³³The articulation of the official church position on homosexuality was taken up by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. See Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1988).

³⁴See, for example, Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), “A Homosexual in My Congregation?” *Ministry*, November 1996, 10-11, 29; idem, “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, 26-29; *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 1-16; Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story,” *Adventist View*, Winter 1993, 9, 15; Beth Schaefer, “Homosexual Warfare,” *View*, Special 1999 issue, 18-21. Beside these church publications, *Adventist Today*, an independent publication based in La Sierra, CA, recently devoted an entire issue to the subject. In it, some Adventists have argued for homosexuality. See articles by Norman Brown, Ben Kemena, Kate McLaughlin, Jim Miller in the July-August 1999 issue of *Adventist Today*.

³⁵Chris Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality,” *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 4-16.

³⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1995), 154, 169, emphasis added. The wording in the current (1995) *Church Manual* is based on the revisions made at the 1990 GC session in Indianapolis

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10. Obliteration of Gender Role Distinctions. One overlooked reason for Adventism's changing attitude toward homosexuality is the impact of feminist theology on sexual role distinctions. This fact is evident in the liberal (radical feminist) and conservative ("egalitarian" or "equalitarian") reasoning for ordaining women as elders or pastors. Though employing different sets of arguments, both liberal and conservative proponents of women's ordination are united in their denial of male headship and gender role differentiation *at creation*. To them, a belief in the biblical teaching of sexual role distinctions before the fall of Adam and Eve suggests the absence of "full equality" and the existence of superiority/inferiority among the first pair.³⁷

We should not miss the connection between the above arguments and those used to promote homosexuality. Just as feminists seek "full equality" by getting

(see 1990 *Church Manual*, 147, 160, 173). It may be argued that the 1990 and 1995 *Church Manuals* do not explicitly condemn "homosexuality and lesbianism" as tendencies (which would have implied an adherence to the *non-acceptance* position), but merely condemn "homosexual practices and lesbian practices" (which implies a tacit endorsement of the *qualified-acceptance* position). Chris Blake makes this argument (see his "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," p.11). However, by making the *practice* of homosexuality the basis for church discipline, the delegates at the 1990 and 1995 GC sessions made it clear that they still adhered to a "non-acceptance" position on homosexuality. Ronald Lawson, the "liaison" between the SDA Kinship organization and the SDA Church, maintains that the subtle shift in the position of the SDA Church is attributed to the role of an SDA Kinship "kampmeeting graduate" who was on the committee drafting changes in the Church Manual. The original drafted document had explicitly condemned "homosexuality and lesbianism." The "kampmeeting graduate," Lawson explains, "feeling that the presence of large numbers of conservative Third World delegates would make it impossible to liberalize the statement once it reached the floor [1985 General Conference Session], he got together with friends, including several other veterans of kampmeetings, to try to modify the draft in advance. As they read the situation, it was impossible at that stage to avert the change totally. Consequently, they focused their efforts on changing language which would have condemned 'homosexuality and lesbianism', a sweeping rejection of their very being, to a somewhat more limited condemnation of 'homosexual and lesbian practices.' They were successful in this. Nevertheless, the new statement, which replaced much vaguer language, for the first time labeled this 'practice' as unacceptable and a basis for discipline." See Ronald Lawson, "The Caring Church?: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Its Homosexual Members," a paper prepared for the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (Washington, DC, November 1992), 7; the same paper was presented at the meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Study at San Francisco, November 1992. Some perceptive Adventists have argued that the attempt made at the 1995 GC session to modify the relevant sections on homosexuality was yet another attempt by advocates of pro-gay theology to chip away the church's non-acceptance position.

³⁷In the Seventh-day Adventist Church the two influential books endorsing women's ordination are: Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table: Setting A Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPress, 1995); and Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998). While the former often employs the arguments of "liberal" feminism, the latter adopts the "egalitarian" arguments of Evangelical feminism. Whereas my response to the former volume is found in *Receiving the Word*, 119-129, my detailed critique of the latter appears as several chapters in *Prove All Things: a Response to Women in Ministry*, ed. Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 17-44, 179-218, 287-312.

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rid of *gender* or *sex roles* in marriage and the church, gay theology also seeks to bring about “equality” between homosexuals and heterosexuals by obliterating *sexual identity*. Thus, when radical proponents impose their gender-inclusive reconstructions upon the Bible and suggest that Adam was “an androgynous being” (i.e. bisexual),³⁸ it is only a few steps from seeing homosexuality as a creation ordinance.

Similarly, when conservative proponents of women’s ordination claim that at creation Adam and Eve were “fully equal,” enjoying “total egalitarianism in marriage,” and argue that prior to the fall there was no role differentiation between male and female, whether they are aware of it or not, they also are building a theological nest for advocates of homosexual theology to lay and hatch their gay eggs.³⁹

At the recent General Conference session in Toronto, Canada, the obliteration of role distinctions before the Fall was one of the sore points in the questionable proposal on divorce and remarriage. Regretfully, some failed to see a theological connection between role-relationships and homosexuality.⁴⁰

³⁸Jeane Haerich, “Genesis Revisited,” in *The Welcome Table*, 101, 100. The obliteration of gender differentiation in Genesis 2 is only a few steps away from positing homosexuality or bisexuality in the first created pair. And since human beings were created in God’s image, if Adam was “an androgynous being” does it not mean that God also is androgynous? One wonders what is really behind the gender-inclusive reconstructions of the Bible: “*Son of God*” becomes “*Child of God*”; “*Son of Man*” becomes “*Human one*”; “our heavenly *Father*” becomes “our heavenly *Parent*.” Is this also the reason why an Adventist author promotes the Holy Spirit as the female member of the Godhead and repeatedly refers to the Creator as “He/She”? See Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, Ore.: Better Living Publishers, 1993), 88, 105, 113.

³⁹This basic argument underlies *Women in Ministry*, the pro-ordination book by some faculty of Andrews University. The clearest articulation of this view in the book is my good friend Richard M. Davidson’s article “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” 259-295. Denying that God made man the head of the home at creation, the article argues that God’s original plan for the home was “total equality in marriage” (267), or “total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship” (p. 269), or “headship among equals” (270), expressions understood to mean the absence of role differentiation before the Fall (264, 267, 269). For him the biblical teaching of male headship and female submission implies “functional superiority/inferiority” (260). Though he believes that “headship” was instituted *after the Fall*, it is his view that God’s original plan of “total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship” is still the same in the post-fall situation “as it was for Adam and Eve in the beginning” (269). In other words, today, as at the beginning, there should be no “ontological or functional” role distinctions. Rather, Christians should aspire for the “ideal” of “full equality” in their homes (284). Cf. Peter M. Van Bemmelen, “Equality, Headship, and Submission in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Women in Ministry*, 297-311. The most devastating critique of the post-Fall headship theology has been provided by Samuele Bacchiocchi in *Prove All Things*.

⁴⁰See, for example, Roy Adams, “Fireworks in the Dome,” *Adventist Review*, 5 July 2000, 2-3. Adams expressed “surprise” at my comment that the obliteration of role distinctions before the fall ultimately leads to endorsing homosexuality. He apparently believes the comment by one delegate at Toronto that those of us questioning the theological fuzziness of the proposal were appealing to those with “a scare mentality” (3).

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To speak of “full equality” without seriously coming to terms with the nature and extent of this equality and without stating unambiguously that to act as “equal and joint partners” does not mean to act identically, allows advocates of gay theology to build upon the shaky foundation constructed by liberal and conservative advocates of women’s ordination. At a time of increasing homosexual demands for marital rights, the failure by proponents of women’s ordination to say unambiguously that men are not equal with women personally or even physically *as candidates to be spouses of men* has opened a welcome door for those who seek to nullify the biblical case for divinely instituted role differences and a monogamous heterosexual relationship. This fact has not been lost on proponents of gay theology within Adventism.⁴¹

Summary. The above ten reasons—(i) campaign by pro-homosexual groups, (ii) departure from biblical revelation to empirical research, (iii) the impact of the behavioristic philosophy on recent research findings, (iv) new sexual paradigms, (v) the climate of ‘enlightened’ ethical sensitivity, (vi) the AIDS crisis, (vii) the impact of Kinship’s pro-gay theology, (viii) the 1980 declaration by some scholars, (ix) troubling views in church publications, and (x) the obliteration of gender role distinctions—may help explain why attitudes are changing within the Adventist church on the issue of homosexuality. Before evaluating the arguments being used to domesticate homosexuality in the Adventist church, it may first be useful to summarize the three major positions pleading for audience in the Christian church.

II. Three Options for the Church

The Christian church is, today, being called upon to decide upon what homosexuals should do when they become Christians. Should homosexuals change their orientation, control their orientation, or celebrate their orientation?

The answer to this question has given birth to three contending positions in Christian churches: (a) the *non-acceptance* view, which maintains that homosexuality (whether or not practiced) is not compatible with biblical Christianity (b) the *qualified acceptance* view, which argues that homosexuality can be compatible with Christianity if not practiced, and (c) the *full acceptance* view, which asserts that even when practiced homosexuality is fully compatible with the Christian faith.

⁴¹For example, speaking at the annual meeting of Seventh-day Adventist college and university Bible teachers in San Francisco, California, in 1992, Ron Lawson, the “liason” from the pro-homosexual group Kinship, correctly remarked that the push for women’s ordination, when successful, will eventually open the door for the church to embrace homosexuality, since both causes are waging a similar battle of “discrimination” and share the same basic hermeneutic. The experience of other Christian denominations which have jettisoned the Bible’s teaching on sexual role differentiation for an “egalitarian” model confirms Lawson’s observation that openness toward homosexuality inescapably follows once that step is taken. For a response to the “full equality” argument, see my unpublished article “Ideology or Theology: An Analysis and Evaluation of *Women in Ministry*” (1999).

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Seventh-day Adventists historically have adopted the *non-acceptance* view. But as pro-homosexual groups (like “SDA Kinship”) continue their campaign for the *full-acceptance* view, and as the “born gay” argument draws more support (especially anecdotal support), some segments within contemporary Adventism are moving toward the *qualified-acceptance* view. Since all three views are represented in contemporary Seventh-day Adventism, and since each is based on a set of theological and ethical assumptions, I will briefly summarize the respective views. I will then raise some critical questions for those seeking to move the church toward “qualified-acceptance” or “full-acceptance” of homosexuality.

1. Non-Acceptance View. Historically embraced by the Christian church, this position maintains that homosexuality, regardless of its cause, is incompatible with biblical Christianity.⁴² The following are some of its basic tenets:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As a post-fall distortion of human sexuality, homosexuality (constitutional or situational) is no different from other depraved sexual deviations (such as bisexuality, bestiality, adultery, fornication etc.). The popular quip, “If God had intended homosexuality to be a legitimate expression of human sexuality, He would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve,” aptly summarizes the non-acceptance position.

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: Homosexuality is both evil (like sickness and death) and sinful (like pride, adultery, and murder). Like all other morally corrupt tendencies, homosexual orientation or disposition does not excuse the sin of homosexuality. All people are tempted to act upon their besetting sexual desires, cravings or tendencies (homosexual and heterosexual). The temptation is not sin, but yielding to it is morally wrong.

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: Believing that there is no sin that is outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the non-acceptance position maintains that the Creator of human sexuality can fix every sexual problem. Homosexuality and homosexual lifestyle can, therefore, be overcome by God’s transforming power (in the conversion/new birth experience) and by God’s enabling or sustaining grace (in the gradual work of sanctification). God is able to deliver a homosexual from his/her sin and keep such a person from falling.

(d) Response to Homosexuality: The church should accord all homosexuals their full rights as human beings created in the image of God, show compassion,

⁴²Representatives include, Westmont College New Testament scholar Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), Louisville Seminary New Testament professor Marion Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church* (Westminster, PA: John Knox, 1995), Gordon-Conwell Seminary church historian Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), and Don Williams (Biblical scholar at Claremont Men’s College), *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church* (Los Angeles, CA: BIM Publications, 1978). In their theological discussion, Schmidt, Soards, Lovelace and Williams pay greater attention to church history and Biblical theology than to contemporary scientific findings on homosexuality.

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kindness, and Christian love to all those struggling with sexual sins, and point them to Jesus Christ as the Answer to all their needs. Homosexuals should be urged to repent and accept God's forgiveness.

Homosexuals who acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality, who accept Christ's offer of forgiveness, and who, by faith, seek to commit themselves to a life of sexual purity should be accepted into church fellowship. But those who do not acknowledge homosexuality as sin and/or those who are engaged in homosexual practices should not be accepted into the church.⁴³

The *non-acceptance* view, therefore, *rejects* the view that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual."

2. Qualified Acceptance View. Currently gaining currency in the Adventist church and implied in the current *Church Manual*, this accommodating view argues that unpracticed homosexuality *can be* compatible with Christianity.⁴⁴ The following are some of its essential teachings:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As a post-fall *aberration*, homosexual condition/orientation ("constitutional homosexuality" or inversion) is a non-ideal condition of human sexuality (just like poor eye-sight, asthma, or allergies). "God didn't create homosexuality, as He didn't create loneliness or disabilities."⁴⁵ Homosexuality is not God's ideal plan for people, and therefore must be removed *wherever possible*.

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: The homosexual condition or orientation is an evidence of the brokenness and fallenness of our present world. The condition may be classified with disease (such as alcoholism, or allergies), with handicap (such as congenital blindness), or eccentricity (such as left-handedness). It may even be evil (like sickness or death), but when not practiced it is not necessarily sinful (like pride, blasphemy, or murder). Because some homosexuals do not choose to be gay, but are born that way, "we shouldn't hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature)."⁴⁶ Being a homosex-

⁴³ Ronald M. Springett concludes his study on homosexuality: "The church must accept the individual of homosexual orientation who needs help and support and struggles against same-sex tendencies. But those who insist on and promote the active homosexual lifestyle as normal, natural, or even superior to heterosexual relations by that very act disregard and undermine the sole authority upon which the church's very existence and mission is based, namely, the Scriptures" (Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, 164).

⁴⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), and Lewis Smede, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976) adopt this view. While the latter is a more popular version than the former, they both seek to deal pastorally with the tragedy of "an ethically upright, mature homosexual who is struggling with his condition" (Thielicke, 271). They seem to accept, as equal partners, both the Bible and the testimonies of homosexuals and research by social scientists in their theological discussion of the issue.

⁴⁵ Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

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ual is not sin,⁴⁷ but (lustful and inappropriate) homosexual activity is sin and therefore, must be avoided.⁴⁸

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: In very rare situations, God may deliver some homosexuals from their condition/orientation. Generally, however, since genuine homosexuals did not choose their orientation, and since in most cases there is no possibility of change in orientation, homosexuals must aim at controlling (i.e. putting in subjection) their homosexual drives. One Adventist scholar writes:

“We must teach them to live with their condition. In a sense it is like being born left-handed. . . . However, it does not give license to practice homosexual acts, which violate Christian moral standards. In this situation we must consider the homosexual on the same basis as the heterosexual. . . . The homosexual may not be able to do anything about his attraction for his own sex, but by God’s grace he can control his impulses. He may not have had any real choice regarding his condition, but he has choice about his actions.”⁴⁹

Cure or deliverance may not always be possible for those with homosexual orientations. But through prayer, counseling, “therapy,” and other methods of behavior modification (skills of self-discipline or self-control), homosexuals can cope with their sexual predicament.

(e) Response to Homosexuality: While accepting their condition as a “thorn in the flesh,” and while controlling their desires, homosexuals should accept God’s unconditional love and acceptance. On the other hand, the church should treat people with homosexual orientation as it would treat heterosexuals—i.e., as real human beings, of equal value in God’s sight and having the same rights as all others. Show understanding, compassion, and love to them “neither condemning them for an orientation over which they have no control, nor encour-

⁴⁷“I don’t deny the *evil* of the thing, for evil it certainly is, but I do deny the *sinfulness* of it. The homosexual condition is to be classified with disease, weakness, death, as an evil; not with gluttony, blasphemy, murder, as a sin. Both sin and evil are the work of Satan, were brought into the world at the Fall, and will one day be destroyed by Christ, but they are not identical. Sin, which we must avoid and need never commit, is represented in our situation by homosexual lust and the activity to which it leads. Evil is different. We pray to be delivered from it, but may nevertheless find ourselves left in it, and then have to aim at using and transforming it. In our situation that means a homosexual nature. I’m sure that in this sense it is morally neutral. . . .” (Alex Davidson, *The Returns of Love: Letters of a Christian Homosexual* [London: Intervarsity, 1970], 80).

⁴⁸Chris Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation,” 11, equates homosexual *orientation* with temptation, and states: “We cannot condone homosexual activity. Homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God’s will. Yet a difference exists between the person who fights against homosexual tendencies and the one who experiments with or revels in them. It’s a sin to cave in to temptation. It’s not a sin to be tempted.”

⁴⁹Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 83.

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aging them to accept something less than God's best for their lives,"⁵⁰ as homosexuals are led to accept Jesus as their Savior.

Homosexuals who renounce homosexual practices and make a commitment to remain celibate must be accepted as church members in good and regular standing. They can hold church offices and can be ordained as ministers. "If an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol can hold any church office, a homosexual who never practices homosexuality can hold any church office."⁵¹

The *qualified acceptance* view, therefore, assumes that "once a homosexual (almost) always a homosexual."

3. Full Acceptance View. Historically rejected by the church, this revisionist view of morality asserts that homosexuality is *fully compatible* with Christianity.⁵² The following are some of its primary precepts:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As part of the *pre-fall natural order*, genuine (constitutional) homosexuality is not a distortion, nor an aberration of human sexuality. It is an immutable sexual orientation given or created by God as a gift to some people—just as is heterosexuality. It is an eccentricity (a characteristic of a minority) or a mark of one's individual identity (just like possessing a particular color of skin, eyes, or hair).

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: Homosexuality is morally neutral; it is neither evil nor sinful. An article in the *Newsletter* of SDA Kinship states this position well:

"Homosexuality and heterosexuality are two aspects of sexuality, neither being the counterfeit of the other, both being right or wrong depending upon the context of their expression. . . . Both the homosexual and the heterosexual are capable of lusting or loving, worshipping the creature or the Creator, and of seeking salvation by works or accepting it as a gift of God."⁵³

Homosexuality may be eccentric, but (like congenital blindness or the sickness of alcoholism) it definitely is not evil or sinful (like murder or pride).⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰Kate McLaughlin, "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" 29.

⁵¹Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 16. Blake, who wrote this long before reading my response to argument two, below, insists that the difference between our positions is primarily semantic and that his use of terms is in line with the *Church Manual*. I would say that an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol is no longer an alcoholic, and a non-practicing homosexual who has been born again may face temptation, but has *not* been *reborn* as a homosexual.

⁵²Representing this position are Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?—Another Christian View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), a work that draws heavily on findings of social scientists. The same position is advocated by SDA Kinship International, Inc.—"a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists"—and a group which maintains that "God can bless a committed homosexual relationship."

⁵³See J. Stuart, "Counterfeits," *SDA Kinship Newsletter* (May 1980):4 (cited by Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas*, 257).

⁵⁴In 1973, *Trends*, a publication of the United Presbyterian Church, devoted a full issue to the topic: "Homosexuality: Neither Sin or Sickness" (see *Trends* 5 [July-August 1973]).

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abuse of homosexuality (e. g., promiscuity, rape, or prostitution) is wrong, but not its legitimate expression (as in loving, consensual, monogamous, homosexual relationships).

(c) *Way Out of Homosexuality*: To insist that homosexuals should change their orientation is equivalent to asking an “Ethiopian” to change his skin, or asking a person five feet tall to become six feet. Homosexuals do not have to be transformed into heterosexuals, nor should they “just control themselves” until they become “heterosexualized.” Because of the long years during which they have been victimized as “sexual minorities,” homosexuals must claim the assurance of God’s acceptance and leading in their homosexual lifestyle.

(d) *Response to Homosexuality*: Homosexuals should not be condemned, despised, or singled out as the embodiment of sexual perversion. They, like all others, deserve love, dignity, and respect. Effort must be expended to present the living Christ to the homosexual who is not yet a Christian (i.e., the person who was “born a gay” but has not yet been “born again”). But whether converted or unconverted, all homosexuals should celebrate God’s “gift” (homosexual orientation), and *practice* homosexuality within a permanent relationship of love and fidelity or within the biblical guidelines for sexual morality.

Homosexuals who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior must be considered as full and regular members of the church, and if they choose, they must be encouraged to date other homosexuals—as long as the relationship is kept pure. In other words, homosexuals should be affirmed in their same sex relationships, be allowed to “marry” or to form “closed-couple homosexual unions,”⁵⁵ and whenever necessary, be permitted to adopt children. The rules of marriage should apply in homosexual marriages just as in heterosexual marriage. Converted homosexuals who have a calling or the requisite spiritual gifts should be ordained as pastors.

The full-acceptance view, therefore, maintains that “once a homosexual, always a homosexual.”

Summary. All three views—non-acceptance, qualified acceptance, and full-acceptance positions—are competing for converts within the Seventh-day Adventist church. The “hot potato” issue is whether to regard homosexuality as: (a) a morally-sinful practice to be renounced, (b) a morally-neutral condition to be controlled, or (c) a morally-acceptable gift to be celebrated.

Each of the three views raises crucial theological, ethical, and hermeneutical issues. Whereas the non-acceptance view and the full-acceptance view are con-

⁵⁵For example, Scanzoni and Mollenkot, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, 111, 71, 72, argue for “the possibility of a permanent, committed relationship of love between homosexuals analogous to heterosexual marriage.” Adventist ethicist David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984):16, also writes: “Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form Closed-Coupled homosexual unions.”

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sistent, the qualified acceptance view is inconsistent. Yet, it appears that the qualified-acceptance view is that which is being widely promoted by some thought leaders in the church.⁵⁶

Before the Adventist church renounces its traditional non-acceptance position in favor of the qualified acceptance position, the church should demand biblically consistent answers from advocates of this version of pro-gay theology.

While concerning myself with these questions in the final section of this presentation, I will evaluate some of the common arguments often put forth in favor of homosexuality. However, on this “hot potato” item, just as on any other controversial subject, “it is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it.”⁵⁷

III. Evaluating Some Pro-Gay Arguments

In order to silence or challenge the Bible’s negative valuation of homosexuality, advocates of pro-gay theology often put forward several arguments. In this section, I will state the key arguments and offer brief responses. The discussion is organized under non-biblical and biblical arguments for homosexuality.

A. Non-Biblical Arguments for Homosexuality

These sets of arguments tend to be scientific, philosophical, or logical. Their basic thrust is to show that: people are born homosexual—i.e., conclusive evidence exists to prove that homosexuality is genetic or inborn; and since homosexuals are “born gay,” their sexual orientation is a natural or normal trait of their identity (like the color of the skin or hair), and the orientation is allowed or given by God; a person’s homosexual orientation is morally neutral and unchangeable. We shall look at ten such non-biblical arguments.

1. “To learn the truth about homosexuality, talk to real homosexuals.”

For many, it is not sufficient to trust the Bible writers as the exclusive vehicle of a dependable knowledge of all truth. In order to “learn the truth about homosexuality,” we must update our knowledge *about* them (gained through whatever means) by actually listening to homosexuals themselves. This seems to be the point in some recent Adventist publications.

⁵⁶ This qualified-acceptance position has been reflected in articles in *Adventist Review*, *Ministry*, *Insight*, and *Adventist View*—see footnote 34. See also B. B. Beach and John Graz, *101 Questions Adventists Ask* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 55. The same theological view was promoted in booth #1109 at the Toronto GC session. The booth was listed in the GC Exhibition book as “Someone to Talk To.” Its organizers placed a two page advertisement in the book in which they claim that the NAD Family Ministries Department has recognized their organization.

⁵⁷ The above statement is attributed to Joseph Joubert (1754-1824); see David L. Bender, “Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?” in Bruno Leone, ed., *Racism: Opposing Viewpoints*, rev. ed. (St. Paul, MN: Greenhaven Press, 1986), 9.

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For example, one Adventist author writes that after “years of reading, observing, and eventually talking to people,” her homosexual son finally confirmed to her that indeed, “homosexuality is a condition, not a behavior. Whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person chooses.” Her son “told us that from his earliest memories he knew he was ‘different.’” She also learned that God may change a persons’s sexual orientation only “on rare occasions,” and that one can be a homosexual and be “deeply spiritual.”⁵⁸

One non-Adventist scholar has explained why we need to go to homosexuals themselves to learn the truth about homosexuality. In his article entitled, “A Newly Revealed Christian Experience,” Chris Glaser, a self-avowed gay Christian on the Presbyterian task force studying homosexuality, explains that gay Christians are “the best source” for the Church to understand homosexuality.⁵⁹ United Church of Christ minister William Johnson states this new approach to knowing (epistemology):

“Rather than looking to the psychologists and the psychiatrists and the sociologists, and even to the theologians, to find out about gay people, there is a need to listen to gay people within our churches and within the society, to begin to understand what we perceive to be the problems, and then together to work on those problems.”⁶⁰

A Princeton Theological Seminary professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), echoes this view:

“I used to believe that homosexual acts are always wrong. Listening to gay and lesbian students and friends, however, I have had to re-think my position and reread the scriptures. . . . I have no choice but to take the testimonies of gays and lesbians seriously. I do so with some comfort, however, for the scriptures themselves give me the warrant to trust that human beings can know truths apart from divine revelation.”⁶¹

Response to Argument #1. Bible-believing Adventists need to ask whether the testimonies and claims of homosexuals are an adequate basis to learn the truth about homosexuality. Are homosexuals, by virtue of their experience, more qualified to speak on the issue of homosexuality than the inspired writers of the

⁵⁸Kate McLaughlin, “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” 26-29. Cf. Suzanne Ryan, “When Love Wasn’t Enough,” 2-3; Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation,” 4-5, 6.

⁵⁹Chris Glaser, “A Newly Revealed Christian Experience,” *Church and Society* 67 (May-June 1977):5.

⁶⁰William Muehl and William Johnson, “Issues Raised by Homosexuality,” *Raising the Issues* (materials distributed as Packet 1, Task Force to Study Homosexuality, United Presbyterian Church), 4, cited in Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1984), 116-117.

⁶¹Choon-Leong Seouw, “A Heterotexual Perspective,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seouw (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 25.

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Bible who served as spokespersons of the Creator for human sexuality? In other words, is the attempt to justify homosexuality on the grounds of personal experience and/or empirical studies, rather than biblical revelation, a legitimate starting point for any investigation regarding sexual morality? Are the testimonies and claims of homosexuals necessarily true?

Specifically, does one have to be a homosexual in order to understand the truth about homosexuality? If we restrict knowledge or understanding of the homosexual condition to only homosexuals, does it mean that one has to experience a particular kind of sinful tendency in order to understand what exactly that sinful reality is? Assuming, for the purposes of argument, that homosexual orientation is a part of the constitutional make up of a person (just as a person's color or gender is), does it mean that true knowledge about that identity can only be had by persons with that kind of sexual identity? Does it mean, for example, that only black African women can fully understand the pains of people in that category? By analogy, could Jesus, a single Jewish male, have understood the experience of, say, Maria, a single-parent Hispanic woman?

Could it be that in a desire to appear more "informed" and perhaps more "compassionate," some Christians are giving the impression that they are ethically and religiously more knowledgeable and "sensitive" than the inspired Bible writers who condemned the practice of homosexuality? How can pro-homosexual advocates be wiser than the One who has given His written Word and His moral laws as the basis of true human joy and self-fulfillment? How can they be more compassionate than the One who has given His life for all humanity? Is it, perhaps, that they do not view the Bible and its God as did the Bible writers—the pioneers of biblical Christianity?

2. "There's A Difference Between Being A Homosexual And Practicing Homosexuality." Discussions on homosexuality often define it in two ways: (a) homosexual *orientation* or *inclination* or *tendency*—an inborn sexual attraction, predisposition, or desire toward a member of one's own sex, and (b) homosexual *behavior* or *practice*—an erotic activity with a member of one's own sex, an activity that may or may not be morally right.⁶²

On the basis of this distinction some Adventist writers argue that homosexual *orientation/condition* (also referred to as "ontological" or "constitutional" homosexuality or "inversion") is a permanent and unchangeable part of the indi-

⁶²Writes Anglican theologian D. S. Bailey: "It is important to understand that the genuine homosexual condition, or *inversion*, as it is often termed, is something for which the subject can in no way be held responsible; in itself, it is morally neutral. Like the normal condition of heterosexuality, however, it may find expression in specific sexual acts; and such acts are subject to moral judgement no less than those which may take place between man and woman. It must be made quite clear that the genuine invert is not necessarily given to homosexual practices, and may exercise as careful a control over his or her physical impulses as the heterosexual." D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955], xi).

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vidual's constitutional make up. It is like the color of a person's skin—a non-behavioral trait that is to be viewed as morally neutral and a condition from which no one can change. On the other hand, homosexual *practice/activity* must be judged according to morally acceptable norms. "Being a homosexual is not sin," it is argued, but "homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God's will."⁶³

Response to Argument #2: This argument is meaningless, if not misleading. Is homosexuality something you are, like being black or elderly or handicapped or female, or is it something you do, like adultery or incest or lying? This question goes to the heart of the pro-homosexual statement that "there is a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality." In order for the pro-gay argument to be valid, one must assume that homosexuality is not a sin. On the other hand, if homosexuality is a sin, as the Bible seems to suggest, then the distinction between being and practicing homosexuality is artificial and invalid.

Let's think a little more carefully: Can a person really be a homosexual without practicing homosexuality? If this is so, can a person be an adulterer without practicing adultery? Can an individual be a liar without practicing lying? Also, if a person repents of his besetting sin, and through the enabling grace of God gains victory over, say, stealing, lying, immorality, etc., would it be theologically appropriate to continue viewing the person as though he were still in bondage to that particular sin, even though he may still be tempted?

Rather than distinguishing between "being a homosexual" and "practicing homosexuality," perhaps it is more theologically sound to distinguish between the temptation to act upon one's sinful homosexual tendency (which is not wrong) and actually choosing to cherish and act upon that temptation (a wrongful choice).

If allowed to stand unchallenged, the distinction made between "being homosexual" and "practicing homosexuality" would raise a number of biblical and theological questions. First, does the Bible make such a distinction between homosexual *orientation/condition* and homosexual *practice/behavior*?—between *inversion* (constitutional homosexuality) and *perversion* (the abuse of homosexuality)? Adventist scholars disagree on this issue.

For example, one New Testament scholar admits that, "Such a distinction [between *inverts* and *perverts*] does not appear in Scripture, nor does the Bible reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today." But he seems

⁶³Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 11. To be fair, I should make it very clear that though Blake argues that "being a homosexual is not sin," he does believe that homosexual *practice* is sin. He is not preaching that "It's okay to be gay." Instead he is calling for an end to persecution of those who face homosexual temptation so they can be brought to Christ rather than driven from Him. He is right to argue that name-calling, ostracism, and violence against homosexuals are not Christian.

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to negate this categorical statement when, in the very next sentence, he writes: “Nevertheless, Paul must have had reference to the perverted sexual practices common in the degenerate pagan society of his time. Obviously he is referring to perverts, not inverts who do not participate in homosexual practices.”⁶⁴

If the Bible makes no such distinction, how is it “obvious” for Paul to be referring to a non-existent distinction? In other words, if Scripture does not make the contemporary distinction between homosexual orientation (inversion) and homosexual practice (perversion), how is it possible that “the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts”?⁶⁵ In order not to be accused of forcing the Bible into the mold of today’s sociological dichotomy between perversion and inversion, Adventist exegetes would need to establish whether the Bible makes such a distinction or not. The Bible condemns sin in thought and deed. It teaches that we all have sinful natures, but offers victory through rebirth.

Second, the distinction between orientation and practice—the former being morally neutral and the latter morally wrong—also raises theological and ethical questions. Does the universal sinfulness of all humanity and the fact that they are born with weakness and tendencies to evil (Ps 51:5; 143:2; cf. 14:3; 1 Kings 8:46; Pro 20:9; Rom 3:23; 7:14-24; 1 John 1:8) allow one to suggest that this sinful tendency or propensity is morally neutral, and therefore, not a sin to be repented of or overcome by the power of Christ (Rom 7:25; 8:1; Eph 2:1-10; John 1:13; 3:5; 2 Cor 5:17)?

Third, if Adventists adopt the social scientists’ distinction between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *practice*, would not such a dichotomy be a biblically questionable rendering of actions and attitudes? In other words, how can the *practice* of homosexuality be wrong, and yet, the inclination toward or the longing for that action be neutral (cf. Matt. 5:27, 28; 1 John 3:15)?

Is it Scriptural to argue that a homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral (and hence, not a sin) but the *action* itself is that which is sinful? If there exists an *orientation* toward a wrong act, does not a person need as much help to overcome that inclination as the individual who has succumbed to that wrong desire—whether it be lying, stealing, adultery or killing, etc.?

Instead of referring to homosexuality as a morally neutral orientation, is it not more biblical to say that a homosexual orientation is nothing more than an

⁶⁴Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, 75. It appears that in the Torah, the assumption is that everyone will marry, if possible. Not only is there no allowance for an inverted homosexual, but there is no suggestion that some might choose not to marry but to remain single. Not until the NT do we find Jesus calling disciples to be willing to forsake their families and follow Him and Paul urging disciples to forego marriage if possible and devote themselves to God’s work.

⁶⁵Writes Kubo: “Thus in treating the New Testament evidence we must keep two things in mind. Scripture does not reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today. The contemporary practices indicate that the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts” (Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, 76).

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almost helpless sinful tendency or propensity (such as kleptomania, nymphomania, inveterate adultery), a condition that makes temptation to sin almost irresistible? And if homosexual orientation, like kleptomania and nymphomania, is a sinful human condition, does not this diagnosis suggest that the cure for this problem has to be Divine?

Could it be that the failure to recognize homosexuality as sin is one reason why it cannot be overcome? If homosexual orientation excuses the sin of homosexual desires, does it not imply that other sinful orientations (such as compulsive lying, compulsive adultery, compulsive racism, compulsive stealing, compulsive disobedience to authority, etc.) should all be excused as irreversible sinful conditions? Wherein then, lies the power of God's transforming grace?

3. "People Are Born Homosexual." When advocates of pro-gay theology assert that people are born gay, they actually go beyond the generally accepted view that genetics and environmental factors *influence* a person's behavior. Instead, they suggest that homosexuality is largely *caused by* a person's genes.⁶⁶ This belief, which is itself based on the deterministic philosophy of behaviorism, is designed to suggest that what is inborn is (a) natural or normal, (b) unchangeable, (c) allowed or created by God—as with a congenital defect or one's eye color, and that it is (d) morally legitimate.

The logic and implications of this view are as follows: If a person is homosexual because of inbred homosexual condition, there is no hope or possibility for change. And because the homosexual cannot change, all aspects of society must change, including education, religion, and law. Not only must homosexuality be accepted as socially legal for homosexuals, it must also be promoted as a "normal lifestyle option" and, if necessary, the church must be pressured to abandon its "immoral discrimination" against homosexuals seeking church membership.

Response to Argument #3. Even if one could prove that homosexuality is of genetic, hormonal or environmental origin, would this make homosexuality morally legitimate? Does being "born" alcoholic, pedophile, or gay make alcoholism, pedophilia, or homosexuality normal? Even if it does, does the fact that something is "normal" make it morally right?

Is behaviorism or biological determinism compatible with biblical anthropology, which teaches that human beings are created in the image of God and endowed with freedom of choice? Can we correlate this naturalistic philosophy with the biblical doctrine that we are accountable to God for our conduct (doc-

⁶⁶This argument has to do with the causes of homosexuality and the possibility of change. If the root cause of the homosexual orientation is strictly genetic, then the chances of change are very slim. If, on the other hand, homosexual orientation has to do with one's environment or choice, then changing one's environment or exercising the power of choice can effect a change in a homosexual's condition.

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trine of judgment)? Does not this “I did not choose, I cannot change” philosophy raise serious questions about Christ’s power to help us “overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to sin”?⁶⁷

Does not this behavioristic philosophy lead to a “once a sinner, always a sinner” doctrine? In other words, *would it be biblically correct to maintain that even after conversion, an alcoholic/drug addict or a habitual/compulsive liar or sexual pervert will always remain an alcoholic/drug addict or habitual/compulsive liar or a sexual pervert? Is not this “born a gay” philosophy in conflict with the “born again” promise of the living Christ?*

To clarify the issue further, we will look at seven other aspects of this “born a gay” theory: (i) Do studies show that homosexuality is inborn? (ii) Is homosexual orientation natural or normal? (iii) Is homosexual orientation God-given? (iv) Is homosexual orientation morally neutral? (v) Is homosexual orientation unchangeable? (vi) Does God want homosexuals to give up “who they are”? (vii) Is it true that “once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual”?

4. “Studies Show that Homosexuality is Inborn.” Like every other sinful practice, one’s genes, environment, and many other factors may greatly influence a person’s predisposition to a particular sin. But pro-gay advocates go further, claiming that scientific studies offer conclusive proof that people are born gay.

Response to Argument #4. Although some future studies may one day bear this out, the research findings often cited as evidence of the “born a gay” condition are, at best, inconclusive; they are questionable at worst.⁶⁸ Two of these deserve mention because of the prominence often given them in Adventist publications.

(a) *Neurobiologist Simon LeVay’s 1991 Study on the Brains of 41 Cadavers.* The cadavers consisted of nineteen allegedly homosexual men, sixteen allegedly heterosexual men, and six allegedly heterosexual women. He reported that a cluster of neurons in a distinct section of the brain (called the interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus, or the INAH3) were generally smaller in the homosexual men as compared to the heterosexual men. As a result, he hypothesized that the size of these neurons may cause a person to be either heterosexual or homosexual.⁶⁹ This study is often cited as “proof” that people are born gay.

⁶⁷Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671; cf. *The Ministry of Healing*, 175-176.

⁶⁸For a more detailed discussion, with supporting references, see Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow: Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 137-142; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the “Gay Christian” Movement*, 107-131. What follows is a brief summary from these works.

⁶⁹Simon LeVay’s findings were published as “A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science*, August 30, 1991, 1034-1037.

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As others have shown, LeVay's study is exaggerated, misleading, and fraught with major weaknesses. (1) In order for his theory to be valid, studies would have to show that the difference in size of that section of the brain occurred 100% of the time. But LeVay's own study showed 17% of his total study group contradicted his theory. Three of the nineteen allegedly homosexual men actually had larger neurons than their heterosexual counterparts, and three of the heterosexual men had smaller neurons than did the homosexual men! (2) There is no proof that the section of the brain he measured actually has anything to do with sexual preference. (3) The study did not show whether the size of the neurons caused the sexual preference or whether the sexual preference caused the size. (4) The scientific community has not by any means unanimously accepted LeVay's finding. (5) LeVay's own objectivity in the research is in question, since he admitted in a September 9, 1991, *Newsweek* magazine that after the death of his homosexual lover, he was determined to find a genetic cause for homosexuality or he would abandon science altogether.

(b) *J. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard's 1991 Study of Twins.* Bailey and Pillard investigated how widespread homosexuality is among identical twins (whose genetic makeup are the same) and fraternal twins (whose genetic ties are less close). Among other things, they discovered that 52% of the identical twins studied were both homosexual. Bailey and Pillard hypothesized that the higher incidence of homosexuality among the identical twins implies that homosexuality is genetic in origin.

Bailey and Pillard's theory is also misleading and exaggerated. For their theory to be a fact, the following should hold: (1) There should never be a case when one identical twin is heterosexual and the other homosexual, since both identical twins share 100% of the same genes. If sexual orientation is genetic, then both identical twins will in 100% of cases always be either homosexual or heterosexual. Bailey and Pillard's findings of only 52% challenges their own hypothesis. On the contrary, their research confirms that non-genetic factors play a significant role in shaping sexual preference. (2) The twins should be raised in different homes to eliminate the possible effect of environmental factors in their sexual preferences. But all twins studied by Bailey and Pillard were raised in the same homes. (3) A later study on twins by other scholars yielded different results. (4) Bailey and Pillard, like LeVay, may not have approached their study objectively, given their personal feelings about homosexuality. Because Bailey is a gay rights advocate and Pillard is openly homosexual, their objectivity in the research may be questioned. (5) There are also questions about whether the sample was representative, since Bailey and Pillard requested subjects by solicitation through homosexual organizations and publications.

Other studies have been done. However, to date, we know of no study that supports the claim by pro-gay advocates that conclusive evidence exists that people are born gay or that homosexuality is inborn or of genetic origin. We are

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not suggesting that genetics does not influence one's homosexual predisposition. Our contention is simply that the studies usually cited for the claim that "people are born gay" are not as conclusive as proponents would have us believe. It seems that the studies are put forth to intimate that homosexuality is not a sin to be repented of, but a mark of one's identity to be celebrated.

5. "Homosexual Orientation Is Natural or Normal." Based on the assumption that homosexuality is inborn, i.e. of genetic origin, advocates argue that homosexuality should be accepted as a natural or normal human condition.

Response to Argument #5. This argument is also flawed. Leaving aside the important issues of the manner in which the scientific "research" is conducted and the kind of interpretation given to the research "findings,"⁷⁰ even proving that homosexual orientation is inborn (i.e., of genetic origin) will not make homosexuality normal or desirable. Many defects or handicaps today are inborn, but hardly anyone would call them normal for that reason alone. Why should homosexuality be considered natural or normal, just because it may be inborn?

When we say that something is natural, we refer to what happens repeatedly in the world of nature—in which case we do not assign moral judgment to it. For example, spiders kill and eat other spiders, including their mates. "But as a moral category natural refers to something that is in accord with God's intention. Actions are good or bad: for example, people sometimes kill and eat other people. But the fact that cannibalism happens in the world—perhaps in satisfaction of deeply held religious beliefs or peculiar culinary tastes—does not make it *natural* in the sense that it conforms to God's will. In summary: that which is *natural* to human experience or human desire is not necessarily *natural* in God's moral design."⁷¹

6. "Homosexual Orientation Is God-given." The argument here is that because many homosexuals claim that since their childhood they have *always* had homosexual feelings, their "natural" homosexual tendencies are from God.

Response to Argument #6. Scripture nowhere suggests that if a thing seems natural it is inevitably God-given. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that many "natural" states and desires are not of God and are contrary to His will.

For example, "The natural man does not receive the things of God" (1 Cor 2:14). Before conversion, we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). Scripture teaches that we are a fallen race, born in sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity" (Ps 51:5; cf. Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12). Sin has marred our physical and spiritual nature (1 Cor 15:1-54; John

⁷⁰ For more on this, see Joe Dallas, "Born Gay?" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 1992, 20-23.

⁷¹ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* 133.

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3:5-6). We cannot therefore assume that because something is natural or inborn, it must be God-ordained.

7. “Homosexual Orientation Is Morally Neutral.” From the assumption that people are born gay, proponents argue that homosexuality should be viewed as a neutral expression of human sexuality. Like heterosexuality, homosexuality can be rightly used or abused. The abuse is wrong. But its use within a loving, consensual, and monogamous relationship is morally right.

Response to Argument #7. As to the assumption that because homosexuality may be natural or inborn (an unproven assertion) it is morally neutral or legitimate, we may ask: If we would demonstrate conclusively that adultery, incest, pedophilia, violence, lying are inherited, would we be justified in considering them legitimate or neutral? Should the standard for morality be determined by what is inborn?

Contrary to this view, homosexuality is still immoral, whether inborn or acquired. “And immoral behavior cannot be legitimized by a quick baptism in the gene pool.”⁷²

Morality is not determined by what is inborn. Those wishing to discover God’s moral standards must look to the Bible. The Ten Commandments and God’s pre-fall order, rather than the latest discoveries of science regarding the post-fall sinful condition, provide the moral guidelines on whether homosexuality is moral and immoral. The leap from *what is* (alleged “facts” of the homosexual condition) to *what ought to be* (the morality of homosexuality) is too large to make.

8. “Changing Homosexual Orientation Is Difficult and Rare.” It is claimed that because homosexuality is an inbred condition, the homosexual has no (or very little) hope of ever changing.

Response to Argument #8. The oft-repeated claim that “changing one’s homosexual orientation is difficult and rare” almost suggests that it is impossible to change one’s sinful tendencies. It may be difficult, if the work of transformation is a human work. But if this operation is performed by God, as Scripture and Ellen G. White teach, then changing a person’s sinful orientation is not “difficult and rare.” In fact, the Bible itself says that sinners such as fornicators, adulterers, thieves, and *homosexuals* were actually able to overcome their sinful practice through the transforming power of Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Similarly, Ellen G. White states unequivocally that “a genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong.”⁷³ The miraculous conversions and

⁷²Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the “Gay Christian Movement”* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 117.

⁷³Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed., Francis D. Nichol, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1101.

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transformed lives in our day also confirm that changing one's sinful orientation is not "rare."

But even when we suppose, for the sake of argument, that it is "difficult and rare" to change the homosexual condition—or even that no amount of prayer, counselling, and effort of any kind can make a homosexual change his orientation—do these facts make homosexuality less sinful? Definitely not. One former homosexual's statement is worth quoting:

"There is no contingency factor in any scriptural reference to any kind of sin, in either the Old or the New Testament. We never read anything like: 'Thou shalt not do thus and so!' ('Unless, of course, you tried hard to change, went for prayer and counseling, and found you just couldn't stop wanting to do thus and so. If that's the case, then thus and so is no longer sin. It's an inborn, immutable gift and you can darn well [feel free to] indulge in it!')"⁷⁴

9. "God Does Not Want Homosexuals to Give Up 'Who They Are'."

Based on the assumption that people are born gay, and on the basis of texts like Psalm 139:13 ("For you created my inmost parts") and Psalm 100:3 ("It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves"), pro-gay advocates maintain that people's homosexual *orientation/condition* is part of their identity, defining who they are as sexual human beings. Consequently, it is argued: "Since God made me the way I am, and since I have had my orientation from my earliest memories, why shouldn't I express my God-given sexuality? Why would God ask me to change something which He Himself has given me?"⁷⁵

Response to Argument #9. The fact is that God wants every one of us, including homosexuals, to give up something we have had all our lives—*ourselves*, our sinful selves. The Bible condemns all forms of self-love or self-indulgence as expressions of idolatry and presents *self-denial* as the hallmark of Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26-27; cf. Rev 12:11). The only way really to find one's self is by losing it (Mark 8:34-37). We cannot change ourselves; but Christ can change us if we truly want to be changed from our besetting sexual tendencies.

⁷⁴Dallas, *A Strong Delusion*, 121.

⁷⁵Thus, the Andrews University student newspaper carried an article by David Rodgers (pseudonym), a denominationally employed Andrews University campus outreach coordinator for the gay group, Kinship. Rodgers states that his homosexuality "certainly wasn't a choice. . . . God made me this way and it's not something I should change. Or can change" (Yoonah Kim, "The Love that Dares Not Speak Its Name," *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, 9). The same article refers to "Ann," a 28-year old lesbian who seeks to transfer her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University. Ann speaks about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role: "I am a lesbian because God knows that that's the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual" (ibid).

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10. “Once A Homosexual, (Almost) Always A Homosexual.” This is where the logic of biological predestination eventually leads: People are born gay; they cannot change their condition; they will always remain gay. If anyone has to change, it must be the institutions of society and the church, not the homosexual. The laws of society and the Bible must change to accommodate the homosexual who, once gay, will always be gay.

Response to Argument #10. Perhaps the most important question raised by the issue of homosexuality is whether Christ has power to help people overcome sin in their lives. This is of course an important question if homosexuality is sin. For if homosexuality is just a sickness or addictive/compulsive behavior, then homosexuals need therapy, not repentance; they need medical cure and not moral correction. And if homosexuality is simply a morally neutral part of a person’s identity, then “once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual.”

The latter claim has been made by the editor of a leading Adventist church paper:

“You attempt to make a point that neither the Bible nor human experience can support—that a person’s sexual orientation is itself sinful and must and can be overcome by the new birth. As Jesus and our common sense tell us, no amount of praying or piety can turn a person five feet tall into one six feet tall; and a person who is an alcoholic is an alcoholic for life. The only question is whether the alcoholic will *practice* on the basis of her [sic] or her orientation.”⁷⁶

The above quotation summarizes the issues raised in this paper. Not only does it raise questions about the normative source of one’s religious authority (Bible? human experience? Jesus? common sense?), but also it raises the question about whether or not (a) we can distinguish between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality, whether or not the experience of conversion—“the new birth”—can help a person to overcome his/her sinful sexual orientation (whether homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual) and whether (c) a person who is an alcoholic or homosexual can overcome all these sinful tendencies and cease to be an alcoholic and homosexual.

⁷⁶ Official letter, dated May 28, 1993, from New Testament scholar William G. Johnsson, editor, *Adventist Review*, to Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. In this letter, Johnsson was responding to a summary version of this paper I had submitted for publication. The above quotation presents the first of three reasons given why my article—titled then as “‘Born A Gay’ Or ‘Born Again?’”—in its present form is not acceptable” for publication in the *Adventist Review*. The editor suggested that the article should be re-worked “to bring it in line with the general thinking of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this matter [of homosexuality]” if it should be considered for publication. The “general thinking” that the editor endorses seems to be the *qualified-acceptance position*. In addition to the above reason, the editor also suggested that the article should (1) deal with the pro-gay reconstructions of the Biblical texts that challenge homosexual lifestyle and (2) be “shaped within the framework of a greater compassion.” I am indebted to Dr. Johnsson for the suggestion. This present article is a partial response to his invitation.

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If the Bible's diagnosis of homosexuality as sin can be established scripturally, then the Bible's prescription is the same for homosexuals as it is for all other sinners: a call to conversion and an invitation to participate in the process of biblical sanctification. If this is true, then the Bible's approach cannot be disdained as naive, simplistic, or inadequate, nor belittled as "pat answers" that are incomplete for people struggling with sexual addiction. It forces us to answer the question of whether the transforming power of God is more effective than the impotent power of psychological therapy.⁷⁷ The testimony of Scripture exposes the lie that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual." Homosexuals can be, and have actually been, changed through the transforming power of Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11).

B. Scriptural Arguments for Homosexuality

On the basis of Scripture, Seventh-day Adventists historically have rejected homosexuality as morally unacceptable. Today, however, some are reinterpreting the Bible to allow for the practice. Proponents claim that scriptural references to homosexual acts are "culturally-conditioned," and thus do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today.

Because of space limitations I can only summarize and respond to some of the major scriptural arguments justifying pro-gay theology. Those who seek more information may want to consult the in-depth analysis and evaluation provided in some other excellent works.⁷⁸

11. "Scriptural references to homosexual acts do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today. They are 'culturally conditioned'."

⁷⁷See Andrews University psychology professor John Berezcz's, "How I Treat Gay and Lesbian Persons," *Student Movement*, November 11, 1992, 7, where he asserts that seeking help in the complex area of homosexuality from "untrained nonprofessionals," such as a local pastor, "is a bit like asking your mailman to remove your gall bladder. If you're seeking sexual re-orientation therapy, a competent professional trained in sex therapy is your best hope."

⁷⁸See, for example, Thomas E. Schmidt's *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), and Marion L. Soards' *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995). To date, the most detailed Adventist response to scriptural arguments of pro-gay advocates is the GC Biblical Research Institute's commissioned work by Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1988); cf. Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry*, September 1988, 14-16. I am indebted to the following works for their excellent readable review and evaluation of the scriptural arguments by pro-gay advocates: Carl Bridges, Jr. "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," in *Gay Rights Or Wrongs: A Christian's Guide to Homosexual Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazzalongo (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 147-169; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*, 185-202; John R. W. Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships?: Why Same-Sex Relationships Are Not A Christian Option* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985).

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Probably the major reason Christian churches accept homosexuality is the sophisticated scriptural arguments being employed to justify the practice.

Proponents either maintain that the Bible is “silent” on the issue or that scriptural passages that condemn homosexuality (Gen. 19 [cf. Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2:6-10]; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11), if “rightly” understood, are either ambiguous, irrelevant to contemporary homosexual practice, or refer to pederasty or cultic prostitution.⁷⁹ In short, advocates of gay theology argue that because biblical passages on homosexuality only deal with specific historical situations, they are “culturally conditioned” and no longer relevant for Christian sexual ethics in the present time.

Response to Argument #11. Undergirding these new reformulations of biblical teaching on homosexuality is liberalism’s unscriptural view of biblical inspiration, interpretation, and authority. One writer has correctly noted: “There are only two ways one can neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of Scripture.”⁸⁰ Indeed, many of the biblical arguments by homosexuals are “strained, speculative and implausible, the product of wishful thinking and special pleading.”⁸¹

12. “Jesus said nothing about homosexuality in any of the Gospels.”

The argument is that, as followers of Christ, Christians should base their beliefs on the teachings of Christ. If Jesus Christ, the founder of biblical Christianity, was silent on the issue of homosexuality, why should we go beyond our Master by condemning the practice?

Response to Argument #12: The lack of record in the Gospels of Christ’s statement on homosexuality does not mean that He never addressed it during His earthly ministry. According to John, if the Gospel writers had attempted to record all the works of Christ, the world could not contain all the books (John 21:25).

Moreover, the recorded teachings of Christ in the Gospels are not the Christian’s only source of authority. “All Scripture”—from Genesis to Revelation—constitutes the normative authority. The fact that one section of the Bible says nothing on a subject does not mean the other sections are silent.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to say that Jesus is silent on homosexuality. His statement in Matthew 19:3-8 and Mark 10:2-9 reveals God’s created intent on

⁷⁹These pro-gay arguments are best articulated by former Yale University professor of history John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), and Anglican theologian Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. John R. W. Stott describes Bailey as “the first Christian theologian to re-evaluate the traditional understanding of the biblical prohibitions regarding homosexuality” (Stott, “Homosexual Marriage,” *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1985, 22).

⁸⁰Stanton L. Jones, “The Loving Opposition,” *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1993, 13.

⁸¹Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality*, 113.

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human sexuality—namely, monogamous, heterosexual relationships are the only context for the expression of human sexuality.⁸²

13. “The Bible writers did not know about homosexuality as we know it today.” Some argue that the kind of homosexuality condemned by the Bible writers was that which was connected with rape, prostitution, or idolatry—not loving, committed, and faithful homosexual relationships. They claim that even if the Bible writers condemned homosexuality as we know it today, this is not the first time Bible writers have been wrong. They were wrong on many things, including the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women, practices later allegedly corrected by the “Spirit’s leading.” If they were wrong on these issues, why can’t they be wrong on homosexuality? And if under the Spirit’s leading the church came to embrace slave emancipation, monogamy, women’s equal rights, why should not the church, led by the same Spirit, accept homosexuality?

Response to Argument #13: First, if we believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, and not simply the personal opinions of ancient writers, and that the Bible is the all-sufficient guide in doctrine and practice for all people living at all times (2 Tim 3:16-17; cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21), then “it is unthinkable that God—who is no respecter of persons—would be so careless as to offer no guidance in His revealed Word to the thousands of homosexuals He knew would exist throughout time, if indeed their relationships were legitimate in His sight.”⁸³

Second, it is without foundation to argue that the Bible writers (Moses and Paul) were ignorant of today’s more “enlightened” scientific/theological view of homosexuality. These men were erudite in their intellectual training and discerning in their calling as God’s prophets. They never made the fine distinctions cited by today’s pro-homosexual advocates because there is no validity to recent distinctions between the homosexual act and the condition, the latter being something about which homosexuals have no choice. The Bible writers condemned homosexuality of itself. They also offered God’s miraculous transformation as the cure for this sin (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Third, the suggestion that the Bible writers were wrong on a number of issues is an assertion arising from unexamined assumptions of contemporary

⁸²While Jesus is not reported to have spoken on homosexuality or homosexual behavior, his one recorded statement [in Matt 19:3-8 and Mark 10:2-9] about human sexuality reveals that he understood males and females to be created by God for mutual relations that unite and fulfill both male and female in a (permanent) complementary union. There is no room here for an argument from silence concerning what Jesus ‘might have’ or ‘must have’ thought about homosexuality. But from Jesus’ own words we see that he understood human sexuality to be God’s own creation for the purpose of male and female uniting in a complementary relationship” (Marion L. Soards’ *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995], 28).

⁸³Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* (Eugene OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 276.

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higher criticism (the so-called higher critical method). In an earlier work I have challenged this discredited method of liberal interpretation as incompatible with the tenets of biblical Christianity.⁸⁴ Moreover, the claim that the Bible writers accommodated or tolerated (some say encouraged) slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women, practices later allegedly corrected by the “Spirit’s leading,” is a scholarly *myth* that has been challenged by responsible Bible scholars.⁸⁵ The Bible writers never once *commended* the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women. But they did repeatedly condemn the practice of homosexuality (see, for example, Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26ff. 1 Cor 6; 1 Tim 1:8ff.).

14. “Sodom was destroyed because of pride, inhospitality, and/or gang rape, not because of homosexuality.” When the men of Sodom demanded of Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them” (Gen 19:5), it is argued that they were violating the ancient rules of hospitality. Some assert that the Hebrew word *yadah*, which is translated “have sex with” (or “know” in KJV), appears 943 times in the Old Testament, and carries sexual meaning only about ten times. Thus, it is argued that the men of Sodom had no sexual intentions toward Lot’s visitors; they only wanted to to “get acquainted” with them or interrogate them, fearing that they were foreign spies being harbored by Lot, himself a foreigner. Furthermore, even if they had sexual intentions, the condemnation of their action would be the condemnation of homosexual gang rape, not a consensual homosexuality as such.

Response to Argument #14: Indeed, Sodom was destroyed because of pride and inhospitality (cf. Eze 16:49-50; Jer 23:14; Luke 17:28-29). But it is a false distinction to separate inhospitality from sexual sin. What the men of Sodom sought to do was another form of inhospitality. Also, inhospitality and pride

⁸⁴See my *Receiving the Word*, 241-249, esp. 279-321. Cf. my unpublished article, “A Bug in Adventist Hermeneutic,” 1999, a summary version of which is to be published in a future issue of *Ministry* under the title, “Questions in the Quest for a Unifying Hermeneutic.”

⁸⁵Readers will benefit from the following works which challenge the above “accommodation” hypotheses: Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993); Theodore D. Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery: Or, An Inquiry into the Genius of the Mosaic System, and the Teachings of the Old Testament on the Subject of Human Rights* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864); cf. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery As Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990). These works offer biblical evidence showing that God at no time tolerated polygamy and slavery as morally legitimate practices for His people. On the issue of the subjugation of women or “patriarchy,” George Knight, *Role Relationships of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985), and Guenther Haas, “Patriarchy as An Evil that God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1995, 321-326, have challenged the notion that male headship (in the home and church) is an evil practice that God tolerated.

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were not the only reasons for Sodom's destruction. The city was punished also because of its "abominations" (Eze 16:50), a veiled reference to its sexual deviations. The Bible describes various things as "abomination," a word of strong disapproval, meaning literally something detestable and hated by God. But since the word is used in the so-called "inhospitality passages" of Ezekiel 16 to describe sexual sin (v. 22, 58), and since the word refers to same-sex acts in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the "abominations" of Sodom are not exclusive of sexual deviations.

Two New Testament passages make this point explicitly. The apostle Peter indicates that, among other things, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their "filthy conversation," "unlawful deeds," and their "walk after the *lust of the flesh*" (2 Pet 2:6-10), a reference that includes adultery, fornication, and other sexual perversions (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Jude specifically linked the destruction of these wicked cities to their sexual deviations: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to *fornication, and going after strange flesh* are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). The "*fornication and going after strange flesh*" are obvious references to sexual perversions (so NIV, RSV, NRSV, Phillips, TEV).

Pro-gay advocates incorrectly assert that the Hebrew word *yadah* as used in Genesis 19 means "to get acquainted with," not "to have sex with" as the context clearly indicates. Lot's reply to the men of Sodom shows that he understood their demand in sexual terms: "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing" (Gen 19:7). In fact, in the very next verse, the word *yadah* is translated "slept with." Lot, acting out of sheer desperation and hopelessness proposed: "Look, I have two daughters who have never *slept with (yadah)* a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them" (v. 8). Lot definitely had no reason to think that the men of Sodom merely wanted to question or get acquainted with his daughters! Derek Kidner puts it neatly: "It would be grotesquely inconsequent that Lot should reply to a demand for credentials by an offer of daughters."⁸⁶ The fact that Lot refers to his daughters' virgin status indicates he understood the *sexual* content of the request. Clearly, then, *yadah* refers to sexual intercourse.

This much can be said: The men of Sodom were were not interested in Lot's desperate offer of his virgin daughters. They were proposing a homosexual rape. But for such rape to have involved "all the men of the city, both young and old" (Gen 19:4), homosexual activity must have been commonly practiced—one reason why Jude records their "*fornication, and going after strange flesh* are set forth [in Scripture] for an example [and warning unto us]" (Jude 7). As we will

⁸⁶Derek Kidner, "Additional Note on the Sin of Sodom," in *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 136-137.

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see, other Bible passages condemn all homosexual activity, not just homosexual rape.

15. “The Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, condemning homosexual activity as sinful, do not condemn homosexuality as we know it today.” In these passages, God forbids a man to “lie with” another man “as with a woman.” They are an “abomination.” Advocates of gay theology, however, argue that the practices condemned as “abomination” (Heb. *to’evah*) in these passages of Leviticus have to do with the kind of homosexuality associated with pagan religious practices. Pro-gay writers therefore assert that God was not prohibiting the kind of homosexuality practiced today by Christians, but only the kind connected with idolatry. Even if the passages condemn homosexuality in general, they argue, these passages in Leviticus are part of the ceremonial holiness code that has no permanent binding obligation on Christians.

Response to Argument #15: First, if these passages condemn homosexuality only because of its association with idolatry, then it would logically follow that other practices mentioned in these passages—incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice—are also condemned as sinful only because of their association with idolatry. Conversely, if incest, adultery, polygamy, bestiality, etc. are morally objectionable regardless of their connection with pagan practices, then homosexuality is also morally wrong, regardless of the context in which it is practiced.

Second, in context, both Leviticus 18 and 20 deal primarily with morality, not idolatrous worship. When God wants specifically to mention the practices of cultic or idolatrous prostitutes, He does so, as in Deuteronomy 23:17: “No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.” Their lack of mention in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 indicates that God is dealing with homosexuality per se, not with any alleged specific form of Canaanite religious practice.

As for the contention that Scripture always connects the word “abomination” (Heb. *to’evah*) with idolatry or pagan ceremonies, one biblical example will discredit the claim. In Proverbs 6:16-19 God is described as hating such “abominations” as a proud look, a lying tongue, murder, etc. Are we to believe that pride, lying, and murder are morally acceptable as long as they are not carried out in idolatrous pagan contexts? Certainly not.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn homosexuality, alongside incest, adultery, polygamy, and bestiality, in the strongest terms. These moral concerns are still relevant today. Also, since these sexual deviations are again denounced in the New Testament, we may conclude that the moral content of these Leviticus passages is permanently normative, not part of the ceremonial holiness code.⁸⁷

⁸⁷For an argument supporting the permanently binding nature of these passages, see Michael Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/3 (July-September 1983):

16. “In Romans 1:26-27 Paul does not condemn individuals who are homosexuals by nature; rather, he refers to idolatrous heterosexuals who have ‘changed their nature’ by committing homosexual acts.” According to this argument, the real sin condemned by Paul is two-fold: (I) the changing of what is natural to a person into what is unnatural, and (ii) homosexuality committed by people who worship images, not God.

Response to Argument #16: Advocates of pro-gay theology often argue that if a person is homosexual, he or she can never become truly heterosexual. And yet they often quote the Romans 1 passage as an example of truly *heterosexual* people committing a sin by becoming truly *homosexual*. We may therefore ask: If a person who is a heterosexual can change and become a homosexual, why cannot a person who is a homosexual be changed by regeneration and become a heterosexual?

For a number of reasons, it seems inconceivable that Paul could be describing predominantly heterosexual people indulging in homosexual acts, even though such people would be included in his condemnation. First, he describes the men and women committing these homosexual acts as “burning in lust” for each other. Are we to understand this as heterosexuals who are simply experimenting with an alternate lifestyle?

Also, if verses 26 and 27 only condemn homosexual actions by people to whom they did not come naturally (i.e., heterosexuals who are practicing homosexual acts), but don’t apply to individuals to whom those same actions allegedly *do* come naturally (true homosexuals), then consistency and intellectual integrity demands that the sinful practices mentioned in verses 29 and 30—fornication, backbiting, deceit, etc.—are permissible as long as the people who commit them are people to whom they come naturally.

Is Paul’s use of “natural” purely subjective (what is “natural for me” in my orientation) or is it objective (what is “natural for everyone” regardless of orientation)? The context of Romans 1 suggests that Paul is describing homosexual behavior and other sinful practices as objectively unnatural. They are part of the practices that result when men “exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.” “He was talking about an objective condition of depravity experienced by people who rejected God’s will.”⁸⁸

In other words, it is the very nature of the sexual conduct itself that Paul considers unnatural. Homosexuality is unnatural to the man as a male (*arsen*) and to the woman as a female (*gune*), not because of what may or may not be

259-266, especially 264ff. on “The Relevance of the Law.” See also du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*.

⁸⁸Carl Bridges, Jr. “The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality,” in *Gay Rights Or Wrongs: A Christian’s Guide to Homosexuals Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazalongo (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 160.

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natural to their personality, but because of what is unnatural according to God's design when he created male and female. Homosexuality is unnatural, whether it is committed by idolaters or those who worship the true God.⁸⁹

17. "Paul's *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* statements in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:9-10, denouncing the 'effeminate and them that defile themselves with mankind' are actually a condemnation of an 'offensive kind of homosexuality,' not the 'offense of homosexuality'." In both passages, Paul lists those who engage in homosexual behavior among such lawless people as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, kidnapers, etc. According to pro-gay advocates, the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* (translated in 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1 as "them that defile themselves with mankind") and *malakoi* (translated "effeminate" or "soft" in 1 Cor 6), which the apostle uses to denounce homosexual activity, refer to homosexual *abuse*, not its right use. Thus, these passages do not condemn today's "loving and committed" homosexual relationships, but rather offensive kinds of homosexuality activity, such as homosexual prostitution.

Response to Argument #17: For good reason the terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* have been understood traditionally as a reference to the active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. The first term (*arsenokoitai*) literally means "male bedders" (reference to a man who "beds" another), and the second term (*malakoi*) refers to "soft" or "effeminate" men, specifically males who play female sexual roles with the "male bedder." There is no hint in these words that Paul was condemning only a certain kind of homosexual abuse, as in prostitution, rape, or pagan ceremonies. He condemns homosexuality in itself as sin.

Further, note that *arsenokoitai* is derived from two words—*arsen* (referring to man as male) and *koite* (a term that appears only twice in the New Testament, and literally means "bed" or "couch." In Rom 13:13, it appears in "Let us walk honestly. . . not in chambering [*koite*]"); and in Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable . . . and the bed [*koite*] undefiled."). The combination of the two terms *arsen* (male) and *koite* (bed) does not even suggest prostitution, rape or idolatry—only sexual contact between two men. In other words, homosexuality is wrong, regardless of the reason why it is practiced.

Note also that when Paul used the term *arsenokoitai* to condemn the sinful practice of homosexuality, he derived it directly from the Greek translation of Lev 18:22, which in part reads *kai meta arsenos ou koimethese koiten gynaikos* ("and you shall not sleep in bed with a man as with a woman"), and of Lev 20:13, which also contains the words *kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaikos* ("and whoever may lie in bed with a man as with a woman"). There-

⁸⁹A detailed exegetical study of Romans 1:26-27 appears in Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow*, 64-85.

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fore, Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:9-10 presupposes Leviticus's condemnation of homosexual acts. Is it any wonder that Paul lists homosexuality among "lawless" deeds that would bar a person from the kingdom of God?⁹⁰

In summary, the Bible is not morally neutral on homosexuality. Paul's statements in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1,⁹¹ along with the Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, clearly show that homosexuality in all of its various forms is a sinful practice. Homosexual behavior, like heterosexual fornication, is sin, whether it results from one's orientation or from conscious choice. In other words, the Bible condemns all homosexual lust and behavior, including what takes place today. *It is not wrong to be tempted either homosexually or heterosexually, but it is wrong to yield to one's sexual temptation.*

Conclusion

The questions that have been raised in this article are some of the major issues confronting Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventists as they respond to the attempts by some within our ranks to reconcile the homosexual lifestyle with biblical Christianity. Unless biblically consistent answers are given to the questions, one cannot but conclude that the qualified-acceptance position on homosexuality, just like the full-acceptance position, cannot be a biblically-defensible option for Seventh-day Adventists. Until there is a clear articulation of a scripturally consistent position on homosexuality, the following criticism of "homosexual practices" will have to be applied equally to homosexuality and lesbianism:

The church cannot condone homosexual activity without betraying its biblical, historical, and spiritual heritage. Its conscious acceptance of the authority and inspiration of Scripture would need to undergo such a radical, liberalizing change that the fundamental teachings of the church would be left without foundation.

The consequences of such change with its ramifications for theological, ethical, and moral teaching might be labeled by some as progressive, calculated to enlighten the church and produce a more compassionate laity accommodated to the modern society in which it lives. But in reality such a move would be a giant step toward repaganization of the church. The resulting religion would not be a Bible

⁹⁰For more on this, see D. F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arse-nokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984):125-153, especially 126-129. Cf. Zaas, "1 Corinthians 6:9ff.: Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 17 (1979): 205-212.

⁹¹For more on this, see Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/4 (October-December 1983):350-358; David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/3 (July-September 1993): 327-340, and "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/4 (October-December 1993): 479-492.

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religion or that of the prophets, the Lord, or the apostles, not Christianity except in name.⁹²

In today's climate of "enlightened" ethical sensitivity, the above words and the theological position adopted in this paper may seem "judgmental" or "uncompassionate" to some. If so, *we must make it absolutely clear that God's grace covers every kind of sin for any believer in Jesus who contritely turns toward God and makes a decisive commitment to turn away from sin.* "God can forgive homosexual sin as well as heterosexual sin, sin which is socially acceptable as sin and sin which is not. But the first step in receiving forgiveness is to recognize our wrongdoing as sin."⁹³

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical world view presents a loving Father who is interested in all aspects of our being and our lifestyle (3 John 2). His written Word is the surest and most trustworthy guide for every human thought and conduct (2 Tim 3:16-19). It tells of a compassionate and powerful God who is abundantly able and willing to assist us in overcoming our human weaknesses (Heb 4:15-16; Jude 24; Eph 3:20). And the Bible introduces us to a faithful Savior and his dependable promises. Writes Ellen G. White:

Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal. . . . 'Come unto Me,' is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer.⁹⁴

We all can receive help if we are willing to believe that whatever God commands we may accomplish in His strength. The apostle Paul, a few verses after his condemnation of sinful practices such as homosexuality, declared that though he was "the chief of sinners," Christ's enabling grace was able to turn his life around (1 Tim. 1:9-16). If Jesus can change "the chief of sinners," certainly, He can change you and me (1 John 1:9). But this is possible if, and only if: (i)

⁹²Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, 163-164.

⁹³Bridges, Jr., "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," 169. Noel Weeks states it well: "It may seem kind to say that a person is not responsible for his sin. But it has the harsh and cruel consequence that sin is therefore outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The homosexual is doomed to live with the misery of sin. Make no mistake. Sin and misery go together. When we deny the homosexual the gospel we tell him to expect a continuance of his misery. The point is often made that the church should show compassion to the homosexual. So it should. The first item of that compassion is telling him how escape is possible. Why should he seek the church that tells him that nothing can be done for him? He may like such a church to ease the burden of his guilty conscience, but such a church has nothing to offer him" (Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988], 172).

⁹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 329

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we accept that the homosexual lifestyle is morally wrong and resolve to change; (ii) we are willing to accept Christ's abiding offer of pardon and cleansing (Matt 11:28-30; 1 John 1:9; Isa 1:18). The choice is ours.

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Unity—But At What Cost?

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In May 1997, Cardinal Basil Hume, spiritual leader of Roman Catholics in Great Britain, spoke at Canterbury Cathedral. In the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he stated publicly that the primacy of the Pope was a necessary ingredient of any move toward Christian unity involving Rome.¹

Christian unity has become the focus of most Christian churches today. And why not? After all, did not Jesus say, in John 17: 20–22,

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one, just as We are one (NKJV).

The Century of Mission

Just over 200 years ago, in 1792, an English Baptist village pastor and village cobbler by the name of William Carey was instrumental in founding the Baptist Missionary Society. A year later, in 1793, Carey and his family became the Society's first missionaries—they went to India. In the years following, missionary and Bible societies sprang up all over Europe and America. Men like Robert Morrison, Adoniram Judson, John Williams, Robert Moffatt, and Hudson Taylor were sent out to the four corners of the globe to preach the gospel to the heathen. And what a job they did! During the 19th century, Christianity increased from 23% of the world population in the year 1800 to 34% in the year 1900.² The century of mission, as the 19th century in church history is now called, increased the percentage of Christians in the world by more than one-third. Today, Christians are still only about one third of the world population. In

¹ *Review and Herald*, June 26, 1997.

² David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: UP, 1982), 3.

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other words, Christianity has made no progress in the evangelization of the world in the 20th century.

Although the Christian church as a whole had tremendous success in evangelizing the world during the 19th century, tensions developed between different churches and missionaries over the new converts. Sheep stealing became a common accusation which they hurled at each other. The heathen, therefore, began to ask: “How come you serve the same God, yet you are so divided?” And the missionaries did not really have good answers.

The Ecumenical Movement

This question was taken up in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. One of the topics discussed was “How To Evangelize Without Fighting.” At the end of the discussion a resolution was passed, the goal of which was “to plant in each non-Christian nation one undivided Church of Christ.”³ But in order to do that, they needed to have some kind of unity.

At Edinburgh the idea of the ecumenical movement was conceived, but because of World Wars I and II, it took almost another forty years to bring the ecumenical baby into the world. In 1948, 351 delegates from 147 Protestant churches gathered in Amsterdam, Holland, to organize the World Council of Churches. Since then, the ecumenical movement has made good progress. Today, 317 churches with more than 400 million members belong to the World Council of Churches, whose headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

Unity! Yes, but at what cost? There is no more sheep stealing going on, but there is also hardly any more evangelization of the pagans taking place.

The Roman Catholic Church

During the first twelve years after 1948, only Protestant churches belonged to the World Council of Churches. Then in 1961 all the Orthodox churches joined. The largest Christian church, however, the Roman Catholic Church, with about one billion members, is still not a member of the World Council of Churches. Until the 1960s one could not really be a good Catholic and be ecumenical. In 1964, however, the Roman Catholic Church officially stepped into the ecumenical age. In that year, the second Vatican Council adopted the decree on ecumenism, which says that “all who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they, therefore, have a right to be called Christians and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.”⁴ The decree refers to non-Catholic Christians as “separated brethren.”⁵

³ B. B. Beach, *Ecumenism—Boon or Bane* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 84.

⁴ Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild), 345.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 346.

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The Catholic ecumenical position is very simple—the separated brethren ought to accept the supremacy of the pope, and either become members of the Roman Catholic Church or join hands and continue their existence as separate entities within the framework of a fraternal religious system. And some Protestant leaders are in fact seriously considering doing just that. In 1989, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, leader of 70 million Anglicans, after his audience with the Pope, said: “For the universal church I renew the plea. Could not all Christians come to reconsider the kind of primacy the bishop of Rome exercised within the early church, a ‘presiding of love’ for the sake of the unity of the churches in the diversity of their mission.”⁶

Popes Paul VI in 1969 and John Paul II in 1982 visited the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, but the Roman Catholic Church still is not, and probably never will be, a member of the World Council of Churches. Nevertheless, there exists close cooperation between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in many ways. In a number of countries around the world, for example, the Roman Catholic Church is a member of the National Council of Churches. Every Sunday ecumenical worship services are held around the globe, and in 1991, for the first time in history, the pope held an ecumenical service with two Lutheran bishops at St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. After the service, the Swedish Lutheran bishop, Bertil Werkstrom, said: “The moment has come where we must say that the denunciations at the time of the reformation are no longer valid.”⁷

In 1994, Paul Crouch, the founder of Trinity Broadcasting Network, told two Roman Catholic priests and a leading Catholic laywoman who were his guests: “In the essentials our theology is basically the same: some of these even so-called doctrinal differences . . . are really matters of semantics. . . . So I say to the critics and theological nitpickers, ‘Be gone, in Jesus name!’ Let’s come together in the spirit of love and unity. . . .”⁸ Unity? Yes, but at what cost? Truth is sacrificed on the altar of unity.

A Prophecy

In 1885, Ellen White, under inspiration, wrote:

When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when under the influence of this three-fold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its constitution as a Protestant and Republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we

⁶ *South Bend Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1989, quoted in D. K. Nelson, *Countdown to the Showdown*, 41.

⁷ *Catholic Herald*, Oct. 11, 1991.

⁸ Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994) 405.

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may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.⁹

In 1885, when she wrote this, the ecumenical movement was not even thought of. At that time, not only were Protestants quarreling amongst themselves, but most of them were violently opposed to the Roman Catholic Church, as some still are today in Northern Ireland. Over the last forty years, we believe, we have seen the first part of this prophecy being fulfilled. We have confidence, therefore, that the second part will be fulfilled in the future.

Revelation 13

Revelation 13 presents two symbolic beasts supporting each other. Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that the first beast is a symbol of papal Rome, and the second a symbol of Protestant America. Lest we be misunderstood, we must make it clear that when we speak of papal Rome we are not referring to individual believers in the Roman Catholic Church but to a religious-political empire, an institution teaching doctrines based on the traditions of men rather than on the Word of God and with the political power to impose those doctrines. God has his people in all Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church.

In Revelation 13:12 it says: “And he [the second beast] exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.” According to this text we may expect that sometime in the future the United States will tell the world to worship, i.e., to obey, the papacy.

In 1888, Ellen White wrote:

Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in the stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this three-fold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.¹⁰

“Protestants of the United States,” she says, “will be foremost in reaching over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power.” Do we have any indications that this could ever happen? Yes, we do. On March 29, 1994, thirty-nine leading evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics—men like Pat Robertson and John Cardinal O’Connor—signed a document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.” Headlines

⁹ *Testimonies to the Church*, 5:451.

¹⁰ *The Great Controversy*, 588.

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emblazoned upon newspapers across America proclaimed: “Christians Herald New Era” and “Catholics Embrace Evangelicals—Conservatives of Both Faiths Agreed to Accept Each Other As Christians.” Just last year, on Reformation Day, October 31, 1999, Lutherans and Roman Catholics signed a common declaration on justification by faith—the very issue which started the Reformation in the 16th century. According to this document, Lutherans and Roman Catholics “are now able to articulate a common understanding of justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.”¹¹ The remaining differences, we are told, no longer justify doctrinal condemnations. Unity? Yes, but at what cost? The process of the ecumenical rapprochement is virtually wiping out the Protestant Reformation.

In 1995, the book “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission” was published. The authors reported that “European Catholics and Protestants have concluded that the condemnations of the Reformation were based on misconceptions, were aimed at extreme positions on the other side and no longer apply to today’s situations.”¹² We wonder what Martin Luther and the thousands who gave their lives for the principles of the Reformation would say to that?

For a few years now, the Christian Coalition has been operating in the United States. Ralph Reed, former General Secretary of this organization, claims:

The future of American politics lies in the growing strength of Evangelicals and their Roman Catholic allies. If these two core constituencies—Evangelicals comprising the swing vote to the south, Catholics holding sway in the north—can cooperate on issues and support like-minded candidates, they can determine the outcome of almost any election in the nation.¹³

What does prophecy say?

He deceived those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the beast to be killed (Rev. 13:14, 15).

The Christian Coalition, or an organization similar to it, could well become the instrument for the development of the image to the beast, which is the union of church and state to enforce religious laws.

¹¹ *Adventist Review*, June 22, 2000, 8.

¹² Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Working Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 108.

¹³ Ralph Reed, *Mainstream Values Are No Longer Politically Incorrect: The Emerging Faith Factor in American Politics* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 16.

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Unity? Yes, but at what cost? (1) There is hardly any mission to the heathen, because it is no longer politically correct to convert pagans, since all religions lead to God anyway. Christ as the exclusive way of salvation has been abandoned. (2) Truth has been sacrificed on the altar of unity. (3) the Reformation is virtually being wiped out. Nevertheless, through all these events prophecy is being fulfilled.

That They May Be One

But did not Christ say Christians should all be one? Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, "That they may all be one," is often cited as the biblical basis for the ecumenical movement. But what did Jesus really pray for in John 17? In verses 11 and 12 He says:

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is not an appeal to the disciples to produce unity. The unity He refers to is already there. Jesus is not dealing with something at which the church should aim. He is not even speaking to His disciples or to us—He is praying to His Father that God may keep His followers in that unity which He, through His Word, has already brought into existence. The essence of that unity is the unity between Father and Son (verse 21). This unity is a spiritual unity, not some organizational unity. And this spiritual unity has always existed amongst true believers. It is not a superficial unity which negates God's Word for the sake of political or social goals, as worthy as some of them may be.

Conclusion

As Seventh-day Adventists we are privileged to see the fulfillment of prophecy taking place. We are privileged to have a part in that spiritual unity, which all true believers, whatever their church affiliation, share. It is a unity based on the Word of God, not on political or social manifestos. It is a unity which safeguards God's teachings, rather than change and accommodate them. True Christian unity comes from above. It is a God-created spiritual unity, not an outward organizational unity created by sinful human beings. As individuals we may become part of this spiritual unity through conversion, revival, and reformation in our lives. To experience this spiritual unity should be the goal of every Seventh-day Adventist.

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Will Christ Return in the Year 2000?

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Will Christ return in the year 2000? This is a “hot potato” issue for many Seventh-day Adventists. They believe Christ will come by that date. That’s only months away. “For just as the work of creation took six days, so human history will last 6,000 years,” they reason. “Just as the Sabbath followed six days of creation, so the Millennial Sabbath in heaven will follow 6000 years of human history.” They see creation week as an analogy of the seven thousand years between creation and recreation. They refer to prominent Adventist leaders of the past who taught this view, such as O. R. L. Crosier,¹ Joseph Bates,² James White,³ T. M. Preble,⁴ W. H. Littlejohn,⁵ S.N. Haskell,⁶ and J. N. Andrews.⁷

¹O. R. L. Crosier, “The Sabbaths under the Law typify the great Sabbath, the seventh millennium.” *The Day Star Extra*, Feb 7, 1846.

²Joseph Bates, “The Millennium is the seventh thousandth year,” *The Seventh-day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign*, 1849, 282-29.

³James White, “The age to come will be the great Jubilee, the seventh millennium, in which the land, the whole earth will rest.” *The Advent Review*, September, 1850. Reference to God’s great week, referring to 6000 years of history and a 1000 years of rest, *Review and Herald*, March 6, 1856.

⁴T. M. Preble, “Advent believers expect their rest in the seventh thousand years,” *A Tract Showing that the Seventh Day should be observed as the Sabbath, instead of the First Day; According to the Commandment*, See copy in George Knight, *The Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, 184.

⁵W. H. Littlejohn, “Just as the land is tilled for six years with a Sabbath rest so the earth is occupied by humans for six thousand years followed by a Sabbath rest when the it will lie desolate,” *Review and Herald*, March 4, 1844.

⁶S. N. Haskell, “The weekly Sabbath was a stepping stone leading up to the other sabbatic institution; and besides being a memorial of creation, it pointed forward to the final rest of jubilee.” *The Cross and its Shadow*, 248.

⁷J. N. Andrews wrote a *Review and Herald* series of six articles (July 17 to August 21, 1883) titled, “The Great Week of Time, or the Period of Seven Thousand Years Devoted to the Probation and Judgment of Mankind.” He believed the 7000 years is cut off from the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future and assigned to the probation and judgment of mankind (July 17, 1883). “We think that God chose the six days such as are known to man for the work of creation in order to

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These seven writers were convinced and are convincing others. The question, though, is not who taught this view, but was their teaching right?

We must ask by whose authority they came to this conclusion? Who told them that human history would be only 6000 years? It isn't found in the Bible. Nowhere in Scripture does it say the purpose of creation week is to inform us about the length of human history. Creation week is history and not prediction. Creation week is about the past and not about the future. Creation week is about what Christ did and not about what He will do. Scripture is silent on the date for creation and the second advent, as well as the length of time between the two. Eschatology is based on prophecies and not on protology, or the study of first things like creation week.

Seventh-day Adventists know the difference between descriptive and pre-scriptive passages in Scripture. That's why texts about early Christian meetings on the first day of the week are not viewed as proof for a change of Sabbath to Sunday. First day meeting stories in the New Testament do not require us to keep Sunday. If we saw them as more than stories we would radically alter our Eschatology about Sunday laws. Those first day meetings are historical records without any other significance. So is creation week.

Some see the Sabbatical years (Lev 25:1-7) as a type of the coming Millennium. Just as six years were followed by a Sabbatical year, so 6000 years of history will be followed by a Millennial rest (Rev 20:1-7). The Sabbatical cycles (six years of harvesting the land and one year of rest) were pragmatic and not prophetic. They were for the good of the land and had nothing to do with Eschatology. Nowhere does Scripture say they illustrate the length of human history before the Millennium. Every fiftieth year was a Jubilee, a time of liberty when people and land were freed (Lev 25:8-55). Some see this Jubilee year as a type of the Millennium, Pope John Paul 11 speaks of the year 2000 as a Jubilee year.⁸ Will the coming Jubilee be the Millennial Sabbath? Evidently the Jubilee year was an idea never carried out. There is no biblical or extra-biblical evidence that the Jubilee was ever kept. There is no biblical evidence either that the Jubilee year ever acquired prophetic significance. Proponents of the creation week model for 7000 years believe the Sabbatical years and Jubilee are types of the Millennium.

However, typology cannot be assumed. It cannot be gifted to a passage from an external source like human reason. Typology is rooted in the biblical record itself. Biblical typology is always stated within Scripture. One is not left to read typology into Scripture. The absence of biblical typological statements must not be made up by creative interpretation. In his doctoral dissertation on biblical typology, Richard M. Davidson says, "The nature of biblical typology remains ambiguous as long as an a priori understanding of its conceptual struc-

represent to man that in six days of 1,000 years each, days such as are known to God, he would accomplish the period assigned to man before the judgment" (August 21, 1883).

⁸Pope John Paul 11, *Ut Unum Sint*, (Boston, MA: Pauline, 1995), 11-15.

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tures is brought to the biblical text instead of allowing these structures to emerge from careful exegetical analysis.⁹ Unless there is a clear, unequivocal biblical linkage between the Sabbatical and Jubilee years with the 6000 year time frame of history and the Millennium, there remains an unsure foundation upon which to build such an hypothesis. So far I have not seen a convincing biblical reason for such a linkage.

It is not good enough to link the days of creation with the fact that 1000 years is like a day to God (Psa 90:4; 2 Pet 3:7-8). This is a common argument among proponents of the 7000 year theory, reaching back to the Early Fathers.¹⁰ A 7000 year period is not the only way to misinterpret Genesis 1-2 by Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:7-8. It could also argue for 1000 years for each creation day. It's up for grabs—either a 7000 time-frame for salvation-history or 6000 years for creation. The two are mutually exclusive.

What about Archbishop Ussher's 6000 year chronology? Dr. R. H. Brown, physicist, specialist in age-dating and former Director of the Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, wrote a perceptive article on the question.¹¹ Computations on when that 6,000 years is complete vary radically from AD 336 to 1822 to 2037, depending on which factors are taken into consideration. That's a difference of 1701 years! The Jews place it more than two hundred years in the future! Surely not a good guide for telling us when Christ will come.

So if the Bible is silent on the length of human history, do we get the 6000 theory from the Early Church Fathers, Ussher's chronology, or Mrs. Ellen G. White? It is true that many of the early Church Fathers did speak of the 7000 year time frame.¹² It was "characteristic of the first three centuries,"¹³ and taught in subsequent centuries. In AD 221 Sextus Julius Africanus believed the earth would last only 6000 years, the Millennium to come in AD 500, or 254 years from his time.¹⁴ Contemporary Hippolytus of Rome, in AD 234, counted 5738 years back to creation, and hence the Millennium would begin in 262 years from his day.¹⁵ Lactantius (260-330), speaking of the last times, says, "I have already shown above, that when six thousand years shall be completed this change must take place, and that the last day of the extreme conclusion is now drawing

⁹Richard M Davidson, "Typology in Scripture: A study of hermeneutical *tipos* structures," Th.D. Dissertation, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1981), 7.

¹⁰For example, Lactantius gives this as the evidence for his 7000 year theory based on Psalm 90:4 and 2 Pet 3:8, *The Divine Institutes*, 7. 14, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (after as ANF), 7:211.

¹¹R. H. Brown, "Usshering in the Second Advent," *Perspective Digest*, 3/3, 1998, 48-52.

¹²For example, Irenaeus (c. 130-200) *Against Heresies*, 33.2, ANF, 1:562; Lactantius (260-330) *The Divine Institutes*, 7.14, ANF, 7:211; Barnabus, *Epistle of Barnabus*, 15. 1-9, Johnnes Questen, *Patrology*, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1990, 5th printing), 1:89.

¹³Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 3:426. Oden is a specialist in the Church Fathers.

¹⁴Sextus Julius Africanus, *Chronicles, Patrology*, 2:138.

¹⁵Hippolytus of Rome, *The Chronicle, Patrology*, 2:176.

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near.”¹⁶ These last three Church Fathers concluded that nearly all of the 6000 years had passed by their time. By contrast, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) said, “there should follow on the completion of six thousand years, as of six days, a kind of seventh-day Sabbath in the succeeding thousand years.”¹⁷ He considered the Millennium to be from the first coming of Christ until the end of the world, and hence already in progress.¹⁸ These views about the Millennium are all based upon 1000 years for each creation day. The fact that they varied on when the 7th thousand years begins, though all drew their chronology from the Bible, demonstrates the uncertainty of the creation date.

Perhaps the earlier Adventist writers were influenced by Ussher’s chronology. Perhaps today, though, most Adventists looking to the return of Christ in 2000 are doing so on the basis of statements by Ellen White. In *The Great Controversy* she speaks of 6000 years. Concerning time just before Christ’s return she says, “For six thousand years the great controversy has been in progress.”¹⁹ Commenting on the controversy after the Millennium, she says, “For six thousand years he has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe and causing grief throughout the universe.”²⁰ What do we make of these statements?

First it should be noted that these statements do not specify the year 2000. They merely talk about 6000 years. They do not use any biblical evidence for their assertion. Was Ellen White using the popular Ussher’s time frame as she used accepted chronology for writing historical sequences in the rest of *The Great Controversy*? The fact that she had no date in mind is seen by her repeated warning against setting a date for the second advent.²¹ Also, soon after 1844 she said Christ could have come by then if the saints had been ready.²² There’s no mention that He really could not come because 6000 years of human history hadn’t yet transpired. He delayed because of human unreadiness, not because the year 2000 was still future. So He could have come nearly 150 years before the year 2000! Of course it could be argued that the 6000 year statements take all this delay into consideration. Yet even that does not bring us to the year 2000, for no one knows when the 6000 year period began.

The last biblical time prophecy ended in 1844 (Dan 8:14), and Ellen White says, “Our position has been one of waiting and watching, with no time-proclamation to intervene between the close of the prophetic periods in 1844 and the time of the Lord’s coming.”²³ Christ said of His coming, “The Son of Man

¹⁶For example, Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 7.25, ANF, 7:220; Augustine, *The City of God*, 20.7, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*, First Series, 2:426.

¹⁷Augustine, *The City of God*, 20:7, NPNF, First Series, 2:426.

¹⁸Augustine, *The City of God*, 20:8, NPNF, First Series, 2:428.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 656.

²⁰Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 673.

²¹Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 32-42.

²²Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 695-696 (1883); *Desire of Ages*, 633-634 (1898).

²³Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 36.

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will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matt 24:44; Luke 12:40). So there is always an urgent imminence that transcends any date.

What if time goes beyond 2000? Could there be a great disappointment for those who expect Christ to come that year? That is a real possibility, and such a disappointment could cause many to give up as they did in 1844. Calendar dates should have nothing to do with our belief in Christ’s return. Fulfillment of biblical prophecy has everything to do with His coming. That’s the only safe place to fix our gaze. We must be people of prophecy and not people of speculation. In my latest book *Christ is Coming!* is traced the many end-time movements that are rapidly fulfilling prophecy, like Spiritualism, the Charismatic movement, the Christian Coalition, the global power of the Papacy, the uniting of church and state, Dominionists, the New Age movement, the promotion of Sunday, and the uniting of churches. When one looks at all that is happening, the combined picture is overwhelming.²⁴ It shouts out loud and clear, “Christ is coming soon!” without any reference to the year 2000. Let’s look at one of these movements—the Ecumenical movement, or the uniting of churches. Revelation 13:3-4 says all the world will wonder after and worship the Catholic church. We will see that this is well underway. But first some historical background.

Ecumenism

“Ecumenism comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, meaning ‘the entire inhabited earth’ (Acts 17:6-7; Matt 24:14; Heb 2:25). More precisely, it’s an attempt to unite all Christians.”²⁵

“Will it involve the whole world in the end?”

“Yes. The whole world (Rev 13:3-4)!”

“But that’s more than Christian churches. That means all religions and everyone, religious or not.”

“True. That’s the finale. We’ll just look at what’s happening among Christians that leads to that universal union.”

Christ prayed, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21). That is what motivates the churches. Proponents

²⁴The book presents end-time movements, end-time doctrines, and end-time events. The last 100 pages (of the 585 pages) is a journey through final events.

²⁵From an Evangelical perspective, see David F. Wright in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1988), 219-22. He gives perceptive critiques. T. Weber in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 340-342. From a Catholic perspective, see August B. Hasler, Victor Conzemius, and Karl Rahner in *Sacamentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, (New York: Herder and Herder, npd), 2:191-202. Other sources include, R. Rouse and S.C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*; H. Fey, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968*; R. M. Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution*; N. Goodall, *The Ecumenical Movement and Ecumenical Progress: A Decade of Change in the Ecumenical Movement, 1961-1971*; J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*; B. Leeming, *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity*; J. D. Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals*.

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say Paul urged it: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephes 4:4: 3-6). In his ministry Paul wrestled against forces seeking to divide the church. As T. B. Weber observed, “Throughout his ministry, the apostle worked to maintain the unity of the church in the face of theological deviation (Galatians and Colossians) and internal division (I and II Corinthians).”²⁶ As we’ll see, that’s a very different story from today’s Ecumenical Movement.

1. Historical Overview

Often ecumenism is studied in light of the schisms from the Roman Catholic Church in ancient times (Syrian and Egyptian), in 1054 (Eastern Orthodox) and from 1517 onwards (Protestants). It is assumed that the Catholic Church was established on Peter, by Christ, and the Church remains authentic through apostolic succession, so that ecumenical means a return to the one Church of Christ. However, one should keep in mind that the Catholic Church began in the 4th century AD, not in the time of the apostles. It is significant that the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), in its final report in 1982, said that “the New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter’s leadership; nor is the transmission of apostolic authority in general very clear.”²⁷

Here is an overview of ecumenical endeavors in the light of departures from the Roman Catholic Church and the gathering for an ultimate return to her communion.

1. 325 The Nicene Creed affirmed belief in the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”
2. 1054 Eastern Orthodox church split from the Western Catholic church.
3. 1517- Protestant churches began to leave the Catholic church.
4. 1846 Evangelical Alliance formed from over 50 denominations in Britain and America.
5. 1908 Federal Council of Churches formed from 31 American Protestant churches.
6. 1910 International Missionary Council at Edinburgh resulted in forming the next three organizations.
7. 1921 International Missionary Council, Lake Mohonk, New York, tried to get Protestant missionary agencies to co-operate with each other.
8. 1925 Conference on Life and Work, Stockholm, sought unity among churches in solving social, political, and economic problems

²⁶T. Weber in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 341.

²⁷*The Final Report*, London, 1982, 83, as quoted by David F. Wright in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 219-220.

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9. 1927 Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, looked at the theological basis for unity.
10. 1948 World Council of Churches (WCC) formed with 147 denominations from 44 countries at Amsterdam.
11. 1954 WCC at Evanston, Illinois.
12. 1961 WCC at New Delhi, India.
13. 1964 (Nov 21), Vatican Council II. Decree on Religious Freedom and Decree on Ecumenism.
14. 1964 (Nov 21), Pope Paul VI's Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*).
15. 1965 (Dec 7), Pope Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople lifted the excommunication which Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Caerularius imposed on each other in 1054.
16. 1968 WCC at Uppsala, Sweden.
17. 1975 WCC at Nairobi, Kenya.
18. 1983 WCC at Vancouver, British Columbia.
19. 1995 (May 25), Pope John Paul II's Encyclical on Ecumenism (*Ut Unum Sint*).

This list gives a quick overview of ecumenical landmarks. There were attempts to win or force back the Eastern Orthodox church after its split from the Catholic Church. But there was no effort for unity of the churches for three centuries (17th - 19th). In fact, the Protestant churches continued to divide all the time, until today there are over 300 different denominations. Not until the twentieth century did ecumenism become a driving force among many churches. For much of the first half of the century, ecumenical efforts were promoted among Protestant churches. Concerning the 1910 Edinburgh Ecumenical Conference, August B. Hasler reports, "The Roman Catholic Church was not represented, but Orthodox Churches assured the organizers of their support."²⁸

In his book *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, Paul G. Schrottenboer notes four facts that are drawing the churches together today: 1. "The growth and spread of secularism and anti-Christian ideologies in an increasingly hostile world." 2. The use of Mass media by the Catholic Church and the gifts of Pope Paul II have "projected to the world a completely new image of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution that is very attractive." 3. The formidable growth of Protestant independent churches who "are not clearly conscious of the doctrinal heritage of the Reformation and consequently of the sharp doctrinal differences between Roman Catholics and evangelicals." 4. "The clear anti-Marxist stance of the present pope has provided Catholicism with a new ground for acceptance even among Protestant or evangelical persons in

²⁸August B. Hasler in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:193.

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North America and Europe This acceptance on ideological grounds often does not take into account the demands of evangelical truth.”²⁹

2. Vatican Council II (1963-1965)

It was not until the Pontificate of Pope John XXIII that the Catholic Church began to really take a leadership role in ecumenism On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII called for an Ecumenical Council, with “separated communities” invited to attend as observers. He also established a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with scholar Austin Cardinal Bea at its head. Vatican II Council was a purposeful outreach to “separated brothers,” to those who had left her, such as the Eastern Orthodox and the original Reformation Protestants. As Walter M. Abbott, S.J., affirmed, “The Decree on Ecumenism marks the full entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement.”³⁰ Vatican II went further than Protestant ecumenism in reaching out to Jews and to all non-Christian religions. In Vatican II the Catholic Church launched a mission to bring the world into its fold. It’s vision was universal union and not limited to Christian unity.

Vatican II is the 21st Ecumenical Council. The first eight involved the church worldwide, but after the Eastern Orthodox schism (1054), the later Councils were western Councils The first six defended important Biblical truths, including Christ (against Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Monothelism) and the Holy Spirit But unbiblical doctrines were also disseminated by the Councils, such as Mary exalted to *Theotokos*, “bearer of God” (431), veneration of images (787), compulsory clerical celibacy (1139), Transubstantiation in the Mass (1215), condemnation of Protestant’s biblical beliefs (1545-1563), and Papal infallibility (1869-1870).³¹

In Vatican II, the Catholic Church is described as “God’s only flock.”³² What about the separated brethren? The Decree states: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.”³³ These “separated Churches” “derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”³⁴ Clearly ecumenism is no mere unity of churches, but a return to the Catholic Church. So Vatican II hopes that, “all Christians will be

²⁹Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 18-19.

³⁰Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 339.

³¹For helpful insights, see Justo L. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 1:413-414 and August B. Hasler, Victor Konzemius, Karl Rahner, Gotthold Hasenbuttl, Johannes Brosseder, Willehad Eckert, Eduard Stakemeir, and Angar Ahlbrecht in *Sacramentum Mundi*, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder), 1:191-212.

³²*The Documents of Vatican II*, 344 (6.1.2).

³³*Ibid*, 345 (6.1.3).

³⁴*Ibid*, 346 (6.1.3).

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gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.”³⁵ “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”³⁶ In this way the church replaces Christ as the means of salvation. Union is church-centered, rather than Christ-centered.

Here yet again is Satan’s studied strategy to shove Christ from view and replace Him with something else.

So many people focus on the terms “separated brethren” and “separated Churches” and rejoice in this change in the Catholic Church. But this has to do with method, public relations, the means to reach these groups. Where there is no change, and this is decisive, is in Catholic doctrines which brought about the separations from the Catholic Church in the first place. These Catholic doctrines remain the same. The Documents call these “weighty differences,” and they include the work of redemption, the mystery and ministry of the Church, and the role of Mary in the work of salvation. Vatican II expects the separated brethren to come back and celebrate the Eucharist together in visible union, and yet the Eucharist is one of the key causes for division among them.³⁷ In fact, Vatican II states: “In His Church He instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about.”³⁸ Evidently all the change in doctrine must be made by the separated brethren. Not one Catholic doctrine is changed in Vatican II. This is seen throughout the history of Catholic theology. There is development of doctrines, or additions to doctrines, but the traditions handed down by the church remain unchanged. As Pope Paul VI said in his *De Ecclesia*, “nothing really changes in the traditional doctrine” (1964).

A uniting on points of common concern is underway, a uniting that seems to override doctrinal differences. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner says Christians “have more in common than separates them and possess a common task in regard to the ‘world.’”³⁹ Some of these common goals are social, having to do with family values and the sacredness of life (vs. abortion). The force at work against these values is a common enemy for all Christians. This common enemy drives the churches together, very much as citizens of all persuasions come together in wartime. In fact, “the study of theology has become, in the second half of the 20th century, increasingly an ecumenical activity, with co-operation and interaction between scholars of different traditions, so . . . that confessional dis-

³⁵*Ibid*, 348 (6.1.4).

³⁶*Ibid*, 346 (6.1.3).

³⁷*Ibid*, 362 (6.3.20).

³⁸*Ibid*, 343 (6.1.2).

³⁹Karl Rahner, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:200.

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tinctives have steadily diminished.” There has been a “quest for consensus rather than truth,” which includes “taking the churches’ standpoints rather than the Bible as its basis.”⁴⁰

“It is hard to imagine any of the major Protestant churches embarking on doctrinal definition in the present theological climate;” says Gerald L. Bray, because “all the emphasis is on unbridled pluralism and the tolerance of any kind of faith or unbelief.”⁴¹ Concerning Protestants and Catholic churches, Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg note, “Today the churches share a largely common, supradenominational interpretation of Scripture, and a common awareness of the historical contingency of theological formulations. And on this basis new convergencies have grown up in our understanding of the content of faith. In this process, one-sided emphases have been corrected, emphases which were partly the cause of the division but which partly grew up as its consequence, and in the wake of the controversial theology that developed out of the separation.”⁴²

Protestantism is willing to change its doctrines to meet the common enemy. Not so the Catholic church. Speaking about Evangelicals and Catholics, Michael Horton says, “If it is not Rome that has altered its position in favor of the gospel, then it must be the other partner that has moved from its earlier position.”⁴³ Scripture says “Babylon is fallen” (Rev 14:8; 18:1-4). James R. White asks, “What has led to the ‘de-protestantization’ of much of Protestantism today?” He answers, “The Reformers knew the key to resisting the onslaught of Rome in their day, but many today seem to have forgotten what it is: The Bible, The Bible alone, and all of the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* is just as important today as it was for a Luther or a Zwingli or a Calvin at the time of the Reformation.”⁴⁴

While Biblical truth is overlooked in the quest for unity on common points of doctrine, the Catholic Church is not seen for what it really is, and its eschatological mission remains uncomprehended. While Roman Catholicism remains true to its doctrinal beliefs, it remains committed to the view that it alone is the real Body of Christ on earth. As Ansgar Ahlbrecht noted, “The Catholic Church does not regard itself as a confession, that is, as one denomination among others, but as the one Church of Christ.”⁴⁵

Consider this “de-protestantization.” Protestant and Anglican Churches sought union beyond truth, “suggesting that the question of truth did not matter.” Hence, “the slogan used in those days was doctrine divides while service

⁴⁰David F. Wright, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 219-220.

⁴¹Gerald L. Bray, *Creed, Councils and Christ*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 32.

⁴²Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds, trans. Margaret Kohl, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 14.

⁴³Michael Horton, Foreword to R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 12.

⁴⁴James R. White, *Answers to Catholic Claims: A Discussion of Biblical Authority*, “ (Southbridge, MA: Crowne, 1990), iv.

⁴⁵Ansgar Ahlbrecht, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1:211.

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unites.”⁴⁶ Today, ecumenism still has its common points of agreement high on the agenda, letting distinct doctrines slip from view (in non-Catholic churches), whereas the Catholic Church remains insistent on her unique doctrines. Vatican II states, “Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning.”⁴⁷

Timothy Weber notes two kinds of ecumenism. 1. The World Congress on Evangelism (Berlin, 1966; Lausanne, 1974) declared that unity “is based on truth (adherence to the historic gospel) This was the ‘cooperative model’ of unity, where conservative evangelicals ‘sought to restore evangelism to primary place in the church’s mission in the hope that more visible kinds of unity would follow.’” 2. “The federation model of the World Council of Churches tended to downplay the necessity of doctrinal agreement and evangelism while stressing concerted social and political action in Christ’s name.”⁴⁸

“Today, for good or bad, the lines that separate evangelicals and Roman Catholics are fading,” says Davis Duggins. “More and more people from both sides are working together on common social causes, and many of them are describing their spiritual lives in similar language. Some evangelical leaders welcome the changing landscape. ‘Its high time that all of us who are Christians come together regardless of the difference of our confessions and our traditions and make common cause to bring Christian values to bear in our society.’”⁴⁹ Johannes Brosseder speaks of an ecumenical theology. He calls it “a theology of fellowship, a theology which has discovered that what is common is proportionally much greater than the differences and divergences. . .”⁵⁰ Charles Colson writes in the forward of Keith Fournier’s book, ‘When the barbarians are scaling the walls, there is no time for petty quarreling in the camp.’⁵¹

But doctrinal differences do matter. And they are not minor compared to points of common agreement. The differences call in question essentials of the gospel. Praying to Mary as co-Redeemer, for example, is not a peripheral difference. It radically calls in question the sole mediatorship of the one Redeemer, Jesus Christ. As J. Daryl Charles put it, “The profound theological differences, for example, that separate evangelicals and Catholics cannot be ignored or circumvented, nor can they be ‘negotiated.’”⁵² In commenting on the slogan “Doc-

⁴⁶Walter M. Abbott, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Introduction to the Decree on Ecumenism, 339.

⁴⁷*The Documents of Vatican II*, 354 (6.2.11).

⁴⁸Timothy Weber, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 342.

⁴⁹Davis Duggins, “Evangelicals and Catholics: Across the Divide: How Can We Relate To One Another In This Secular Age,” *Moody Monthly*, Nov 1993, 12.

⁵⁰Johannes Brosseder, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1:207.

⁵¹Charles Colson, in Keith A. Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics*, (Nashville TN: Nelson, 1990), vi.

⁵²J. Daryl Charles, “Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue: Basis, Boundaries, Benefits,” *Pro Ecclesia*, 3/ 3 (1994), 293.

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trine divides, experience unites,” John M. Frame says, “we cannot brush doctrine aside as a mere impediment to unity, as many users of that slogan would like to do. A doctrinally indifferent church is a church that does not care about the gospel message, for the gospel is precisely a doctrine, a teaching, a narrative of what God has done for our salvation.”⁵³

In *Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches*, eight scholars present what is going on in various major denominations. James Heidinger II notes, “doctrinal compromise and unbelief” is “the heart of United Methodism’s tragic decline.”⁵⁴ Waldo J. Werning comments, “The proper basis of such Lutheran fellowship lies in agreement in doctrine, not in human ceremonies, and in the recognition that Christian practice is the application of doctrine to life.”⁵⁵ Homer Tricules says, “Informed evangelicals reject the claim that doctrine divides while evangelism unites . . . American Baptist laypeople need to be grounded in the essentials of sound doctrine.”⁵⁶

Genuine unity can only come from the whole truth. It is only as churches accept all that Scripture has to say that the prayer of Christ for unity can be achieved. Any uniting on common points of doctrine, while ignoring distinct doctrines, is an insufficient basis for union. George Carey speaks of a “common core of truths,” which include six beliefs: that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior; that God is Triune; that faith in Jesus and baptism into him through the Trinitarian confession constitute the new birth and the initiatory rite into the church; that through the Holy Spirit the Christian church is constituted and that it takes all ministries and gifts in the body to express the fullness of the catholic faith; that our faith is divinely revealed in Scripture and expressed in the ancient creeds of the church; and that Jesus Christ will come again in glory as Lord, Judge, and Savior. He goes on to suggest that Protestants can accept Catholic emphasis on Mary as long as it does not obscure Christ.⁵⁷

⁵³John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion: Denominations and the One Body of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 84.

⁵⁴Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal In the Mainline Churches*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987), 24.

⁵⁵Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal*, 76.

⁵⁶Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal*, 85.

⁵⁷George Carey, *A Tale of Two Cities: Can Protestants and Catholics Get Together?*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 161-162. In speaking of five common theological tenets that unite evangelicals, John Warwick Montgomery also takes a minimalist approach to unity which fails to take into consideration doctrinal distinctives that are biblical. His essentials are: conviction that the Bible alone is God’s objective inerrant revelation to mankind; subscription to the Ecumenical confessions as expressing the Trinitarian heart of biblical religion; belief that the Reformation confessions adequately convey the soteriological essence of the scriptural message, namely, salvation by grace alone through faith in the atoning death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ; stress upon personal, dynamic, living commitment to Christ and the resultant prophetic witness for Him to the unbelieving world; and a strong eschatological perspective, *Ecumenicity, Evangelicals, and Rome*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969), 17

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Here non-Biblical dogmas are added to Biblical truths. This not only introduces human traditions as equal to divine revelation, but these very traditions obscure the uniqueness of Christ. Any addition to God's divine revelation is a human work that needs to be called in question by divine revelation, and not admired. The six beliefs cited by George Carey represent a minimalist basis for union, but these very beliefs are called in question by major doctrines in the Catholic church, such as human tradition as equal to divine revelation, the function of Mary in redemption, and human works needing to be added to the gift of salvation. Biblical truths are never served by human error. Human works can never add to Christ's gift of salvation.

It is an immense paradox that the Reformers, who stood so solidly for truth against error, through their heirs are seeking union with error at the expense of truth. At the same time, it is Roman Catholicism that remains staunchly opposed to any change of its doctrines, while allowing for superficial window dressing maneuvers to appear more inviting for the return of "separated brethren." What would Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli think? What would the martyrs think? All that they stood and fought for could be lost in a union on common points of doctrine.

No effort to unite churches will see Roman Catholicism losing its uniqueness or dominance. As Richard John Neuhaus noted, "Even when, please God, all the churches are in full communion in the one Church Catholic, there will likely be a Roman Catholic Church. By virtue of its size, tradition, structure, charisms, and energies, the Roman Catholic Church will have a singular part in shaping the world-historical future of Christianity."⁵⁸

It is from within Christendom that the final attack against Christ will come. A false Christianity will reject the true gospel. This false Christianity will have, by its very nature, joined the rest of the world; or as Prophecy puts it, "The whole world was astonished and followed the beast . . . they also worshiped the beast" (Rev 13:1-4). H. B. Swete, in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, perceptively states, "Those who take note of the tendencies of modern civilization will not find it impossible to conceive that a time may come when throughout Christendom the spirit of Antichrist will, with the support of the state, make a final stand against a Christianity which is loyal to the person and teaching of Jesus."⁵⁹

3. Controversial Ecumenical Document (March 29, 1994)

⁵⁸Richard John Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 287.

⁵⁹H. B. Swete, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 257, Quoted by Wilbur M. Smith in "Armageddon," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 64.

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On March 29, 1994, thirteen persons,⁶⁰ Catholic and Evangelicals, issued a Document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the 3rd Millennium” (*ECT*). It was endorsed by twenty-five well known Catholic and Evangelical leaders.⁶¹ The document caused a furor in Catholic and Evangelical circles. Dave Hunt said, “The document, in effect, overturned the Reformation and will unquestionably have far reaching repercussions throughout the Christian world for years to come.”⁶²

One of the key differences between Catholic and Evangelical theology has to do with justification by faith alone through Christ alone. Martin Luther discovered in Romans that, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). This truth became the heart of the Reformation. It rejected the Catholic notion that Justification is through faith plus works. Any human works detract from the one saving work of Jesus Christ. “The doctrine of Justification,” wrote John Calvin, “is the principal ground on which religion must be supported.”⁶³

R. C. Sproul’s book, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, calls in question the *ECT* document. He rightly points out that justification by faith is understood differently by Catholics and Evangelicals. Even the Council of Trent taught justification by faith. But it was not by faith *alone*. That was the key issue of the Reformation. “The word *alone* was a solecism on which the entire Reformation doctrine of justification was erected. The absence of the word *alone* from *ECT*’s joint affirmation is most distressing.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship), Juan Diaz-Villar, S.J. (Catholic Hispanic Ministries), Avery Dulles, S.J. (Fordham University), Bishop Francis George (Diocese of Yakima, Washington), Kent Hill (Eastern Nazarene College), Jesse Miranda (Assemblies of God), Msgr. William Murphy (Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Boston), Richard John Neuhaus (Institute on Religion and Public Life), Brian O’Connell (World Evangelical Fellowship), Herbert Schlossberg, Archbishop Francis Stafford (Archdiocese of Denver), George Weigel (Ethics and Public Policy Center), and John White (Geneva College and the National Association of Evangelicals).

⁶¹William Abraham (Perkins School of Theology), Elizabeth Achtemeier (Union Theological Seminary—Virginia), William Bently Ball (Harrisburg Pennsylvania), Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ), Robert Destro (Catholic University of America), Augustine DiNoia, O.P. (Dominican House of Studies), Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J. (Fordham University), Keith Fournier (American Center for Law and Justice), Bishop William Frey (Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry), Mary Ann Glendon (Harvard Law School), Os. Guinness (Trinity Forum), Nathan Hatch (University of Notre Dame), James Hitchcock (St. Louis University), Peter Kreeft (Boston College), Matthew Lamb (Boston College), Ralph Martin (Renewal Ministries), Richard Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary), Mark Noll (Wheaton College), Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute), Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor (Archdiocese of New York), Thomas Oden (Drew University), J.I. Packer (Regent College, British Columbia), Pat Robertson (Regent College), John Rodgers (Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry) and Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J. (Archdiocese of San Francisco).

⁶²Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 5.

⁶³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (London: James Clarke, 1962), 2:37 (3.11.1).

⁶⁴R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 36.

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The key word “alone” is missing throughout Catholic thinking. Evangelicals believe the gospel is justification through faith *alone* by Christ *alone* found in Scripture *alone*. By contrast Catholics see faith as a human work, so there is *no faith alone, Christ alone, nor Scripture alone*. Human penance and purgatory are added to justification and to Christ’s work by Roman Catholicism just as the tradition of the Magisterium is added to Scripture. It is the human additions to the work of Christ in salvation and revelation that deny the free gift of the gospel. It is this “human addition” which distinguishes Roman Catholicism from authentic evangelicals.

For that reason, I believe the trend toward tolerance and cooperation is a destructive one because it blurs the distinction between biblical truth and a system of false teaching.”⁶⁵

4. The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

We need to look at this *ECT* document in the light of the Council of Trent. As one reads through the Canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, it is obvious that reform of the church is present, but reform of doctrine is absent. In fact, every unique doctrine of the Reformation is denied with anathemas.⁶⁶ Yet reform based upon error is only superficial. Real reform must be based upon Biblical truth.

The Council of Trent rejected the Reformer’s view on justification. Consider the following six canons:

Can. 4 If anyone says that man’s free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God’s call and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to obtain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if it wishes, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive, let him be anathema.

Can. 9 If anyone shall say that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will—let him be anathema.

Can. 11 If anyone shall say that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God—let him be anathema.

Can. 12 If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or

⁶⁵John MacArthur, quoted by Davis Duggins, *Moody Monthly*, Nov. 1993, 15.

⁶⁶*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P., (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978).

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that it is this confidence alone which justifies us—let him be anathema.

Can. 24 If anyone shall say that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of increase—let him be anathema.

Can. 32 If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God, that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.⁶⁷

Here human works hide Christ's sole work for human salvation. Any addition to the gospel is not the gospel. Paul says, "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Gal 3:11, cf. 2:16) Christians in Galatia accepted a doctrine of justification plus human works, just as Catholic theology does Paul called this "a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all" (Gal 1:6-7). Catholic theology has many human works, such as penance, intercession of saints, the role of Mary, and purgatory, which deflect attention from Christ's saving work.

Christ plus anything for human salvation negates the gift, negates grace, and negates justification. So many see the Catholic "gospel" as identical to the evangelical gospel, but this is impossible. Although it is good for Christians to come together to unite against humanism in its many forms (abortion, declining moral values, pro family issues), they need to realize that Christ plus anything human is also humanism. Wherever Christ is linked to human works, it's the human works that take center stage and become the driving force in the life. Humanism to earn salvation is no better than humanism in needless abortions. Both deny the proper place to Christ in human affairs.

This holds true of the Church as a corporate body. The Catholic church claims to be the Body of Christ, but in fact it takes the place of Christ. Salvation is based upon union with the Church. It is the sacraments of the Church that save. It is the Church that interprets Scripture, which means interpreting the mission of Christ. It is the Church that administers penance, last rights, and purgatory. Catholic theology is Church-centered rather than Christ-centered, even though it claims that the Church is merely the channel through which Christ works. Catholic ecclesiology is Christ plus the Church. As J. Daryl Charles

⁶⁷*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 42-46. There are 33 Canons opposed to the Reformation doctrine of Justification by Faith. The first four of these may seem correct to the Arminian. In the light of the last two, however, the true intent of the first four becomes clear—and unacceptable.

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rightly observed, “Genuine Christian unity will reflect a shift from a church-centered to Christ-centered focus.”⁶⁸

Trent emphasizes the place of human works in justification, and is thus contrary to the Reformers. It is important to note that neither Vatican Council I nor Vatican Council II changed the positions taken at Trent. It is therefore still the official position of the Catholic Church. Even in the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the human element of Trent is still present. Thus justification “is granted us through Baptism” (2020). Sanctifying grace “is infused by the Holy Spirit” (2023). Merit is given “to man’s collaboration” (2025), for “Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods” (2027). And, “Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification” (1446).⁶⁹

These are alleged human contributions to salvation. It is these that detract from the only Savior Jesus Christ. It is this that makes Catholic teaching opposed to the teaching of Scripture, even though it uses the words, “justification by faith.” Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie note that the *ECT* “document overlooks the crucial disagreements concerning the nature and extent of justification: grace alone, through faith alone, based on Christ alone. Besides this, “Questions concerning the idolatrous implications surrounding the worship of the consecrated host are not addressed. Evangelical concern over inappropriate attention involved in the veneration of saints, images, and especially Mary is not addressed.”⁷⁰ Geisler and MacKenzie conclude, “in the eyes of historical Protestantism, it is a false gospel.”⁷¹

Clothing the true gospel with garments of humanism robs the true gospel of its good news. It is not good news that penance, human works for merit, and purgatory on the one hand, and saints and Mary interceding on the other hand, need to be added to the free gift in Jesus Christ. The gospel is either a free gift or it is not. It cannot be both. No matter how much of gospel language is used on the part of Catholic theology, if it is married to human works, the gospel gift is no longer intact. Anything that takes the place of Christ, or makes Him secondary, or ignores His free gift of justification, is against Christ, or anti Christ.

For a number of years I taught a class on Vatican II to graduate Seminary students. In reading carefully through the sixteen Documents, it became clear that changes were superficial compared to the absence of any doctrinal change. For example, it addressed “separated brethren,” but still in the context that the

⁶⁸J. Daryl Charles, “Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue: Basis, Boundaries, Benefits,” *Pro Ecclesia*. 3/2 (1994), 305. Charles is optimistic that unity can be achieved. He looks at matters that seem to be believed by Catholics and non-Catholics, but does not look at the differences that mitigate against union.

⁶⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 363, 489-490.

⁷⁰Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, 501.

⁷¹*Ibid*, 502.

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Catholic Church is the only Body of Christ; and it allowed the Mass to be said in the vernacular, but the Mass is still the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ (even though unbloody) which denies the uniqueness of Calvary. Vatican II continued the double focus of Trent, by presenting change without any change of doctrine.

5. Pope John Paul II (May 25, 1995)

On May 25, 1995, Pope John Paul II released a 105 page Encyclical letter titled *Ut Unum Sint*, “that they may all be one”—words from Christ’s prayer (John 17:21). The Pope said, “In our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ’s disciples.” This is true “especially as the Year 2000 approaches, a year which Christians will celebrate as a sacred Jubilee,” commemorating the incarnation.⁷²

Concurring with Pope John XXIII, Pope John Paul II says, “What unites us is much greater than what divides us.”⁷³ In other words, seek unity on what the churches have in common. The Pope assures, “we are on the way toward full unity,” for, “Truly the Lord has taken us by the hand and is guiding us.”⁷⁴ The Pope notes, “With increasing frequency Christians are working together to defend human dignity, to promote peace, to apply the Gospel to social life, to bring the Christian spirit to the world of science and of the arts. They find themselves ever more united in striving to meet the sufferings and the needs of our time: hunger, natural disasters and social injustice.” In fact, “Christians are becoming ever more united in their rejection of violence, every kind of violence, from wars to social injustice.”⁷⁵

The Pope is right in stating the basis of unity is truth. He said, “Love for the truth is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians . . . Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ’s disciples.”⁷⁶ The Spirit of Truth has manifested that truth in Scripture alone. But the Pope believes the Spirit has also worked through “the great Tradition” and the “Church’s living Magisterium.”⁷⁷

The Pope asks, “how much further we must travel until that blessed day when full unity in faith will be attained and we can celebrate together in peace the Holy Eucharist of the Lord.” He notes that “The obligation to respect the truth is absolute,” and then enumerates those absolute truths as areas for fuller study. “1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of

⁷²Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, (Boston, MA: Pauline, 1995), 11-15.

⁷³Ibid, 32.

⁷⁴Ibid, 35, 37.

⁷⁵Ibid, 83-85.

⁷⁶Ibid, 46.

⁷⁷Ibid, 48.

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the Word of God; 2) the Eucharist, as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial and Real Presence of Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit; 3) Ordination, as a Sacrament, to the threefold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate; 4) the Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith; 5) the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ's disciples and for all humanity."⁷⁸ These non-Biblical doctrines remain unchanged in Catholic theology.

The Pope turns to the common martyrology held by the churches. He states that "the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the saints—those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation."⁷⁹ To ground union on the "full communion of the saints" is not Biblical. The fact of Mary, saints, and martyrs living in heaven in communion today is not taught in Scripture. Even if it was in Scripture, communion in heaven cannot be the basis of communion on earth. Biblical truth is the product of the "Spirit of Truth," so truth is the only basis of authentic unity under the Spirit of Truth. Jesus spoke of His true successor—the Holy Spirit, and not Peter—and said, "the Spirit of truth" "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). "He will bring glory to me" (John 16:14).

In his final exhortation, the Pope refers to his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, sent on November 10, 1994. He said, "In my recent Letter to the Bishops, clergy and faithful of the Catholic Church indicating the path to be followed toward the celebration of the *Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000* I wrote that 'the best preparation for the new millennium can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church.' The Second Vatican Council is the great beginning—the Advent as it were—of the journey leading us to the threshold of the Third Millennium. Given the importance which the Council attributed to the work of rebuilding Christian unity, and in this our age of grace for ecumenism, I thought it necessary to reaffirm the fundamental convictions which the Council impressed upon the consciousness of the Catholic Church, recalling them in the light of the progress subsequently made toward the full communion of all the baptized. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active in this endeavor and that he is leading the Church to the full realization of the Father's plan, in conformity with the will of Christ."⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ibid, 87-89.

⁷⁹Ibid, 93.

⁸⁰Ibid, 107.

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So the Pope gives credit to the Holy Spirit for leading in the reaffirmation of non-Biblical Catholic doctrines at Vatican II, and considers that faithfulness to the teachings of Vatican II will lead to true union. Jesus in His prayer for union pled to the Father, “that they be one as we are one” (John 17:22). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united in truth. In this same prayer for unity among His disciples, Jesus asked, “Sanctify them by the truth: your word is truth” (John 17:17). There is no true unity among Christians apart from a unity over Biblical truth. Non-Biblical doctrines, common social concerns, the fact of martyrs—none of these are the right basis for unity

“The Gift of Salvation,” A Second Controversial Ecumenical Document, October 1997

In an attempt to answer some of the questions raised by the ECT document and to state the meaning of salvation, a coalition of individual Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants⁸¹ drafted a document titled, “The Gift of Salvation,” the first week of October, 1997. An Alliance of ten Confessing Evangelicals responded with a critique of the document on November 15, 1998.⁸²

They first compared the new document with the ECT document, saying, “On the surface, this new statement seems greatly improved, and in some respects it is. However, we are profoundly distressed by its assertions and omissions, which leave it seriously flawed. We understand it to be expressed in terms that are consistent with historic Roman Catholic theology, while failing adequately to express the essential Protestant understanding of the gospel, and we plead with our fellow evangelicals not to be misled by this new initiative but instead to hold firm to the doctrine of ‘justification by grace alone because of Christ alone through faith alone,’ which is the biblical gospel.”⁸³

The major difference between the Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification by faith through Christ is the place where righteousness exists. For Protestants, Christ is their righteousness, and so righteousness is imputed to the believer, whereas for Catholics Christ’s righteousness is infused within the believer, and the believer needs to perform works of penance, receive the prayers of Mary and saints, and go to purgatory before salvation is gained. In summary, salvation is either received (Protestants) or achieved (Catholics). It is either a

⁸¹Many of the same persons who drafted the ECT document crafted “The Gift of Salvation” document.

⁸²The ten framers of the critique of “The Gift of Salvation” document are: John H. Armstrong (Reformation and Revival Ministries), Alistair Begg (Parkside Church, Cleveland), James M. Boice (Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia), W. Robert Godfrey (Westminster Theological Seminary, California), John D. Hannah (Dallas Theological Seminary), Michael S. Horton (Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), Rosemary Jensen (Bible Study Fellowship), J. A. O. Preus III (Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis), R. C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries), and Gene E. Veith (Concordia University, Wisconsin).

⁸³“An Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals,” document is on the world wide web at [http://www.alliance.org/pub/articles/Appeal to Evangelicals.html](http://www.alliance.org/pub/articles/Appeal%20to%20Evangelicals.html) 1.

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gift (Protestants) or earned (Catholics). It is either good news (Protestants) or bad news (Catholics). Both cannot be the gospel.

In summing up their criticism of the document, the ten evangelicals wrote, "Sadly the publication of 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' and now 'The Gift of Salvation' has provoked a severe controversy within the ranks of professing Evangelicals. It has divided Evangelicals from Evangelicals. To the degree it has done this, it has disrupted much of the unity once enjoyed by Evangelicals and has revealed that the unity we thought we had was not as deep as we believed." Further Unity apart from the Gospel is not biblical unity. In these troubled times we dare not compromise the Gospel in the slightest degree . . . We are concerned for the task of evangelism, being convinced that without the evangel there is no authentic evangelism. We agree with the Reformers that justification by faith alone is the article by which the church stands or falls and is indeed the article by which we stand or fall. We stand together on these truths. We call all true Evangelicals to stand with us."⁸⁴

The drive to union based on unbiblical premises is breaking up union based upon truth. We salute the ten evangelicals who stand true to biblical truth. These are God's people in other churches who will come out of Babylon and stand with God's remnant in the end-time (Rev 18:1-4), when all the world will wonder after the Catholic church (Rev 13:3-4).

7. The Coming Great Church

In his book *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*, Jacob Marcellus Kik has a chapter entitled, "The Coming Great Church." Along with other post-millennialists, who believe that Christ will come after the millennium of peace on earth, he believes that the churches will unite as one before the second advent. He finds the first hint of this in Genesis 3:15, where God said to the serpent, Satan, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike your heel." He rightly sees Christ as the One who brings this defeat of Satan. He wrongly believes this is worked out in history so that the Millennium comes before the second advent.

It is pertinent to our discussion to note that Roman Catholics interpret Genesis 3:15 differently. They follow the Latin Vulgate, which says, "she" will crush your head, rather than "he" The word "she" refers to Mary, they believe, in place of the "he," which refers to Christ. In Catholic theology it seems that Mary has become the great unifier of churches in the end-time. The unprecedented number of alleged apparitions of Mary today may well contribute to the uniting of churches

In his 1987 (Marian year) encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II presented Mary as the one who can promote unity among Christian churches. He

⁸⁴Ibid, 6.

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said, “Why should we not all together look to her as *our common Mother*, who prays for the unity of God’s family and who ‘precedes’ us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?”⁸⁵

Imagine the push for unity when Satan (2 Cor 11:14) comes as Christ⁸⁶ and calls all to follow him in keeping Sunday! This will be the final non-Biblical doctrine that unites the churches, a doctrine invented by Catholicism. Then those who follow Christ and keep His Sabbath will be found outside these churches. The important thing to focus on is this—the ecumenical movement is another example of Satan’s working to hide Christ and His truth. It is an important part of final events on planet earth.⁸⁷

Years ago Ellen G. White was shown the end-time. These insights are as up-to-date as the sources referred to in this chapter. She wrote that among Protestants, “the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome.”⁸⁸ But the fact is, “When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”⁸⁹ Then, “there will be a national apostasy which will end in national ruin.”⁹⁰ In fact, “Every soul that is not fully surrendered to God . . . will form an alliance with Satan against heaven, and join in battle against the ruler of the universe.”⁹¹ How incredibly sad! No one will stand alone in the end-time. The world will be united with the Catholic church and Satan. The remnant will be united with Christ. The only protection from the false alliance is union with Christ and His truth.

The end-game is all the world wondering after and worshiping Catholicism and the devil who works through her (Rev 13:1-4). America takes the lead in this final union (Rev 13:11-16). That’s the universal destiny of the Ecumenical Movement. What should we know as we move towards the year 2000? We should know Christ is coming again soon, not because of the date 2000 but because of fulfilling prophecy, and the ecumenical movement is one of many prophecies being fulfilled with rapid pace.

⁸⁵Pope John Paul II, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II, (Redemptoris Mater)*, ed. J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 386.

⁸⁶Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 624-625.

⁸⁷Others given in *Christ is Coming!*

⁸⁸Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 563.

⁸⁹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 445.

⁹⁰Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:976.

⁹¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 465.

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The Process of Conversion as Explained by the Great Controversy Metaphor

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Conversion is a process, barely noticeable at first, then proceeding by steps and occasional leaps until one has turned away from sin and toward God. Experience bears evidence that the process does not end at a moment of rebirth, but continues as, having been reborn, one learns to walk in step with God and say no to temptation.

The Bible presents the idea that we are in the midst of a war between Christ and Satan which has lasted thousands of years, began before creation, and will end with the last judgment and the destruction of everything evil and bent. The war is often called the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, and its battlefield is now this world.

I submit, however, that this war also has a personal component. Each one of us is a battlefield, as well, and in us Christ and Satan fight for supremacy, all our lives. What follows will present this personal Great Controversy metaphor and show how it helps to explain the conversion process.

The day's topic in my Old Testament Literature class was the Old Testament evidence for the resurrection of the dead and what happens after death. It was an important, carefully biblical, but unavoidably controversial thing to discuss in a state university class where half the students were Catholic, a quarter mainline Protestant, and a quarter Evangelical or Charismatic.

The students had already read a 6,000 word handout on the topic and looked up about thirty Bible passages, so they knew what we were going to discuss. Their faces were intent, their eyes sharp, and many sat on the edges of their seats. I had warned them that teaching "by the Book," *sola scriptura*, meant that at some point in the semester everyone would be offended by something I

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taught, when the teachings of the Bible conflicted with the traditions of their church. This topic was bound to offend.

They were listening, they were thinking, but no one seemed offended. Their questions were good ones. If the soul is merely dust animated by the breath or spirit of life, given by God, then when that spirit returns to God, can it think? How can God resurrect dust and give it a person's thoughts? Can people be resurrected if they are cremated? If the spirits of the dead can't float around and haunt us, then what are ghosts?

Can Demons Attack Christians?

Cynthia raised her hand. She was a non-traditional student in her thirties, happily married, an active nine-year-old Christian, and eager to go all the way with God.

"Is it possible," she asked, "for a born again Christian to be attacked by demons? Last winter I woke up one night with an overpowering feeling that my house was filled with something evil. I prayed frantically for my husband and children and walked through the house consecrating each room to God."

"What happened then?" I asked.

"Finally the feeling that there were demons present lessened and went away, and I seemed to feel peace settling over the house."

"Yes," I said, "I've experienced that."

"But I've been born again," Cynthia said. "How can demons gain access to me? I belong to God!"

I smiled from my seat on my desk and looked around at the watching faces. As I did I asked God to guide me.

You Are an Island

"There's a war on," I said. "This world is a battlefield between Christ and Satan. Even though Christ won the crucial battle at the cross, Satan hasn't given up fighting. He won't give up until he's destroyed. He knows his time is short, but he's going to take as many of us with him as he can. That's why he still tempts us. That's why we still sin and suffer."

Everyone seemed to be with me so far. "Let me answer your question, Cynthia, by way of an illustration, an extended metaphor, a sort of parable. According to the preacher John Donne, 'No man is an island,' but let's pretend that you are. We'll call you 'Cynthia Island.'"

"Let's say that Cynthia Island is about the size of, oh, Vermont, or perhaps Sicily or Crete. It's surrounded by the sea. Imagine several hundred villages, a few dozen towns, several cities, and a million citizens. Imagine mountains and valleys, fields and forests, rivers, high cliffs overlooking the sea, and sandy beaches.

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Enemy Attack

“When you were born, Cynthia, Cynthia Island was under the King’s control, the rightful King, and the island was at peace, though there were some dangerous cliffs and swamps and wild animals.

“However, there was an enemy prince across the sea who hated the King and coveted Cynthia Island. So even before your birth the enemy attacked, but in such a subtle way that it seldom raised suspicions. When you were a child spies reported on what people were saying and doing. Agents infiltrated and began influencing people’s thoughts, suggesting that if they were free of the King and His laws, their lives would change for the better: more excitement, fun, intellectual challenge, progress.

“The King’s troops sensed the simmering rebellion, and they tried to dissuade the people, but to no avail. Terrorists struck all over the island, and the islanders became afraid and lost faith in the King’s power to care for them and save them. Enemy troops landed in the guise of a ‘liberation army,’ took over several towns. The people gave the King’s troops less and less support, rather than turning to them for help.

“Finally, Cynthia, about the time you were old enough to make your own decisions—the age of accountability, whenever that is—the citizens of Cynthia Island demanded the right to vote on whether they should be under the King’s control, or independent. The King graciously allowed this vote, but He lost, and He and his troops had to leave the island, turning over control to the citizens, or so the citizens thought. The King formed a government in exile and awaited the opportunity to return.

Independence or Tyranny?

“The citizens soon discovered that with the King gone, there was no way to keep out the enemy prince and his troops. The enemy quickly conquered the island, and the enemy prince claimed it as his own, even though he told the islanders that now at last they were independent and free, and he was merely leading a ‘peacekeeping force’ to guarantee their freedom from the King.

“As promised, there was more excitement, more fun, more intellectual challenge, more progress, but there was little peace, little rest. There were moments when some people sensed they had been misled. In the end, everything they did seemed to turn sour.

“The enemy had won the hearts of the islanders through patient deception, quiet insinuation, cunning argument, through telling people what they wanted to hear and promising them anything. The people continued to believe themselves independent and democratic. The enemy wanted them to think that. However, though the enemy troops were seldom seen, they were everywhere, unrecognized. Whenever a few islanders tried to go in a direction that displeased the enemy, they were soon forced back into compliance. The people’s freedom was an illusion, but a powerful illusion, and it fooled most of them. They were sure

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they were free, and they bragged about the freedom which had allowed them to expell the King.

The King Fights Back

“Meanwhile, the rightful King and His government and troops were in exile, but they did not give up the fight. Much as the enemy prince had done, the King sent special agents to infiltrate Cynthia Island. The difference was that they were not deceitful. They whispered into open ears; they touched open hearts; they knocked quietly.

“Where islanders seemed interested, the infiltrators passed on messages from the King. They gave them instruction manuals, and as people read those manuals they learned to be partisan fighters, opposing the enemy occupation. They joined the resistance movement, doing the King’s will and work. The partisans began sabotaging communications and transportation and spreading the word that the King was coming back.

“As the resistance movement grew, the partisans began attacking enemy strongholds, but with little success. They were fighting for the King, but in their own strength—a recipe for failure. A few villages were retaken, lost, and captured again. Paratroopers landed and helped the partisans. There was fierce fighting.

“The King’s troops tried to invade by sea many times, tried to establish a beachhead, but without much success. There wasn’t enough popular support. Finally, though, with the invitation of the resistance, a massive invasion carried the day. Yard by yard, the King’s troops pushed forward, and they captured more and more of Cynthia Island. When an enemy-caused famine or plague made the islanders hungry or sick, or when an earthquake knocked down houses or enemy troops used too much force while policing the populace, the people thought again of the peace they’d had under the true King. Then they supported the partisans by offering food and shelter, and the King’s troops prospered in their fight.

“The time came when the enemy held only the larger towns and the cities, but the gates were strong and locked. If you walked through the countryside, you would say that Cynthia Island was again under the King’s control, but that wasn’t true, because the enemy-ruled cities were like tumors in the heart of the island.

Surrender and Rebirth

“At last, hungry, exhausted by the fight, and no longer blinded by the enemy’s lies, the city dwellers threw open the gates during the darkest night of the year and welcomed in the King’s troops as the enemy fled in panic.

“When the rightful King arrived, the people repented and confessed that they were wrong to try to be independent. They had been a country of ‘do-it-myself-ers,’ but now they realized that ‘I can do it myself’ was merely an an-

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cient enemy lie. They begged the King's forgiveness, and the King forgave them.

"This, Cynthia, was of course your condition when you were born again. After years of being under Satan's control, after years of God patiently wooing you or battering at your heart, after giving up bits of yourself or most of yourself and thinking that was enough, you surrendered fully to Him and were born again. You were now a citizen of God's Kingdom, an adopted child of the King.

"Just ask yourselves, all of you, if this hasn't been your experience. You can remember little moments of grace—the wonder of holding a newborn baby, a perfect day, an unexpected kindness, a few encouraging words which meant much more to you than the speaker intended—and as you look back you can see God's hand there, drawing you nearer when you hardly knew Him. That was the undercover work, training the partisans.

"Then perhaps you learned about Christ, felt like you'd accepted Him, started calling yourself a Christian, and thought you'd arrived. That was the King's troops establishing a beachhead, getting ashore. But if you've continued in your faith you've gained victory over this or that sin or bad habit, or grown in your devotional life, and you've thought, 'Wow! I thought I was a Christian before, but I see now that I had no idea what being a Christian meant. Now at last I'm truly a Christian.' That was like the King's troops capturing enemy strongholds, liberating villages.

"If you're like me, Cynthia, you claimed Jesus as your Savior years before you submitted to Him as your Lord. Jesus as Savior invaded in force and captured the countryside. But it wasn't until you submitted to Him as your Lord that the city gates were thrown open and He became the true King of Cynthia Island and the enemy could be expelled.

"That's when you were born again. Before, Satan was your lord, but your Savior was fighting to save you. Now, your Savior is your Lord, but Satan is fighting to get back in. This time, though, you recognize his tricks, and you know he wants to enslave you again.

"Sometimes, despite knowing the danger, you deliberately let Satan capture a village or two, for some reason. Perhaps he entices you with some trinkets, offers to entertain you, and you open your gates. Then you have to repent and ask your Lord to retake the lost territory and make it His own again.

"I sensed God's presence here and there for years when I hardly knew Him and didn't walk with Him at all. Then for ten years I went to church, thought I was religious. Step by step, as I was ready, God led me, and always I thought 'Now I'm a Christian, and I wasn't before.' Only then, after a decade, did I finally surrender everything to God and tell Him, 'You'll have to work your way in me, because I can't do this myself.'

"That's when I was truly born again and my nature was changed. That's when the peace came, the joy, and also more and more victories and miracles (even though there were victories and miracles before, as well). That's when my

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own island became the King's private property, in which He could will and do His good pleasure.

The Enemy Fights On

"This is not the end of the story of Cynthia Island, though. The cities had opened the gates, and the enemy had fled, but there were still enemy strongholds here and there, still enemy troops living in underground bunkers and tunnels.

"One by one, the King's army demolished the strongholds, to the extent that the islanders were willing to let this happen. Some of these strongholds were in palaces, cathedrals, museums, concert halls, banks, and people were often loathe to agree to the destruction of these 'cultural treasures' until there was clearly no other option.

"Meanwhile, although Cynthia Island was now generally peaceful and happy, the enemy was always watching for moments and places of opportunity. The enemy stirred up towns, terrorized the countryside, and tried to launch major offensives.

"However, once they had surrendered to the King, the citizens remained generally faithful. There was always someone somewhere, it seemed, in rebellion, but the tendency and desire was to serve the King.

"The skirmishing continued, as it had for years. But there was a very great difference between living under the enemy's rule while the King tried to gain control, and living under the King's rule while the enemy struggled to regain its power.

"Gradually, as the years passed, the enemy strongholds were eliminated. But the enemy never gave up trying to recapture Cynthia Island. It never gave up its subtle or ruthless attacks for long. Sometimes it was a campaign of disinformation which encouraged an ironic view of the King's government. Sometimes it was biological warfare, a plague that destroyed thousands. Sometimes it was terrorism which murdered innocent children and led some to doubt that the King was still in control. Sometimes it was the assassination of faithful civil servants, merely because their faithfulness was a stench in the enemy's nostrils.

The Island Is You

"So, Cynthia, that's you today. You've surrendered completely to God and been reborn as His child. Now you belong to Him and He is your Lord. Loving thoughts of Him fill your mind, and you are constantly walking and talking with Him. One by one, sometimes painlessly and sometimes after a hard fight, God is cleansing you of your bad habits, your evil tendencies, which serve as demonic strongholds.

"Being born again doesn't mean you can no longer sin. It means you've given God the right to remove sins from your life whenever He pleases. It means you *want* to be freed from sin, whatever the cost. It means you want to be as

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righteous in the flesh as God has declared you to be in Christ, and God has made that possible by adopting you as His child.

“Meanwhile, Satan and his minions keep attacking you in various ways, trying to turn you away from God, whether for awhile or forever. This means you are always under attack, and sometimes those attacks can be painful or frightening.

“It’s not that one moment you are saved, the next unsaved, then back again. You used to be lost, but God was fighting to have you for His own. Now you are saved, now you are adopted, but Satan is fighting to get you back. Satan wants you to be like the Prodigal Son and reject your Father, except without ever returning home. If you did that you would still be your Father’s child, but you would be a *lost* child. The presence of fighting in you doesn’t mean you don’t belong to God. All you need to do is to continue to faithfully and obediently walk with the One who has always been entirely faithful to you. Let Him do the fighting for you and in you. That’s what faith is. It’s like allowing a surgeon to cut out a cancer. You can’t do it yourself, so you have to have faith that the Great Physician can do it. Your job is to deliberately go under the knife.”

For some time I had been watching Cynthia wipe tears from her eyes. “That really makes everything clear,” she said. “That’s my life. I’m still giving things over to God for Him to deal with in His own way. He’s still guiding me into all truth.”

“Me, too,” I said. “We’re both refugees on an upward path, and that path is littered with the heavy belongings we’ve dropped by the wayside as we’ve learned to trust God and believe that He will provide.”

God at War in Us

I looked at the students around the classroom. “This illustration may be a metaphor,” I said, “but there’s a lot of truth in it. Each one of you is an island. Some of you are still under enemy occupation. But if so, your being here is proof that God is fighting to conquer you and willing you to surrender and throw open the gates to your heart. As you do your assignments for this class, the King’s resistance movement is growing. Some of you have already surrendered to the King and welcomed Him back onto your island. Now you are at various stages of destroying enemy strongholds and allowing the King’s troops to beat back enemy attacks.

“This Great Controversy between Christ and Satan is deadly serious, a matter of eternal life or eternal death, not only for you but for your friends and loved ones and for those who have never heard the Gospel.

“As Joshua said, ‘Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.’ Have a good weekend—don’t do anything God wouldn’t do.”

I exchanged smiles with thirty islands as they turned in their daily work and filed out of the classroom. I love teaching the Bible!

“Are You Born Again?”: A Doctrine of Regeneration

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Today is my birthday. My fifth birthday. Five years ago today (as I begin this essay), after growing up a preacher’s kid in a loving Christian home, after eighteen years of Christian education, after ten years when I didn’t attend church and lived the secular lifestyle, after ten years of marriage when I attended church faithfully, prayed and preached, talked a lot about religion and church affairs, but struggled with anger, fear, hatred, lust, ambition, greed, doubt, and depression—five years ago today, at the age of forty, I finally surrendered. I surrendered to God, surrendered both everything bad about me and everything good. I put everything into His hands and asked to receive everything from His hands. I renounced my citizenship in this world. I surrendered all. I accepted salvation. I accepted Christ as my substitute. I asked Him to live out *His* life within *me*. I joined God’s resistance movement, taking up spiritual arms against both Satan’s occupying forces and those in rebellion who are collaborators with the enemy.

At that moment I was born again.¹ Or at least that’s the way it seems to me. My anger and fear, my hatred and lust and ambition, my greed and doubt and

¹ March 1993. Ellen G. White uses virtually the same definition. “When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. . . . It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. ‘He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.’ ‘Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.’ I John 3:24; 2:3. This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.” *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, [1900] 1941), 312–13.

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depression, were washed away in a moment. For the first time in years I felt peace and joy flow over me, around me. They've never left. Sure, there have been moments when I've fallen short, many times when I've had to repent. Sure, there have been times when I've neglected prayer and Bible study and felt less than Spirit-filled. But I've always come to my senses and hurried back home.

After all, I'm an adopted child of the King! I'm a prince! I'm no longer a citizen of earth, but an alien, a stranger. The world and I have different cultures, different customs. To me, earthlings often seem odd and perverse. I'm sure I sometimes seem the same to them. But I'm an ambassador, here on a mission with a message to deliver. And now that I've been born again, I have a story to tell and a burning desire to tell it, to bear witness. (Just fifteen minutes ago, as I write this sentence, I led a woman to surrender and rebirth and prayed with her in the hallway after New Testament class. What a thrill!)

Are You "Born Again"?

"Are you 'born again'?" When someone asks you that, what do you say? On what biblical basis? And how do you prove it?

I've been asked that question a few times, and for a long time it puzzled me, and I wasn't sure what to say.

When people ask us if we are "born again," they are really asking us either or both of two questions. Question one: "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Question two: "Are you a part of the Evangelical/Fundamentalist subculture?"

We are all familiar with the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus recorded in John 3. We know we can't enter the kingdom of God unless we're born again (without quotes). Some of us have experienced a wonderful, emotional turning point that leads us to think we've been born again. Others of us assume we must have been born again at some point, as we're baptized church members. Many of us are very comfortable with the term "born again," and it may even be a common expression in our daily conversation. We may see it as a sort of "sheep vs. goats thing." Others of us feel a bit uncomfortable with the term, and we're not quite sure how to answer when we're asked if we're "born again."

Evangelicals and fundamentalists of many denominations, as I've said, often identify themselves as "born again Christians" as a way of distinguishing themselves, evidently, from other "so-called" Christians who have not been "born again" and so "cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Like me (five years old today), they can often recount the very minute they were suddenly "born again," and if this rebirth was not a powerful emotional experience, it is sometimes doubted by their peers. Journalists tend to associate being "born again" with certain political and social issues: Republican flag wavers against abortion and gun control and for prayer in public schools and capital punishment.

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What Does It Mean? When the Christian polltaker George Barna asks people if they are "born again," he says he is asking if they have accepted Christ as their Savior and as Lord of their lives and believe they will someday go to heaven. Is that what it means to be "born again"? Is that what the verse says? Isn't that what all Christians of all denominations believe (or should believe), even the ones who don't identify themselves as "born again"?

What does the Bible say? The best way of understanding God's Word is to let it interpret itself. Is there anything else in the Bible that will help us understand these important words of Jesus? Yes, there is!

Given the emphasis evangelicals place on being "born again," you would think the term is common in the Bible. Actually, it isn't. Both the King James Version (KJV) and the New International Version (NIV) use it only three times: twice when Nicodemus visits Jesus and once in 1 Peter 1:23. However, the words "regeneration," "renewal," "rebirth," and "born of God" are used as synonyms of "born again," so it is an important Bible teaching, and there are plenty of texts and contexts to guide us, with the help of the Holy Spirit. (When was the last time someone asked you, "Have you been regenerated?")

A Key Text. The most important text, of course, the one people are most likely to memorize, the one that makes them talk about being "born again," is Jesus' statement to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In the Greek, the "born again" used here is literally "born from above," but "born again" is an idiomatic meaning, and so well translated.² (In 1 Pet 1:3 and 23 the exact word meaning "born again" is used.)

Nicodemus chose to quibble with Jesus about a man entering his mother's womb a second time (v. 4). This is odd, as the rabbis considered Gentile converts to Judaism to have been reborn,³ so the idea should have been familiar. He should have understood Jesus. At the least, he should have thought Jesus meant "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

When Jesus talks about "the kingdom of God," sometimes He means Himself, representing God's kingdom, or God's invasion of a fallen planet through Him to bring it to righteousness (Matt 12:28), what we could call the inauguration of the kingdom of God. Sometimes He means the body of believers who have accepted Him (Matt 21:31), what we could call the appropriation of the kingdom of God. Sometimes He means heaven, or the earth made new (Luke 13:28), what we could call the consummation of the kingdom of God. Sometimes Jesus seems to have more than one meaning in mind at once. We have to figure out what He means by the context.

² See A. Ringwald's article on "Birth," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:179.

³ *Ibid.*, 180.

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When Jesus said, “no one can *see* the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (NIV), He left the way open to think He meant, “You can’t see (understand) my teachings or my purpose here unless you have been born from above.” But that’s not what He meant. How do we know? Because Jesus then explained his terms, using a parallel expression: “Except a man be *born of water and of the Spirit*, he cannot *enter into* the kingdom of God” (v. 5). The words “enter into” makes it seem that He is talking about heaven. However, Jesus means all three aspects of the kingdom of God: entering *into Christ*, entering the resistance movement He was starting on earth, and entering into heaven.

Born of Water. The parallel terms “born again” and “born of water and of the Spirit” help us understand the meaning of “born again.” Some people have suggested that “born of water” refers to human birth, being born after “the water has broken,” but this is unlikely. It is much more likely that Jesus is talking about baptism, but to think He is saying “You can’t go to heaven unless you are baptized” would be superficial and legalistic.⁴ What does the Bible say?

Baptism reminds us of John the Baptist, of course. Paul says, “John’s baptism was a baptism of *repentance*” (Acts 19:4). Mark 1:4 says that John came “preaching a baptism of *repentance* for the forgiveness of sins.”

John was not the originator of baptism. Baptism was a frequent and important Jewish ceremony. Leviticus 15 specifies immersion in water for purification from physical ritual impurity. Ceremonial immersion symbolized the washing away of ritual uncleanness or sin. Such uncleanness as a woman’s menstruation was not always sin. If sin was involved, though, the *mikvah* (the word for both the bath and the bathtub) was supposed to be accompanied by repentance. It also symbolized a rebirth into a clean relationship with God. From here to John’s using baptism to symbolize repentance and a return to spiritual purity is only a short step.

Many large homes in Jerusalem had private pools for baptism by immersion for ceremonial purification. There were similar pools under the temple for the priests, and enough pools outside the temple gates to baptize a hundred people at once.⁵ Baptism by immersion was also part of a ceremony recognizing the conversion of gentiles and their rebirth into the Jewish faith, though the Bible does not mention this.

Observant Jews in Jesus’ day usually baptized themselves, ducking under the water. Some people think that’s how John’s baptism was done, too, but Matt 3:13–14 teaches otherwise. Also, Acts 8:38 tells us that “Philip and the eunuch went down into the water” of a pool or stream beside the road when the Eunuch accepted Christ and requested baptism.

⁴ Ringwald says, “It is only with Justin and Irenaeus in the 2nd cent. that rebirth became a synonym for baptism” (180).

⁵ This is the most likely spot for the baptisms on the Day of Pentecost.

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John preached that those who had truly repented should “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8), and Jesus too called for such fruit. By “born of water,” thus, Jesus meant a profound repentance, conversion, a sincere turning away from sin. (One of the two Greek words translated “repentance” [*metanpeō*] means “turning away,” and one of the two Hebrew words [*çûl*] means “turn,” although the Latin root of our word repentance [*repenitere*] is related to “penitence” and “penitentiary” and suggests change as a result of punishment—quite different from the freely-chosen turning away of the Hebrew and Greek.) *The continual turning away from whatever separates us from God is a crucial aspect of true faith.*⁶ Such turning away, however, is in itself a gift from God, possible only through the Holy Spirit.

Paul defines the effects of this deep repentance when he rejoices that the letter he wrote rebuking the Corinthians led them to turn away from sin and toward God. He writes:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. (2 Cor 7:10–11, NIV)

Paul writes that “without holiness no-one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). True repentance turns from sin with loathing and gratefully embraces this holiness, rather than recoiling from it. With many of us, until we sink so low that we truly loathe ourselves and our sin and despair of doing anything about it, God can’t bring us to the point of full surrender to Him, full reliance on Him.

Born of Spirit. This leads to the second part of Christ’s statement. What about being born “of the Spirit”? John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16, NIV). The most important manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is the fiery boldness in bearing witness to Christ that follows true repentance and conversion (Acts 4:29–31). Those who are truly born again are consumed by the love of God and eager to turn away from anything that separates them from Him. The love of God (both His love for them and their love for Him) fills their minds and their thoughts, and they long to share it with others. This is a fruit of discipleship and a sign that one has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus, repentance, faith, and discipleship are closely connected.

There is, however, much more the Bible can teach us about being born again, other meanings to help us understand Christ’s words in John 3:3 and help

⁶ “As with John’s baptism, so earliest Christian baptism was an expression of *repentance and faith* (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12f.; 16:14f., 33f.; 18:8; 19:2f., cf. Heb. 6:1f.)” J. D. Douglas, et al, *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), article on “Baptism,” 122.

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us decide if we have in fact been born again. Sometimes the term refers to the resurrection of the righteous when Christ returns. Matt. 19:28 says, “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the *regeneration* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The Greek word translated “regeneration” in this verse [*palingenesia*] does literally mean “the being born again” or “the rebirth.” Yet Jesus is talking about the resurrection of the dead when he returns, when we will be “born again” into immortal life (see 1 Cor 15:54). He is also talking about the “rebirth” of this world as a place of beauty and peace and holiness, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1).

If this is what Jesus means when he speaks with Nicodemus, then He is reading Nicodemus’s mind, sensing that when Nicodemus confesses Him to be “a teacher come from God” (John 3:2), he is really asking Jesus if He is about to set up His messianic kingdom on earth. Jesus, thus, would be telling Nicodemus that he will only “see” and “enter into the kingdom of God” if he is resurrected. Could this be part of what Jesus means by “born again”? There are other clues to guide us.

Reborn as Heirs of God. “Born again” also means being reborn as heirs of God.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:4–7 NIV).

This little passage offers us a good opportunity for what English teachers call a “close reading.” By reading it very carefully we will find eight important lessons on what Christ meant by being “born again.”

1. Salvation comes *by* God’s mercy, but it comes *through* being born again. Evidently, unless we are reborn, it is presumptuous to believe we are saved.

2. Being reborn is a sort of “*washing*,” like baptism, and in the Bible washing suggests being *cleansed* from something, primarily sin or defilement. So, we can’t be born again unless we are sinners, born wrong the first time—born with spiritual “birth defects”—and need cleansing. (Jesus was baptized at the Jordan, but He was not born again in this sense, as He was without sin.)

3. “*Rebirth*” and “*renewal*” are related concepts. On one hand, those who are truly reborn are also renewed, at once. As Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come!” On the other hand, the evidence of that instant renewal becomes more obvious as we mature in Christ, trust God more and more, and walk where He leads us. Paul is also talking about one of the purposes of being born again when he writes, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be

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transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2 NIV). Until we are reborn, we can't understand God's will for us, and we certainly can't assent to it and approve of it. Being born again is the means by which our spiritual faculties are enabled to understand, accept, and do God's will.

4. This “rebirth” and “renewal” is worked out in us “by the Holy Spirit”—it is not our own work, not something we try to do so we will be acceptable, but something done in us and to us, if we are truly reborn. It changes us, though, makes us different. As Paul writes in Col 3:9b–10, “you have *taken off your old self with its practices* and have *put on the new self*, which is being *renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*”

5. This “rebirth” and “renewal” comes to us “through Jesus Christ our Savior”—it is because of Him that the Holy Spirit is able to renew us.

6. Through God's “grace,” or favor, because of His “kindness and love,” we *have been justified*, not only *declared* “righteous” but *made* “righteous,” but it was done for a reason, “so that . . .”

7. Because we are now righteous before God, in Christ, and because through Christ the Holy Spirit is available to “regenerate” and “renew” us, we can now, by accepting salvation, become “*heirs*” of God, *children* of God, who may rightly look forward to receiving *an inheritance*. John writes, in 1 John 5:19, “We *know* that we are *children of God*, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one,” or, as Acts 10:38 says, “under the power of the devil.” However, as “children of God,” *we don't have to obey* “the prince of this world.” We are under the law of our new country, our heavenly country, the law of grace. As Paul writes in Romans 6:14, “For *sin shall not be your master*, because you are not under law, but under grace.” If we are “born again” as spiritual heirs of God, we are able to say no to this world's temptations.

8. That inheritance as heirs is “*the hope of eternal life.*” In a very real sense, we *have eternal life now* by faith and hope, because we are *heirs* of eternal life, looking forward to our inheritance—but we are *not yet immortal* (1 Tim 6:16). However, because we have been adopted as children of God and are brothers and sisters of Christ, we are confident that *we will inherit immortality* (again, see 1 Cor. 15:54).

Reborn as Children of God. Yes, being “born again” means rebirth as “children of God.” What a wonderful thought! If we are “children of God,” then some of the Bible's counsel on children may prove useful in understanding what it means to be “born again.” Jesus said, “Except ye be *converted* [from a Latin word meaning “to turn thoroughly”; the Greek word, *straphēte* (from *strephomai*), means “turn yourself back”] and *become as little children*, ye shall *not enter* into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3 KJV). Conversion is the means by which we “become as little children.” Note that here is another thing Jesus says we must do to “enter the kingdom of heaven.” We must be “born again” and we

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must “become as little children.” What does this mean? While the text does not explain, I’ve noticed that little children have open, loving hearts. They respond to love and accept it without question. So should we. What else do they do?

Peter writes, “As *obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires* you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so *be holy in all you do*; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ Since you call on a *Father* who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as *strangers* here in reverent fear” (1 Pet 1:14–17). We are to live as “strangers” because we don’t belong in this world. It’s not our home, and we should not be seduced by its customs. After all, we are children of the King! We are also called to be “*obedient children.*” We’re not called to be prodigal children, feeding swine in an unfriendly town far from our Father, but heirs and ambassadors.

The “humanists” of this world celebrate their ability to make their own decisions, to be kings in their castles, to decide for themselves whether what God asks makes sense. In the kingdom of God, this is treason, rebellion. Such rebellion seems to be what led to Lucifer’s downfall. In the Torah, the “laws of Moses,” rebellion against God is one of the most serious of offenses. Some of us act as if the fifth commandment were “*Humor thy father and thy mother,*” but God commands us to “honor,” and when we are “little children” that includes obedience. If children are to obey their earthly parents, what do we owe our heavenly Father? If we are truly “born again,” truly “children of God,” then we will obey. If Christ is truly our Lord, our Master, then we are His servants and slaves, as well as His children, and so doubly called to obey.

If we are truly “born again” “of the Spirit,” then we are no longer “worldly,” but “spiritual.” If we are still slaves to worldly things, perhaps we should reevaluate whether we are indeed “born again” and seek God’s grace with all our hearts and ask Him to convert and transform us. Paul writes, in Romans 7:24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from *this body of death*? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, *I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*” Paul is saying here that there is only one way to escape slavery “to the law of sin,” which leads to death, and that is to be “a slave to God’s law” by being “born again.” This does not mean becoming a legalist. It means being willing to be led “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Ps 23:3). That is the direction in which true freedom in this world lies.

How We Know. John writes, “*This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did*” (1 John 2:5b–6 NIV). In a sense, thus, the purpose of taking up our cross and walking as Jesus walked is so we will *know* that we have indeed been “born again.” A feeling of overwhelming spiritual excitement sometimes comes with surrender to God, but such excitement is easily counterfeited by the evil one. However, when we find ourselves filled with compassion for others or overwhelmed by the desire to share the good news of salvation, when we find in our lives the evidence of victory

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over the addictions and bad habits which have made us stumble while walking with God, we find evidence that we have been “born again” and are now “spiritual.” As Paul writes, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship*” (Rom 12:1 NIV). When we offer up our bodies to God, imperfect though they be, when we surrender ourselves to God as living sacrifices, as an act of worship, He will transform us, making us “holy and pleasing,” both spiritually and physically. Paul writes to Timothy, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (1 Tim 3:12). Most Christians today face little persecution from family, acquaintances, or government. Those who are truly “born again,” completely submitted to Christ, are more likely to experience persecution, though, because they are more of a threat to the world and its ways.

What It Is and What It Isn’t. Regarding the battle between the world and the Spirit, Paul writes:

Since, then, you have been *raised with Christ* [i.e., “born again” according to the Spirit—not according to Adam’s seed, but Christ’s seed], set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life [reborn in Christ] is now hidden with Christ in God.* When Christ, who *is your life*, appears, *then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry* (Col 3:1–5 NIV).

If you are “born again,” you are born according to the Spirit, so you should consider yourself dead to the temptations of this world and allow God to work in you the victory which glorifies His name. If you find video games or sports or television or making money or possessing things more interesting than spending time with God and talking with Him and about Him, perhaps you should reconsider your path, ask yourself what you want from your relationship with your heavenly Father. If you say you’re “born again,” but you aren’t putting to death your earthly nature—or rather letting God by His grace put it to death for you—the Bible says you are not really “born again.” If you say you’re “born again” but you aren’t walking after the Spirit, if you are not turning away from the world, you are not “born again.”

On the other hand, you *are* “born again” if you are walking with God, having repented and turned away from the world—even if you don’t claim to be. Everyone who has truly accepted Christ, everyone who has enough faith to walk the way He asks us to walk, is “born again.” Whether or not they have experienced a sense of overwhelming emotion or can specify an exact time when this occurred doesn’t matter. What matters is that they walk with God through the Holy Spirit and not by their own power, which is impossible.

Anyone who claims to be “born again” but doesn’t walk in the Spirit, doesn’t submit to the Word and obey it to the extent the Spirit has led, isn’t

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“born again.” (As 1 John 2:29 says, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who *does what is right* has been born of him.”) Bear in mind, though, that surrender to God’s will leads to victory, leads to transformation, but not all at once. Paul writes in Heb 10:14, “by one sacrifice he has *made perfect for ever* those who are *being made holy*.” Those who are “born again” are “being made holy” in this life, a bit at a time, as they are willing to be led, but they can be confident of salvation, because in God’s eyes they are already “made perfect for ever” by Christ’s sacrifice.

Living for Righteousness. Being “born again” means “living for righteousness.” Why did Christ die for us? Peter tells us: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might *die to sins* and *live for righteousness*; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:24–25 NIV). Literally, in the Greek, “so that we might die to sins” reads “that we *having died to sin* might *live for righteousness*.” If we are “born again” in the Spirit, then we are *already* dead to this world and strangers here, and we are called to *live* as if we were dead to sin, not responding to it. Through His death, Christ not only saved us but made it possible for us to “live for righteousness” now, thus experiencing salvation in this life, before the consummation of salvation when Christ returns. Note that Peter does not say that Christ saved us so we could go astray, but so that we could return to the flock and its Shepherd.

Paul writes to Titus:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*, we should *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself *a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:11–14 KJV).

Not everyone who tries to live this way is “born again.” It’s possible for people to think they can “earn” salvation by living this way, and such people have not yet, perhaps, met their Savior and understood the gravity of their sin. However, this *is* the road those who are “born again” will be walking, according to God’s Word. Jesus said, “By their fruit you will know them” (Matt 7:16 NIV). “But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. Against such things there is no law. *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires*. Since we *live by the Spirit*, let us *keep in step with the Spirit*” (Gal 5:22–25 NIV). “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. *Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them*” (Eph 5:8–11 NIV).

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For many years, even while attending church every week, I read the Bible only to criticize it, only to find errors, reasons to disbelieve. I also loved to criticize the church and its leaders and their motives. Being “born again,” though, means accepting the Word of God as truth, as truth meant for *us*, not just for people long ago. (Paul writes, in 1 Cor 10:11 KJV, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are *written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” That means they were written for *us* and can be applied to our lives today!)

The Spirit and the Word. How does the Holy Spirit reveal to us this rebirth which leads to seeing and entering the kingdom of God? How does He guide us in our “walk in the light” (1 John 1:17)? Some Christians assume that if God has something to say to them, He will impress His will on them and they will feel it. Perhaps they will hear a voice. Perhaps they will simply feel that a decision is right. However, this approach is highly unreliable, especially when people place these feelings above the Scriptures. The Bible offers a better way.

James writes, “He chose to *give us birth* [i.e., *born again*] through the *word of truth*, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18 NIV). What does it mean to be reborn of God through “the word of truth”? The Bible tells us. Jesus said, “But when he, *the Spirit of truth*, comes, *he will guide you into all truth*. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13 NIV). What is that truth into which He will guide us? Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them [i.e., “make them holy”] through thy truth: *thy word is truth*” (John 17:17). Peter writes, “For you have been *born again*, not of *perishable seed*, but of *imperishable*, through the *living and enduring word of God* [Both Christ and the Bible] (1 Pet 1:23).

Thus, Jesus pleaded for the Father to show us the truth in the Scriptures, and He promised the Holy Spirit would lead us to that truth. The purpose of the Holy Spirit’s leading is to *make us holy* by convincing us to follow the teachings of the Word, submit to God, and fully accept Salvation. Note that *the Spirit must guide according to the Word, or it’s not the Holy Spirit, but another spirit*. (As I said earlier, a lot of people assume that being born again is always accompanied by powerful emotion. Often it is, but not always. You can’t trust your emotions, but you can trust God’s Word.)

Born of God. Being “born again” also means being “born of God.” The apostle John speaks often of what it means to be “born of God,” and by studying these verses, we can learn what it is to be “born again.” John writes, at the beginning of his gospel, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become *children of God*—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but *born of God*” (John 1:12–13 NIV). Thus, rebirth comes of truly believing in Christ’s name—believing enough to be willing to take up our cross and follow Him.

In 1 John especially John teaches what it means to be “born again” or “born of God.” “If you know that he is righteous, you know that *everyone who does*

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what is right has been born of him" (2:29). This text specifies that it is those who do what is right—according to the light they have been given—who have been born again (see also Rom. 1:18–20). It does not say you are born again *by* doing what is right. If we compare the verse with others we have already discussed, we understand that doing what is right is part of how we *recognize* that we have in fact been "born of him."

John continues, "*No-one who is born of God will continue to sin*, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (3:9). This verse doesn't mean that Christians are incapable of sinning. Rather, John is saying, again, "by their fruits shall ye know them"—those who continue to live willingly in sin after realizing it is sin have not been "born of God." To persistently thwart the will of God is evidence that He is not truly your Father, even though you may claim that He is.

John writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*" (4:7). Thus, if we do not love others, we have evidence that we have not yet been born again. "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (5:1). Here John is talking about *true* belief that results in fruit, as the next verse proves: ". . . for *everyone born of God overcomes the world*. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (5:4). By faith, John says, we *have* overcome the world. It's so certain that those who have been reborn can overcome the world that John writes it in both past tense and present. This overcoming is characterized by obeying God's commandments (vs. 3: "This is love for God: to obey his commands."). In Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation, all are urged to "overcome," so evidently overcoming is also something we must *continue* to do.

Finally, a wonderful promise: "We know that *anyone born of God does not continue to sin*; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him" (5:18). If we are truly born again, God gives us the power to say no to sin and its harm. We may still choose to turn away from God, we may all choose to return to sin, and all of us do, but not because we have to. Being born again *frees us* to walk with God without the evil one baying at our heels, if only we're willing to say no to his tempting, using the power to say no given us by the Spirit. The enemy may prowl "like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8); he may accuse us before our God day and night (Rev 12:10 NIV); and temptations will continue. Those who are born again, however, are freed of the constant, nagging temptation that often plagues those who have not yet surrendered to God and become His servants, under His protection.

In the Old Testament there is even a reference to *gentile nations* being reborn, reborn "in Zion," which is to say, reborn righteous, as sons and daughters of God. This ties in with Paul's teaching about "spiritual Israel" in Romans 11, where the *true* "Israel" is God's faithful ones around the world, whether Jew or Gentile. We find these words in Psalm 87:4–6 (NIV): "I will record Rahab and

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Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was *born in Zion*.' Indeed, of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.' The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born in Zion.' Selah." This is good news for the world. It is less good news for "Zion," except for "this one and that one." The "chosen people" who are not faithful will be "cut off," their places taken by the faithful Gentiles counted as having been "born in Zion" (see Rom 9:6, 11:17–24; Isa 19:19–25).

When Are We Born Again?

In summary, the Bible teaches that to be "born again" is to accept the heirship Christ offers and become children of God and citizens of a heavenly kingdom, then live in *this* world according to the rules and customs of *that* heavenly kingdom. This is done "by the Spirit." Being "born again" is not only something we *claim*, but something we *live*.

When does this happen? This is a hard question. Jesus defined being born again as being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5). As we have seen earlier, by "born of water" He meant baptism, but only in that it *symbolized* a profound repentance, turning away from the old life. Ideally, one should be baptized as soon as one has repented in this way, and one should receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit immediately afterward. I've seen this happen with people during evangelistic campaigns, and it often happens this way in third world countries, which is why their church membership is growing so fast. They've surrendered, they've been born again, they've caught fire, they've been disciplined, and they've gone out to make more disciples.

But it doesn't *always* work that way. If we make being born again and receiving the Holy Spirit synonymous with baptism, saying, "She's been baptized into the church, so she must be born again," then we have to ignore the many definitions of rebirth the Bible gives us. Also, we doom our church to life without the Spirit—the equivalent of death. No one wants to worship in a mausoleum among dead Christians.

When John baptized in the Jordan, baptism immediately followed repentance. Likewise with the Ethiopian eunuch baptized by Philip (Acts 8). Today, though, months often pass between repentance and baptism. It is also possible that baptism sometimes happens years before true repentance occurs. (This was my experience, even though for a decade before I was born again I saw growing evidence of God's work in my life. I loved God and believed in Him, and He gave me several notable victories—He freed me from rock music, from swearing, from alcohol—despite my failure to let Him entirely have His will with me. Was I "saved" then? I don't think I was born again, because when I truly surrendered to God, the results were breathtaking, in line with the New Testament evidence. But I was on the road, at least now and then.)

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What about the Spirit? When Paul went to Ephesus, he found there people who had been baptized with water but hadn't yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19). Peter and John also found this situation in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17).

What makes us fit for baptism? In many churches, in much evangelistic work, repentance has been replaced by acceptance of a set of propositional truths, and baptism is merely a graduation ceremony.⁷ Many seem to think we are baptized into a denomination, rather than baptized into Christ, into the body of Christ, into His death and resurrection, and into rebirth as citizens of a heavenly kingdom and strangers in this strange land.

This is a terrible thing to say, but my impression is that based on the definitions given in the Bible, the great majority of Christians, including Evangelicals who proudly call themselves “born again,” have never truly understood the enormity of the gulf separating them from God. They have never truly repented, never fully surrendered themselves to God, and never been born again. For many, we see no evidence in their lives that they have been born again and received salvation. We don't find the fruits of the Spirit.⁸

Accepting Jesus as Lord. Recall George Barna's definition of being “born again”: people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. A savior is a redeemer or rescuer. People in a tough situation are happy to be rescued, and accepting Christ as Savior sounds quite undemanding, unlikely to interfere with our lives. We cling to John 3:16 because it makes salvation seem so easy: just believe. (And we define belief, essentially, as a willingness to receive eternal life so long as nothing is asked of us or mere assent to the idea that Jesus is Christ.)

But what does it mean to accept Jesus as our Lord? In our free, democratic society, the word “Lord” has lost its meaning. In a quasi-feudal society, such as existed in most cultures in Christ's time, your lord was the person you served, the person you were duty bound to obey. If your lord said “Come,” you came. If

⁷ This choice sentence was given to me by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim as an annotation on an early draft of this paper.

⁸ The following comment by Ellen White is from the *General Conference Bulletin* of 1893 (132): “It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner. These are professedly serving God, but they are more earnestly serving mammon. This half-and-half work is a constant denying of Christ, rather than a confessing of Christ. So many have brought into the church their own unsubdued spirit, unrefined; their spiritual taste is perverted by their own immoral, debasing corruptions, symbolizing the world in spirit, in heart, in purpose, confirming themselves in lustful practices, and are full of deception through and through in their professed Christian life. Living as sinners, claiming to be Christians! Those who claim to be Christians and will confess Christ should come out from among them and touch not the unclean thing, and be separate.” In Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press), 41. We dare not imagine that the ratio today is any more favorable.

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your lord said "Follow me," you followed. If your lord said "Go," you went. If you wanted to rest but your lord said "Work in my vineyard," you worked.

Today, our Lord bids us "Come" to Him. Then He tells us to "Go" to the world. He says, "Follow Me." He says, "Work in my vineyard." If Christ is our Lord, we do what He asks of us. If we don't, someone else must be our lord. If we don't, we haven't been born again.⁹

We know from experience that giving birth takes time, and the moment of birth usually follows a good deal of pain. But the baby isn't born *while* it's coming out—it's not born *until* it's out. That's the way it is with being born again, too, though the pain is often spiritual rather than physical. Those of us who are married know that there has to be a lot of wooing before there can be a wedding. Being born again is a sort of marriage—the church's marriage to the Bridegroom, if seen in a personal sense, is a related metaphor—and sometimes Christ must spend decades wooing us before we finally give in and agree to belong to Him forevermore.

God knows our hearts. God looks at us sitting in our pews and knows if we are being drawn to Him. I can easily look at my own life and see how God won me to Him, step by step. (And on many of those steps I thought I had no further to go in this world.) I also know, though, that finally He led me to the edge of a figurative cliff and asked me to step off into His arms, and I did it.

But what of those who never take that step? What of those who come to church but are dead to the Word? What of those who preach the Word but live a lie?

God knows hearts, but we don't. We can be *certain* that if we have truly repented, if we have fully surrendered ourselves to God, if we see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, if we are walking in the light, we have been born again and become heirs of salvation and sons and daughters of God. We have inherited eternal life.

If we do not have that evidence in our lives, but sense that we are being drawn closer, led step by step up the path of righteousness, we can pray that God knows we are approaching Him and will have mercy if we should die before we fall into God's arms. (I suspect that many people, like the thief on the cross, take that final leap in the last hours or moments before death, leaping in faith into the Heart of Love.)

If we are spiritually dead, even if we are baptized and pay a faithful tithe, even if we attend church weekly and are leaders, elders, deacons, our only hope of salvation is to fall on the Rock and be broken.

⁹ Ellen White writes, in her book *Faith and Works* (16), "Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have the genuine ring of faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love."

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Salvation is as easy as falling off a log. But who wants to fall off a log? Salvation is as easy as skydiving for the first time. But we've always heard not to trust a parachute we haven't packed ourselves, and we can't pack this parachute—God packed it. Salvation is like winning a free vacation to Tahiti. But the tickets we're handed do us no good unless we're willing to go there and enjoy it.

Before we are born again we walk in darkness penetrated here and there by flashes of lightning and shafts of light. After we are born again we walk in a light sometimes obscured by clouds—clouds which are sometimes large and sometimes small, sometimes low and foggy and sometimes fleecy. But even if we are under a large and threatening cloud, in the distance, radiant, still we see the light, and we know by faith that in a little while we shall be out from under the shadow and back in the warm sun, if only we walk back toward the light.

When I visit the southern United States I sometimes find myself among people who speak with a southern accent. I pick up accents quite easily, and sometimes—especially when I'm under stress—I'll find myself speaking with a southern accent, too. I'm not trying to do it; I'm not trying to make fun of the accent; it simply happens, an influence of the environment.

Likewise, children of God—aliens and strangers in this world—sometimes find themselves speaking with a worldly accent, especially when they're under stress or temptation, even when they don't want to. This can sometimes help them fit it. But it's not really who they are.

When Chinese Premier Deng Xiao Ping visited Texas, he was delighted to be presented with and photographed in a cowboy hat. But that made him neither a cowboy nor a Texan. Likewise, children of God live in this world and make use of the tools and garments of this world as necessary, but that doesn't mean they are children of the devil again. However, frankly, Premier Deng looked pretty silly in that cowboy hat, and God's children also don't look quite right when they are in the world. They don't quite fit it. Aliens and strangers are easily spotted.

A Helpful Allegory: Faith of Jesus.

Paul writes, in Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the *faith of Jesus Christ*, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the *faith of Christ*, and not by the works of the law" (KJV). The Greek word translated faith, *pistis*, also means faithfulness. The text in the original language does *not* say faith *in* Christ, but the faith *of* Christ. What does that mean?

It seems likely that Paul deliberately used this "faith [faithfulness] of Jesus Christ" phrase expecting his readers to catch an allusion to a ceremony which some of them would have experienced and many would know about, even though it is almost unknown today. It provides a useful metaphor or allegory of what Christ has done for us. Paul was referring to a Roman law known as *fidei*

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commissum, “the faithful commission” or “the commission of faith.”¹⁰ The “faith of _____” formula was standard legal language found in *fidei commissum* contracts.

If this *fidei commissum* is in fact what Paul had in mind, it’s worth studying. Here’s how it worked. In Paul’s day there were a number of rich old Romans whose wives and children were dead. The state would inherit their money when they died unless they had an heir. Many of these men had faithful servants or friends whom they would like to adopt and name as their heirs, but the law said that a Roman citizen could only adopt another Roman citizen, and sometimes these servants or friends were not citizens.

So the Romans made a law which would help a citizen adopt a non-citizen. A Roman could now adopt a non-citizen if he would first give his inheritance to another Roman citizen, who would *faithfully* pass it on to the non-citizen the first man wanted to adopt. There was a risk, though. If the citizen made the second citizen his heir, with the understanding that the second citizen would faithfully pass on the inheritance, but the second citizen was not faithful and decided to keep the money himself, there was nothing the first citizen could do about it. This is why it was called the “commission of faith.” The rich man had to choose his faithful commissioner wisely.

However, even if the second citizen was faithful, there was more to the bargain. The person being adopted had to do three things to become the heir. First, he had to agree to take the first citizen’s name as his own. Second, he had to allow the first citizen to pay all of his debts. Third, he had to reach out his hand and accept the inheritance.

Paul’s argument in Galatians is that Jesus faithfully received the promise made to Abraham and passed it on to the Gentiles, allowing them (us) to become “heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29), but consider the implications for salvation. The Father wants to adopt us and make us His heirs, but the law says that only perfect citizens of heaven can inherit. The Father passes the inheritance on to Jesus, hoping that Jesus will be faithful and pass it on to us. Because Jesus is “faithful unto death,” He can pass on the inheritance to us, if we’re willing. But in order to receive that inheritance, we have to give up our own names (sons of the evil one) and accept God’s name (sons of God); we have to let God pay all our debts (Satan the accuser says we owe many debts, and he is right); and we have to accept the inheritance.

That’s what being born again is about. We are reborn as adopted children of God, our debts paid by Christ at Calvary. A lot of us don’t like the idea of someone else paying our debts. A debt reduction might be okay, but we want to

¹⁰ Martin Weber wrote about this in an appendix to his interesting book *Who’s Got the Truth* (Silver Spring: Home Study Institute, 1994). He got it from a scholarly article by Greer M. Taylor, called “The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ [PISTIS CHRISTOU] in Galatians” (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXV [March 1966], pp. 58–76.)

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do our fair share. But that's not allowed. We have to let God pay it all, or the adoption cannot be completed.

Living like people who are born again is not what makes us born again. In fact, we can't successfully live that way *until* we are born again. But once we are adopted, once we are princes and princesses, we ought to start acting the part, acting like children of the King, dressing like children of the King, talking like children of the King, doing the princely work expected of children of the King.

Prince Charles didn't marry Lady Diana because she traveled around the world helping people, visiting the sick, and cutting ribbons. Those are things she began doing after she became a princess, because that's what princesses are supposed to do. Likewise, God wants to adopt us, at no charge to us, and then He wants to assign us some errands of mercy to a lost world. If we are truly born again, we will be happy to do them, and with practice we'll get better at it. It's not salvation by works. It's the difference between saying the word thanks and acting it out—one sounds grateful, but one *shows* grateful.

In Deut 30:19 Moses says, speaking for God, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose life*." If I offered an extra ten good years of life, would you take it? What if I said to have it you have to walk down a path that will lead to giving up tobacco and alcohol, fat and sugar and meat, walking ten miles a day, and giving up your stressful job? Most people aren't willing to give up all that for ten years, even though the extra years of life are free. They'd be willing to have the ten years if they could stay as they are, but they aren't willing to be transformed.

Jesus says, "Follow Me," and He offers eternal life. We say we want eternal life, but are we willing to follow Him to where the eternal life is? He tells us it will lead to our being born again, being transformed into His image, and we may lose our love for the things we loved before. You now know what it means to be born again, and you know what it will do to your life, and you know it is the only way you can be sure of salvation.

So, are you born again? Are you willing to "choose life"?

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Blessed Assurance? Yes!: A Doctrine of the Assurance of Salvation

Ed Christian
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“Now a slave has no *permanent* place in the family, but a *son* belongs to it *forever*.” (John 8:35)

“. . . those who are *led* by the Spirit of God *are* sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to *fear*, but you received the Spirit of *sonship*. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba*, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that *we are God’s children*. Now if we are *children*, then we are *heirs*—heirs of *God* and *co-heirs* with *Christ*, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:14–17)

“Are you saved?”

Has anyone ever asked you that? What did you answer? If the question makes you feel uncomfortable, why?

Has anyone ever approached you on the sidewalk and said, “If you were to die tonight, would you be sure of receiving eternal life?”

Well, would you? Are you sure? On what basis are you sure?

I teach the Bible to college students from many denominations. About a fourth of them are from one of the many Evangelical denominations which encourage members to refer to themselves as “Born Again.” When these students ask, “Are you saved?” they may mean “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and been born again?” However, “saved” is, for them, also a code word meaning “one of us.” Thus, I hear students say, “He’s saved” when they mean “He’s a fundamentalist Christian like we are, so he’s okay.”

These “saved” students often believe in the teaching theologians call “eternal security,” but my students refer to as “once saved, always saved.” By this

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they generally mean they believe that having once been “saved” at a specific time, they can never be lost, no matter what they do.¹

The majority of my students are far less certain of their salvation, even if they too claim Christ as their Savior. In many cases they are correct to be uncertain, because their walk with God has been very erratic and they see little evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal 5:22–23). In other cases, they are walking with God, but modest or unwilling to predict the perseverance of their present faith to the end.

What does the Bible teach? What is assured, what is certain, or at least as certain as possible in a world where our faith is in something and Someone we do not yet see (Heb 11:1)? How assured can we be of our own individual salvation? Do some of us deny an assurance of salvation we could fairly claim? Do some of us claim an assurance of salvation which is more accurately called presumption?

One of my favorite hymns, a hymn I’ve heard sung by dozens of congregations, is this:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Fanny Crosby, who wrote these words in 1873, identified, in the lyrics, seven excellent reasons for her own assurance of salvation, all based on her faith in the trustworthiness of God’s promises in His Word:

1. “Heir of salvation” [that is, adoption as a child of God];
2. “Purchase of God” [that is, ransom or redemption from sin and Satan];

¹ Norman L. Geisler, who himself believes in “eternal security,” has revealed what I call the “dirty little secret” of the “once saved, always saved” teaching in his book *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999). On the basis of 1 John 2:19, Geisler argues that if people do not persevere in their faith to the end or at least do not die in their faith, it is because they were never born again and so were never actually “saved.” My students use this argument sometimes, but never about themselves. Consider, though, the case of a student who believes in eternal security and claims to be born again, believes he is born again, is told he is born again. He is sure he can never be lost. In later years, however, he turns away from God and dies unrepentant. Geisler says this proves he was never actually born again, or he would have remained faithful. Where, though, is the security in the “once saved, always saved” position if you can never be sure if you have really been “once saved”? The result is that where the Arminian says, “I have been born again, but if I turn away forever I’ll be lost,” the believer in eternal security has to say, “If I’ve been born again, I can never be lost, but I won’t know until I die faithful if I’ve actually been born again.” As Geisler points out, the end result is the same (130). Many believers in eternal security, of course, don’t hear this “dirty little secret” from their pastors. I prefer the Arminian teaching that we can indeed have assurance of salvation, even though that assurance is conditional on perseverance. This paper shows that the Bible gives us evidences by which we can know we have been born again. If Geisler’s position is correct, then we could exhibit all these evidences, yet not be born again at all. The result is that we have no real way of knowing if we have in fact been born again. We can claim it on the basis of a powerful emotion, but we may be mistaken, so we have no assurance at all. It seems unwise to deny people the assurance offered by God’s Word because it conflicts with a theological presupposition based on a few proof texts.

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3. “Born of his Spirit” [that is, having been born again];
4. “Washed in His blood” [that is, sacrificial atonement and baptism];
5. “I in my Saviour” [that is, assurance through being “in Christ”];
6. “Filled with His goodness” [that is, the evidence of salvation given by the fruit of the Spirit and “the fruit of the light” (Eph 5:9)]; and
7. “Perfect submission” [that is, walking consistently and humbly with God].

I could simply say “Amen” and stop there, but perhaps I should say more.

Assurance and Presumption

There is a *true assurance* of salvation which can be enjoyed by every Christian who trustfully walks in the “path of life” (Ps 16:11), who lives by “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). Even though we slip and fall from time to time, we will be saved and live with God forever if we continue to repent and continue to walk with God, rather than turning away from Him and walking in the “way of death” (Rev 14:4; Heb. 11; Jer 21:8). Sinners with ears open to the still, small voice of the Spirit and with a continual, teachable attitude of humble repentance swim in a sea of forgiveness in the heart of God. If they remain in that sea they can never be lost, even if they “fall short of the glory of God” every day of their mortal lives (Rom 3:23; John 3:16).

There is also a *false assurance* of salvation which is better called *presumption* because it is not based on the full teaching of God’s Word and may lead to destruction. Some walk in the “way of death,” as it is called in Jeremiah 21:8, because they presume God is so loving that He will eventually save everyone, so they choose to live in sin. Others walk in the “way of death” because they presume salvation is theirs because they were baptized and confirmed in the “true faith,” even though they live in sin. Some walk in the “way of death” because they presume being “born again” is the work of a single moment of faith that does not need to lead to a lifelong walk with God (in contrast with James 1:4: “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”). Others walk in the “way of death” because they presume a “Spirit” which tells them to do what the Bible forbids is God’s new truth for today. Some walk in the “way of death” because they presume it is impossible for Christians to sin, whatever they do (a faulty reading of 1 John 3:9).

Assurance of God’s Faithfulness

There are two types of true assurance we need to consider. One is the assurance that Jesus saves, that God is who He claims to be, that He will fulfill His promises.² The other is the assurance of our own salvation. Many Christians

² The most important SDA source for this aspect of assurance is Hans K. LaRondelle’s *Assurance of Salvation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999). LaRondelle was also the principal contributor to the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly on the topic (January–March 2000), but the book provides a more detailed look at the topic. I have made use of some of LaRondelle’s categories in the section

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who claim to be certain that God is faithful are not sure that they themselves are faithful or that God intends to be faithful to them. Let's look at these two types of assurance in the light of what God says to us in the Bible.

Assurance in God's Word. Assurance is built on God's Word. If God's Word is not true and trustworthy, any assurance we may feel is no more than presumption. If the Bible is only partly true, only partly reliable, there can be *no assurance*. Why? If part of the Bible is *not* true, how do we *know* that the part we think is true is in fact true? Assurance begins with our trusting that the whole Bible is true and God's Word to us and for us. (1 Thes. 2:13 "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.") All of what follows is assuredly true only if God's Word can be trusted.

Assurance in God's Plan. In Rev 12 Christ reveals to John the great controversy between Michael and the dragon—between Christ and Satan. He reveals the war in heaven that led to Satan being cast down to earth, where he "leads the whole world astray" (v. 9), "accuses them before our God day and night" (v. 10), and makes war against "those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17).

God's Word assures us, though, that God has a plan to rescue us and that the end is at hand. We find that assurance in Isaiah 14:23–27, in the very chapter in which God gives a coded message to His people about the fall of Lucifer:

The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. I will crush the Assyrian in my land [the enemy, Satan]; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

In the final chapter of God's Word, Christ assures us that He has not forgotten His plan. "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev 22:12). If God's Word is true, then we have full assurance that this salvation will come to pass as promised.

Assurance of God's Love. If we can trust God's Word, we can have complete assurance in God's unchanging love and His longing to adopt us as His children. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.'" God says, "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned

which follows. However, the primary intent of this paper is to examine the evidences on which personal assurance of salvation might be based, and these are outside the scope of LaRondelle's book.

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away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty" (Mal 3:6–7).

Assurance in Christ the God/Man. If God's Word is not mistaken, we have the assurance that in Christ the Son of God became man and died in our place, so we could have life. John tells us, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus tells Nicodemus, "'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him'" (John 3:16–17). Paul writes, in Rom 3:25–26, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Peter writes, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet 1:18–19).

Assurance in Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. If God's Word is true, we have the assurance that Christ rose from the grave in glorified flesh and ascended to heaven. When Jesus appears to His disciples after His resurrection, He says, "'Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have'" (Luke 24:39). Preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter says, "'Seeing what was ahead, he [David] spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear'" (Acts 2:31–33). Peter writes, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet 1:20–21).

Assurance of a Heavenly High Priest. If God's Word is not mistaken, we have the assurance that Christ, as our heavenly High Priest, continues to make possible our connection to the heavenly Father who loves us. In Heb 2:17 Paul writes: "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." He continues, in Heb 4:15–16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time

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of need.” In Moses’ day the Holy God so longed to dwell among His unholy people that He asked them to build Him a sanctuary, a tent, where He could live (cf. John 1:14). There He could be surrounded by those He loved, even though no one could live within half a mile of Him because of His holiness. They couldn’t actually enter into His presence, though He longed for them to be able to do so, but by setting aside sin and uncleanness and through repentance and the blood they could “draw nigh” (Heb 7:19; James 4:8). Christ’s heavenly ministry is not to appease the wrath of God, but to mediate as God/Man between the Father and humanity so repentant sinners who cannot by themselves approach a loving but Holy God can receive the reconciliation the Father so earnestly longs for.

Assurance of a Heavenly Defender. God’s Word assures us that Christ defends us against Satan’s accusations. We find in Job 1:7 that Satan roams through the earth. Peter tells us Satan is roaming through the earth looking for “someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Christ reveals to John that the dragon tried to “devour” the “child,” Christ Himself, when He was born (Rev 12:4). In Job we learn that Satan accuses us before God of unfaithfulness (Job 1:6–12, 2:1–7), but faithful Job, unable to defend himself, says, “Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high” (Job 16:19). Christ reveals to John that Satan accuses the brethren “day and night” before God, but John also writes, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1).

It is common and comforting to speak of our having assurance in heaven because our defense attorney is our big brother and our judge is our father—how can we lose? We mustn’t forget, though, that though the Father Himself loves us, He is utterly holy and can do no wrong, so when Satan accuses, God must be absolutely fair. God loved Job, yet when Satan accused Job, God had to test Job and prove him righteous. The assurance that comes from having Christ as our heavenly defender is that while we are being accused *in absentia*, we are not without representation. Like Job, we have “an advocate” to speak up in our defense when we are accused by the adversary, one who knows what it is like to be human and “tempted in every way” (Heb 4:15).

Assurance of Judgment Against the Wicked. If we can trust God’s Word, we have the assurance that God will judge the wicked who hurt His children, find them guilty, and destroy them. In Revelation the seven trumpet judgments, the seven plagues that fall on the earth, and the destruction of Babylon all occur in response to the prayers of the saints for salvation and justice.³ God says to Moses, “I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free” (Acts 7:34). When Christ returns, it will again be in response to the oppression of His people.

³ Rev 5:8; 6:9–11; 8:3–5; 16:1, 5–7; 17:6; 18:4–6, 20, 24; 19:2.

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Listen to the prophetic message God gives to Zephaniah:

The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth. (Zeph 1:14–18)

Peter tells us, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat” (2 Pet 3:12).

There are those who deny God's wrath because they can't reconcile it with His love. Yet those same people may proclaim God's call to help those who are oppressed. Does God hear prayers? Does God answer prayers? If God's adopted children plead with Him to free them from those who are hurting them and destroying the earth (Rev 11:18), can they fairly expect God to respond? If you caught someone harming your children, would you not be tempted to use violence against that person, were it not that God says “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (Deut 32:35)? Would you not cry out for justice? God's wrath is His response against those who try to persecute or pervert His children. It is a righteous wrath, not a sadistic wrath. It consumes and destroys in order to put an end to suffering.

Romans 1:18 says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, . . .” In Rom 2:5, Paul writes, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” We can have full assurance that if God can be trusted, these promises will come true.

The Assurance of Christ's Return. If the Bible actually is God's Word for us, then we can have the assurance that Christ is coming back to raise the righteous dead and take us to live with Him. In John 14:1–3, Jesus Himself promises to return:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

The apostle Paul promises Christ's glorious return and the resurrection of the dead in 1 Thes 4:14–17:

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We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.

From these texts you cannot be sure that He will come for you, but you can be sure that He will come.

The Assurance of An Earth Made New. God's Word promises us that God will remake the earth after destroying it by fire and melting the very elements. If we trust God to keep His word, we have the assurance that those who trust in Christ will live eternally on an earth made new. John writes, in Rev 21:1-4,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Here is God's promise in Isaiah 66:22-23:

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD."

As Paul often writes, "Here is a trustworthy saying" (1 Tim 1:15, for example). If God can be trusted, then His Word is true, *all* true. If His Word is true, then we can be *sure* of all these things. If we're not sure of some of His Word, if we doubt the Bible is reliable, then logically we should doubt these things, too. That is why *assurance is only for those who BELIEVE*.

Evidences of Personal Assurance Salvation

But, you say, it's all very well to point out all this assurance we can have in God's faithfulness on the basis of God's Word, but "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). What about our own salvation? *Can there be any assurance that we ourselves will be saved? There can, though it's always conditional on being faithful to the end.*

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Jesus says, to the church in Laodicea, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I *will* come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). Imagine the assurance of salvation as Christ’s “open door policy.” Once you have opened the door and invited Him in, as long as you don’t shut the door and refuse Him entrance He will keep on coming in and eating with you. Those whose hearts are open to God and His guidance may be assured of salvation. The only way they can lose out on salvation is to slam the door and lock Christ out of their lives.

In Isa 66:2, God makes this precious promise: “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” That’s it exactly. The assurance of salvation does not come from being able to count the days or months or years since you last broke a commandment. It comes from the evidence that your spirit is humble and contrite, quick to hear God’s bidding and quick to take His advice and do what He asks, according to His Word and according to the Holy Spirit’s whisperings. As David prophesies, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

The continual response of the “broken and contrite heart” to God’s bidding is, of course, obedience—humble, grateful, and quietly joyful obedience. Many New Testament verses call for obedience (e.g., Rom 1:5, 6:16; 2 Cor 9:13, 10:5; 1 Pet 1:2 ; 2 John 1:6). The most common Greek verb translated “obey” is *hupakouo*, which is derived from the words *hupo*, meaning “under,” and “*akouo*,” meaning “hear.” We understand better what God means by “obedience” if we realize that its root meaning is “under hearing.” Obedience is not the perfect performance of certain acts, but a continual listening for and hearing of God’s bidding. That’s what it means to be “under hearing.” As James 1:22 says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” If we really believe in God, if we really know Him and love Him, His wish is our command. For a believer to hear His Word without doing His Word would be ludicrous. If you do not do, either you have not really heard or you do not really believe.

The assurance of salvation is not a matter of feelings, but evidence. It is not proven by feeling overwhelmed during a meeting and bursting into tears. Saying it is so does not make it so. The true assurance of salvation does not stem from a lasting memory of something that happened once and never again.

Fortunately, the New Testament offers a number of evidences or criteria by which we may obtain, as it were, scientific, experiential, and experimental assurance that if we are faithful, we will be saved (Heb 10:36; 1 Tim 4:16; James 1:4). There is evidence by which we may know we are not “in Christ” and evidence by which we may know we are “in Christ.” If we are not “in Christ,” perhaps we may yet be saved—after all, it is God who is the Judge and who knows hearts and knows who is savable—but we can certainly have no biblically-authorized assurance of the fact.

Will NOT Inherit Eternal Life:

When I was in college, I learned that Paul was the great apostle of salvation by grace, utterly opposed to salvation by works. I learned that James, on the other hand, was, as Luther said, “an epistle of straw” because it taught salvation by works. When my first son was born we decided to combine the two and called him James Paul. This is, of course, a terribly wrong-headed analysis of these two inspired writers.

The fact is that several times Paul lists those who specifically will not inherit eternal life. James and John also list characteristics of these people. Bear in mind that these authors are not talking about those who have done these things and repented or those who slip but repent and return to the “path of righteousness,” but those who do these things and say there is nothing wrong with doing them—those who walk in “the way of death.” Actually, they are not primarily speaking about church members, but about “the wicked” who do not know God. However, if we harbor such sins in our lives as cherished habits—thinking we love God and God loves us, so these sins don’t really matter—these verses definitely apply.

Bear in mind, too, that we must be very cautious, on the basis of Christ’s parable of the wheat and the tares, about judging church members and saying, “He’s doing that, so he won’t be saved.” Use these evidences to judge yourself and hear the Spirit’s call to repentance.

Let’s read through the verses that offer the most explicit evidences:

1 Cor 6:9–10 “Do you not know that **the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: Neither the **sexually immoral** nor **idolaters** nor **adulterers** nor **male prostitutes** nor **homosexual offenders** nor **thieves** nor the **greedy** nor **drunkards** nor **slanderers** nor **swindlers** will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Gal 5:19–21 “The **acts of the sinful nature** are obvious: **sexual immorality, impurity** and **debauchery**; **idolatry** and **witchcraft**; **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions** and **envy**; **drunkenness, orgies** [more accurately, “partying”], and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**”

Eph 5:3–6 “But among you there must not be even a hint of **sexual immorality**, or of any kind of **impurity**, or of **greed**, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be **obscenity, foolish talk** or **coarse joking**, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: **No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, **for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.**”

CHRISTIAN: BLESSED ASSURANCE? YES!

Rom 13:12–14 “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in **orgies** and **drunkenness**, not in **sexual immorality** and **debauchery**, not in **dissension** and **jealousy**. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the **desires of the sinful nature**.”

Rev 21:8 [Jesus speaking] “But the **cowardly**, the **unbelieving**, the **vile**, the **murderers**, the **sexually immoral**, those who **practice magic arts**, the **idolators** and all **liars**—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Rev 21:27 “Nothing **impure** will ever enter into it [the New Jerusalem], nor will anyone who does what is **shameful** or **deceitful**, but only whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Rev. 22:14–15 [Jesus speaking] “‘Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, **those who practice magic arts**, the **sexually immoral**, the **murderers**, the **idolaters** and **everyone who loves and practices falsehood**.’”

Heb 12:14 “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; **without holiness no-one will see the Lord**.”

James 2:12–13 “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because **judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful**. Mercy triumphs over judgment!”

1 John 2:4 “**The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar**, and the truth is not in him.”

1 John 3:6 “**No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning**. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

1 John 3:10 “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: **Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother**.”

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. **Anyone who does not love remains in death**.”

1 John 3:15 “**Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer**, and you know that **no murderer has eternal life in him**.”

1 John 3:17 “**If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?**”

1 John 4:8 “**Whoever does not love does not know God**, because God is love.”

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3 John 11 “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. **Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.**”

Let’s break these into categories. When we speak of “sin,” we tend to think of the “big ones,” such as fornication and murder, especially if we don’t find them tempting. God’s list, however, hits much closer to home. Look at those who can’t reasonably have the assurance of salvation:

Sex: Sexually immoral (6); Adulterers; Male Prostitutes; Homosexual offenders; Impure (2); Debauched; Obscene

False Gods: Idolators [vile, shameful] (4); Practicers of Witchcraft; Practicers of Magic Arts (2)

Physical Violence: Murderers (3); Thieves; Swindlers

Intemperance: Drunkards (3); Partiers [orgies] (2)

General Sinning: Sinners continually; Evildoers; Disobedient; Unbelievers

Spoken Sins: Liars [deceit, falsehood] (3); Slanderers; Sowers of discord; Anger [fits of rage]; Arguers [dissensions] (2); Members of factions; Foolish talkers; Coarse jokers

Silent Sins: Greedy (2); Envious; Jealous; Selfishly ambitious; Haters; Cowards

Ungodliness: Loveless (3); Unmerciful; Ungenerous to the poor; Unholy.

This list should be enough to convince every one of us that “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). As Paul writes, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). If our assurance must be built on perfect performance, not only can we have no assurance, but we can have no hope.

But there *is* hope, and there *can be* assurance. As Paul writes in Rom 7:24–25, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” He also writes, “Without holiness no-one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). We are *called* to holiness, but we *grow into* holiness. Heb 10:14 says, “by one sacrifice he has *made perfect for ever* those who are *being made holy*.” Peter says that *growing* in virtue as we mature as children of God makes *sure* our salvation.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godli-

CHRISTIAN: BLESSED ASSURANCE? YES!

ness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is short-sighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election *sure*. For if you do these things, *you will never fall*, and you *will* receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3–11, emphasis added)

Do you find evidence in your life that you are “being made holy”? When God speaks to you through His Word or through His Spirit, do you say “Yes” in your “broken and contrite” heart and give that sin to your heavenly Father so He can take it away and lead you in “the paths of righteousness”? If so, you *can* have assurance of salvation.

Perhaps you have one of these sins in your heart, but you don’t care. Perhaps you love one of these sins too much to give it up. Perhaps you don’t see anything wrong with it. Perhaps you excuse the sin as part of what makes you human. Perhaps you say you were born that way or became that way because of your parents. If this is how you feel, plead with God to break you open, because as you stand perhaps you will be saved—God knows—but you yourself can have no assurance.

These sins serve as evidence. Since they are listed specifically as sins which will keep us from eternal life, if one or more of them is deeply rooted in our hearts, we can be sure that we cannot now have assurance of salvation.

For those on the “path of life,” it helps to see these sins and temptations as road signs, side roads, and off-ramps. “Wrong Way!” “Do Not Enter!” “Caution!” “Sharp Curve Ahead!” “Speed Limit 55!” We can be on the right road and still find these warnings, but if we do find these warnings, we must respond at once and do the right thing about them.

Those who are born again tend to say “Yes!” to God when He guides them, but as they are “being made holy,” they sometimes say “No.” I know from experience that there is a cycle which those who are born again tend to go through if they say “No” to the Savior they say is their Lord:

1. They are experiencing an open-hearted walk with God, hearing His voice and responding.
2. God reveals a sin in their lives.
3. They deny it’s a sin.
4. God stops talking to them and waits.
5. They finally notice the silence and wonder what’s wrong.
6. They remember what God has already revealed and they have denied.
7. They give the sin to God and He takes it out of their lives and gives them victory.

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8. Once again they hear God's voice and feel His peace and walk with Him.

All this time, though, even when they've stalled or seem to have run out of gas, they are on the "path of life." They can get off if they insist, but those who are really on it rarely choose to get off for good, even though they may stall quite often.

We KNOW we WILL Inherit Eternal Life

The Bible doesn't offer only negative evidence of our salvation. It also offers positive evidence. A number of texts give us proofs by which "we know" we are in Christ and so will be saved. Let's look at some of these:

- 1 John 2:3–5a "**We know** that we have come to know him [Christ] **if we obey his commands**. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him."
- 1 John 2:5b–6 "This is how **we know** we are in him: **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.**"
- 1 John 3:14 "**We know** that we have passed from death to life, **because we love our brothers**. Anyone who does not love remains in death."
- 1 John 3:18–20 "Dear children, **let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth**. This then is how **we know** that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."
- 1 John 3:21–22 "Dear friends, **if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence** before God and receive from him anything we ask, **because we obey his commands and do what pleases him**."
- 1 John 3:24 "**Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them**. And this is how **we know** that he lives in us: We know it **by the Spirit he gave us**."
- 1 John 4:6 "We are from God, and **whoever knows God listens to us**; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. **This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth** and the spirit of falsehood."
- 1 John 4:13 "**We know** that we live in him and he in us, **because he has given us of his Spirit**."
- 1 John 4:15 "**If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God**."

CHRISTIAN: BLESSED ASSURANCE? YES!

3 John 11 “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. **Anyone who does what is good is from God.** Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”

Rom. 8:16 “The **Spirit himself testifies** with our spirit that **we are God’s children.**”

Heb. 10:12–15 “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy. **The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this.**”

Just look at how sure the Bible tells us we can be:

We know we have come to know Him.
We know we are in Him.
We know we have passed from death to life.
We know we belong to the truth.
We know He lives in us
We know we live in Him and He in us.
We have confidence before God.
God lives in him and he in God.
We are God’s children.

If we have “passed from death to life,” if “we live in [Christ] and he in us,” if “God lives in [us] and [we] in God,” if “we are God’s children,” how can we be lost? Only by leaving home and never coming back. Only by choosing the “way of death” and refusing God’s pleas for us to return to the “path of righteousness.” Only by hardening our hearts and locking out the Holy Spirit.

We might also draw assurance from the Beatitudes spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. If Jesus says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6), can we take Him at His word? Ellen White writes:

If you have a sense of need in your soul, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, this is an *evidence* that Christ *has* wrought upon your heart, in order that He may be sought unto to do for you, through the endowment of the Holy Spirit, those things which it is impossible for you to do for yourself.⁴

Many people who claim to be Christians have never really surrendered to God, have not given up their allegiance to the world, are not in Christ, are not really adopted as God’s children, and so can have no assurance of salvation. Their claims to assurance—alas!—are mere presumption. It is true that in this

⁴ *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 19 (emphasis added).

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life earthly lusts and the spirit are always at war in our bodies (see Rom 7:22–23). However, Jesus said, “No-one can serve two masters” (Matt 6:24). John writes, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

A lot of Christians try to hold “dual citizenship.” They want to be passport carrying children of God so they can have eternal life, but they don’t want to give up their passport from the kingdom of this world. They want to fit in here. They don’t want to be seen as foreigners in this world. But God calls for us to be “strangers and pilgrims,” “a peculiar people,” different from the people around us (1 Peter 2:11, 9).

Before we are truly ready to surrender our worldly passports and become God’s adopted children, we often try God’s way for a while—perhaps for several weeks or months—then return to our old lives. We may do this a number of times.

This is like the home visits adoption agencies sometimes arrange for older children who are being adopted. Sometimes there is a “foster home” arrangement for several months before children have to decide if they want to be adopted by a family. Perhaps they stay for a weekend, then return to the orphanage and their friends and old ways. Then, because the family still wants them, they stay for a week or two, getting used to strange ways of doing things, but they aren’t ready to commit themselves, so they return to the orphanage.⁵ Then something terrible happens at the orphanage, and the children decide that being adopted can’t be worse than this, no matter how “different” the family is.

Because a full surrender to God is so difficult for us until we have been thoroughly broken by the suffering of this world and realize we can’t save ourselves, it’s hard to be saved, even though it’s free. (Bear in mind, though, that this difficulty is due entirely to us—not to God, who is eager to save us.)

However, because those who have truly been born again and are “in Christ” are “new creations” (2 Cor 5:17), it’s also hard to be lost once you’re saved. Once you’ve really been transformed by the Holy Spirit and tasted the joys of salvation and grown accustomed to God’s ways of doing things, you may fall short of the mark now and then, your eyes may be drawn by some flashy bauble, but why would you want to go back to something not nearly as joyful?

“[T]hose who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the coming age,” as Paul puts it in Heb 6:4–6, may trip and fall daily, but they do not easily “fall away.”⁶

⁵ 1 John 2:19 comes very close to this analogy: “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

⁶ In this passage Paul is of course stating that if those who experience these things fully “fall away,” it is “impossible” for them to “be brought back to repentance.” We must temper this, however, with the good news that the Prodigal Son left home for a long time, but evidently did not en-

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Let's review these evidences of salvation on which we can base our assurance. God's Word says we can have assurance of salvation:

- If we obey Christ's commands to love God and one another (2);
- If we love our brothers (2);
- If our hearts (or consciences) don't condemn us;
- If we walk as Jesus did;
- If we listen to John (and others from God, as found in God's Word);
- If we acknowledge Christ as God's Son;
- If we do what is good; and
- If we have the Holy Spirit in us (4).

Actually, we find here a recipe for a holy life: a life of love, goodness, and obedience, guided by the Word and the Spirit. Those who live this life are already experiencing salvation, so of course they can have assurance.

How does "The Spirit himself testif[y] with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:16)? In three ways. First, the Spirit gives us His fruits: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). When we begin finding these have become part of our character—quite uncharacteristically—we are noting the Holy Spirit at work, and if the Holy Spirit is doing this kind of work in us, that is evidence on which we can base assurance. Second, the Spirit gives us spiritual gifts which help us serve others and gives us the zeal to serve others. If we feel this urge to serve, where before we were afraid to serve, that too is evidence which should assure us. Third, the Spirit "testifies with our spirit," comforting us, telling us God loves us, telling us "we are God's children." If we hear the true voice of the Comforter assuring us, we have evidence which should make us feel sure.

Probably the best biblical explanation of our assurance of salvation is in Paul's "adoption" metaphor found in Eph 1:5, Rom 8:13-23; Rom 9:4; and Gal 4:4-5. If we are God's children and stick close to our adopted Heavenly Father, we will be saved.

Imagine a little homeless girl adopted by a wealthy family and taken to live in their mansion. Instead of enjoying herself as she learns the family's ways, instead of learning to walk and talk and dress and think like a member of the family, she is shy as a mouse and always has an anxious look on her face.

"What's wrong?" her new mother asks her.

"I'm afraid I'll do something wrong and you'll send me back to the streets."

"But we've adopted you, dear," her new mother says. "You belong to us, now, and we belong to you. We're never going to send you back. That's not even possible. If you want to leave us and never come back, you can, but we

tirely "fall away," as Jesus has him coming back. It is also the case—appalling though it is to admit it—that the great majority of those calling themselves baptized Christians have never been willing to accept this level of intimacy with their Lord. Thus, though they may not be saved, they cannot be said to have "fallen away" from something they never had.

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can't send you back. We've signed the papers. It's official. You don't get un-adopted when you do something wrong and adopted again when you apologize! That's not how it works! As long as you're willing to stay here and be part of the family, you can, for the rest of your life. If you make a mistake, come tell us about it and we'll forgive you. But don't worry that we're about to send you out on the street again."

Jesus says, "Enter into the joy of thy lord" (Matt 25:21). Have you done that?

Consider the laws God gave His chosen people. When Israelites sinned or became unclean they had to repent and offer a sacrifice or go through a cleansing ceremony. However, when they sinned they didn't stop being God's covenant people until they repented. Instead, they became covenant people who needed to turn back to God.

Likewise, when God's adopted children sin they don't stop being His children until they say they're sorry. When you commit a sin, you are not lost until you repent. The idea of being lost and saved again a hundred times a day is simply not biblical. If we live in a constant attitude of being obediently "under hearing," if we have a "humble and contrite heart" easily touched by God's Spirit, we can live and bear witness to others in full assurance.

This is the Gospel: "Jesus calls you to follow Him, whatever the cost. If you are willing to trust Him enough to turn yourself over to Him completely, he'll transform you and make you like Him. And when He begins doing that, you will have evidence that even though you are still growing in Him and making mistakes now and then, you belong to Him. And you can be sure He will return and give you eternal life unless you insist on turning away from Him and never coming back."⁷

Ellen White touches the heart of assurance so well in her book *Steps to Christ* that she deserves to be quoted at length:

⁷ J. R. Spangler writes, in one of the most important SDA articles on this topic, "One of the greatest hindrances to our evangelistic outreach is, I feel, a lack of assurance on the part of our people. How can we share our faith in Christ unless we *know* that God has accepted us as His son or daughter? And how can we know we are His child unless we base our acceptance solely on Christ's merits alone? This is the foundation on which our love for Christ and motivation for His service are built" ("From the Editor: What Assurance of Salvation Can a Seventh-day Adventist Christian Have?" *Ministry*, February 1979, 20–22). This editorial is continued in June 1979, 22–23. Other useful SDA articles on the topic include the following: Frank B. Holbrook, "Does the Judgment Jeopardize Assurance?" *Adventist Review*, 22 July 1982, 6–8; Israel Leito, "The Assurance of Salvation: Finding Our Anchorage in 'the Sure Word of Prophecy,'" *Adventist Review*, 30 October 1997, 30–31; Robert S. Folkenberg, "In Full Assurance," *Adventist Review*, 30 October 1997, 56; Robert S. Folkenberg, "Called to Assurance—In Christ," *Adventist Review*, 28 October 1993, 6–9; Robert S. Folkenberg, "Assurance in Christ," *Adventist Review*, 7 May 1992, 13; A. C. McClure, "Growing Up Worried: How to Have Assurance in the End-Time," *Adventist Review*, [n.d.] October 1996, 9–10; David N. Marshall, "Watch Out for 'Grace-Busters'!" *Adventist Review*, 8 October 1992, 8–9; Sandy Eickmann, "To Be Right With God," *Adventist Review*, 29 October 1988, 57–59.

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While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.

It is true that there may be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ. The love of influence and the desire for the esteem of others may produce a well-ordered life. Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil. A selfish heart may perform generous actions. By what means, then, shall we determine whose side we are on?

Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ's, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.

Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Galatians 5:22, 23. They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God they will follow in His steps, reflect His character, and purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure. The vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside. . . . There is no evidence of genuine repentance unless it works reformation.⁸

I praise God for the assurance of salvation which I have and which you can have, too, if you're willing to be adopted and accept God's name as your own! I've known what it is to not be sure, and I know many people who aren't sure. Many of them, of course, shouldn't be sure and can't be sure. But what of those who really could, if only they were willing to trust in Jesus and take Him at His word? Are you in this number?

The assurance of salvation is like putting on a soft fleece sweater on a chilly morning. It's comforting. It feels delicious. I roll my shoulders and twist my neck back and forth and bask in the warmth of it. It's a warmth that relaxes me and frees me to work efficiently instead of shivering with cold.

As Paul writes, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim 1:7). I have a friend who is a lawyer. For

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, [1892; rev. 1896], n.d.), 57–59 [emphasis added].

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the first few years after he joined a major law firm he worked long hours in constant terror that if he didn't he would be fired. Now he is a partner in the firm. He still works long hours, but he is no longer afraid. Now he is confident of his position in the firm, and because of that confidence he is a more effective worker, and at last he can enjoy his work.

God's Word offers us a number of evidences by which we may be sure of our salvation. God offers us a confidence which allows us to serve Him with joy and peace instead of in constant fear. This assurance leads to a quiet glow of God's presence which leads the heart to gratitude and praise. As Fanny Crosby writes, "O, what a foretaste of glory divine."

God's Word tells us we can be confident of His love. We can be confident of His care. We can be confident of God's mercy. We can be confident He has died for us. If we have these evidences in our lives, we can be confident that we are God's children, that we belong to Him, that He belongs to us, that we are in Him, that He is in us. We can be confident He will never forsake us, even though we can forsake Him.

This is the assurance God offers us. If we are walking with God and our hearts do not condemn us, if the Holy Spirit is not being shut out but obeyed, we can be confident that if we do not turn away, we *will* be saved. We can be confident that even if we should die suddenly, Satan cannot claim us, because we live in an attitude of submission to God. We are His children, His holy ones.⁹

There is a false assurance which is really presumption.¹⁰ But this is the true assurance of salvation.¹¹ This assurance is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see," as Paul writes in Heb. 11:1, defining faith. Assurance and certainty are synonyms. That means assurance is an important part of real faith, the kind of faith that makes you willing to go where God asks you to go and do what God asks you to do, even when it doesn't make any sense.

Do you know this assurance? If you don't, why not? Wouldn't you like to?

⁹ Ellen White writes, in *Christ's Object Lessons* (419–420), "The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ. When Christ reigns in the soul, there is purity, freedom from sin. The glory, the fullness, the completeness of the gospel plan is fulfilled in the life. The acceptance of the Saviour brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, perfect assurance. The beauty and fragrance of the character of Christ revealed in the life testifies that God has indeed sent His Son into the world to be its Saviour."

¹⁰ "No repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct. Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven." Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (555–556).

¹¹ "In the new birth the heart is brought into harmony with God, as it is brought into accord with His law. When this mighty change has taken place in the sinner, he has passed from death unto life, from sin unto holiness, from transgression and rebellion to obedience and loyalty." Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (468).

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Hate Your Family and Carry Your Cross: A Doctrine of Discipleship

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There are many whose names are on the church books, but who are not under Christ's rule. They are not heeding His instruction or doing His work. Therefore they are under the control of the enemy. They are doing no positive good; therefore they are doing incalculable harm.¹

The word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, which means “pupil” or “learner.” This is the word used in Jerome's 4th century Latin translation, known as the Vulgate, to translate the Greek word *mathétes*, which means “learner,” essentially.

In Jesus' day, both in Jewish culture and in Greek culture, a teacher's “disciples” followed him everywhere he went. They gathered around him when he stopped, listening eagerly to every word, sometimes questioning, memorizing the teacher's aphorisms, adopting the teacher's way of speaking and acting and dressing and looking at life.² Being a disciple differed from merely attending a teacher's public lectures. It meant devoting all one's time to the teacher, immersing oneself in him and his teaching, as it were, accepting him as an authority who spoke the truth, and modeling oneself after him.

Because teachers often taught while walking from place to place (the Greeks called philosophers who did this “peripatetic”), a disciple was, literally, often a *follower*. When Jesus “called” His disciples, asked them to join Him, he usually said “Follow me,” and this meant both travel with Him and be His disciple. Indeed, the followers of Jesus came to call the spiritual path on which He led them the Way (Acts 9:2).

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, [1900] 1941), 304.

² This is a good reason for trusting the accuracy of the Gospels.

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Jesus not only asked His disciples to follow, but He *sent them out*. We hear first of the Twelve, then of others, both men and women, being called *apostles*, because the Greek word *apostolos* simply means “sent out.”³ The Old Testament Church is built on the word “come,” with the Gentiles coming to Israel, the crossroads of the world, to learn of the true God. The New Testament Church, on the other hand, is built on the word “go,” go *into the world* and spread the good news, rather than expecting the world to come to you. This is the work of those who are “sent out,” those who are not of “the Twelve,” yet are truly “apostles.”

We know now what the word “disciple” means. What does it mean, though, to be a disciple? What does it mean to make disciples? What does Jesus teach about discipleship? What does the Bible tell us about what discipleship means, to the individual and to the world?

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He gave His followers what is called “The Great Commission.” This reminds us of commissioning an officer for service in the army, and that’s what it is. Christ is sending His disciples—including all of us—on a mission to the world, a military mission against the Kingdom of this World and its fallen prince. We could call them “soldiers of the Cross,” if we liked, or we could call them *missionaries*.

Matthew tells us, “Then the eleven disciples [Judas being dead and not yet replaced] went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go [note that they are learning to obey, but it would be a long process]. When they saw him, they worshiped him [the appropriate response to God]; but some doubted. [If you wait for your doubts to disappear before you follow Christ, you’ll never go at all. The best way to deal with doubt as you enter discipleship is to step out, move forward, even if you have only as much faith as a grain of mustard seed. Your faith will grow as you see how God keeps His promises and blesses your service to others. If you were already perfect, you wouldn’t need to become a disciple. Disciples seek discipling because they don’t yet know how, but they want to learn!] Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt 28:16–20).

There are several points worth noting in the above verse:

On what authority does Christ give this command?: He says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” When Jesus appeared to Mary

³ Usually “apostle” refers to one of “the twelve,” but it could be correctly used of anyone “sent out” by the church leaders (e.g., Rom 16:7, where the otherwise unknown Andronicus and Junia are called “of note among the apostles [*apostolois*]; Luke 10:3, where Jesus says, to the seventy-two being sent on a missionary journey, “I send you” [*apostellō*]). Today’s equivalent could include missionary families, Bible workers, literature evangelists, and even pastors sent to their districts by their leaders.

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Magdalene after His Resurrection, He told her, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father” (John 20:17). He seems to have meant that although raised from the dead, He still had to ascend to His Father to ascertain if His life and death were sufficient atonement to cover the sins of sinners. If they were, then the Father could give him authority over heaven and earth, and he could *then* tell His disciples to go out to the world and preach Salvation in His name. The Great Commission is proof that the Atonement *is* sufficient.

Note the several aspects of the assignment Christ gave to His disciples, not only the remains of the Twelve, but to all disciples everywhere:

Go: The disciples were not to stay in Israel and wait for people to come to them, but to go into all the world. They were not to merely let their lights “shine before men” by smiling and nodding to their neighbors or being honest, but to “go.”

Make Disciples Of All Nations: It wasn’t enough to merely tell people about Jesus. It wasn’t even enough to get them to pray “the sinner’s prayer.” The disciples were to make disciples, with all that implied, just as Jesus had made disciples. And Salvation was available for the whole world, not just for the Jews. Christ’s disciples were to be missionaries, all of them.

Baptize Them: Baptism was a sign of repentance, of turning away from sin and toward God, and a sign of entry into “the Body of Christ,” the Church, the saved. Some argue that the order here is significant: baptism should follow, and not precede, an entry into discipleship. (This is not to say baptism should be postponed until we have reached perfect discipleship, but until we have decided to surrender everything to Christ and let Him live out His life within us in order to make more disciples).

Teach Them to Obey: It was not enough to simply convince people to surrender to Christ and follow Him and be baptized. (How often we assume the process ends with baptism!) Disciples were also to be teachers, teaching new disciples to obey Christ’s commands, including the ones in the Great Commission. This assumes, of course, that the disciples had themselves been taught. The Twelve had been taught by Christ, but now they would have to teach an ever-widening network of new disciples, as would those who came after them.

The Key to salvation was Christ (Matt 16:19). Christ’s disciples held the key to heaven in their hands and in their hearts. Wherever they would bring people to Christ, they would bind the powers of darkness and loose those who believed from their bondage to sin. But “this gospel of the kingdom” depended on them. Where they failed to do their duty, where they failed to make disciples and baptize and teach, people would remain in bondage. Even those who believed and were baptized—but were not made disciples and taught—remained easy prey for the evil one.

So what does it mean to be a disciple? Actually, discipleship is thoroughly defined in the Bible, but we tend not to notice. This is partly because it is a “hard teaching,” it asks a lot of us, so we don’t want to hear it. Jesus talks about

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discipleship in many of His parables,⁴ but let's concentrate on other evidence of Christ's definition of "disciple."

Matthew reports Jesus saying, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be *like* his teacher, and the servant *like* his master" (Matt 10:24–25).

Christ's disciples are not called to be Him—that is, to try to save themselves—but they are called to be like Him. Although He remains the master, disciples are people who try to be like their teacher—He is their model as well as their Savior. What we see Christ doing for others is what we are to be doing for others. The way we see Christ responding to His Father is the way we are to respond to His Father. In the preceding verses (Matt 10:17–24), Jesus warns the Twelve that they will be persecuted. Making disciples means *preparing* people for this fact.

The texts that follow are among the hardest of Jesus' "hard sayings. Are you ready for these?"

Jesus says, to a crowd of followers, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26–27, 33).

In His instructions to the Twelve as he sends them out as missionaries—as "apostles"—Jesus speaks to us, as well. "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:34–39).

This is a call to all out revolution against the *status quo* of the world and the worldly church, to utter commitment to the cause of bringing the lost to salvation, whatever the cost to ourselves. After a similar call the rich young ruler turned and "went away sorrowing," and millions have joined him over the centuries, preferring the certain pleasures of this world to the promise and hope of a better world to come.

⁴ For example, the when Jesus tells His followers to not hide their lamps under bowls (Matt 5:14–15, He is teaching about discipleship. The parable of the weeds teaches a lesson about how the true disciples of Christ will be recognized (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43). The parable of the talents is crucial (Matt 25:14–30). The definition between the sheep and the goats in Matt 25 is illustrative (vs. 31–46), as is the story of the watchful servants (Luke 12:35–40). Jesus' illustrations about counting the cost of discipleship deserve study (Luke 14:28–33).

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What is Jesus saying? Isn't the fifth commandment "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exod 20:12), and doesn't the Torah prescribe the death penalty for cursing one's parents? Yes. Doesn't Jesus Himself speak against those who use vows of gifts to the temple as an excuse for refusing to care for their aged parents (Mark 7:11–13)? Yes. So what does He mean?

Hyperbole is one of Jesus' favorite rhetorical devices—that is to say, He often exaggerates, says extreme things, to make a point. Though there is some exaggeration in these verses, however, Jesus is deadly serious, as well.

Being a Christian does not usually lead to persecution unless it actually *makes a difference* in a person, but if it doesn't make a difference, is one really a Christian? One could make a case for answering "Yes" to that question, but clearly such a person would not be a *disciple*, and would not be doing much to further the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is asking for disciples. That's what He means when He says, "Follow me."

Jesus is not recommending that we actually hate our parents, nor that we dishonor our parents or disobey them, but, as Peter told the Sanhedrin, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29), and this goes for our parents as well. We should honor our parents in all things, except where they ask us to turn aside from the Word.

Some people are blessed with godly parents, spouses, and children who encourage "speaking boldly for the Lord" (Acts 14:3) and being scrupulously true to the Word. Others have families who love them, but don't want them to turn away from the comfortable *status quo* and become "fanatics" about following God, risking worldly success. Even if one remains firmly within the religious tradition in which one and one's family were raised, being a whole-hearted disciple within that tradition may lead to persecution from one's parents or spouse or children, or even one's priest or pastor.

I've seen church-going men who claim to be Christians divorce their wives because their wives began devoting themselves to prayer and Scripture, even though such prayer and study led the women to be much better wives than they had been before. Sometimes just having a "good" person around can be a great trial for people who know themselves to be walking down "the path that leads to destruction," and this may lead to persecution.

Jesus says if you're not willing to face persecution and even death for His sake, you are not worthy of Him who accepted both for you. The Church is the Bride of Christ. Christ does not want a coy bride who accepts a kiss now and then and appreciates a box of chocolates—He wants a Bride who gives herself completely to Him, who knows Him intimately—in the King James meaning of the word—and with delight and passion.

Disciples may not be *called* to give up everything for the sake of the Gospel, but they must be *willing* to give up everything.

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(Let me give you this word of comfort: the better you get to know your Bridegroom, the more willing you will be to give up everything for Him—this willingness usually happens by way of a number of little steps and several big ones. Your Bridegroom is eager to make you His own, but He is gentle and patient, and He won't ever force you—you have to give yourself to him, voluntarily.)

When Jesus says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword,” He has two meanings in mind. Within the context, what He means is that the demands of discipleship often lead to discord within families. On the wider level, however, Jesus is saying that while He is the Prince of Peace, the peace He gives His life to bring to the earth cannot come until sin and Satan are destroyed forever.

One of Satan's great deceptions is the belief that there can be true peace on Earth while sin still exists, that a compromise can be worked out between good and evil which will allow them to coexist. Even family members may urge that if only we will compromise our beliefs, not insist on doing what Jesus commands, we can all live in harmony. Harmony is a fine ideal, but not at the cost of Discipleship.

There are those who teach a sort of evolutionary approach to the Kingdom of God, holding that the whole world is getting better and better, and eventually the last remnants of evil will wither away, followed by an age of peace and the eventual return of Christ after that. This is not what the Bible teaches.

“Not peace but a sword” does not mean, however, that we are to go on a military crusade, a *jihad*, a holy war, to wipe out evil. God says, in Zech. 4:6, ““Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty.”

Our military service owed to God consists of putting on “the full armor of God”: “the belt of truth,” “the breastplate of righteousness,” “feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace,” “the shield of faith,” “the helmet of salvation,” and “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” and prayer (Eph 6:10–18). We are called to be “prayer warriors,” to use a current term, to fight violence and evil with prayer.

God calls us to stamp out evil in our own lives through full submission to Him, but not in the lives of others through laws and police action. That is not God's way, but Satan's way. Where you see people of good intent trying to legislate Christianity, you see Satan at work, despite their good intentions. “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matt 22:29).

John tells us, “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you *hold* to my teaching, you are *really* my disciples. *Then* you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31–32, emphasis added).

To hold to Christ's teaching means to continue in it. It means not only persevering in our faith, but persevering in our relationship with Christ and continuing to do what He asks us to do: make disciples, baptize, teach new disciples to obey God's commands, love one another, and serve those in need.

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Real disciples hold to Christ's teaching rather than to "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col 2:8).

Coming to a knowledge of the Truth and being set free by it also depends on our continuing in it. The Disciple's source of truth is the Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). The Disciple has to be "into the Word."

Jesus also said, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will *know* that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34–35, emphasis added).

Disciples love one another. The only way to love is to fall in love. The only way for Disciples to love one another is to fall in love with the Master. This saying is not difficult to understand, but the implications are earth-shaking. Christians have generally failed to "love one another." Because of this failure they have misrepresented God to the world and probably kept millions or even billions from coming to a knowledge of the truth! What kind of penance can possibly atone for that?

In misrepresenting God in this way, in claiming to be something we are not, in claiming for God a power we refuse to let Him manifest in us, are we in effect breaking the third commandment and taking the Lord's name in vain? Are we blaspheming God every time we claim to be His? A sobering thought.

The teacher and evangelist Russell Burrill has said, "When you tire of being a hypocrite you can do one of two things: you can become on the outside what you are on the inside or you can become on the inside what you are on the outside."⁵ Which is it going to be?

Discipleship means allegiance to a person, and that person is Christ. Christ tells His disciples to follow, to go, to make disciples, to baptize, to teach. He also tells his disciples to bear much fruit.

He says to us, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, *showing* yourselves to be my *disciples* . . . You did not choose me, but I *chose* you to go and *bear fruit*—fruit that will *last*. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 15:8, 16, emphasis added).

The fruit Jesus is asking us to bear, in this context, is not the "fruits of the Spirit," wonderful and necessary as those are, but *more disciples*. A disciple is a reproducer, which is to say, a missionary. Those who are *not* bringing others to Jesus and making disciples of them *are not themselves disciples* and are not fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28.

⁵ The organization, some of the texts, and some of the ideas for this article come from an unpublished sermon by my friend and teacher Russell Burrill, given at Blue Mountain Academy on 7 February 1997. If you would like a greater challenge to discipleship, I would suggest that you read at least the first chapter of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who chose to die in a concentration camp while standing firm in his faith rather than betray Jesus and go free.

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In Rev. 14:1–5 Christ reveals the characteristics of the “Invisible Church,” the true disciples of Christ drawn from every denomination and ready for the Bridegroom when He returns for His bride. John is told, “They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”

The true church today is made up of those who are truly disciples, who are willing to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes,” even if that means following Him to persecution or death, as it does still in many countries. Because they have “his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads,” they are able representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. They are also difficult to deceive, because they have head and heart knowledge of God, rather than a mere superficial acquaintance with the Scriptures. They are people who deliver the “eternal gospel” to “every nation, tribe, language and people” (v. 6), they are the people produced by that message, and they share that message as people see what it has done to them and for them. They are Disciples.

Being a Disciple is a demanding task. You can do it where you live, where you work, where you study, but it demands substantial time and energy and intensity. It is also an exciting task, however, and an all-consuming task.

As you progress along the path of discipleship, you may find you really aren’t very interested in television anymore, because God’s word seems so much more important and interesting. You may find you’re having a hard time listening to your CD collection anymore, because those lyrics are starting to offend you. The more time you spend with God, the less happy you will be at wild parties.

I remember a little song which says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus / Look full in His wonderful face, / And the things of earth will grow strangely dim / In the light of His glory and grace.” It’s true. Sometimes by the time God calls us to give something up, we’re quite happy and even relieved to give it up if we’re walking with Him.

What if we decide we don’t want to be disciples? What if we decide that’s asking a bit too much? What if we decide we can make it to Heaven just fine by being “born again” at some meeting and then going about “business as usual”?

Here’s a text worth considering. It’s an Old Testament text, but still fully operational, and very sobering. God is speaking to Ezekiel, warning what will happen to him if he refuses to share God’s message with the Israelites. “When I say to the wicked, “O wicked man, you will surely die, and *you do not speak out* to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and *I will hold you accountable* for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself”” (Ezek. 33:8–9, emphasis added).

To me this is about as sobering a Bible text as any I can think of. Its meaning is clear, and it is God’s word to us as well as to Ezekiel. If God gives you an

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opportunity to lead a sinner to Christ, but you refuse to do so, God will hold you to blame for that person's eternal destruction! What is murder or adultery in the eyes of God compared to this sin, yet who is not guilty of it?

I believe that in the last days before Christ returns, the great aching anguish in the hearts of Disciples will not be whether or not they have confessed every little failing, but the thought of the hundreds of people placed in their paths to whom they never spoke of Jesus, people who might have turned to God but perhaps never did. Thank God for forgiveness and for His sovereign grace and omniscience.

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1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?

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The stated purpose of the recently released *Women in Ministry* is “to provide data to facilitate informed decision making [about the role of women in ministry].”¹ While the goal is applauded, upon perusal of the book one soon finds that the decisions are often made *for* and not *by* the reader. The majority of contributors to the exegetical chapters of this volume support an egalitarian *ministerium*, so they were compelled, in the absence of any clear biblical prescription, to produce a hermeneutical alternative for the reader, based primarily on the argument from silence.²

While this paper parallels a chapter on the same verses by Larry Richards, I have purposely decided not to critique his hypothesis. Instead, I intend to conduct as honest an exegesis as I can so the reader may use this chapter as a guide for decision making. As I mature, I am realizing more and more that confrontational tactics do not set the tone for meaningful dialogue.³

¹Nancy Vyhmeister, ed. *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1998), 2.

²Cf. Raoul Dederen, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *ibid*, 23; Jacques B. Doukhan, “Women Priests in Israel: A Case for Their Absence,” *ibid*, 38-39; Robert M. Johnston, “Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church,” *ibid*, 47; Keith Mattingly, “Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study,” *ibid*, 71-72; Jo Ann Davidson, “Women in Scripture: A Survey and Evaluation,” *ibid*, 178; Richard M. Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” *ibid*, 259-84; W. Larry Richards, “How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time? (1 Corinthians 11 and 14),” *ibid*, 322; Walter B. T. Douglas, “The Distance and the Difference: Reflections on Issues of Slavery and Women’s Ordination in Adventism,” *ibid*, 392-94.

³Indeed, Ellen White warns: “Brethren, we must sink the shaft deep in the mine of truth. You may question matters with yourselves and with one another, if you do it in the right spirit; but too often it is large, and as soon as investigation begins, an unchristian spirit is manifested. This is just

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Problems with Interpretation

I frequently have distraught students approach me asking for *the* right answer to an issue of controversy. Their confusion is often fueled by the varying opinions and theologies that circulate throughout our denomination. Since my answer could very well add to their confusion, my response is often delivered with a barrage of questions that forces the students to critically analyze the various positions they have encountered. I truly believe that people ought “to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other [people’s] thoughts.”⁴ We are called to be Bereans. I’m not sure exactly which principles the Bereans used to check the validity of Paul’s rendering of biblical theology, but I would like to point to three areas I often investigate to analyze the strength of a theological argument.

1. Philosophical Methodology. Although my area is New Testament, I enjoy the times when I am asked to teach Contemporary Theology. Reading the documents that portray the development of Christian doctrine allows me to see how much theology is akin to philosophy. The theologian utilizes diverse texts to systematize doctrines, and there are many times when the absence of one text will mean the collapse of an entire doctrine. The truth is, many theological conclusions are based on deductive argumentation. The problem with a deductive argument is that the conclusion is not always a clear fact. It must be deduced in the mind of the auditor.

Unfortunately, since there is absolutely no text that directly speaks to every issue with explicit terms, the method of deductive argumentation predominates in the discussion on women in ministry. For instance, try as we may, we find no clear “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not allow women to serve as bishops.” Consequently, both sides are forced to hide behind the “argument from silence.” However, even in the appearance of silence, there is often enough static to cause audible waves that are capable of reception by those who are willing to fine tune their exegetical receivers. While we may not be fully able to determine the uninhibited sound, the probability of the conclusion is heightened.

2. Audience Hypotheses. The prologue of *Women in Ministry* contains a statement by James White, who counseled: “All means which according to sound judgement, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations should be employed.”⁵ While this is good advice, it should not be seen as an invitation to throw caution to the wind. The guiding phrase in this statement is “sound judgement.” Many methods of interpretation are not forbidden by scripture, but are not useful in the quest to “advance the cause of truth.” If “truth” is indeed an accurate understanding of what God is saying

what Satan delights in, but we should come with a humble heart to know for ourselves what is truth.” (CWE, 41)

⁴Ellen G. White. *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1903), 17.

⁵James White, “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*, 26 (April 1860), 180. Cited in Vyhmeister, 5.

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through the text, one cannot dogmatically claim a position to be “true” if the methods used to arrive at it are hypothetical.

Many exegetical studies are governed by audience hypotheses.⁶ The audience hypothesis is often arrived at by looking for internal clues within the book itself and finding some external social phenomenon into which these clues can fit.⁷ The major problem with constructing doctrine from audience hypotheses lies in the very nature of the term “hypothesis.” A hypothesis is a working thesis that is based on inference and not fact. It is the sole task of the person working under the hypothesis to defend his or her position straw by straw.⁸ However, when one’s exegesis is governed by an hypothesis, the conclusion will have to be hypothetical.

3. Presuppositions. During an open discussion period in class one day, a student bemoaned the fact that many of the theological positions she had nurtured from childhood were now being challenged. As I probed her further, she explained that her studies in the development of theology have led her to see that she was often exercising simple faith in complex doctrine. Even the simple act of praying to Jesus demanded rethinking, since one can only claim such an act biblical if one deduces that Jesus is God. Many of our presuppositions are unconsciously formed by those who have significant influence over our lives. The heavy influence of presuppositions on one’s interpretation is seen in the lives of many professional theologians who reject the clear teaching of scripture to support the creeds of their denominations.⁹

Ellen White tries to guard against the negative results of presuppositional sanctity when she says,

We have many lessons to learn, and many, many, to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.¹⁰

⁶In this study the essays by Richards and Vyhmeister presuppose a gnostic influence and Doukhan argues for cultic prostitution.

⁷For example, with so much in the pauline epistles about *gnosis*, many have projected the full blown gnosticism of the second century into the first century letters. As much as one may hide behind the titles “incipient” or “proto”, the hermeneutic is governed by what we know of gnosticism in its full blown state. Further, even the so called “developed” gnosticism remains an enigma. See Bentley Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁸See for instance the conclusions of my *doktorvater*, Robert Jewett, in “The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979): 55-87.

⁹For example, see essays in D. A. Carson, ed. *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 37.

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If I truly want to hear the word of God, I must be willing to let go of cherished positions. I must not approach the text with the intention of defending my understanding of what the text should say. If I intend to decipher biblical truth, I must place secondary importance on the *dogmata* of all creeds and commentaries and depend on *sola scriptura*—the Bible alone.

Method Used In this Study

What is there for us to learn in Paul's statements about women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14? Let me say that my current understanding is that while the Bible supports the ordination of women (whatever "ordination" means), it does not support their occupation of the highest ecclesiastical office, which is the episcopate (senior pastor).¹¹ I am also working under the conviction that the current "*textus receptus*" as transmitted through Nestle-Aland 27 and UBS 4 with its variant readings conveys a reasonable account of the content of the original autographs. In my attempt to discern the will of God as revealed in His Word, I reserve hermeneutical caution for those points of textual differences. I do not subscribe to early interpolation theories, nor do I accept the growing consensus on a deutero-pauline corpus. Having faith in the word demands enough—I do not need to further complicate my religious experience by exercising faith in the conclusions of post-enlightenment European skepticism.

In addition to accepting the Bible as the revealed Word of God, I also acknowledge that it is a book that reflects various phases of history and culture. 1 Corinthians was written to a real church to address real problems. Paul did not write in a vacuum. He had helped to establish the church and was receiving frequent reports from and about the church, and he writes to address specific problems.¹² Members of the original audience did not have to scratch their heads and consult lexicons to discern Paul's admonitions. As we read the letter, we see that the original audience was affected by the cultural influence of the Judaism and paganism of the first century Greco-Roman world. The letter is set at a time when the Christian church is going through birth pangs as it is forced to separate from the umbilical chord of its Jewish parent. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, it is Paul's responsibility to aid the fledgling church as it first flexes its wings.

I also accept 1 Corinthians as a literary document that was written to be heard and not read. I must therefore take into account that the original audience did not have the luxury of analyzing each aspect of grammar and syntax to decipher the "real" intent of the letter. The rhetorical proximity between Paul and his

¹¹See Keith A. Burton, "A Practical Theology of Ordination," *Ministry* 69 (1996), 26-29; and the provocatively titled "At God's Table Women Sit Where They Are Told," *Spectrum* 25,3 (1996): 52-57. The original title was "The Place for Ordained Women Has Already Been Set," but the editors saw fit—to my chagrin—to "spice it up."

¹²See Margaret M. Mitchell, "Concerning *PERI DE* In 1 Corinthians," *Novum Testamentum* 31 (1989): 229-56.

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audience allowed for immediate understanding. In light of this, we must use extreme caution in our linguistic study, especially with regards to semantics. The important question that must be forefront in our mind as we analyze the passages is “How did the intended audience *hear* this?”

As I stated above, my purpose is to produce a document that will really be helpful in decision making. It is not my intent or desire to make a decision for the reader. If I am faithful in my treatment of the text, the text should speak for itself. In this chapter, I propose that many of the arguments that utilize these passages in the debate over women’s ordination are not focused on the right object. The major issue is not whether women can pray or prophesy with unveiled heads or whether they should be in “silence,” but it focuses on how Paul arrives at his conclusion. What is the basis of Paul’s plain teaching on the status of women in these passages? I submit that *while Paul often appeals to culture and tradition, the real validity of his arguments stems from the reality that he grounds each one in a principle from the authoritative Tanak.*

1 Corinthians 11

I would be the first to admit that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is a confusing text that demands deep reflection.¹³ It is obvious that Paul addresses a cultural issue and embraces cultural norms. Since the majority of the New Testament correspondence was written to be heard,¹⁴ I approach my interpretation through the lens of rhetoric. Rhetoric demands that one identifies the “issue” (*stasis*) of the rhetorical situation. What “issue” is Paul addressing here? It is obvious that the “issue” is one known both to Paul and his audience and concerns women covering their heads while praying or prophesying in church. The fact that it is an “issue” means that there were people in the congregation who had a different understanding than the one Paul presents.

Paul addresses the issue by formulating a rather extensive argument from deduction:

2 *Captatio benevolentiae*. Paul praises the Corinthians for honoring the traditions.

3 *Argumentative premise*. God is the head of Jesus, who is the head of man, who is the head of woman.

4-6 *An Argument from Embarrassment*. A man who prays or prophesies with his head covered shames Jesus, but a woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered shames the man.¹⁵

¹³See also admission by A. C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The meaning of *kephale* in 1 Cor. 13,” *JTS* 45 (1994), 619, who calls it a “notoriously difficult passage.”

¹⁴See George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984; and Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

¹⁵Verse six contains a syllogism. Major Premise: It is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven; Minor Premise: If a woman does not want to wear a veil she should cut or shave her hair; Conclusion: In order to avoid the appearance of shame, a women should wear a veil.

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7-12 *An Argument from Scripture*. A man should not cover his head since he is the image and glory of God, but a woman should cover her head since she is the glory of man.

13-15 *Argument from Nature*. A man's long hair is degrading, but a woman's long hair is attractive.

16 *Parenthesis*. An appeal to the Corinthians to honor this tradition in solidarity with the "churches of God."

Captatio benevolentiae (11:2). Paul uses a rhetorical device known as *captatio benevolentiae* to "capture the good will" of his audience. Before he addresses the problem area, he praises the audience for recognizing his authority and adhering to ecclesiastical tradition: "I commend you, because you remember all things from me, just as I gave them to you, you maintain the traditions." "Tradition" (*paradosis*) was not a bad word for Paul. He understood that every social group has rules that define it. In order to strengthen group identity, Christians everywhere had to have certain standards. The commendation is "tongue in cheek," or perhaps optimistically "lawyerly."¹⁶ Paul hopes that his flattery will ensure the positive reception of his argument.

Argumentative Premise (11:3). Before Paul introduces the tradition, he establishes a premise. Initially, this premise is not buttressed with biblical proof, but is basically conveyed in an authoritative fashion. The literal translation states, "But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ." It is immediately obvious that Paul uses "head" metaphorically. Until recently, it had generally been taken for granted that Paul uses "head" to demonstrate the relational hierarchy between God, Jesus, man, and woman. It was also conceded that while the exact nature of the "headship" is not stipulated, it appears that the sense of the text is that God is "over" Jesus, who is "over" every man, who is "over" a woman. However, in recent decades, a growing number of scholars have followed the lead of Stephen Bedale, who suggests that Paul understands *kephale* to mean "source" or "origin."¹⁷

¹⁶But see Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991), 443.

¹⁷Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954), 211-15. His supporters include Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, "Does Male Dominance Tarnish our Translations," *Christianity Today* 5 (October, 1979), 23-29; "The 'Head' of the Epistles," *Christianity Today* 20 (February, 1981), 20-33; Margaret Howe, *Women and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 60; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco: Word, 1974), 30-31, 100; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1971), 103; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1971), 248; Colin Brown, "Head," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:156-63; James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (London: InterVarsity, 1981), 164; Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972), 282-302.

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While Bedale has attracted an impressive list of disciples, Wayne Grudem warns that “authors who propose the sense ‘source’ are proposing a new meaning, one previously unrecognized by New Testament lexicons.”¹⁸ This is not to diminish the possibilities of new linguistic discoveries, but can one be so imperious as to presume the supremacy of an English meaning over the multiplicity of translations in lexicons of other languages? While Fee follows Bedale’s lead, he admits that the interpretation of this passage “has been further complicated by the resurgence in the 1960s (after being latent for nearly forty years) of the feminist movement both within and outside the church, so that many of the more recent studies on the text are specifically the result of that movement.”¹⁹ Consequently, it is necessary to question the political intent of the author.

Grudem’s research is based on a massive lexicographical study assisted by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database. Out of over 12,000 references to *kephale* in the TLG, Grudem randomly selects 2,336 and concludes that in not a single instance could *kephale* be translated “source.”²⁰ He thus summarizes his research:

[T]he meaning “ruler, authority over” has sufficient attestation to establish it clearly as a legitimate sense for *kephale* in Greek literature at the time of the New Testament. Indeed, it was a well established and recognizable meaning, and it is the meaning that best suits the New Testament text that speaks of the relationship between men and women by saying that the man is “head” of a woman and the husband is “head” of the wife.²¹

The possibility of “source” as a translation for *kephale* has been further investigated by Fitzmyer, who in his attempt to discover the semantic impact of *kephale* on the Hellenistic Jew highlights a number of occasions in the LXX in which the Hebrew *ros* is translated by *kephale*. None would deny that *ros* connotes “authority” or “supremacy”, hence it would only stand to reason that “a Hellenistic Jew could instinctively use *kephale* as a proper expression for authority.”²²

Given the natural connotation of *kephale* as metaphor, it seems evident to me that many who translate *kephale* as “source” do so on grounds other than

¹⁸Wayne Grudem, “Does *kephale* (“Head”) Mean “Source” or “Authority” in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985), 40.

¹⁹Fee, 492.

²⁰For an independent assessment of his research, see the chart on Grudem, 50-51.

²¹Grudem, 59.

²²J. A. Fitzmyer, “Another Look at *KEPHALE* in 1 Corinthians 11:3,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), 509. Fitzmyer lists Jeremiah 31:7 (LXX 38:7), 1 Kings 21:12 (LXX 20:12), 2 Samuel 22:24, Deuteronomy 28:13, 44, and Isaiah 9:13-14. More specifically, Fitzmyer, 510, proposes, “a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that *kephale* . . . be understood as ‘head’ in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else.” See also J. A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephale* in 1 Corinthians 3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59; and Perriman, 602-22, who argues that the meaning is neither “source” nor “authority.”

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exegesis. However, the meaning of a biblical term should not be determined by political exigency. Heuristics should not becloud hermeneutics. Richards states it well: “As attractive as the meaning of ‘source’ for the Greek word *kephale* is, we must, in the final analysis, rely on the passages written by Paul himself for a definition of *kephale*.”²³ Paul uses *kephale* metaphorically in Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Colossians 1:18, 2:10 and 2:19. In each instance, there is no doubt that “authority” is the intended connotation for *kephale*.²⁴

Also important for the exegesis of verse 3 is the understanding of *aner*. While the Greek could be translated “man” or “husband”, the context demands that it be understood “man.” I am surprised that some leading translations have opted for “husband” in this verse.²⁵ This practice is so popular, that Richards does not even feel the need to justify his translating *aner* with “husband.”²⁶ However, those who translate *aner* as “husband” have no real semantic or contextual grounds. Is Christ only the head of husbands? Are only husbands included in the remainder of the pericope? Of course not! Paul is not addressing marriages here, he is simply stating the levels in the human-divine order in which women are stratified under men.²⁷ The basis for his *theologoumenon* is not established until his second argument (11:7-12).

An Argument from Shame (11:4-6). Paul delves into the real issue here as he identifies the tradition. Apparently in the context of church, a man was not to pray or prophesy “having [something] against the head” since he would shame the head. On the other hand, when a woman prays with her head unveiled, she shames her head. Many commentators translate *kataschune* as “dishonor.” However, the usual translation of the term is “shame.”²⁸ It is not merely an infringement on social status, but the stirring up of a negative emotion in the offended one.

Another problem comes with the understanding of *kephale* in this context. Lexical semantics demands that a term be understood in the context of its most recent reference, unless there is an obvious change in context. The double use of *kephale* and the syntactical demands of the clause suggest that Paul is engaging in a word play with the actual and metaphorical meaning in these verses. In each instance, the first reference is actual and the second is metaphorical. By putting something against his actual head, the man shames Christ—his metaphorical head. The obvious hermeneutical question at this point is, “How is Christ

²³Richards, 318.

²⁴Fee’s logic is definitely flawed when he argues against this understanding on the basis that the word *exousia* (“authority”) is not used. (502)

²⁵E.g. New American Bible and New Revised Standard Version.

²⁶Richards’ explanation for translating *aner* as “husband” is confined to an endnote that simply states: “the Greek word for ‘man’ (*aner*) means both ‘man’ and ‘husband.’” (331, n.25).

²⁷See discussion in Conzelmann, 184. “Yet it is not questions of marriage that are being discussed here, but questions of community. It is a case of the *nature* of man and woman as such.”

²⁸See R. Bultmann, “*aischuno*, ktl,” *TDNT* 1, 189-91.

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shamed when a man has something against his head while praying or prophesying?" It seems to me that 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 helps to answer this dilemma. In this passage, Paul speaks of the "veil" that is lifted when one comes to Christ. Unlike Jewish men, who often covered their faces when approaching the divinity, the Christian man no longer has to approach God with a veil. The veil represents a barrier that has been demolished through the work of Christ. Is it possible that the covered head represents a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of Christ's mediatorial work? Is it possible that in prohibiting men from covering their heads, Paul discounts the Jewish custom of covering one's face when approaching the divinity?²⁹

Contrary to the man, when the woman prays, it is not Christ who she shames by not covering her literal head, but it is her metaphorical head—the man—who is shamed. In no uncertain terms, Paul makes it clear that the purpose of the woman's head covering is not for her benefit, but the man's. It is not immediately obvious why the man would be shamed by the woman's lack of head covering. However, upon reflection, when one thinks of the covering as a barrier, it appears that Paul is concerned about men being sexually attracted to women who ministered. Is it possible that women who were publicly prophesying and praying are being asked to suppress their sexual attractiveness that may distract a worshiping male?³⁰ Could this be a case similar to 1 Timothy 2:9-10, where women are asked to avoid the wearing of jewelry because of its potential to distract the eye from their inner beauty?

Paul goes on to say that a woman praying or prophesying with her hair uncovered is like one who does these things with a head that is shaven or shorn. Verse six is clear in its stipulation that a shorn or shaven head is disgraceful (*aischron*). No self-respecting woman in the first century would want to cut her hair. Short hair had negative connotations that reflected on the woman's character. If a woman entered the worship place with short hair, she would be immediately stigmatized. By comparing uncovered hair to shorn or shaven hair, Paul seems to be alluding to the fact that both would serve as a distraction. He is not inviting women who disagree with the tradition to change their hair styles. He simply presents an argument to support the tradition of head covering for those women who have a public role in worship.

²⁹For a similar line of reasoning see David E. Blattenberger, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11:2-26 through Archaeological and Moral-Rhetorical Analysis* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 28f. See also W. C. Van Unnik, "With Unveiled Face", An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians iii 12-18," *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 153-69.

³⁰Bernadette Brooten, "Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, 63), feels that Paul is attacking homoeroticism between females, but this does not take into account that the counsel is to prevent the embarrassment of males.

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An Argument from Scripture (11:7-12). While the first argument is based on spiritual and moral *topoi*, the second argument is based on the Tanak—particularly the Genesis account of creation. What is important to our using the current passage as a key to decision making is Paul’s understanding of the authoritative nature of the Genesis account of creation. He understands the symbiotic relationship between Genesis 1 and 2. He has not been influenced by Julius Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis! He does not attempt to modify the straight teaching of the biblical cosmogony. He engages a strict reading of the text and interprets it at face value. The reason why a man does not cover his head is because he is in the “image and glory of God.” It appears that in addition to the Genesis account of creation, Paul utilizes the creation hymn of Psalm 8 to develop his midrash. While Genesis 1:27 refers to man (and woman) being made in the *eikon* of Elohim, Psalm 8 declares that he was crowned with glory (*doxa*) and honor. Although it can be reasoned that Genesis depicts both male and female as being created in God’s image, Paul reads Genesis 1 through the lens of Genesis 2. Since the man was created first, Paul reasons that he is the original image and glory of God. However, the woman is the “glory” of man. Notice that woman is not said to be the “image” of man. The fact that woman is not the “image” of man could be the very reason why the veil is needed. Again, this is not for the woman’s sake, but the man’s.

Verses eight and nine explain why the woman is the “glory” of man. First of all, woman was created *from* man. Secondly, woman was created *for* man. Again, Paul takes the text at face value. His argument has nothing to do with the status of humans after the fall. Paul sees an inherent hierarchy in the male-female marital relationship (Gen 2:26) from the original creation.

Having stated the premise for his argument, Paul draws the conclusion in the purpose clause of verse 10: “Therefore, the woman ought to have authority over the head, because of the angels.” This verse poses two major exegetical difficulties.³¹ The first problem is posed by the phrase “to have authority over her head” (*exousian echein epi tes kephales*). Many translations view *exousian* as a metonym for “veil” and interpret the phrase to mean “to have a veil on her head.” However, there is no obvious indicator for this reading. During his discussion, Paul has been appealing directly to women. He allows them to independently respond to his request. *Exousia* is something that is vested in the individual, and inherent in her status. In light of this, the whole idea of “authority over the head,” may relate to the woman’s right to do what she wants with her

³¹A concise synopsis of the exegetical alternatives is provided in W. Gerald Kendrick, “Authority, Women, and Angels. Translating 1 Corinthians 11:10,” *Bible Translator* 46 (1995): 336-343. On the difficulty in translating the verse, David R. Hall, “A Problem of Authority,” *Expository Times* 102 (1990), 39, comments: “This is one of many verses in Paul’s letters which are difficult to interpret because we do not know the background. Reading a Pauline letter is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. We can gather a gist of what is being said, but the details escape us because we cannot hear the voice at the other end of the line.”

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head. As we have already seen, the specific purpose of the head covering is not so much for the ministering woman as it is for the worshiping man. By covering her head, the woman provides a barrier to male lust. By exercising her *exousia* the woman helps to redirect the focus of the worshipers to God.

The final section of the clause is also confusing. Paul introduces a new entity into the discussion: “angels” (*angeloi*). The woman exercises authority over her head “because of the angels.” The Oxford NRSV depicts a recent trend in its suggestion that *angeloi* may refer to human messengers. However, this use of *angeloi* is extremely rare in the New Testament. It is much more likely that Paul here refers to spiritual *angeloi*. I personally am stumped by this verse. If Paul does indeed base his midrash on the LXX version of Psalm 8, then the reference to angels may allude to the psalmist declaration that man was “made a little lower than the angels.” Nevertheless, since the textual information is so scanty, I will refrain from offering an interpretive suggestion.

Having closed his argument, Paul makes a paranthetical statement indicated by *plen* (“nevertheless”). “Nevertheless, neither is woman independent from man, nor is man independent from woman in the Lord; for as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman, and all things are from God.” Paul is careful to end his argument on a soteriological note. In the spirit of Galatians 3:28, Paul stresses that in spite of the inherent differences between male and female, they are not independent creatures. They are both dependent on each other. Although woman was created for man, man also needs woman. And although woman was made from man, man is born through woman. However, ultimately both man and woman have their origin in God.

An Argument from Culture (11:13-15). Paul’s third argument to support the head covering tradition is derived from culture. He asks the question, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is dishonorable for him, but if a woman has long hair it is glory for her?” Paul talks here about what is proper. He appeals to the mores and values of the Greek world. Although many of us are influenced by the tendency of the Renaissance artists to depict biblical characters like the radicals of the flower power generation, a number of Greek sources inform us that Greek men did not grow their hair long.³² For a man to wear his hair long would be to dishonor (*atimia*) his position as a male in society.³³ In the Hellenized world that cherished order, men were supposed to look like men.

On the other hand, women were expected to wear their hair long. Paul states that long hair is a woman’s glory (*doxa*). *Doxa* is here contrasted with the *atimia*

³²*BAGD*, 442, cites Hdt. 1, 82, 7; Plut., Mor. 267b; Ps.Phoc. 212.

³³See discussion on the relationship of hair length to masculinity in Blattenberger, 46-61. Note especially the primary sources in his footnotes. But see comments by Cynthia L. Thompson, “Hair-styles, Head Coverings, and St. Paul. Portraits from Roman Corinth,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 (1988), 104, who although acknowledging the significance between male and female hair lists categories of people who sported long hair.

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(dishonor) that is associated with a man wearing long hair. Both dishonor and glory are concepts that must be acknowledged by another party. The RSV misses the entire point when it translates *doxa* with “pride.” The point is not how the woman feels about her own hair, but how others perceive it.³⁴ The essence of *doxa* is splendor and beauty.³⁵ *Doxa* is supposed to attract. This insight helps to strengthen the reason for the woman’s hair covering during worship. If the woman’s hair serves to attract, then it will definitely distract worshipping males.

Concluding Statement (11:16). Paul concludes the argument with an authoritative statement:³⁶ “If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no other custom, neither do the churches of God.” This verse serves as an inclusio to verse 2 where Paul praises the Corinthians for holding fast to the traditions (*paradoseis*). Here he makes it plain that the tradition he has just defended is a custom (*sunetheia*). All the churches of God agree that a woman should cover her head, and since the Corinthians are a part of the association, they are expected to show solidarity. Paul does not expect them to blindly accept the custom, but he has given them reasoned grounds to support its establishment. Also, notice that although he reasons from scripture, he does not make the issue of hair covering a divine mandate.

Helpful Conclusions from 1 Corinthians 11. As I end this section, I think it is safe to say that the dual purpose of the pericope is to explain and enforce the tradition of women covering their heads during public ministry in a co-ed worship setting. While the passage does not cover all aspects of women in ministry, there are certain relevant points that can be drawn from our exegesis:

1. When it is spiritually expedient, the church is authorized to make doctrines that have no explicit biblical mandate. While Paul could not point to a text that stipulated women should cover their heads in worship, he endorsed the practice because it allowed for all people to worship without distractions.

2. While Paul’s conclusions are contextually relevant, his arguments are biblically based. The Tanak had no scriptures that addressed the issue directly, so Paul had to extract a principle from the plain teaching of scripture. The fact that women were created “for” men and are the “glory” of men means that men need a barrier when worshipping to stop them from being distracted.

3. Women had a ministering role in the worship service. 1 Corinthians 14 makes it clear that the liturgy was open to include a hymn, a scripture reading, a revelation from two or three prophets, testimonies in another tongue from two or three people as long as there is an interpreter. The fact that 1 Corinthians 11

³⁴The same is true for the man with long hair who brings dishonor to himself.

³⁵See BAGD, 203f.

³⁶T. Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 679-89, would have us believe that Paul is not exercising authority here, but is making a gentle appeal since his teaching caused the confusion in the first place.

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speaks of women praying and prophesying means that women were allowed to minister in certain capacities. This does not appear to be an issue for Paul.³⁷

4. Paul accepted the plain biblical cosmogony that supports a hierarchical relationship between women and men. Although men have inherent authority over women, this hierarchy does not provide them with any soteriological advantage and is strictly applicable to the realm of the social.

5. Paul has no problem with adapting to societal mores. Other societies may not have had such a negative view of men with long hair.³⁸

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

If the fifteen verses of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 have posed an exegetical challenge, then the two and a half verses of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 present an even bigger one. Our task would have been a lot easier if Paul had not been so silent about what exactly he means by women being silent. By referring to “all the churches of the saints,” Paul makes it clear that he is once more appealing to current ecclesiastical custom or tradition. The content of this specific tradition involves the silence of wives (*gunaiques*) in the worship setting. Paul’s words are very clear: “As in all the churches of the saints, let the wives be silent; for it is not permitted for them to speak in church, but they are to be in subjection, just as the law says. But if they wish to learn, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a wife to speak in church.”

Since 1 Corinthians 11 portrayed the Corinthian women as prophesying and praying, it would appear that Paul is here contradicting himself. Hence Richards question, “How can a woman prophesy and keep silence at the same time?” Some have tried to satisfy the enigma by posing different settings for the two passages,³⁹ or proposing that this passage is as an interpolation.⁴⁰ However, the setting of both passages is clearly the church assembled for worship, and, in spite of the highly hypothetical arguments in support of interpolation, I have to side with Schüssler Fiorenza, who states: “Since these verses cannot be excluded on textual-critical grounds but are usually declared inauthentic on theological

³⁷In fact, other female prophets are mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 21:9; Rev 2:19-23). See comments by Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shephard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 215.

³⁸This also helps us understand that although Paul does not openly attack the societal institution of slavery, he never provides biblical support for its practice. Douglas fails to see this in his critique of Bacchiocchi, Holmes, and Pipim (392-94).

³⁹For instance, H. R. Homyard, “Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (1997):461-72, suggests that chapter 11 relates to non-church activities, and chapter 14 to church worship.

⁴⁰See Fee, 699-707. See also Philip B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995):240-62, who cites variant readings in Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus; J. H. Petzer, “Reconsidering the silent women of Corinth—a note on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” *Theologia Evangelica* 26 (1993): 132-38; and MacDonald, 216.

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grounds, it is exegetically more sound to accept them as original Pauline statements and then explain them within the present context.”⁴¹

What is the present context? These verses are couched close to the conclusion of Paul’s counsel on proper decorum in the worship service—a discussion that starts in 11:2. More specifically, Paul is providing suggestions for church liturgy, particularly with regards to prophesying and speaking in tongues. In 14:23 he expresses his concern about how an outsider would perceive disorderly conduct in worship. Consequently, as an aid to establishing order he proposes a suggested order of service in verses 26-30. So concerned is he about order in the worship service, that twice in these verses he recommends that tongue speakers and prophets should keep silent if their contribution does not add anything to the worship service (14:28, 30).⁴²

Indeed, as Richards recognizes, it is in this context that we are to understand the Pauline admonition for wives to be silent.⁴³ Some may be asking why I have been using “wives” to translate *gunaikes* when I rejected the dual translation of *aner* in 11:3. The answer lies in v. 35, where Paul makes it plain that the women in question had “husbands”—which would naturally make them “wives.”⁴⁴ This universal rule was applicable to wives “in [all] the churches,” to ensure order in the worship service. One may ask, “If Paul has a problem with wives speaking in church, why didn’t he address the issue in chapter eleven when he spoke of women in general?” However, in light of v. 35, the issue is not merely “speaking,” but speaking for the sake of learning.⁴⁵ Unlike the female prophets who were making spiritual revelations, these wives were asking questions that demanded answers. Imagine the commotion in a small gathering if husbands and wives were carrying on conversations while designated people were trying to preach, pray, or prophesy.⁴⁶

Paul well recognizes that his admonition is culturally and contextually grounded. He knows that there is no explicit text in the Tanak prohibiting wives from asking questions in church. However, he feels that in order for the command to be spiritually relevant, it must have a biblical principle. Paul does not

⁴¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 230. See also the excellent text critical discussion about the variant readings by Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997):242-255.

⁴²See also Richards, 323.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴See discussion in Fiorenza, 231, who concludes: “the injunction does not pertain to all women but solely to the wives of Christians.”

⁴⁵See M. Hasitschka, “‘Die Frauen in den Gemeinden sollen schweigen.’ 1 Kor 14,33b-36 - Anweisung des Paulus des rechten Ordnung im Gottesdienst,” *SNTU* 22 (1997):47-56.

⁴⁶But see L. Ann Jervis, “1 Corinthians 14.34-35: A Reconsideration of Paul’s Limitation of the Free Speech of Some Corinthian Women,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 (1995):51-74, who proposes that the women were interrupting the prophets and thus bringing confusion to the service.

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pretend to have “papal” authority as he delivers his admonition. For this particular ruling, he appeals to a section of the “law” (*nomos*) that calls for the subordination of wives. While it has been suggested that *nomos* could refer to Rabbinic law⁴⁷ or early Christian ecclesiastical law, the original audience would have taken for granted that Paul makes a reference to the “Torah” section of the Tanak.⁴⁸

It appears that Paul derives the principle for this tradition from Genesis 3:16b: “and your desire [shall be] towards (*pros*) your husband, and he shall rule (*kurieusei*) over you.” While the English term “desire” has romantic connotations, the LXX’s use of *apostrophe* denotes “a desire to control.”⁴⁹ As a result of the fall, the woman “desires” to control the husband. Indeed, in Genesis 3:17, Adam is chastised for allowing his wife to lead him into sin. This feminine desire to control stimulates competition for “headship.” Consequently, in a bid to maintain the original order, Yahweh prophesies that the husband will now “rule over” his wife.⁵⁰ However, since it is the wife’s desire to control, she must now make a conscious effort to “submit” to the lordship of her husband.⁵¹ Hence Paul’s deduction that “the law says” (*ho nomos legei*) wives are to be subordinate (*hupotassesthosan*).

So how does all of this relate to the command for wives to be silent? It seems to me that the real issue is not one of whether or not a wife could speak in church, but how she should submit to the person who is telling her not to speak. Is it possible that Paul could have been assisting husbands who did not want their wives to disturb the service by asking them to explain things that were hard to understand?

Paul ends his admonition by stating, “It is shameful for a wife to speak in church.” Now that we have an idea about the background, we know that this statement is not to be understood absolutely. Only those wives who are insubordinate are being chastised here. It is interesting to note that Paul utilizes the same word for “shameful” (*aischron*) as he did in 11:6 to refer to a woman with shorn or shaven hair. If I am right in my thesis that short hair is objectionable because it distracts worshipers, then it is safe to assume that the type of talking that was taking place was also distracting. Indeed, when placed in the larger context of chapter 14, it is clear that Paul’s concern is with “decency”

⁴⁷See Fiorenza, 231; and S. Aalen, “A Rabbinic Formula in 1 Cor 14,34,” *Studia Evangelica* 2 (1964): 513-25.

⁴⁸See, for instance, Romans 3:21, where Paul speaks of the Tanak with the term “law and prophets” (*nomos kai prophetai*).

⁴⁹The same term is used in Genesis 4:6 when it speaks of sin “desiring” Cain. See U. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959), 165–166.

⁵⁰The husband’s implicit position as *kurios* can be contrasted to Cain’s implicit designation as *archon* (4:7). *Kurios* denotes inherent status whereas *archon* denotes function.

⁵¹See Ephesians 5:22-33, where Paul ends his discussion about marital relationships with an appeal for the wife to “respect” her husband.

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(*euschemonos*) and “order” (*taxin*) in worship (11:40). In light of this, it may be well to adapt one of the interpretive translations offered by Daniel C. Archiea:

When you come together to worship, the wives should refrain from talking. In fact, they should not talk at all, since as the law says, they are subordinate to their husbands. If they want to find out about anything, they should wait until they get home and then ask their husbands. It is shameful for wives to be talking during the church meeting.⁵²

Helpful Conclusions from 1 Corinthians 14. While this passage was not as “meaty” as the first, there are certain points of learning that can apply to our discussion on women in ministry:

1. As in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul acknowledges the authority of the church to establish spiritually expedient rules that are not clearly stated in Scripture.
2. Whenever Paul refers to ecclesiastical law, he anchors it in a theological principle.
3. Paul sees the subjection of wives to husbands as a divine command that although stipulated after the fall remained relevant for the Christian community. In alluding to Genesis 3:16b, Paul establishes the fact that current human character—particularly the wives desire to control—needs to be subject to Divine wisdom.
4. Worship should be theocentric and not anthropocentric. The human element in worship needs to be subjected to the order of the Spirit. Worshipers should focus on God and not on each other.

General Conclusion

As we assess the two passages in light of women in ministry, I do not believe I will be amiss to conclude that both are directly relevant to the ongoing discussion. 1 Corinthians 11 makes it clear that women publicly ministered in the early church through prayer and prophecy. It is also clear that their spiritual giftedness does not obliterate the hierarchical distinction between the genders that was established at creation. In addition to supporting the male-female hierarchical distinctiveness, an understanding of 1 Corinthians 14 is also helpful in letting us know that Paul does not place a general indictment against women speaking in the community of the saints. So the answer to the question, “How does a woman prophesy and keep silence at the same time?” is simple. She doesn’t! In each pericope, Paul addresses two distinct categories of women. The only thread that holds these two passages together is the distraction caused by their actions in the worship service. In both passages, Paul’s chief concern is the uncovered female heads, talkative wives, uninterpreted glossalalia, and the many other phenomena that distracts the worshiper from the true object of worship.

⁵²Daniel C. Archiea, “The Silence of Women in the Church: Theology and Translation in 1 Corinthians 14.33b-36,” *Bible Translator* 46 (1995), 111.

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So how can this study assist in the decision making process of those who desire to arrive at a biblical decision on the role of women in ministry? Rather than provide an answer, I would like to close with a few questions:

1. Are there any aspects of *this* study that appear to be governed by philosophical methodology?
2. Does it appear that I arrive at my conclusions through adherence to an audience hypothesis? If so, how close is the hypothesis to the plain reading of the text?
3. Did you get the impression that my conclusions were governed by my presuppositions, or did you detect a sense of objectivity?
4. In light of Paul's acceptance of ecclesiastical authority, does an individual member of the church have the right to reject the church's current stance on women in ministry?
5. At what point should the church's authority to devise spiritually expedient doctrines be challenged?
6. How does Paul use scripture to address the issue of women in the church?
7. On what basis would you accept or reject Paul's use of scripture in his admonition?
8. Did the Corinthian woman have to be ordained in order to prophesy?
9. Did Paul uphold the hierarchical distinction between male and female?
10. Does the biblical teaching on male "headship" apply to church organization?

I trust that your honest and prayerful answers to these questions will help to clarify the issues.

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Women, Teaching, Authority, Silence: 1 Timothy 2:8–15 Explained by 1 Peter 3:1–6

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What did Paul mean when he wrote, “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim 2:12¹)?

If we look at the verse by itself it seems clear enough, though a hard teaching in a day when women serve as presidents of universities, corporations, and even countries.

Those of us who want to submit to God’s Word and let it judge us rather than we judging it have not found the text obscure. We’ve said, along with the Christian billboard advertising seen around the country, “What part of ‘Thou shalt not’ do you find confusing?”

But what are the implications? My wife teaches little children in church. Is she disobeying this verse? She is also a college professor with authority over many men. Is that appropriate?

When is teaching really teaching, and when is it not teaching? What is authority? Whole congregations and even denominations have split over these questions.

Precept Upon Precept

When we impose our human reasoning, traditions, or experience on the Bible, we are guilty of judging the Word by our own ideas.

If we want to understand the Bible, we need to let Scripture explain itself by comparing word with word, verse with verse. The result can be surprising at times, but it can also be wonderfully satisfying. This verse is an especially good example.

¹ All scriptural quotations are from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

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Richard Davidson, Chair of the Old Testament Department at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary at Andrews University, has recently pointed out that 1 Tim 2:8–15 and 1 Pet 3:1–6 are parallel passages. I knew there were similarities between the two, both of which deal in part with female adornment, but I'd never considered them side by side.

Davidson claims that because of the parallels, 1 Pet 3:1–6 sheds light on the meaning of Paul's apparent prohibition of women teaching or having authority.² I was skeptical, but because 1 Tim 2:12 has puzzled me for years, I decided to type out the two passages side by side and highlight the parallels. The results astonished me.

Look first at the best known part of each of these passages: 1 Tim 2:9–10 and 1 Pet 3:3–4. Both advise that women should dress modestly. Both suggest that the proper adornment for "women professing godliness" is not physical but behavioral. They have in common the words "adorn" ["adornment"], "hair," and "gold." Where Paul writes "costly clothing," Peter writes "fine apparel."³

Given these similarities, it seems almost certain that one of these men is restating the work of the other in this passage. But which came first? Scholars have long debated this.

If I had to guess, I would say Peter is restating Paul's ideas, for three reasons. First, Peter is familiar with Paul's work and says Paul has written "some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16).

Second, Paul's passage is "hard to understand" in several places, while Peter's is clear. Third, Peter's passage is more detailed than Paul's. Writers are more likely to add information that makes something clearer than to rewrite a passage to make it more confusing. As Peter and Paul are known to have met on occasion, it's easy to imagine Peter saying, "Brother Paul, what did you mean by this?"⁴

² "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1998), 279–80, 293 (n. 102).

³ The Greek is somewhat different, but likewise synonymous.

⁴ It is also relevant that the subject matter of nineteen of the twenty-five verses in Jude is also found in 2 Peter, either using the same words or paraphrasing them. In these verses—297 words in Peter and 256 words in Jude—78 words are found in both. [See D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 437–438.] This lends support to the idea that Peter is paraphrasing Paul in 1 Pet 3:1–6, rather than Paul borrowing from Peter. It seems to have been common practice with him. Compare, for example, 2 Cor 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," with 1 Pet 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." Again Peter is clarifying Paul. For another example, compare 1 Pet 2:1 with Eph 4:3. Paul writes, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and *evil speaking* be put away from you, with *all malice*." Peter writes, "Therefore, laying aside *all malice*, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all *evil speaking*, . . ." 2 Cor 12:20 is also very similar. What Peter writes is either the same words or synonyms, but more concise and clearer. Also, a growing num-

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1 Timothy 2:8–15	1 Peter 3:1–6
<p>8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;</p> <p>9 In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,</p> <p>10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, WITH GOOD WORKS.</p> <p>11 Let a woman LEARN IN SILENCE with all <i>submission</i>.</p> <p>12 And I do NOT permit a woman TO TEACH OR TO HAVE AUTHORITY over a man, but to BE IN SILENCE.</p> <p>13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.</p> <p>14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.</p> <p>15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they CONTINUE IN FAITH, LOVE, AND HOLINESS, WITH SELF-CONTROL.</p>	<p>1 Wives, likewise, be <i>submissive</i> to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,</p> <p>2 when they observe your CHASTE CONDUCT ACCOMPANIED BY FEAR.</p> <p>3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—</p> <p>4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, WITH THE INCORRUPTIBLE BEAUTY OF A GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT, WHICH IS VERY PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.</p> <p>5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being <i>submissive</i> to their own husbands,</p> <p>6 as Sarah OBEYED Abraham, CALLING HIM LORD, whose daughters you are if you DO GOOD and are not afraid with any terror.</p>

More Parallels

Let's look at some of the other parallels. The passage by Peter refers twice to "wives," once to "women" who have "husbands," and once to "Sarah," the wife of a patriarch.

Paul's passage refers twice to "women," three times to "woman"—one of whom is "childbearing," and thus a wife—and once to Eve, the wife of a patriarch.

ber of scholars are accepting the "Matthean Priority" theory, that Mark was not the first gospel written, but that Mark wrote down Peter's stories about Jesus, and Peter had a copy of Matthew's gospel to spark his memory. This negates the need for a "Q Source" and is in line with Peter's other literary borrowing. (See David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

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Are “women” and “wives” parallel? In fact they are! “Woman” and “wife” are the very same word in Greek: *gynē*. The correct translation depends on the context.

1 Timothy 2:8–15	1 Peter 3:1–6
“adorn”	“adornment”
“hair” [lit. “plaiting”], “gold,” “costly clothing” “with good works”	“hair” [lit. “plaiting of hair”], “gold,” “fine apparel,” “with incorruptible beauty”
“woman” [<i>gynaiki</i> , v. 12], “women” [<i>gynaikas</i> , v. 9] “Eve,” “childbearing” [<i>technogonias</i> , childbirth]	“wives” [<i>gynaikes</i>], “women” [<i>gynaikes</i>], “Sarah”
“submission” [<i>hypotagē</i>]	“submissive” [<i>hypotassomenai</i>]
“man” [<i>andros</i> , a form of <i>aner</i> , a man or husband], “Adam”	“Husbands” [<i>andrasin</i>], “Abraham”
“learn in silence,” “be in silence” [<i>hesychia</i>],	“a gentle and quiet spirit” [<i>hesychiou</i>], “without a word”
“not . . . to teach or to have authority,” “with good works,” “continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control”	“chaste conduct accompanied by fear,” “obeyed,” “calling him lord,” “do good,” “with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit”

Why then do we find “women” in 1 Timothy and “wives” in 1 Peter? Because Paul’s passage was “hard to understand,” which for centuries has led translators to accidentally “twist” the meaning. Failing to notice the parallel between the two passages, they decided Paul was writing about women in the formal worship service. The NIV even prefaces the passage with the heading “Instructions on Worship,” even though there is nothing in it that clearly points to congregational worship.⁵ In truth, the parallels between the words of Paul and Peter suggest that Peter—under inspiration—understood Paul to be writing about wives in the home.

Likewise, Paul’s passage has the word “man” and Peter’s “husbands,” but the words used here for “man” and “husband” have the same root in Greek.

Both passages call for women to be submissive. The Bible clearly calls for women to be submissive to their husbands, for the woman to submit to the man (1 Cor 11:3). However, it does not call for women to be submissive to other men merely because of gender difference, other than the submission all who are part of the Body of Christ—whether male or female—owe to each other (1 Pet 5:5; see also Eph 5:21).

⁵ The call for the believers to pray for those in authority [vs. 1–2] need not mean in the church. Men are told to lift up “holy hands” not in the worship service, but “everywhere,” literally “in every place” (v. 8). Paul is explaining forms of quiet missionary activity through public prayer, not prescribing acceptable forms for congregational worship. The lifting up of hands was a common practice in Jewish prayers, even on the street.

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Thus, Paul's call for "submission" is another reason to believe he was writing about "wives" rather than "women" in the church.

Teaching, Authority, and Silence

What does Peter tell us about what Paul means when he writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence"? When we understand Peter's argument, Paul's will become clear. Fortunately, Peter's argument is not difficult.

In 1 Pet 2:13–3:6 Peter calls in turn for everyone to submit to the government, for servants to submit to their masters, for wives to submit to their husbands, and for husbands to give honor to their wives. Later, in 5:5, he tells younger people to submit their elders, asks all church members to submit to each other, then in v. 6 tells everyone to humble themselves before God. What parts of the book are not about submission are about suffering.

We are to submit to the government "to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (2:15). Slaves are to submit to masters because "enduring grief" is "commendable" (2:19), it will lead masters to praise them rather than curse them. Wives, by submitting, may win unbelieving husbands to Christ (3:1–2).⁶ Thus, this submission is part of God's strategy for expanding His kingdom and minimizing resistance to it.⁷

Now we are ready to look at the parallels that help us understand what Paul is saying about teaching and authority.⁸

Paul writes that a woman must "learn in silence" and "be in silence." Does this mean wives must never speak? Many English translations suggest it does. Peter explains Paul's meaning, however, when he writes that wives, "without a word," with "a gentle and quiet spirit," may win their husbands to Christ. In Greek, Paul's "silence" is *hesychias* and Peter's "quiet spirit" is *hesychiou pneumatos*.⁹

Peter uses a pun in v. 1 when he says that husbands who do not "obey the word" may be won "without a word." A wife doesn't have to quote Scripture to her husband on all occasions to win him to Christ. There are better ways.

C. Raymond Holmes concurs with this understanding of "silence" when he writes, "Paul does not mean to enforce absolute silence on these women learners. This is apparent by his choice, under inspiration, of the Greek term *en hesy-*

⁶ Paul makes a similar argument in 1 Cor 7:14 when he says that unbelieving spouses can be "sanctified" by their believing husbands or wives. ("Sanctified" here is not a theological term, but means "made holy" or, more clearly, "brought to holiness.") However, in this case it is not only women but men who by their own holiness can bring their spouses to believe.

⁷ In 2:12 Peter calls all believers to live good lives so the pagans will glorify God when He returns.

⁸ Note in passing that Paul's call for believers to pray for those in power (1 Tim 2:1–2) is parallel to Peter's call for submission to rulers and masters in 1 Pet 2:13–21.

⁹ In 1 Cor 14:34–35, which is clearly dealing with proper decorum in a wildly disordered worship service, Paul commands women to be silent [*sigatosan*] and not talk [*lalein*]. We don't know the exact circumstances, but *lalein* refers to talking in general, not to teaching, preaching, praying, or prophesying. Teaching and authority are not the issue here, but wives disrupting worship by talking to their husbands (see v. 35).

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chia, which means ‘peaceable and nonargumentative,’ implying respectful listening. Another Greek word was available, *sige*, had he wished to indicate total silence. The ‘quiet lives’ of 1 Timothy 2:2 and the ‘quiet spirit’ of 1 Peter 3:4 are certainly more realistic understandings than absolute silence.”¹⁰

This brings us at last to Paul’s not permitting a woman “to teach or to have authority.” Peter explains this when he calls for “chaste conduct accompanied by fear” and reminds wives that “Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.”

If Jesus is our Lord, we accept that we have no authority over Him. As Job discovered, we are not in a position to teach God (see Job 38–41). The parallels reveal that both Paul and Peter are calling women to a quiet service which will draw their husbands to salvation. As Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath.”

Actually, Peter reveals that we “twist” Paul’s words when we concentrate on his not permitting women “to teach or to have authority.” We should also include, in Paul’s admonition, his call for women to reveal their godly characters by their “good works” and “continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” These, along with “propriety and moderation” in adornment, make up a complex of characteristics found in “women professing godliness.”

Thus, by his apparent rephrasing of Paul’s rather awkward statements, so “hard to understand,” Peter reveals the beautiful truth at the heart of Paul’s passage. Christ-like wives can transform their homes and families without preaching at their husbands. They don’t need to tell them what they’re doing wrong or tell them what they have to do “or else!”

We discover Paul is not talking about the worship service or church governance in this passage, but only about how wives can create a Christian home.

We find that 1 Timothy 2:11–15 does not preclude godly women from teaching, preaching, evangelizing with authority, but only calls for them to be submissive to their husbands.

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” does not depend on accepting the misogynistic traditions of ancient Greek culture or the faulty reasoning of the medieval church. It does not depend on forcing the Word to fit our cultural norms. By comparing verse with verse, passage with passage, we find that God’s Word interprets itself.

Post-Publication Note: Interested readers should also see Gordon P. Hugenberger’s “Women In Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis?: A Survey of Approaches to 1 Tim 2:8–15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35/3 (September 1992): 341–360. This is the article cited by Richard Davidson in his own article, mentioned above, which led in turn to my study. Unfortunately, the issue of *JETS* containing Hugenberger’s article was not on the shelf in the seminary library where I researched this piece. Hugenberger’s article is complementary to this one, but includes much valuable information this one lacks.

¹⁰ “Does Paul Really Forbid Women to Speak in Church? A Closer Look at 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 167. However, my friend Dr. Holmes believes the passage is talking about the worship service, not the husband and wife in the home.

Prophets Under God’s Authority: Headcoverings in 1 Corinthians 11:1–16

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1 Corinthians 11:1–16 is a challenging passage, and breaking the code is deeply satisfying. Unlike 1 Tim 2, 1 Cor 11 is clearly describing the assembly of God’s people worshipping together.¹

Paul’s concern in vs. 1–16 is convincing the Corinthian church that women must cover their hair—and so their heads—while praying aloud or prophesying.² Some denominations have understood these verses to mean that all women should cover their heads in public, or at least during worship. Not so! The text clearly restricts this command to women while they are praying or prophesying (vs. 4–5).³ (By implication, as this prophesying is public, out loud, in the worship setting, we should see this as public prayer, as well, and not private, silent prayer.) There is *no* mention of any requirement for *all* women to cover their heads. When these chosen women have finished praying or prophesying, evidently, they may uncover. (Do these women know in advance they will be praying or prophesying and so bring a headcovering with them? Is one provided, passed out to the women as necessary? We don’t know.)

Why is Paul concerned about these women covering their heads? Burton claims it is so men are not attracted to these women while they are praying or prophesying.⁴ I find no warrant for this assumption in the text. It would be odd

¹ See my “Women, Teaching, Authority, Silence: 1 Timothy 2:8–15 Explained by 1 Peter 3:1–6,” *JATS* 10/1-2 (1999), 249–254.

² My friend Keith Burton has provided an excellent rhetorical analysis of this passage in his “1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophesy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?” *JATS* 10/1-2 (1999), 232–248. This analysis reveals the care with which Paul makes his arguments.

³ Ralph P. Martin refers to 1 Cor 14:3 (“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” KJV) as a clue to the modern corollary of this sort of prophecy in his “New Testament Worship: Some Puzzling Practices,” *AUSS*, 31/2 (Summer 1993), 122.

⁴ He’s not the only one to make this claim. In an otherwise exemplary article, so does M. D. Hooker in “Authority on her Head: An Examination of I Cor. XI. 10,” *New Testament Studies*, 10 (1963–1964), 410–416, though it contradicts her own thesis. Many others have also believed this.

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if men were especially drawn by the hair of women who are praying or prophesying. Given what we know of Greek attitudes toward women and their proper societal roles in Paul's day, "the lust of the eyes" would not likely be their reaction to such a public ministry.

What then is the answer to this question? We find in v. 3 that God is the head of (or authority over) Christ, Christ the head of the man, and the man the head of the woman. In the normal course of events, a woman has no authority over her man (1 Tim 2:12), just as her man has no authority over Christ, and Christ receives His authority from His Father (Matt 28:18).

However, when she is praying or prophesying during public worship, a woman speaks with authority, either as she petitions or praises God on behalf of the entire assembly or speaks for God to the entire assembly. In Paul's day, there needs to be a symbolic way of indicating when a woman *is* speaking with authority and where that authority comes from.

Drawing on Gen 1:27 and Ps 8:5, as Burton correctly notes, Paul argues in v. 7 that man is both the image and the glory of God. Thus there can be nothing unseemly in a man praying or prophesying with his head uncovered, because that head brings glory to God. Indeed, if a man covers the head on his shoulders which brings glory to God while praying or prophesying, he instead brings shame to his spiritual Head, Christ (v. 4).⁵

However, drawing from Gen 2:21–24, Paul also argues in v. 7 that while man is the image and glory of God, woman, taken *from* man, is the glory (though not the image) *of* man, not God. While the Greek words *aner* and *gyné* in the passage in 1 Corinthians cannot be accurately translated "husband" and "wife" in this context, the allusion to Gen 2:24 indicates it is the wife who brings glory to her husband. (This is similar to Paul's argument in regard to the importance of a woman's inner beauty in 1 Tim 2:9–10 and Peter's in 1 Pet 3:3–4.) It would be odd if the beauty and submission of someone else's wife brought glory to me, any more than the obedience and good breeding of someone else's children brings glory to me.

If a man is God's glory and a woman is man's glory, what is a woman's glory? In 1 Tim 2:15 Paul says, "She shall be saved in childbearing," but in 1 Cor 11:15 he argues that her glory is her glorious hair, so long as it isn't cut short or shaved, which would be shameful (in that, cutting off her glory, it would fill her with shame and bring less glory to her husband).

⁵ Hooker writes, "Since he is the reflexion of God's glory, any attempt to disguise this fact in worship, where God is expressly glorified, would be shameful—especially when he is speaking to or from God in prayer or prophecy. Similar ideas are found in the Old Testament story of Moses (used by Paul in II Cor. iii), whose face shone with the reflected glory of God after speaking with him on the mountain, and who was then forced to wear a veil—which he removed every time he went in to speak to the Lord—because the Israelites were unable to bear the sight of this reflected glory" (414–415). Hooker's article, now thirty-six years old, is still much-cited and has influenced a generation of scholars. For example, C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 254–255; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 602–608. I discovered it after writing the first draft of this article and was pleased to have my exegesis confirmed.

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If a man's hair is long, it hides his glorious physical head (Paul's argument; not mine) and so fails to bring glory to his spiritual Head (v. 14).⁶ A woman's hair, however, is the glory God has given her, a glory meant to cover her (v. 15), and yet because it covers her a modest glory meant for all to see and enjoy.⁷

When a woman is praying or prophesying in public worship, however, all glory should go to God, not to her or her husband, so her head (and hair) must be covered.⁸ These are only symbols, of course, but potent symbols in Paul's day.

But what else did the covering on the woman's head symbolize? In v. 8 Paul says the woman came from the man (at the creation). In v. 9 he says the woman was made for the man (at the creation). (As all women were not made for all men, but the man and the woman were to be "one flesh" [Gen 2:24], the context of these two singular nouns points to husband and wife, even though "man" and "woman" are the correct translations.)

How then can a woman have the authority to pray for and prophesy to men in a congregation? Paul answers this question in v. 10. It reads, literally, "Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels." According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, the word used here which is translated as "authority," *exousía*, implies "the power of authority, the right to exercise power," "the power of rule or government, the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others," "apostolic authority," "the power of judicial decision." These are appropriate for one bearing a prophetic message. The word translated "authority" in 1 Tim 2:12, however, is *authentain*, which Vine says means "to domineer over" someone. That sort of authority is denied to wives.

When she covers her head before praying or prophesying in the worship service, a woman indicates she is speaking not with her own authority—she has none that is granted in this chapter and as a wife she is already under her husband's authority⁹—but as a prophet with authority from God,¹⁰ as His messen-

⁶ W. Harold Mare writes, "Although it was not proper for a first-century Jewish man to cover his head for prayer (a custom, originally meant to indicate Sorrow, that evidently really developed as a practice in the fourth century A.D.), yet the act seems to have been innovatively tried in the Jewish synagogues in Paul's time" *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:255–56.

⁷ Greek women in Paul's day did not usually wear head coverings in public. See James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women?: A Consideration of 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 1 Cor 14:33b–36," *Westminster Theological Review*, 35/2 (Winter 1973): 194.

⁸ Hooker, "In her case, therefore, her uncovered head will reflect his glory, both because she is his 'glory', and because he is her 'head'" (415).

⁹ See Num 5:19, 20, 29, "under your husband's authority" (*hupandros* in the LXX, lit. "under husband"). However, 1 Cor 7:4 specifies that *both* husband and wife have authority over each other's *body*. To be under one's authority also means to be under one's protection, and the woman speaking for God wears a covering on her head to indicate that she is not to be harmed, because she is under God's protection, as if He were her husband. Consider Ruth 2:12, "'May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'" Similarly, Ruth says to Boaz, "I am your servant Ruth, . . . Spread the corner of your garment over

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ger, *under* His authority,¹¹ with His covering *over* her head.¹² By covering her own glory, in this case, she is not lessening her attractiveness to men, as Burton claims, but indicating that she is not speaking as a woman or wife but as a messenger. (Consider how in Britain, judges and barristers wear white wigs on their heads when they are exercising authority in the name of the state. In days past, when British judges delivered the sentence of death, they placed black coverings on these wigs, again symbolizing that they spoke not with their own authority but with the authority of the state.)

This may also suggest a reading of the next phrase, “because of the angels.” The Greek word *angeloi* also means “messengers.”¹³ The text may mean that a woman praying or prophesying in the assembly needs a sign of God’s authority on her head because messengers need to show evidence of their authority.¹⁴ It

me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” In Ezek 16:8, God says, “Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough to love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine” (all NIV). One might also consider, in the context of headcoverings, Jacob covering the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh with his hands as he prophesies over them and gives them authority as his adopted sons (Gen 48:5, 14, 20).

¹⁰ Hooker, “if now woman also, in contrast to Jewish custom, takes part in prayer and prophecy, this is because a new power has been given to her” (415).

¹¹ Cf. Matt 8:9, in which the centurion tells Jesus he himself is “a man under authority, having soldiers under me.” Hooker, “The head-covering which symbolizes the effacement of man’s glory in the presence of God also serves as a sign of the [*exousia*] which is given to the woman; with the glory of the man hidden she, too, may reflect the glory of God” (415–416). Many have seen this head-covering as a woman’s open recognition that though she speaks, she is under her husband’s authority. E. B. Allo responds, “Cependant il a été observé avec justesse (J. Weiss, Ramsay), que tous les emplois connus du mot [*exousia*] sont actifs, et se réfèrent à une *puissance exercée*, et non à une *puissance subie* par quelqu’un.” [“Meanwhile it has been observed with justice (J. Weiss, Ramsay), that all known uses of the word [*exousia*] are active and refer to an *exercisable power*, and not to a *power imposed* by someone.”] *Saint Paul: Première Épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris, 1934), in his comments on this verse.

¹² Vine calls it “a sign of the Lord’s authority over the church.” W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, [1940] 1966), 89, “Authority.” W. R. Domeris writes, “Within the idea of the veil is to be found the most important theological contribution of the term *māsāk*. The veil denies access, but also points to the awesome mystery that God inhabits and so signifies the gulf between the holiness of God and humankind’s profanity.” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997): 3:252.

¹³ H. Bietenhard writes that classical Greek “uses *angelos* for the messenger, the ambassador in human affairs, who speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him. He is under the protection of the Gods and is inviolate.” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:101. Isa 4:5 says, of the pillar of cloud and fire, “the glory will be a canopy” NASB. Thus, it formed a canopy that symbolized that God’s people were protected by being under His glory.

¹⁴ The Hebrew word *malʿak* can be translated not only as “angel” or “messenger” but as “ambassador.” In Zech 6:11–13 the Lord orders that a crown be placed on the head of Joshua the high priest as a sign that the “Branch” will “bear the honor and sit and rule” (NASB). A head covering is also a symbol of authority in 2 Kgs 11:12. Here, receiving “the testimony” is also a sign

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may also be that Paul's intention was to write "because she is a messenger," but that's speculation.

Is there biblical support for this? Yes, there is. Jesus calls John the Baptist a prophet in Matt 11:9, then in the next verse paraphrases Mal 3:1 using the phrase *ton angelon mou* ("my messenger") as a synonym for "prophet" (see also Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27). We find the same parallelism in 2 Chron 36:16: "But they mocked the *messengers* of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His *prophets*, . . . (LXX translates "messengers" as *angelous*). The parallelism reveals that "messengers" and "prophets" refer to the same people. In Haggai 1:13 the prophet is called God's "messenger" (*angelos*).¹⁵

(By this light the "angels" of the seven churches of Revelation might be seen as people in each church who have the prophetic gift, fit for explaining the messages sent by Christ through the prophet/apostle John.)¹⁶

From this reading of 1 Cor 11:1–7 we learn several useful things. First, the passage does not support those who argue that all men are the head of all women. Second, the passage does not support those who argue that the husband's headship came after the fall. Third, the head covering is a symbol of God's authority, to be worn only by women while they are speaking with authority. Fourth, the passage is not meant to deny women authority, but to carefully provide a way for them to exercise authority within limits when called *by* God or asked to call *on* God.

of authority. Of course, 1 Cor 11 is not suggesting that women who prophesy are being crowned as queens, so while covered they are not crowned.

¹⁵ The LXX differs quite a bit from most English versions in this verse. For example, the NASB translates, from the Hebrew, "Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, "I am with you," declares the LORD." However, the LXX reads, literally, "And spoke Haggai the Lord's messenger among the messengers of the Lord . . ." (. . . *Aggaïos angelos Kurïou en angelois Kurïou* . . .). The next verse says, "So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (NASB). It seems the translators of the LXX based their translation of v. 13 on v. 14, suggesting that they understood *angelos* ("messenger") to be an appropriate term for anyone with a spirit "stirred up" by God, even if not prophesying. The New Testament writers generally quote the LXX. This has important implications for our understanding of those "prophesying" in the New Testament church. Those who "prophesy" there, while speaking for God, may not be "prophets" in the way Isaiah or Ezekiel or Daniel were prophets.

¹⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon* also finds *angelos* used in reference to a human prophet in the apocryphal 1 Esdras 1:48f. They also mention, among others, that Maximus Tyrius, writing in the 2nd Century A.D., calls Plato *angelon*, "as one who brings messages from God." Liddell and Scott, in their *Greek-English Lexicon*, give, as meaning 2 of *angelos*, "one that announces or tells."

If You Know Everything There Is to Know About Timbuktu: Faith and the Integrative Nature of Culture

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At the end of that mind boggling day—where Joseph went from being a mere slave to prime minister of Egypt, a *nobody* nobody knew to a *somebody* everybody knew and honored—we find Joseph wearing a magnificent ring, an elegant necklace of gold, some of Egypt’s finest linen clothes, and driving around in an ornate chariot. “Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph’s hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ And he set him over all the land of Egypt” (Gen 41:42, 43).¹

Do you think Joseph took that stuff off the next day? Gave it back to Pharaoh, saying, “I can’t wear this. I’m a servant of the living God of heaven.” Absolutely not! Each of those items were functional symbols of Joseph’s new status and power in Egypt. But those functional symbols—very tangible things indeed—raise the ever burning question of faith and cultural assimilation. Joseph’s meteoric rise to power completely encapsulated him in Egyptian reality. In one day he soared to the very top of what it meant to live in Egyptian life and culture. As a follower of the Living God of heaven, how far should he go? Was it alright for him to wear jewelry or participate in other tangible Egyptian cultural idioms? How far can God’s people go in following the tangible cultural expressions of their day and remain distinct, pure, a living witness?

How did Joseph wend his way through the reality of encapsulating Egyptian culture without becoming assimilated into it? How was he able to maintain

¹Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

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both his faith and his witness and remain distinct—yet be a part of his real world?

Not surprisingly, some have appealed to Joseph as an example of jewelry usage in particular.² He's an example, they say, that the Bible never prohibits adornment in itself, only the promiscuous use of adornment. They will add that our official Seventh-day Adventist position advocating the non-usage of jewelry is both unbiblical and cultural. That the Bible teaches moderation, not non-usage. In the process, they appeal to the cultural and sociological dynamics of lifestyle.

Do you get it? If Joseph with his impeccable moral and spiritual character could wear jewelry, why can't we? If we put on Joseph's colorful robe and dream of being a people as faithful as he, why can't rings and necklaces be part of that glorious vision? Doesn't Joseph's very example prove that character, not externals, is what is really important? If you got the character, can you put on the hardware? Does participation in tangible cultural idioms of our day really make a difference, if we have faith?

There's no doubt but what we're living in a time when many are struggling with the rationale for our Adventist positions on jewelry and other lifestyle issues. The Adventist Church today faces a real dilemma in the area of lifestyle standards. There seems to be confusion as to what the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy are really saying on lifestyle issues and what we call Christian standards. There's an inconsistency in application of biblical principles and values. And there is both legalism and the fear of legalism.

When our positions are perceived as inconsistent and unreasonable—not applicable to life in the late twentieth century—young people in particular leave the church and turn elsewhere. Eugene Peterson notes that the trend today is for the values and living styles of the youth to be pushed upward to the adult world:

Each generation is, in poet John Berryman's words, "unwell in a new way." The way in which the present generation is unwell—that is, the forms under which it experiences sin—is through episodes of adolescence. There was a time when ideas and living styles were initiated in the adult world and filtered down to youth. Now the movement goes the other way: lifestyles are generated at the youth level and pushed upward. Dress fashions, hair styles, music, and morals that are adopted by youth are evangelically pushed on an adult world, which in turn seems eager to be converted. Youth culture began as kind of a fad and then grew into a movement. Today it is nearly fascist in its influence, forc-

²Dennis H. Braun, "A Seminar on Adventists, Adornment, and Jewelry" (D.Min proj., Andrews University Theological Seminary, June, 1996), 17; Madelyn Jones-Haldeman, "Adorning the Temple of God," *Spectrum* (December, 1989): 50.

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ing its perceptions and styles on everyone whether he likes it or not.³

Communicating biblical values and positions to young people in a meaningful way is particularly challenging. One of the arguments that never goes away is the question of *culture*. It seems that all the significant passages of Scripture on life style issues are being downplayed as being either cultural or not saying all we have thought they have said. That goes for the Spirit of Prophecy as well. The writings of Ellen White are projected as cultural, dated, incomplete, legalistic. People are looking for Christ-centered standards that are based on sound biblical principles (something I affirm). Unfortunately, for many, any appeal to Scripture for concrete injunctions and specific commands on lifestyle issues seems more like legalistic rules.⁴ That leaves the question of application open, cultural, elusive.

Since some have used Joseph as an example of jewelry usage, and because jewelry is viewed so much as a cultural issue, I want to use jewelry as an example of how Joseph likely related to the varied cultural pressures of his day. As I do, I want us to keep in mind a broader spectrum of Seventh-day Adventist Christian lifestyle issues. I'm not just talking about jewelry or ornamentation per se, but raising the question of how tangible does Christian living get in contemporary culture? How Egyptian did Joseph look? We will never know. No doubt his brothers saw no difference between Joseph and the Egyptians. "They did not recognize him," we're told (Gen 42:8). Joseph likely looked pretty Egyptian to them. But while he may have appeared quite Egyptian to his brothers (who really didn't know that much about being Egyptian, anyway), how authentically Egyptian did Joseph really appear to those who knew him or knew the subtle differences expressed in his personal lifestyle and choices? Again, we will never know for certain, but we can catch some significant hints that point in a clear direction. No matter what we can know for sure, it is clear that Joseph does present an example of a consecrated people where external cultural forms make a difference.

Understanding Culture

Before continuing with Joseph, though, we must first understand a bit about culture. According to Charles C. Case, "Everyone is convinced that he knows what culture is. It has become a commonplace metaphor to which anyone can attach his inadequate thoughts or clever opinions."⁵ Culture is only one of several factors involved in shaping human existence. Setting, situation, people,

³Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 128, 129.

⁴Steve Case, ed. *Shall We Dance* (Riverside, CA: La Sierra UP, 1996); Gary Land, "Adventist in Plain Dress," *Spectrum* (December, 1989): 42-48; Jones-Haldeman, 49-55; Charles Scriven, "I Didn't Recognize Your With Your Ring On," *Spectrum* (December, 1989): 56-59; Braun, 6-87.

⁵Charles C. Case, *Culture, the Human Plan* (Washington, D.C.: UP of America, 1977), 9, 10.

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and communication are also important. But culture is like glue. It is the element that ties these factors together.⁶ Culture also “encompasses those aspects of being that are learned, those regularities that are acquired, those things that are gained through association with other humans.”⁷ In this sense, culture is in a fundamental way the most human part of man’s existence. In fact, behind the customs and the tools, the social habits and behavior, of human existence, lies the framework of a plan. It’s a human plan. The plan of culture. “Culture is the construct behind overt behavior. Like a blueprint or work schedule it is prior, basic, and necessary to every action. Like plays and rules of football or the recipe of a cake, it determines the final result.”⁸ Putting it differently, culture is a script one follows to create behavior. Like a theatrical play where actors with a script are given direction and allowed to improvise, and yet the play must follow the plot.⁹ In other words, “culture is placed not at the descriptive end of the behavioral episode but rather at the beginning.”¹⁰ In this way, then, culture shapes behavior more than it reflects behavior. Case puts it this way:

If culture is to be accepted as a dynamic functioning factor in behavior then it must be seen as immediate, participating, and invariably present as a prerequisite to behavior. Culture is not the description abstracted from the observation of human activity; it is not norms, or statistical averages, but the cognitive plans that are present before activity occurs. Culture is not the result of behavior, but determines behavior.¹¹

All this still eludes clear definition. But while we cannot always define the “essence” of culture, it is inextricably bound up with human life in society. Culture at bottom is social.¹² The world of culture is a world of values concerned with what is good for human beings.¹³ In all its forms and varieties culture is a concerned with the temporal and material realization of those values.¹⁴ Culture always expresses itself in tangible ways. Even the immaterial dynamics of culture are realized in temporal and material forms. As H. Richard Niebuhr correctly notes:

Human effort presses on to employ in concrete, tangible, visible, and audible forms what has been imaginatively discerned. The harmony and proportion, the form, order and rhythm, the meaning and ideas that men intuit and trace out as they confront nature, social events, and the world of dreams, these by infinite labor

⁶Ibid., 16.

⁷Ibid., 16, 17.

⁸Ibid., 18.

⁹Ibid., 21, 22.

¹⁰Ibid., 18.

¹¹Ibid., 22.

¹²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 32.

¹³Ibid., 34, 35.

¹⁴Ibid., 36.

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they must paint on wall or canvas, print on paper as systems of philosophy and science, outline in carved stone or cast in bronze, sing in a ballad, ode or symphony. Visions of order and justice, hopes of glory, must at the cost of much suffering be embodied in written laws, dramatic rites, structures of government, empires, ascetic lives.¹⁵

This puts meaning into the Apostle Paul's exhortation, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your mind from within" (Rom 12:2, Phillips). Culture, at bottom, is a paradigmatic story in and of itself. Like most paradigms, culture is comprised of multiple supporting stories. Each of the tangible expressions of contemporary culture (our world), no matter the milieu of time or specific context, have a way of capturing our interest. Holding our attention. Stirring our emotions. Whether the arts, music, architecture, customs and lifestyle, fashions, habits, values, beliefs, or ways of looking at things—each in their own way tell a story, create a world view. They have an uncanny way of slipping past our conscious mind. Circumventing our defenses. Impacting us in subtle ways. Not all this is bad, but culture can sidetrack us to where we forget who we are and what we are supposed to be doing for God in the word—both individually and as an end-time people.

All About Timbuktu

In her book *Wrestling With Angels* Naomi Rosenblatt tells of her struggle to maintain her identity when she first came to the US from Israel in the fifties. She landed in New York with all its affluent consumerism and she struggled to maintain the Spartan values she was raised with. Passing by the seductive display windows of Saks, Tiffany's, and Bergdorf's was a constant lure to embrace the culture around her. As she walked down Fifth Avenue, stealing an occasional glance at the marvelous storefront offerings, she used to hum her old school songs with their Hebrew lyrics about ploughing and protecting the land. With each passing window, she hummed louder and hurried faster down the street. "No matter what our roots are," she writes, "if we develop an authentic personal identity early on, it will anchor us throughout our life."¹⁶ Her mother used to tell her, "Even if you come from Timbuktu, if you know everything there is to know about Timbuktu, you can travel anywhere in the world and never lose your way."¹⁷ Timbuktu, you remember, is the proverbial word for nowhere. If you remember your humble roots, and everything there is to know about them, you can go anywhere in the world and never lose your way.

¹⁵Ibid., 36, 37.

¹⁶Naomi H. Rosenblatt, *Wrestling With Angels: What the First Family of Genesis Teaches Us About Our Spiritual Identity, Sexuality, and Personal Relationships* (New York: Delacorte, 1995), 351.

¹⁷Ibid.

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One reason why Joseph bore the test of prosperity in Egypt is because he knew everything there was to know about Timbuktu—his humble roots. As long as he remembered certain things about his past—who he was—the lure of prosperity would never have power over him. The same would be true with the integrative nature of Egyptian culture and the pressure of cultural assimilation. As long as Joseph remembered everything there was to know about Timbuktu he could not lose his way in a pagan culture.

But what was Joseph's Timbuktu? What did he know about Timbuktu that kept him from losing his way amidst Egyptian culture? When Joseph harked back into his past, what were the values that carried him amidst Egyptian moral and spiritual values? Part of Timbuktu for Joseph was a solemn moment of family spiritual revival and consecration. We read about it in Genesis 35:

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him. "Put away the foreign God's which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I have gone." So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem. (Gen 35:1-4)

One gets the sense that this was no ordinary moment in the life of Jacob and his family. Jacob's only daughter Dinah had gone off to visit the daughters of the land (check out a little of contemporary culture of her day) and was raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite (Gen 34:1, 2). That all ended with Simeon and Levi vengefully slaughtering and looting an entire city (Gen 34:25-29). Jacob's family was on a fast track toward moral and spiritual ruin. But God intervened! He called Jacob's family to an experience of worship. "Arise, go to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau" (Gen 35:1).

In his heart Jacob knew that he and his family could not come before God in worship while their lives were so filled with pagan influences, moral compromises, and spiritual indifference. In *Patriarchs and Prophets* Ellen White illumines the biblical record:

With deep emotion Jacob repeated the story of his first visit to Bethel, when he left his father's tent a lonely wanderer, fleeing for his life, and how the Lord had appeared to him in the night vision. As he reviewed the wonderful dealings of God with him, his own heart was softened, *his children also were touched by a subduing power*; he had taken the most effectual way to prepare them to join in the worship of God when they should arrive in Bethel. "And he gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their

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hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.”¹⁸

A moment of family spiritual renewal. Heartfelt moments of consecration and worship. Joseph was there. Just a lad. Young. Impressionable. Touched by that same subduing power. What did he learn that day as he witnessed first hand his father’s moving testimony and then his big brothers and aunts and mother and step-mothers—each removing certain garments and idols and pieces of jewelry from their lives in an act of consecration and worship? Two things!

First, Joseph’s young mind was impressed with the reality that the artistic expressions of culture that people are so inclined to wear and adorn themselves with are *value laden*. They express moral or spiritual value which the wearer wittingly or unwittingly identifies with. Their sense of self, value system, and view of God is somehow locked up in these concrete expressions.

Second, Joseph learned that *genuine consecration to God finds tangible expression in shedding those cultural idioms that might convey ungodly values. Consecration to God includes external forms*. While you can have the external forms in your life without consecration, you cannot have consecration without it affecting the external forms that in one way or another compete with that very consecration. Doing and being are inseparably linked. This was the Timbuktu that kept Joseph from losing his way in the Egyptian world of incredible artistic cultural expression. Egypt was a civilization filled with tangible cultural expressions that were laden with pagan values and ideals.

The 1998 Andrews University Alumni weekend featured the unveiling of Alan Collins’ bronze sculpture depicting the dauntless Andrews family, Adventism’s first missionaries, standing dockside in Boston in 1874 as they prepare to depart for Switzerland. “Legacy of Leadership,” it’s called. There J. N. Andrews and his two children, Charles and Mary, peer out at their incoming ship. The sculpture captures both the eagerness and apprehension this missionary family must have felt at this important moment in their lives. Many have sensed how it whispers mission, commitment, and sacrifice for a people whom God intends to touch the world for Him. “My heart is wholly bound up in this work, I have no desire but to live in the service of God,” Andrews said. I cannot describe it, but from the moment I first saw photos of the proposed bronze sculpture, I was moved. Moved with a desire for the same kind of commitment to God. One sunny afternoon I stood before this artistic expression of leadership and mission. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought of that dauntless family and all they experienced together for the Lord. There I thanked the Lord for this powerful legacy and recommitted my own life to being a faithful servant to come and go at the Lord’s bidding.

¹⁸Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 205-206. Italics supplied.

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Such tangible artistic expressions reflect the world view of its author or culture and powerfully convey the moral and spiritual values and ideals of that world view. Anyone who has visited Egypt or museums featuring Egyptology cannot help but be impressed with the sheer power of Egyptian artistic expression. Magnificent architecture. Grand sculptures. Impressive pyramids. Graphic reliefs and murals. Stunning color. A culture steeped in artistic expression. You could not live in Egypt without being touched or influenced by the incredible power of its integrated cultural message.

Now it's one thing for the power of a given culture and its tangible expressions to be everywhere around us and all pervasive in its influence. But it's another thing for us to bring to our body or bring to our life or bring to our lifestyle those very objects, behaviors, experiences, or icons. The moment we do, we identify with them. Their moral spiritual values somehow attach to our inner private world. Culture is no longer objective. Out there. Now it is internal. We are being shaped by it within. We experience and come to own culture by participating in its forms. Not all that culture brings to our inner psyche is bad, certainly, nevertheless, it is spiritually and morally formative in its impact.

Again, *Patriarchs and Prophets* makes some interesting observations with regard to Joseph, this time while in Egypt as a mere servant:

He [Joseph] was here exposed to temptations of no ordinary character. He was in the midst of idolatry. The worship of false gods was surrounded by all the pomp of royalty, *supported by the wealth and culture* of the most highly civilized nation then in existence. Yet Joseph *preserved his simplicity* and his fidelity to God. . . . The desire to gain favor of the Egyptians *could not cause him to conceal* his principles. Had he attempted to do this, he would have been overcome by temptation; but he was not ashamed of the religion of his fathers, and *he made no effort to hide* the fact that he was a worshiper of Jehovah.¹⁹

In an environment where culture supported false worship, Joseph preserved his *simplicity*. He made no effort to hide the fact that he was a worshiper of Jehovah. Obviously, this means Joseph's character, life, and lifestyle did not follow the cultural norms of Egyptian society. One could tell where Joseph stood by his lifestyle.

There's more. In Psalm 105 we're told that when Pharaoh promoted Joseph, Joseph was placed in command over all Pharaoh's princes and officials. According to the psalm, "*he taught the leaders how to use wisdom*" (Psalm 105:22 CEV). The Living Bible reads, "*At his pleasure he could imprison the king's aides and teach the king's advisors*" (LB). The Jerusalem Bible's way of putting it expresses the point well: Joseph was "*to train his officials as he thought fit and convert his elders into sages.*"

¹⁹Ibid., 214. Italics supplied.

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Joseph taught Pharaoh's leaders wisdom. According to Genesis 41, Joseph became Egypt's prime shaker and mover. A trend-setter. Together with his wife Asenath (the daughter of Potiphara, the prestigious priest of On) he was a compelling spiritual moral icon in a culture where religious moral values were encapsulated in all the arts and sciences and every day life, including its leaders. Joseph was looked up to as possessing something different. Did he just go along for the ride or did Joseph preserve and promote a radically different life-style?

Patriarchs and Prophets picks up this very biblical theme suggested in Psalm 105:22:

Through Joseph the attention of the king and great men of Egypt was directed to the true God; and though they adhered to their idolatry, they learned to respect the principles revealed in the life and character of the worshiper of Jehovah.²⁰

Character has to do with heart, demeanor, attitude, personal ethos, and temperament. Life has to do with concrete external expressions of what is in the heart. Life is what tangibly flows out from one's inner private world of moral and spiritual *being*. Not only were godly principles being expressed via Joseph's character, but they were tangibly expressed in what Joseph said, what Joseph ate, how he dressed, and what he did. *Being* and *doing* together wonderfully expressed truth about God and what it means to be His servant in a comprehensive integrating pagan culture that molded minds and hearts in an entirely different direction.

Let me suggest something here about one aspect at least of what it meant for Joseph to teach Egypt's leaders wisdom. There is a tendency in the Old Testament to devalue the significance of jewelry as a symbol of ultimate value.²¹ Wisdom literature like Proverbs, Job, and the Psalms create a contrast between wise instruction on the one hand, and silver and gold and precious jewels on the other:

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire compares with her (Prov 3:13-15)

Take my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her (Prov 8:10, 11)

There is gold, and abundance of jewels; but lips of knowledge are a more precious thing (Prov 20:15)

²⁰Ibid., 222.

²¹Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Jewelry in the Old Testament: A Description of Its Functions" (unpublished manuscript for the Biblical Research Institute, 1998), 20.

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This is no speculative connection! Egyptian civilization was a culture steeped in artistic expression. Jewelry and personal adornment was at the heart of its very religious moral life. In his book *Jewels of the Pharaohs*, Cyril Aldred writes how personal adornments were worn by men and women alike and that even the gods had their jewelry, too. The occupation of jeweler was one of the most flourishing businesses in ancient Egypt throughout its long history.²² Egyptian ornamentation was used for the expression of its cultural, social, religious, and magical practices and convictions. My own visit to Egypt startled me with this realization. You cannot miss it! Bracelets and pendants. Ear-rings and necklaces. Ring and ear-plugs. Amulets and headbands and anklets. The list goes on and on. Each a work of incredible artistic expression with brilliant color and aesthetic appeal. Each an iconic depiction of some Egyptian god, or vulture, scarab beetle, falcon, or jackal. The use of gold in adornment was particularly abundant. As gold never lost its luster, but seemed to retain within itself all the fire and glory of the sun, it was felt that the flesh of the very gods was made of this eternally shining material.²³

I can just see Joseph—knowing all there was to know about his Timbuktu experience—teaching Pharaoh’s leaders true wisdom. In one way or another, day after day, devaluing what was at the very heart of their religious moral experience and expression. You see, adornment was a concrete expression of the individual Egyptians’ interests. Their values, their concerns and fears. Concrete expressions of their standing in society and before the gods. Have you ever had people tell you they feel naked without certain forms of adornment, cosmetics, or garments on—whether male or female? That’s how the Egyptian people would have felt. Completely vulnerable and naked without their ornaments. But Joseph’s life and character and convictions and wise instruction would steadily devalue these very things in their eyes. As they watched his life they would always be confronted by something vastly better. Somehow more real. Right.

What happens when things are devalued? They become less important. Set aside. Something else becomes more important. In the process they lose their charm and drop off.

When Debbie came to church for the first time she was wearing a white mink coat and decked to the hilt with jewelry, colorful cosmetics, and all that goes with it—shoes, purse, dress, hair style. Debbie was a jet-set-yuppie real-estate agent whose wild parties featured coke served in tiny silver cups and snorted through \$100 bills. She drove fancy cars and lived in a big house. She had it all. Studying the Bible with Debbie and her husband Rick was a real experience, to say the least. But here she was, her first Sabbath in a Seventh-day Adventist Church and in my pastor’s class. My congregation at that time was a

²²Cyril Aldred, *Jewels of the Pharaohs: Egyptian Jewellery of the Dynastic Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971): 14. See also Adriana Calinescu, ed., *Ancient Jewelry and Archeology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1996).

²³Aldred, 15.

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friendly bunch who knew how to make people feel at home, and so in time Debbie merged right into our church life, where she laughed and fellowshiped and worshiped. No one to my knowledge ever spoke to her about her adornment and extravagant lifestyle. I know I didn't.

I'll never forget the day she asked me for baptism. "She needs some more time," I thought to myself as she stood there with as much adornment on her as ever. But I said, "Sure! When would you like to plan it?" "This Sabbath," she replied. "O.K." I said with a bit of hesitation. "When can we meet to review a couple of things?"

The only time that week Debbie had free was an hour before Sabbath School started, the day of her baptism. I knew she was up on all the things we had studied, so I wasn't too worried. Except, that is, for my chosen style of relating to certain lifestyle issues—let the Spirit lead in His way and in His time. Through the years I have learned that we need to give people space to grow at their own pace. Lifestyle issues need incubation time in each person's heart. You can't expect everyone to always read of the same page. Especially new folk. They make a decision on an issue, then fall back to where they previously were. They go up and down. It happens with long-time members as well. The only place the line needs to be clearly drawn is for leadership. Leaders in the body of Christ must set the pace toward that biblical ideal of a truly Christ-centered standard where Spirit filled hearts and a passionate love for Jesus compels obedience in unequivocal tangible ways. No leader in the body of Christ has the right to interpret or project lifestyle issues from their own perspective. Theirs is the responsibility to engender the lifestyle our world community has envisioned together.

I'll always remember that Sabbath morning meeting with Debbie on her baptism day. When Debbie arrived she was dressed smartly, but gone were the colorful cosmetics and fancy jewels that I had been accustomed to seeing her with. I was startled, to say the least. She still looked lovely, but considerably different. I wanted to say something about it right off, but bit my tongue. When the appropriate moment came in our sharing together, I asked her about her thoughts on adornment. Here was a woman who had been abused, gone through divorce, used drugs, saw her brother carted off to jail for selling drugs. You name it. She was there. And she says, "Pastor Larry, I don't need those things anymore. What I want and what I need most is in that water."

What happens when the love and claims of the living God become all absorbing? Tangible cultural expressions that compete with that vision are devalued, become less important, drop off. Whether personal adornment, questionable styles of music, media experiences, the kind of things we read or watch, recreational pursuits, whatever. There are many tangible things representing the negative dynamics of our contemporary culture that will lose their hold on us when a relationship with God becomes our consuming passion. It

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happens when we love Him supremely, spend time in His Word, and fill our hearts with the guidance He has given us in the Spirit of Prophecy.

But Joseph wore jewelry! It's an undeniable fact that shouldn't really bother us much. The ornaments he wore were functional symbols of his status and power in Egypt. He was Pharaoh's deputy with Pharaoh's signet ring, symbolic gold necklace, and the power to legislate.

Scripture affirms the difference between the ornaments Joseph wears as prime minister and those he could have worn for personal ornamentation. Did you know that the only persons the Lord ever prescribed jewelry for was the high priest, and perhaps the crown on Israel's king (Exodus 28:1-43). Even then the jewels were on the high priest's clothing rather than on himself. When he removed his garments he removed the jewelry. A fine distinction, but an important one in distinguishing the difference between ornamentation used for communicating moral and spiritual truth and that worn for personal adornment.

In Scripture jewelry is used for personal adornment,²⁴ as a form of currency,²⁵ for offerings,²⁶ as evidence of wealth,²⁷ to designate social status,²⁸ as symbols of power and authority,²⁹ as imagery for God's gracious redemption and our value in His sight,³⁰ for religious purposes,³¹ and possibly to ward off evil powers and dangers, i.e., magic.³² Scripture does not reject the use of jewelry altogether. But it does devalue and call into question its use for personal adornment and for religious and magical purposes.³³ Scripture draws a direct connection between luxury in adornment and dress and idolatry.³⁴

When we understand the difference that exists between the contemporary culture of biblical times (the lifestyle, customs, and values expressed by the nations and peoples of the then known world), the culture of biblical characters

²⁴Isa 3:16-23; Ezek 16:11-15; 23:40; Jer 2:32; 4:30; Hosea 2:2, 13; 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3; 2 Kgs 9:30; Song of Solomon 1:10, 11; Rev 17:4, 5.

²⁵Gen 24:22.

²⁶Ex 35:22; 30:11-16; Num 31:50, 51.

²⁷Gen 24:35, 10, 22, 53; 15:14; Exod 11:2; 12:36; 3:22; 32:2-5; 35:20-22; Rev 18:12; Job 42:11.

²⁸James 2:2-4; 2 Sam 1:10; 2 Kgs 11:12; Psalm 89:39; 132:18; 45:13, 14; Ezek 28:11-19; 16:10-13; Isa 3:16-26; Rev 17:4.

²⁹Gen 41:42; Dan 5:29; Esther 3:10, 12; 8:2, 8, 10, 15; Zech 6:11-13; 2 Kgs 11:12.

³⁰Isa 61:10; Mal 3:16-18.

³¹Ezek 16:17; Exod 28:1-43; Hosea 2:13; Gen 35:2-4.

³²This use of jewelry and adornment may be somewhat inseparable from its use for religious purposes, but it does appear that some forms of personal adornment worn by biblical characters had magical connotations. See reference to "amulets" in Isa 3:20 and the "skillful enchanter" in Isa 3:3. "The presence of religious and magic jewelry in the catalog of Isa 3 indicates that the pride of the 'daughters of Zion' was not just based on their financial security and their beauty or on their social position but specially on the psychological security that religious and magical pieces of jewelry provided for them" (Rodriquez, 17, 18).

³³Gen 35:2-4; Hosea 2:13; Exod 32 and 33. See Rodriquez, "Jewelry in the Old Testament."

³⁴Rev 17:4; Isa 3; Gen 35:2-4; Exod 32 and 33.

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(the lifestyle, customs, and values expressed in the lives of individuals knowing or representing God), and heavenly culture (the values and lifestyle Scripture projects as the ideal and true and which has been expressed most fully in the life of Jesus Christ), we can put much of what Scripture says on the subject in context. We can read between the lines better and understand that not everything God's people did represents what God would have had them do. We need to grasp the principles and the values God's Word illuminates and carefully observe the concrete ways God calls for application. While always minimums, such concrete tangible expressions of obedience point the direction we are to go in developing a distinct ethos from that of our contemporary culture.

Since the story of Joseph occurs in the Book of Genesis, and in the Genesis narratives, Joseph is presented as one who is faithful in ways Adam was not, I cannot help but wonder if Joseph understood the truth that God didn't create man wearing adornment. Man and woman's adornment was that he and she were together made in the image of God. Wow!

Where's Grace?

Whenever one touches on lifestyle issues and the reality of concrete application of biblical principles and commands they raise the question of legalism and grace. In preparing this topic I could not help but ask the question, "Where's grace?" When you stop to view the incredible moral and spiritual quality of Joseph's life and faithfulness, it becomes clear that the question of adornment has nothing to do with the basis of salvation. If anything, it has to do with spiritual boundaries, or perhaps witness. If Joseph had compromised in one small area (as Daniel later would be tempted to—Dan 1:8), if he had not clearly shown where he really stood on certain issues, he would have been overcome immediately. In the end it came down to faith. Only faith in God and the world view He casts enables one to resist the integrative nature of culture. Paul tells us that resisting the molding influence of the world calls for a transformed mind where we come to understand what is morally good, what is acceptable to God, and what is pleasing to Him as well (Rom 12:2).

Where's grace in this part of his story? Grace is found in the principles of life Joseph came to understand. Grace is found in the way that concrete injunctions (rules) illustrate how principles apply. Grace is found in the clarity of values expressed in tangible ways. Grace is found in divine empowerment through faithfulness even in little things. No! This is not a question of salvation, but of witness, of influence, of perseverance. It has to do with standing out for God in a confused, dying world.

In the end, Joseph is not an example of how someone looked. He is an example of the concreteness of his values and how the concreteness of his values affected and sustained his moral life and witness in a culture that would have encapsulated him into itself. *From Joseph's experience we learn that external forms can express genuine consecration to God. External forms can help main-*

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tain unique identity in a world that would squeeze us into its mold. Externals can create boundaries that protect us from experiences that would blur our understanding of what is good and steal away our innocence of evil (Rom 16:19). Externals can bring a living witness to the true God and a vision of better, more abundant way. Egypt experienced and saw something different in and through Joseph. Should it not be so with God's people again?

We must be careful, though. Externals are always minimums. Tangible expressions of culture or of counter-culture are just that—expressions. The *doing* because of *being*. Faith demonstrated by works (James 2:17, 18). Genuine Christ-centered principled living will always call for ever-deepening and even more tangible expressions—reaching toward applications we never dreamed of until a consistency flavors our whole character and life. As Oswald Chambers writes in his celebrated *My Utmost for His Highest*, “God always educates us down to the scruple.”³⁵ Ellen White would agree, “We must come nearer to God, place ourselves in closer connection with heaven, and carry out the principles of the law in the minutest actions of our everyday lives in order to be spiritually whole.”³⁶ We must never forget, though, that externals must always be linked with a genuine experience of the heart in order for them to be what they were for Joseph. In all our *doing* there must be authentic *being*.

Samuel Bacchiocchi states clearly one final caveat on this topic. In his book *Christian Dress and Adornment* he writes, “To believe that our outward appearance is an index to *our* character does not give us the right to judge others by *their* outwards appearance.”³⁷ The paradox of Christian lifestyle, he notes, is that “We *dare not judge others* by their appearance, yet *we dare not become a stumbling block to others* by our appearance. Though others cannot read our heart, they can read our clothes, hairstyle, makeup. Our outward appearance makes a powerful statement for Christ.”³⁸

That is true for any lifestyle issue we approach as an Adventist people. We can never move beyond this paradox.

The Inevitable

The external expressions of culture which human beings naturally bring to themselves and into their lives are all *value laden* in one way or another. Some of the moral or spiritual values conveyed are good. They are true to what it means to be human. True to the larger biblical perspective of human beings in relation to God. Others are neutral. And of course, some things that culture communicates, including the idioms or the vehicles for that expression, are unquestionably evil. *You cannot have consecration to God without it affecting*

³⁵Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, May 13.

³⁶Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:75.

³⁷Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Christian Dress & Adornment* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1995), 176.

³⁸Bacchiocchi, 177.

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your relationship to the external forms that culture takes. They either nurture or compete with the very consecration we seek. We will always be pressed with decision. It is inevitable. In our journey with God some things are brought to us, put on us, received within. Other things drop away or must be shunned. Doing and being will always be inseparably linked in Christian moral and spiritual reality. That's something Joseph learned well. It's a personal journey. But "If you know everything there is to know about Timbuktu, you can travel anywhere in the world and never lose your way."

And that's our task. Like Joseph, knowing everything there is to know about Timbuktu. Coming to know everything there is to know about life from God's perspective and letting it make the difference.³⁹

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³⁹This of course assumes moral and spiritual formation via God's Word and illuminating Spirit. Wending our way through the culture maze demands a full view of the biblical witness on both the theoretical and concrete dimensions of cultural values, priorities, perspectives, and world view. See my "Living Under the Word," *Perspective Digest* (1999) for a survey of the comprehensive way Scripture communicates moral vision, i.e., on the levels of principles, rules, stories, world view, God's paradigmatic acts, values, and moral direction.

Sabbath and the New Covenant

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Is literal rest on the seventh day Sabbath a part of the “new covenant” experience to be enjoyed by Christians today? An answer to this question is reached through biblical exegesis which investigates the Sabbath’s scope of applicability.

The following interrelated sub-questions delineate the main sections of the paper:

1. Is the seventh day Sabbath a *universal* institution, or was it only for the literal Israelites?
2. Does the seventh day Sabbath have an *on-going* literal application, or was it a temporary type which lost its literal significance when it met its antitype?
3. Does the seventh day Sabbath have *theological significance* for the present phase of the divine covenant, i.e. the “new covenant,” or did it only have theological significance as part of the obsolete “old covenant”?

Following consideration of these questions in order, I will conclude by formulating an answer to the overall question. Note that English quotations of biblical passages are from the NRSV translation unless otherwise indicated. I do not endorse the NRSV more than any other translation, but it is convenient for me to copy because I have it in my computer.

Universal Sabbath or Only for Israelites?

This section explores the first sub-question: Is the seventh day Sabbath a *universal* institution, or was it only for the literal Israelites?

My short answer to this question is: The seventh day Sabbath is universal because it was instituted at Creation for the benefit of all human beings, before the nation of Israel existed. This answer is based upon exegesis of Genesis 2:2-3, which reads:

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2:2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

2:3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

God rested, i.e. ceased¹ His work at the end of the Creation week because His work was done, not because He was tired (cp. Isa 40:28; Ps. 121:3-4).² On the seventh day He stopped to celebrate what could be regarded as the “birthday” of the world.

There is evidence that God intended not only to celebrate, but also to provide an example for human beings. Exodus 31:17 refers to God being “refreshed” as a result of His rest on the seventh day of Creation. The verb translated “refreshed” here, i.e. *npš*, is used only three times in the Hebrew Bible (all Niphal stem): Exod 31:17; 2 Sam 16:14; and Exod 23:12. In 2 Samuel 16:14, the verb *npš* describes David and his people recovering from fatigue induced by their flight from Absalom (2 Sam 16:14). Exodus 23:12 reiterates the Sabbath command given in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8-11):

23:12 Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

In this context, rest (verb *nwh*) on the seventh day Sabbath clearly relieves the fatigue of human beings and animals (cp. Deut 5:14) and refreshes (verb *npš*) them. Now the question arises: If the verb *npš* describes relief from fatigue in Exodus 23:12 and 2 Samuel 16:14, why does Exodus 31:17 use the same word with reference to God being “refreshed”? The answer lies in the purpose of Exodus 31:12-17, which is to have God’s people follow His example by resting on the seventh day of the week (Cassuto: 1967: 245,404; Sailhamer 1992: 309).

¹The Hebrew word translated “rested” here is the verb from the root *šbt*, which means “cease,” “desist,” or “rest” in the sense of desisting from labor (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 991-992; cp. Skinner 1930: 36-37). Although the precise etymological relationship between this verb and the noun *šabbōt*, “Sabbath” is elusive, the two words are used in biblical Hebrew as if they are from the same root (Hasel 1982:24). Exod 20:11 uses another Hebrew verb, *nwh*, to refer to God’s rest on the seventh day of Creation. While this word is sometimes used with reference to rest from weariness or pain (see e.g. Isa 14:3; 28:12; see further below), this meaning is not necessarily present. The basic meaning of the word seems to be the idea of settling down (see e.g. Gen 8:4; Num 11:25-26; 2 Sam 21:10). Thus, Exodus 20:11 refers to God’s repose at the end of Creation, but does not express the idea that he was weary (cp. Robinson 1980: 33-37; Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 628).

²The idea that God does not sleep (Ps 121:3-4), which affirms the constancy of His care, appears to be contradicted in the Bible by the idea that He can be called upon to arise from sleep (Ps 7:6, 35:23, 44:23, 59:4). However, Bernard Batto has pointed out that the sleeping deity is an image which expresses the omnipotence of God, who can sleep because he has supreme authority. Batto finds this to be the essential significance of Jesus sleeping in a boat on the Sea of Galilee during a storm (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:23-27; Batto 1987: 21-23).

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Even though God did not need rest from fatigue, the Bible here speaks of Him anthropomorphically³ as receiving some kind of refreshing benefit (Sarna 1991: 202) in order to show people how to rest on the seventh day, as a result of which *they would* gain relief from fatigue (Exod 23:12).

Lest it should seem strange that God would do something as an example for human beings, consider two similar cases:

1. In the Israelite ritual system, the blood of a sacrificial animal was drained out and applied to the outside or horns of the altar in the courtyard (see e.g. Lev 1:5; 4:25) or to the area of the outer sanctum and the horns of the incense altar (Lev 4:6, 7) with the remainder disposed of by pouring it out at the base of the outer altar (Lev 4:7). The blood did not go up to God in smoke along with the meat as a “pleasing aroma” (see e.g. Lev 1:9). Why not? Because the meat constituted a “food gift” to God (cp. Num 28:2)⁴ and God had commanded the Israelites not to eat meat without draining out the blood because the blood represents the life (Lev 17:10-12; cp. Gen 9:4). By not eating blood with their meat, the Israelites acknowledged that they did not have ultimate control over life. But God did have such control. So why didn’t He show it by accepting blood with His meat? Apparently because He wanted to be an example to His people, thereby practicing what He preached.

2. Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, but John recognized that Jesus did not need baptism (Matt 3:13-14). Baptism symbolizes purification from sin (Rom 6:1-5), but Jesus was sinless (Heb 4:15). Nevertheless, Jesus insisted that John baptize Him, saying to him:

“Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15).

So Jesus went through the motions of baptism because it is part of a righteous human life, even though the righteousness which He already possessed transcended the fallen state and did not require baptism.

Thus far, we have found that God’s rest served as an example for human Sabbath observance. But did this example begin to operate thousands of years after Creation, or did God intend for human beings to follow His example from the beginning? Jesus succinctly answered the question by declaring that “the sabbath was made for humankind . . .” (Mk 2:27). He viewed the original purpose of the Sabbath as providing benefit to human beings. This means that

³I.e., ascribing human characteristics to the deity.

⁴The word translated “offering by fire” in Lev 1:9 and elsewhere is better rendered: “food gift.” On this interpretation of the Hebrew word *’iššeh*, see Milgrom, 161-162. The rendering “offering by fire” is not appropriate for several reasons, including the fact that some offerings given this designation are not burned (Lev 24:6, 9—“bread of the presence”). Furthermore, the “purification offering” (so-called “sin-offering”) which is burned is never given this designation. Compare also Deut 18:1; Josh 13:14; and 1 Sam 2:28, where priests eat the Lord’s “food gifts.” They could not eat an “offering by fire” because it would be burned up on the altar.

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when God rested on the seventh day of Creation, He did not simply intend to benefit Himself.

It is true there is nothing in the text of Genesis 2 that explicitly tells us the Sabbath was made for human beings, as Jesus later declared. Nor does Genesis state that the Sabbath is to be an on-going, cyclical event, occurring on each seventh day. However, Genesis did not need to explicitly state these things because the context makes them clear. Consider the following contextual factors:

1. According to Genesis 2:3, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Gen 2:3). Thus, God must have endowed this day with a special relationship to Himself, who alone is intrinsically holy (1 Sam. 2:2). But how can a day be holy? A day is a unit of time, which is not a material substance, so it cannot be made holy by application of a holy substance, such as anointing oil (Lev 8:10-12). It must be consecrated *in relation to* beings who are affected by it. The only way for intelligent beings to make/treat time as holy is by altering their behavior. Thus, God altered His behavior on the seventh day of Creation, the archetype of the weekly Sabbath (cp. Hasel 1982: 23), and proclaimed the day holy. Skinner points out, regarding the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3: “. . . it is not an institution which exists or ceases with its observance by man; the divine rest is a fact as much as the divine working, and so the sanctity of the day is a fact whether man secures the benefit or not” (1930: 35).

But what sense would it make to say that God *blessed* the day if He intended this unit of holy time to benefit only Himself? Elsewhere in the Creation story, God’s blessings were outgoing, for the benefit of His creatures (Gen 1:22, 28). So could we imagine that on the seventh day God rested and admired His handiwork while man toiled in the garden (cp. Gen 2:15)? The blessing must be for created beings living in the world where the seventh day operated (see Skinner 1930: 35). In order to receive the blessing, these beings would consecrate the day as God did, by altering their behavior (see Doukhan 1991: 156). The blessing results from activity which acknowledges the consecration. As Skinner put it: “. . . the Sabbath is a constant source of well-being to the man who recognises its true nature and purpose” (1930: 38).

2. God made human beings in His image (Gen 1:26-27) and commissioned them to continue the work of creation by being fruitful and multiplying (vs. 28). He also gave them the work of having dominion/responsibility over the earth (verses. 26-28; 2:15). If human beings are made in God’s image and are to *emulate God* by working on their level as God worked on His (cp. Lev 19:2), it would stand to reason that they should also emulate God by resting from their work as God rested from His (cp. Sailhamer 1992: 96-97).

3. On each of the first six days of creation, God did something which had *on-going* results for our world. Thus, we expect that what He did on the seventh day would also have earthly on-going results.

4. God set up cyclical time even before man was created (Gen 1:3-5, 14-18). According to Genesis 1:14, God made heavenly luminaries, chiefly the sun and

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moon (vs. 16), to mark earthly time as “signs,” “seasons,” i.e. appointed times, days and years. So when Genesis 2:3 says that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, this blessing and consecration could be on-going in a *cyclical* sense, applying to each subsequent seventh day. In fact, the seventh day Sabbath provides a plausible explanation for the origin of the week, which is not defined by the movement of heavenly bodies (cp. Cassuto 1967: 244).⁵

The Creation story does not contain a command for human beings to observe the Sabbath. But neither does it contain commands to abstain from idolatry, adultery, murder, or any of the other Ten Commandments (cp. Exod 20). In Genesis 1-2 God was concerned with setting up the ideal order of relationships rather than commanding protection of existing relationships. For human beings, He instituted the Sabbath, marriage, and work (Robertson 1980: 68-81). These three institutions embody principles which were later expressed in the Ten Commandments (cp. Exod 20:3-17).

According to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve showed disrespect for God’s lordship by eating the fruit of a forbidden tree (Gen 3:6), their marriage and work suffered as a result of the Curse of sin (Gen 3:16-19). But there is an important omission in Genesis 3: the Sabbath is not affected by any curse resulting from the Fall. Unlike the other two Creation institutions, the Sabbath remains a little piece of Paradise. As such, its value is enhanced by the deterioration around it. Now that work is exhausting, ceasing from labor on the Sabbath provides needed rest. More importantly, now that human beings are cut off from direct access to God, they need a reminder of His lordship even more than they did before the Fall.

While the Fall made marriage and labor difficult and reduced their joy, it did not take away human responsibility with regard to any of the Creation institutions or the principles which they embody. When Cain murdered Abel, showing disrespect for the life which had been given by God through the marriage of Adam and Eve, God held him accountable (Gen 4:9-15). Genesis does not say that the sixth commandment was formulated as such before Cain killed Abel, but Cain was a murderer anyway because he violated the order God had set up. Just as we cannot say that the obligation to abstain from murder could not exist before the sixth of the Ten Commandments was given to Israel, so we cannot say that the Sabbath could not exist as a human responsibility before the fourth commandment was given.

⁵Nahum Sarna points out the significance of the Sabbath’s uniqueness as a unit of time and delineator of the weekly cycle: “There is nothing analogous to it in the entire ancient Near Eastern world. This is surprising since seven-day units of time are well known throughout the region. Yet the Sabbath is the sole exception to the otherwise universal practice of basing all the major units of time—months and seasons, as well as years—on the phases of the moon and solar cycle. The Sabbath, in other words, is completely dissociated from the movement of celestial bodies. This singularity, together with Creation as the basis for the institution, expresses the quintessential idea of Israel’s monotheism: God is entirely outside of and sovereign over nature” (1991: 111).

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It is true that the Pentateuchal narratives do not mention the seventh day as a day of ceasing from work between the time God rested on the seventh day of Creation (Gen 2:2-3) and the time He commanded the Israelites to observe Sabbath in the wilderness on the way to Mt. Sinai (Exod 16:23-30). But neither do the early Pentateuchal narratives record the specific obligation to refrain from taking God's name in vain. This is stated in the third of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:7) and illustrated in a later narrative (Lev 24:11-16, 23). The early silence does not constitute evidence that God did not expect people to do these things which were implied by the Creation order.

To summarize thus far, I have found the context of Genesis 2:2-3 to indicate that when God ceased/sabbathed on the seventh day of the Creation week, He did not abruptly stop setting up on-going life for human beings on planet Earth and start doing something *ad hoc* exclusively for Himself. By His own example He created the Sabbath as the capstone and delineator of the on-going weekly cycle for human beings. He had created the world, vegetation, and non-human life by speaking. He had created human beings by forming dust, breathing His breath into nostrils, and using a rib (Gen 2:7,21-22). And then He created the blessed and holy Sabbath by "sabbathing" Himself (cp. Hasel 1982: 22-26).

It is clear that God instituted the Sabbath for all human beings on planet Earth because He instituted it in the beginning, long before Israel existed, along with basic elements of human life such as marriage and labor. The fact that the Sabbath shows up as one of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel at Sinai does not negate the universality of the Sabbath, but rather supports it because the other nine commandments are universal principles applicable beyond the boundaries of the literal Israelite nation (cp. e.g. Rom 7:7).

My interpretation of the Sabbath in Genesis 2 agrees with that of O. Palmer Robertson, a Presbyterian scholar, who wrote:

His blessing of this day had a significant effect on the world. Furthermore, the reference to God's blessing the day should not be interpreted as meaning that God blessed the day with respect to himself. It was with respect to his creation, and with respect to man in particular that God blessed the Sabbath day. As Jesus indicated pointedly, "the Sabbath came into being (*egéneto*) for the sake of man (*dià tòn anthrōpon*) (Mark 2:27). Because it was for the good of man and the whole of creation, God instituted the Sabbath.

Neither antinomianism nor dispensationalism may remove the obligation of the Christian today to observe the creation ordinance of the Sabbath. The absence of any explicit command concerning Sabbath-observance prior to Moses does not relegate the Sabbath principle to temporary legislation of the law-epoch. The creational character of God's sabbath-blessing must be remembered. From the very beginning, God set a distinctive blessing on the Sabbath . . .

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God blessed man through the Sabbath by delivering him from slavery to work . . . (Robertson 1980: 68-69).

God invested the Sabbath with additional significance when He reaffirmed it for the Israelite nation. In addition to its function as a reminder of Creation (Exod 20:11), the Sabbath became a reminder of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt (Deut 5:15). The latter event is thematically related to the former. God delivered His people from Egypt because they were His, by virtue of His creative power, which was displayed in the ten plagues on Egypt and in His miraculous protection and provision for the Israelites in the wilderness. Thus, God's deliverance was a manifestation of the on-going divine creative power which Daniel proclaimed to King Belshazzar: "the God in whose hand is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways" (Dan 5:23).

Because of its importance, the Sabbath was honored in the worship system of the Israelites. This is to be expected. It would be surprising if the Sabbath were not honored in this way. Additional sacrifices were offered at the Israelite sanctuary/temple on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10). The "bread of the presence" on the golden table inside the sacred Tent was changed every Sabbath "as a covenant forever" (Lev 24:8). This bread is the only offering at the sanctuary which is referred to in this way as an eternal covenant. It is no accident that it was renewed every Sabbath. The only other reference to an "eternal covenant" between God and the Israelites as a whole during the wilderness period is in Exodus 31:16-17, where the Sabbath, the memorial of Creation, is called an eternal covenant. Thus, the "bread of the presence" offering, consisting of twelve loaves plus frankincense, was placed upon the golden table every Sabbath to acknowledge the dependence of the twelve tribes of Israel upon God as their resident Creator-Provider (Gane 1992).

The fact that the Sabbath was an important part of Israelite worship does not mean that it is only for the Israelites. It is true that the earthly sanctuary/temple and its rituals have given way to Christ's glorious heavenly ministry (Heb 7-10). It is also true that for most Christians, the Sabbath does not represent the redemption of their literal ancestors from Egypt. But the honored place of the Sabbath in the worship system of Israel at a particular phase of the divine covenant does not wipe out its significance for people living at other times and places.

On-Going Sabbath or Temporary Type?

The second sub-question is: Does the seventh day Sabbath have an *on-going* literal application, or was it a temporary type which lost its literal significance when it met its antitype?

My short answer to this question is: The on-going applicability of the Sabbath, which God instituted at Creation, has not ceased because the Sabbath has never functioned as a temporary type.

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If God instituted the Sabbath for human beings before the Fall (Genesis 2:2-3; see above), the function/applicability of the Sabbath cannot be dependent upon its belonging to the system of temporary types which God set up after the Fall in order to lead human beings back to belief in him. That is to say, the Sabbath cannot be a temporary type because it pre-existed the need for temporary types.

Even if the Sabbath had originated as a human institution when God gave it to the Israelites, it would not necessarily follow that the Sabbath functioned as a temporary type to be superseded by the Christian “rest” experience. It is true that in Hebrews 4, Sabbath rest is used to symbolize a life of peaceful rest, involving all days of the week, which results from believing in God. Perhaps it could be said that as a microcosm of such a life, the Sabbath in a broad sense “typifies” such a life.⁶ This idea is simply an extension of the significance which the Sabbath has had since Creation. But this does not mean *a priori* that the Sabbath is a temporary, historical/horizontal kind of type like the Israelite sacrificial system. Nor does the fact that human beings imitate God by keeping the Sabbath indicate that the Sabbath is a temporary vertical type like the Israelite sanctuary. Examination of the biblical evidence yields the conclusion that the Sabbath is neither a historical/horizontal type nor a vertical type. As such, the Sabbath is fundamentally different from the Israelite festivals, on which rituals functioning as types constituted the essence of observance.

Sabbath as a Historical/Horizontal Type?

A historical/horizontal type consists of something which prefigures something in the future which constitutes its antitype. When the antitype commences, the type becomes obsolete. Thus, for example, the levitical priesthood was superseded by the greater Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb 7-10). The levitical priesthood functioned as a type in one era and ceased to function when its antitype, Christ’s priesthood, began to function in the next era. Another example is the ritual of Passover, which Christ fulfilled and therefore superseded when He died on the cross (see Jn 19:14). Sacrificing literal sheep at the time of Passover can no longer point forward to Christ’s death because that event is now in the past.

In the case of a historical/horizontal type, the type has significance, and then the antitype replaces it. The type and antitype do not function at the same time. A crucial test of whether or not the Sabbath functions as a historical type of a God-given life of “rest” is: Can the Sabbath function *at the same time* as the life of rest? The answer which arises from Hebrews 4 is: yes. In this chapter, God’s “rest” has not suddenly become available for Christians; it was available all along and was not fully appropriated in Old Testament times only because of

⁶Richard M. Davidson, of the Old Testament Department of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University, agrees (personal communication).

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unbelief. Because the life of rest was available in Old Testament times, at the same time when the Sabbath was in operation for the Israelites, the Sabbath cannot be a historical type of the life of rest. The following paragraphs provide the exegetical basis for the conclusion that in Hebrews 4 the life of rest was available in Old Testament times.

Hebrews 4:3, 5 quotes Psalm 95:11, where God said of the rebellious generation who left Egypt and rebelled at Meribah (Exod 17:2-7): "They shall not enter my rest." The reason why the ancient Israelites did not enter God's rest was not because such rest was available only to future Christians when type met antitype, but because they did not believe (Bruce 1964: 73-75).⁷ If they had believed, they would have entered God's rest. James Moffatt comments on this aspect of Hebrews 4: ". . . the reason why these men did not gain entrance was their own unbelief, not any failure on God's part to have the Rest ready" (1924: 51). The next generations could also have entered God's rest, but because of unbelief they stopped short of completely subduing Canaan and therefore failed to enjoy peace from striving against their enemies (Judg 1-3).

Hebrews 4:8 says: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day." Although rest was available as a result of the Conquest under Joshua, it was not attained then because of unbelief, and God had to make a later appeal through the Psalmist (Ps 95:7-8), which is quoted in Hebrews 4:7: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." If God's rest would only become available when the seventh day Sabbath and the Israelite

⁷F. F. Bruce makes this interesting comment: "It was not because the 'rest' of God was not yet available that the wilderness generation of Israelites failed to enter into it; it had been available ever since creation's work was ended. When we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made' (Gen. 2:2), we are to understand that He *began* to rest then; the fact that He is never said to have completed His rest and resumed His work of creation implies that His rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to His overtures with faith and obedience. This interpretation which views the divine sabbath as beginning from the moment when creation's work came to an end and going on to the present time is paralleled in Philo and is implied by our Lord's words in John 5:17, 'My Father worketh even until now, and I work'. It differs from another interpretation which was widespread in the early Church, according to which the seventh day of Gen. 2:2f. is a type of the seventh age of righteousness which is to follow six ages of sin's domination. The identification of the rest of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews with a coming millennium on earth has, indeed, been ably defended; but it involves the importation into the epistle of a concept which in fact is alien to it" (1964: 74-75). While I agree with Bruce that the divine spiritual rest experience described in Hebrews 4 has been available to human beings since they were created, I find that he has not clearly defined the relationship between literal rest *on* the seventh day and the continuous rest experience which *begins on* the seventh day. Genesis 2:2-3 says that God rested *on* (Hebrew preposition *b*) the seventh day. This passage does not say God *began to* rest on the seventh day. Thus, Genesis 2:2-3 defines the seventh day as a unit of time during which rest occurs. It is true that God has not resumed His work of creation in the sense described in Genesis 1-2, but He does work, as shown by John 5:17, which is cited by Bruce. Therefore, I interpret Genesis 2:2-3 as describing God's literal seventh day rest, which serves as an example of literal rest to human beings. But this literal rest symbolizes a continuous "rest" experience available to human beings ever since the first Sabbath.

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worship system would lose their significance, why would God appeal to the Israelites through the Psalmist to have this rest experience?

Hebrews 4 does not contradict the fact that there were some Old Testament people who believed and *temporarily* enjoyed God-given rest. Joshua 23:1 says of the Israelites in the later years of Joshua “. . . when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around . . .” 2 Samuel 7:1 says of David: “Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him.” But this rest for the Israelites and for David did not last because of their failure.

Of course, permanent rest in the ultimate sense will come only when God abolishes the present evil era (Rev 20-22). This rest is still future; it did not commence at the beginning of the Christian era (Moffatt 1924: 53). But although Hebrews 4 refers to several kinds or aspects of rest, it emphasizes a rest which human beings can begin to enjoy in the present era:

The emphasis, therefore, seems to be on that “rest” that comes when the life is submitted to God. The whole discussion is reminiscent of the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 11:28, R.S.V.: “Come to me . . . and I will give you rest” . . . through the experience of personal salvation the individual might enjoy that “rest” here and now through grace while preparing for the full experience ultimately in the kingdom of glory (Graham 1982: 344).

Hebrews 4 appeals to Christians to succeed where people in Old Testament times failed. The condition for entering and remaining in God’s rest is belief, and that is still true during the Christian era or Hebrews 4 would not need to make its appeal to “make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.” It is those who have believed who are entering⁸ God’s rest (Heb 4:3). The Christian era does not change the basic dynamic of entering God’s rest through belief (cp. Eph 2:8-9).⁹

To summarize my discussion of Hebrews 4, we do not find in this passage the kind of discontinuity between the Old Testament and New Testament eras which we find in connection with the Israelite levitical priesthood or the sacrifices officiated by that priesthood (see above). While the idea of divine rest belongs both to the seventh day Sabbath and the “rest” experience given by God to those who believe, the Sabbath and the rest of believers can function in the same era. If the Israelites had believed, the rest experience and the Sabbath would have

⁸*Eiserchómetha*, present tense in Greek.

⁹Harold Attridge overlooks the basic continuity between the rest available in Old Testament times and the rest available to Christians when he attempts to establish a type-antitype relationship between the Exodus generation and the Christian community (1980: 284). It is true that the Exodus generation serves as a negative *example* to Christians and a warning that Christians may also fail because of unbelief. But just because history has the potential of repeating itself through an analogous group of people does not mean that a type-antitype dynamic is present.

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functioned together at the same time. The fact that this was possible shows that the Sabbath did not function as a temporary type which could only be fulfilled when the Christian era commenced.

The Sabbath and God's "rest" are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they are complementary. Insofar as keeping the seventh day Sabbath expresses and helps maintain belief in God (see below), it contributes to the experience of entering God's rest. Therefore, when God offered His "rest" to the Israelites, He offered the Sabbath along with it. The Sabbath was supposed to be part of God's "rest," and there is no indication in the Bible that this has changed.

At first glance, Colossians 2:16-17 could appear to contradict the conclusion which I reached from exegesis of Hebrews 4. Colossians 2:16-17 reads:

2:16 Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths.

2:17 These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

In verse 17, "shadow" means "temporary type." So does this mean that the "sabbaths" mentioned in verse 16 functioned as temporary types?

The issue here is ritual observance of special holy days. "Festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" inverts the order found in Numbers 28-29, where the calendar of ritual offerings on holy days includes offerings on Sabbaths (Num 28:9-10), new moons (Num 28:11-15) and festivals (Num 28:16-29:40). These offerings were part of the Israelite worship system. But it was the rituals performed on the days, not the days themselves, which functioned as the types. Notice that in Colossians 2:17, the pronoun "These" identifies the shadowy things as the list in verse 16: "food and drink or of *observing* festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" in verse 16. Along with food and drink, which in this context must be religious in nature because they have typological significance, it is ritual *observance*¹⁰ of the festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths which constitutes the "shadow"/type; it is not the days themselves. There is no evidence that new moon days, for example, had typological significance of their own; it was the special sacrifices offered on new moon days (Num 28:11-15) which served as a "shadow."

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul affirms the same basic message which was decided at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15): People do not need to practice the Jewish rituals in order to be Christians. The rituals were historical types pointing forward to the better, truly efficacious ministry of Jesus Christ, which has already begun and to which our focus should be directed.

So what about the prohibition of labor on the Sabbath, which is part of the Ten Commandments? Was this part of the ritual system which functioned as a shadow of things to come? No. It is true that the ritual system honored the Sab-

¹⁰The word translated here by the NRSV "of observing" is the combination (preposition + noun) *en mérei*, "in the matter of," literally "in the part of" (Arndt and Gingrich 1979: 507).

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bath, but Sabbath rest itself is not a historical shadow/type (see above), and abstaining from work on the Sabbath existed before any ritual system was needed (see also above). Moreover, even for the Israelites keeping Sabbath rest was never dependent upon the operation of the sanctuary/temple or its services. It could be observed wherever God's people found themselves.

By recognizing the temporary nature of the Israelite ritual element which had been added by God to the Sabbath, Paul implied an affirmation of the underlying universality of the Sabbath, which can be kept by anyone apart from the Israelite ritual system. Paul did not touch the original function of the Sabbath itself. If he had, we can be sure there would have been a major uproar in the Christian church, calling for a council like the one in Jerusalem which dealt with the controversy over circumcision (Acts 15; Specht 1982: 111).

Sabbath as a Vertical Type?

If the Sabbath does not function as a temporary historical/horizontal type, is it possible that it functioned as a temporary vertical type, like the Israelite sanctuary on earth which served as a copy of God's temple in heaven above (Exod 25:9; Heb 8:5; cp. Ps 11:4)? Could human, earthly rest on the seventh day be a copy of divine heavenly rest? The following factors, taken together, indicate that the Sabbath was not such a temporary vertical type:

1. Just because human beings imitate God in some respect does not indicate the existence of a *temporary* vertical type. In Leviticus 19:2, for example, God commands the Israelites to be holy as He is holy. The fact that the rest of Leviticus 19 consists of laws governing divine-human and human-human relationships indicates that the aspect of holiness which is in view is that of character. This call to emulate God's character is repeated in 1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 19:2. It is clearly a timeless command.

2. In Genesis 2:2-3, God rested on the seventh day in connection with His creation of this world. There is no indication that the Sabbath was originally a heavenly institution which was then copied on earth in the same way that the earthly sanctuary was a copy of an original heavenly temple.

3. If the Sabbath were a temporary vertical type, we would expect some indication in the Bible regarding the end of its typical significance as we have in the case of the earthly sanctuary. The earthly temple lost its significance when the original heavenly temple took the place of the earthly as the location toward which worship should be directed (Heb 7-10). But there is no such indication that a similar dynamic applies to the Sabbath.

Sabbath and the Israelite Festivals

If literal observance of the seventh day Sabbath does not function as a temporary type and therefore should be maintained, should we also be obliged to keep elements of the Jewish festivals which do not function as temporary types?

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My short answer is: no. It is true that not every activity connected with the Israelite worship system functioned as a temporary type. For example, the priestly blessing (Num 6:23-27) and prayers and music offered at the temple (1 Sam 1:10-11; 2:1-10; 1 Kgs 8:22-54; 1 Chron 6:31-46; 16:4-37, 41-42; 25:1-31) were simply part of the on-going religious experience and did not function as types. But the rituals, which constituted the essence of observance of the festivals, did function as historical temporary types. According to the Bible, all of the Israelite spring festivals met their antitypes at the beginning of the Christian era. Christ died as the antitype of the Passover lamb (John 19:14). Christ rose as the “first fruits of those who have died” (1 Cor 15:20), i.e. as the antitype of the festival wave sheaf (Lev 23:11).¹¹ The Feast of Weeks, known as Pentecost, when the first fruits of wheat were harvested, met its antitype in the early Christian harvest of souls through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

If the spring festivals were temporary types, it stands to reason that the autumn festivals, when even more sacrifices were offered (see Num 29), also functioned as temporary types. There is no room in the present paper to identify the antitypes of the autumn festivals, which would require more discussion than the antitypes of the spring festivals. However, I have made the point which is relevant to this paper: Unlike the Sabbath, the essence of festival observance is constituted by ritual which functions as type.

Even if the Feast of Booths (so-called Feast of Tabernacles), which was the last of the autumn festivals (Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-38), has not yet met its antitype, this does not mean that Christians should be required to keep it today. According to the New Testament, Christian worship is directed toward Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 7-10) rather than toward the resident Shekinah in an earthly sanctuary having human priests and a yearly cycle of national festivals. This shift in the focus of worship is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Israelite festivals were part of and owed their existence to the Israelite worship system. This system was grounded in the experience of the Israelite nation within its historical and agricultural context and limited to that phase of the covenant in which election of literal Israel operated.

We cannot, of course, fully keep the biblical festivals even if we want to because that would require us to make pilgrimages to a temple in Jerusalem, where sacrifices would be offered (Exod 23:14-17; 34:22-24; Lev 23; Num 28-29). Following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., the Jews developed adapted versions of the festivals which do not require sacrifices or pilgrimage. In this way, the Jews can continue to keep the festivals. These observances are based on important elements of the biblical festivals, to which post-biblical traditional liturgical and didactic elements have been added.

¹¹See Lev 23:11—“the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.” Christ rose on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1).

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If a modern Christian wishes to participate in a Jewish festival occasion such as the Passover Seder, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), or Sukkot (Booths), he/she may find personal enrichment and edification, as I have on a number of occasions in Israel and in the United States. But we should not confuse the Jewish postbiblical adaptations with the mandatory biblical forms of the ancient Israelite festivals, which no longer exist.

The Israelite festivals have been carried on by the Jews because these observances commemorate the historical events which formed their nation, thereby keeping their heritage alive. As Christians, we share their heritage in the sense that we recognize the way God used the Israelites to reveal Himself and His purposes to the world. However, biblical events such as the Exodus from Egypt, which is remembered in the Passover service, did not happen to our ancestors. Those events were limited to the experience of a particular people. But that limited Exodus pointed forward to a universal Exodus which belongs to all human beings equally: our Exodus from sin and the control of Satan through the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). To keep this universal Exodus alive, Jesus gave all Christians the Communion service, a Christian Passover which replaces the biblical Israelite Passover (Matt 26:26-29; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Since the Communion service utilizes only bread and wine and does not require a human priest officiating at a temple, it can continue to function following the destruction of the Second Temple.

Jesus created the Christian Passover on the occasion of the biblical Passover, while the Second Temple was still standing, well before the Jews adapted the festivals for their own purposes. If Christ meant for Christians to keep altered forms of the festivals other than Passover, we would expect him to have taught us what to do, as He did at the Last Supper.

There is a fundamental difference between Israelite and Christian worship. The center and focus of the Israelite worship system was God dwelling among His people on earth, the resident Shekinah enthroned above the cherubim in the holiest apartment of the sanctuary/temple (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15, etc.). The sacrifices, festivals, songs, and prayers of the Israelites were directed toward God in His earthly dwelling place. They knew, of course, that God also lives in heaven (Ps 11:4) and that an earthly building cannot contain him (1 Kgs 8:27; cp. Isa 6:1) but their worship reached heaven via the earthly sanctuary/temple. Notice the wording in Solomon's dedicatory prayer:

Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they
pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place;
heed and forgive (1 Kings 8:30).

So Israelites prayed horizontally toward the temple, and from there the prayers went vertically to heaven. Notice that Daniel prayed horizontally toward Jerusalem even when the temple lay in ruins (Dan 6:10).

Unlike the Israelites under the Sinaitic covenant, Christians under the "New Covenant" are to orient their worship directly to the heavenly temple, where

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Christ ministers as their high priest (Heb 7-10). Christians do not need an earthly temple or mediation by earthly priests. By faith in the mediation of Christ, we can send our prayers vertically from wherever we are directly to God's "throne of grace" (Heb 4:16).

To conclude this section, there is a basic difference between the Sabbath and the Israelite festivals (cp. Cole 1996). The festivals were limited to the Sinaitic/Israelite phase of God's covenant by several factors:

1. The essence of festival observance involved rituals functioning as temporary historical types.
2. For their full observance, the festivals were dependent upon continuation of the Israelite ritual system.
3. The festivals were rooted in the particular national religious experience of the Israelite people.

By contrast, observance of the seventh day Sabbath is not subject to any of these limitations. It is not a temporary type, it is not dependent upon continuation of the Israelite ritual system, and it is universal in origin (see above). Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the Sabbath was restricted to the Sinaitic phase of God's covenant.

Sabbath as Part of the "New Covenant"?

The third sub-question is: Does the seventh day Sabbath have *theological significance* for the present phase of the divine covenant, i.e. the "new covenant," or did it only have theological significance as part of the obsolete "old covenant"?

Whereas the previous sub-question challenged the present applicability of the Sabbath on the basis of typology, the present question challenges its continuing relevance on the basis of covenant theology.

My short answer is: As a sign of the on-going dependence of human beings upon their Creator and His work, the seventh day Sabbath continues to have significance for the "new covenant." The fact that the Sabbath functioned during the "old covenant" period does not mean that the Sabbath became obsolete with that covenant. Rather, there is a sense in which the significance of the Sabbath is restored under the "new covenant."

When God reaffirmed the Sabbath for Israel, the Sabbath was more than a commandment; according to Exodus 31:13, 17 (cp. Ezek 20:12), the Sabbath functioned as a sign of the covenant relationship by which He sanctified the Israelites. This function applied to Israel a principle which had been inherent in the Sabbath since Creation. On the seventh day of Creation, God sanctified the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3), a unit of time. Why? In order to affect those who observe this special time. How would they be affected? They would emulate their holy Creator and acknowledge their on-going connection with him. Because they would belong to God, who is intrinsically holy, they would gain holiness from Him. In other words, the Sabbath would be a sign that God makes people holy,

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just as God explicitly said in Exodus 31:13 with particular reference to the Israelites. From the beginning, His desire has been for all people to enjoy a holy relationship with Him.

The divine-human relationship signified by the Sabbath is one in which human beings are dependent upon God and His work. Thus, those who rest on the Sabbath acknowledge “that I, the LORD, sanctify you” (Exod 31:13) and “that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth” (vs. 17). The Sabbath is not simply the immovable “birthday of the world,” it recognizes the dependence of the world, and more particularly the human beings who have dominion over the world, on God who created the world.

Our dependence on God is not only based upon what He did for us thousands of years ago. According to the Bible, He continues to sustain His creatures. Speaking to King Belshazzar, Daniel referred to “the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways” (Dan 5:23; cp. Ps 114:14-15; 145:15-16; Job 12:10).

God will always be our Creator and Sustainer. Therefore, the basic meaning of the Sabbath, which encapsulates this divine-human relationship (cp. Cassuto 1967: 244), is timeless; it cannot become obsolete as long as human beings inhabit planet Earth.

It is true that God expressed the Sabbath to the Israelites in the form of a law. It is also true that the Israelite phase of the covenant, which emphasized law, was defective and had to be replaced by the “new covenant.” But this does not mean that the Sabbath became obsolete along with the Israelite “old covenant.” This conclusion is based upon examination of the relationship between the “old” and “new” covenants. The “old covenant” was defective because Israel’s response to God’s covenant initiative was defective, not because God gave the “old covenant” to Israel as a faulty means of salvation by works.

There was nothing wrong with the covenant God offered to Israel. Like earlier phases of the covenant, it was based upon grace. This is shown by the fact that God first saved Israel by grace, and then He gave His commandments to them. In Exodus 20, obedience to the Ten Commandments (verses 3-17) is a response to the prior grace of “the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (verse 2).

Earlier Old Testament covenants were also based upon grace. God first saved Noah from the flood (Gen 7:1-8:19) and then formally inaugurated the covenant by giving Noah an on-going covenant promise (8:21-22), blessings and commandments (9:1-7), and a sign of the promise (9:8-17). God first gave Abraham a military victory, keeping him safe as He saved Lot from His captors (Gen 14), and then God formally inaugurated the covenant with him (Gen 15,17).

To Israel, as to Noah and Abraham, God offered salvation by grace through faith, as in the Christian era (Eph 2:8). There has never been a different way of salvation. The divine covenants are unified and function as phases of cumulative

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development in God's overall plan (Robertson 1980: 27-52; Walton 1994: 49-50).

It is true that Christ has eclipsed the Mosaic law in the sense that He is a more glorious revelation of God's character (2 Cor 3). But this means that Christ's revelation sheds greater light on the divine principles which constitute God's law. Christ magnified God's law (cp. Matt 5:17-48); He did not replace law as a means of salvation because God has never offered salvation on that basis.

While no amount of our own works can purchase our salvation (cp. Isa 55:1-3), our works are a necessary part of the faith response which accepts the gift of salvation which God freely gives to us. Real, living faith works through love (Gal 5:6). If faith does not have works, it is dead faith (James 2:26), not the kind of faith through which we can be saved by grace (Eph 2:8). Living in harmony with God's principles results from forgiveness. As Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11).

Doesn't the idea that obedience to God is necessary contradict the dynamic of salvation by grace (Eph 2:8)? No, because obedience is a gift of grace. According to Romans 5:5, the Holy Spirit pours love into our hearts. Thus, God gives us love, the principle upon which law-keeping is based (Matt 22:36-40), as a gift. The fact that the Holy Spirit was available to people in Old Testament times (see e.g. Neh 9:20) indicates that the gift of love by the Spirit is not restricted to the Christian era.

Deuteronomy 6 informs us that God wanted the Israelites to respond to His prior grace by having an internalized, heart relationship with him. He commanded them: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart" (Deut 6:5-6). Upon this principle of love for God and upon the principle of love for fellow human beings (Lev 19:18) all of God's Old Testament commandments were based (Matt 22:36-40). Only by accepting these principles and the more specific commandments which flowed from them would the Israelites accept God's lordship through which they would continue to be saved. This explains why God said: "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD" (Lev 18:5).¹²

So God offered to the Israelites a covenant of grace and internalized love. But it takes two parties to make a covenant. The good covenant became a defective "old covenant" because the divine-human relationship became dysfunctional

¹²In Galatians 3:12, Paul referred to Leviticus 18:5 in order to show that "the law does not rest on faith." Paul then went on to say that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . ." (v. 13). Paul was not attacking the law as such (cp. Rom 3:31; Rom 7:7-12); he was opposing the idea that law functions as a means of salvation. The law functions to reveal God's character, and in the process it shows people how far short of the divine standard they really are (Rom 3:20; cp. James 1:22-25).

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due to human failure to have a heart relationship with God. This is clear from Jeremiah 31:31-34, which first mentions the “new covenant”:

31:31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

31:32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

31:34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

From this passage we can see that the difference between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” is not the difference between “law” and “grace.” Rather, it is the difference between failure to internalize God’s law, resulting in disobedience, and successful internalization of God’s law, resulting in obedience. It is harder to break the law when it is internalized; sin against law in the heart would be a “myocardial infraction.”¹³

When the Israelites were disobedient and failed to receive sanctification from the Lord, any Sabbath-keeping they did would have been a hypocritical outward form (cp. Isa 58). But by accepting God’s grace and internalizing His law, including the Sabbath, the people could become holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2). Thus the Sabbath could be a true sign of a real sanctification experience (Exod 31:13; Isa 58). Jacques Doukhan points out:

In obeying the fourth commandment, the believer does not negate the value of grace. On the contrary, the awareness of grace is implied. Through obedience to God’s law, the believer expresses faith in God’s grace. This principle is particularly valid when it applies to the Sabbath, because in it not only the divine law but also divine grace are magnified (1991: 155).

By restoring sanctification, the “new covenant” restores the Sabbath to its true significance. Instead of being a hypocritical “tour de farce,” the Sabbath

¹³The key to the success of the “new covenant” is found in verse 34: “. . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” The “new covenant” is based upon forgiveness. It is the sacrificial atonement of the incarnate Christ which draws all men to Him (see John 12:31), demonstrating the supreme love of God (John 3:16) and the utter dependence of human spiritual life upon divine grace. Whereas Israel at Sinai began covenant life with a clean slate, as a neonatal nation (cp. Ezek 16), “new covenant” people begin from the humbling posture of accepting forgiveness. Such people know their weakness because they know they have fallen.

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points to a living reality: People who are allowing God to sanctify them keep the sanctified day.

During His ministry, Jesus showed Christians how to live under the “new covenant” (see Specht 1982: 105). He didn’t wait to begin teaching Christians how to live until He had officially inaugurated the “new covenant” era with His broken body and spilled blood. So Jesus’ example regarding the seventh day Sabbath has prime relevance for Christians today. Luke 4:16 says:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

If Jesus had simply participated in Jewish worship on the Sabbath, the significance of His example would be limited.¹⁴ But the fact that He took so much trouble to restore the Sabbath to its rightful place shows that it was of great importance for him and therefore should be important for Christians. Jesus risked controversy and danger by healing people on the Sabbath (see e.g. Mark 3:1-6; John 5:2-18; 9:1-41), thereby stripping away hypocritical human tradition and showing by example the purpose of the Sabbath as it was originally created by God’s own example (Gen 2:2-3; see above): “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mk 2:27).

It is no accident that Jesus made a point of healing people on the Sabbath (Doukhan 1991: 152), thereby lifting their burdens and giving them rest from their suffering. His healing was a manifestation of His on-going divine creative power. When Jesus was persecuted for healing on the Sabbath, He responded: “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (John 5:17). Because of the divine creative work, human beings can have rest (cp. Ps 121:3-4). Moreover, according to Philip Yancey, Jesus’ miracles provided “snapshots” of God’s ideal for the world as He created it and to which He will restore it:

Some see miracles as an implausible suspension of the laws of the physical universe. As signs, though, they serve just the opposite function. Death, decay, entropy, and destruction are the true suspensions of God’s laws; miracles are the early glimpses of restoration. In the words of Jurgen Moltmann, “Jesus’ healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly ‘natural’ things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded” (Yancey 1995: 182-183).

Under the “new covenant” phase of the divine covenant, God restores the world and human beings to the sinless ideal He had for them in the beginning (Rev 21-22). Since the Sabbath was part of the “covenant of Creation,” before human sin arose, it is appropriate that the Sabbath continue into the sinless “new earth.”

¹⁴Compare His circumcision, done to him when He was eight days old (Luke 2:21). The Jerusalem Council, guided by God, determined that circumcision was no longer relevant when Gentiles could become Christians directly without first becoming Jewish.

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Evidence that the Sabbath will continue as a day of worship into the eschatological era is found in Isaiah 66:22-23:

66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain.

66:23 From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.

The context of these verses shows that Isaiah envisioned the Eschaton through the lens of God's plan to use literal Israel to gather all nations to Himself at Jerusalem (cp. Isa 66:18-21). As shown by comparison with the book of Revelation, God will still gather all nations to Himself (Rev 7:9-10). Since the Sabbath was universal from the beginning, there is no reason why it should be regarded as an obsolete element in Isaiah's eschatological description.

Isaiah 66:23 mentions on-going eschatological worship on new moon days along with worship on sabbaths. Like sabbaths, new moons were honored by extra sacrifices in the Israelite ritual system (Num 28:11-15). But this does not mean that new moon days cannot be worship days apart from the ritual system (see the same point above regarding the Sabbath). According to Genesis 1:14, before sin or the ritual system existed, God created and appointed the sun and the moon "to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." The term translated "seasons" here is *mô^{ca} dîm*, which refers to "appointed times" (see Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 417). In passages such as Leviticus 23:2, 4, 37, 44, this word refers to regular, cyclical times of worship. In Genesis 1:14, the term could not include the Sabbath because the weekly cycle is not marked by movements of the sun or moon in relation to the earth as are days, months, and years. But new moons would fit well into the category of *mô^{ca} dîm* in Genesis 1:14. Thus, eschatological observance of regular worship at new moons could revive a potential which was recognized at Creation.¹⁵ But we must make two qualifications here:

1. Isaiah 66:23 mentions sabbaths and new moons as days of worship. But whereas sabbaths by definition are days of rest, new moons are not. Sabbaths are constituted as sabbaths by cessation of ordinary weekly activity. New moons are constituted as such by the position of the moon in relation to the earth (see Gen 1:14). So Isaiah 66:23 does not inform us that new moons will be observed as eschatological days of *rest*.

2. Since God sanctified the Sabbath and instituted cessation of labor on this day by His example (Gen 2:2-3), which He subsequently reinforced by His command (Exod 20:8-11), the Sabbath is naturally a day of worship. But the Bible does not give us this kind of indication that we should observe new moons as days of worship in the Christian era. It is true that new moons were honored by additional sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary (Num 28:11-15), but

¹⁵Compare the monthly cycle of the tree of life (Rev 22:2).

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that appears to be all the attention they received. In fact, while the cultic calendar of Numbers 28 includes new moons because it lists the sacrifices, the list of cyclical appointed worship times in Leviticus 23 passes directly from seventh day sabbaths (verse 3) to yearly festivals (verses 4ff), without mentioning new moons at all. The implication seems to be that the new moons did not function as special days of worship except for the addition of some sacrifices.

To summarize this section, the “old covenant,” as opposed to the “new covenant,” was not a different means of salvation established by God during Old Testament times, but rather, it was a relationship with Israel which was defective due to failure of the human party. So the “new covenant” does not supersede the “old covenant” by abolishing all aspects of what God offered to the Israelites, including His re-affirmation of the Sabbath. Rather, the “new covenant” fulfills the only ideal God has ever had for His people: a heart relationship with him. As an important sign of the divine-human relationship, the Sabbath is restored to its full significance under the “new covenant.”

Conclusion

The seventh day Sabbath as a day of rest was given to the human race at Creation, before there was a nation of Israel and before humanity needed redemption from sin. Therefore, the applicability of the Sabbath is not limited to the Israelite worship system or to the period of salvation history during which ritual observances functioned as temporary types. The Sabbath is for all human beings, whether or not they are sinners and whether or not they are Israelites. The Sabbath did not become obsolete along with the elective covenant with Israel, which became dysfunctional due to human failure. To the contrary, the Christian “new covenant” restores the significance of the Sabbath when God’s people have the experience of which the Sabbath has always been a sign: sanctification by God, the Creator who sanctified the Sabbath in the first place.

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The End of the Israelite Monarchy

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A biographical sketch of the eighteenth century evangelist George Whitefield claims: “His voice had the range of an organ and with it he could reduce grown men to tears by the mere pronounciation of the word ‘Mesopotamia’” (Hallo 1980: 1). Perhaps a Judean exile who sat down in the land “between the rivers,” hung his harp upon the willows and remembered Jerusalem (see Ps 137) would also be moved to tears at the mention of “Mesopotamia,” but not because of the word’s acoustic power. It was from this region, drained by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, that the Assyrians came to obliterate the northern kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians came to demolish the southern kingdom of Judah.

In terms of geopolitical ebb and flow, the Israelite monarchies were simply crushed by revived Mesopotamian superpowers (Bright 1972: 267). The Bible and Mesopotamian documents agree that the Israelites were defeated by superior military forces. However, the biblical record penetrates to a deeper level of causality: The Israelites were defeated by superior forces because they neglected and disobeyed YHWH (= Jehovah),¹ their God. Having forsaken him, despised His covenant and polluted His temple, they were forsaken by him.

According to Ezekiel, when YHWH’s temple was filled with abominations (Ezek 8), His glorious Presence departed in the direction of the Mount of Olives (Ezek 9:3; 10:4,18-19), the way David had gone when he fled from Absalom (2 Sam 15:23ff).² At the Mount of Olives, the divine Majesty lingered (Ezek 11:23) “as though loath to abandon the city altogether” (Greenberg 1983: 191). As He was leaving, the sound of the wings of the cherubim which bore him away was “like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks” (Ezek 10:5). The

¹YHWH, transliterating the unvocalized tetragrammaton, the personal name of Israel’s God.

²W. Shea interprets this passage within the context of an investigative judgment of Judah in Ezek 1-10 (1992: 15-23).

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unspoken message was the same as that pronounced by Jesus over half a millennium later when history repeated itself:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate.” (Matt 23:37-38, NRSV here and in subsequent biblical quotations unless indicated otherwise)

Without YHWH, the temple and the city were soon destroyed.

The present paper explores the end of the Israelite monarchy in terms of political events, underlying spiritual causes connected with those events, and results of the fall of the monarchy for God’s people. The end of northern Israel is covered here to some extent, but the primary focus is on factors leading to the death throes of Judean independence.

Political Events

The tumultuous final years of the monarchy are richly documented. Historical sources include especially (1) the biblical books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, (2) inscriptions from Syria-Palestine, Assyria, and Babylon, (3) accounts of Herodotus and Josephus, and (4) archaeological evidence. Although the sources differ in purpose and orientation,³ they are complementary and there is a high degree of agreement between them in terms of what happened on the surface level (Stern 1975: 30; cp. Mitchell 1991a: 343). Some problems remain, such as the chronological relationship between Sennacherib’s invasion, Hezekiah’s last fifteen years, and the beginning of Manasseh’s reign.⁴ But problems like this do not seriously affect our understanding of the period. After a period of prosperity for the independent kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south (Mitchell 1991a: 322), the beginning of the end came with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 B.C.) to the Assyrian throne. Because his campaigns in the west threatened Syria and Israel, they put their old animosities aside, made a defensive alliance and attempted to force Judah to join with them. To avoid fighting against Assyria without being replaced by a puppet ruler set up by the Syro-Israelite alliance, Ahaz of Judah sent a huge gift to

³The Bible selects historical details primarily as background for conveying understanding of deeper spiritual realities. Inscriptions served purposes such as communication, record-keeping, and/or propaganda. Herodotus and Josephus were early historians who were somewhat detached by space or time from the political convulsions of sixth century Palestine. Archaeological evidence is concrete in the sense that it deals with material remains, but it is often ambiguous regarding the precise relationships between objects and events.

⁴If Hezekiah’s sickness, when he was promised another fifteen years (2 Kgs 20:6; Isa 38:5), occurred about the time of Sennacherib’s invasion, as the narrative suggests (2 Kgs 20:1—“In those days . . .”), we would figure that Hezekiah reigned fifteen years after about 701 B.C. But his reign would overlap with that of Manasseh. A co-regency between Hezekiah and Manasseh is a possible solution (Thiele 1965: 157-161). But some scholars do not accept this idea (see e.g. Miller and Hayes 1986: 351).

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Tiglath-pileser so that he would fight Syria and Israel (2 Kgs 16:7ff), which he probably would have done anyway (Bright 1972: 272).

Tiglath-pileser smashed the northern coalition, conquered the Galilee and Transjordanian regions of northern Israel, deported some of the population, and turned the territories into Assyrian provinces (734-733 B.C.). The remainder of Israel was saved when Hoshea murdered King Pekah, surrendered, and paid tribute. Tiglath-pileser then took Damascus and made Syria into Assyrian provinces (732 B.C.).

Soon after Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) replaced Tiglath-pileser, Hoshea gambled on independence, as shown by the fact that he called on Egypt for help and withheld tribute from Assyria. "This was Israel's suicide" (Bright 1972: 273). No help came from Egypt and Shalmaneser attacked. The capital city of Samaria held out through a long siege, but was taken about 722 B.C. Thousands of Israelites were deported to Mesopotamia and Media, where they were eventually absorbed into the local populations and lost their identity.

The decision of Ahaz about 734 B.C. to turn to Assyria for help, against the warning of Isaiah (Isa 7), brought Judah voluntarily within the orbit of the Assyrian empire as a satellite state. The Assyrians undoubtedly regarded Ahaz' "protection money" as committing him to vassal status (Mitchell 1991a: 333). Thus, when Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz, he inherited a kingdom which had lost full independence. However, when the Assyrian Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) died an untimely death on a distant battlefield and was succeeded by Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), Hezekiah took aggressive action as ringleader of an anti-Assyrian revolt. He had already begun to make extensive preparations for revolt, including equipping his army, storing up food,⁵ and increasing the security of Jerusalem's water supply (2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chron 32:3,5-6,28-30; Miller and Hayes 1986: 354). The remarkable Siloam water tunnel, commemorated by an inscription telling how it was constructed (ed. Pritchard 1969: 321), almost certainly dates to Hezekiah's preparation for a potential siege (Mitchell 1991a: 356).

In 701 B.C., when Sennacherib had subdued other parts of his empire, he lashed out against Syria-Palestine with devastating force and ravaged Judah. According to his annals, he took forty-six fortified towns, besieged Jerusalem, and made Hezekiah the Jew, "a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" (ed. Pritchard 1969: 288). Sennacherib exacted rich tribute, but he does not claim to have captured Jerusalem. From a human point of view this is inexplicable, given the power of Sennacherib and the fact that Hezekiah was a ringleader of a revolt against him. The Bible, however, attributes the survival of

⁵Some scholars suggest that many of the jars found by archaeologists which are stamped *lmlk*, "belonging to the king," were used to store provisions for defensive garrisons (Mitchell 1991a: 355; cp. Stern 1975: 49-53).

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Jerusalem to divine intervention: The angel of YHWH slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2 Kgs 19:35).

Manasseh (697-642 B.C.) succeeded Hezekiah at the age of twelve and reigned 55 years, longer than any king in the entire history of Israel and Judah. He inherited a country ruined and impoverished by war, reduced in area and lowered in status to a vassal kingdom of Assyria. Although 2 Kgs 21:16 indicates that Manasseh's regime was a reign of terror for the people of Judah, his foreign affairs were peaceful. With Judah so weak, Manasseh was in no position to assert his independence against Assyria, which reached the height of its power during his reign (Gane 1997).

According to 2 Chron 33:11-13, at some point during Manasseh's reign he was captured by the Assyrians and brought to Babylon, where the Assyrian king may have been visiting (Mitchell 1991b: 374). Although Manasseh's arrest may have been due to his plotting against Assyria, he was released and restored to Jerusalem. While some have questioned the authenticity of this account, its plausibility is enhanced by a parallel experience of Neco I of Egypt. According to the Rassam Cylinder, Neco plotted against Assyria with other Egyptian vassal kings. They were arrested, bound by the Assyrians, and taken to Ashurbanipal (668-627) in Nineveh, where they were all put to death except Neco, who was pardoned and reinstated as king in Sais with a more favorable treaty than before (ed. Pritchard: 295). This may seem strange, but a vassal king redeemed from death in this way could subsequently be counted on to have undying loyalty to Assyria.

Manasseh was succeeded by his son Amon (642-640 B.C.), who was assassinated by Judean royal officials after two years. The "people of the land" executed those officials and put Amon's eight-year old son Josiah (640-609 B.C.) on the throne. His reign was affected by the collapse of Assyria after the abdication and death of Ashurbanipal (630 and 627 B.C.). As Assyria loosened its grip on Syria-Palestine due to wars between Ashurbanipal's heirs, Egypt moved to fill the vacuum (Miller and Hayes 1986: 388-390). Although Judah came within the orbit of Egyptian influence, Egypt's control was less tight than Assyria's had been. Consequently, Josiah was able to extend his border somewhat to the north into territory which had formerly belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel (Cross and Freedman 1953: 56-57; Malamat 1968: 137).

In 612 B.C. the Medes and Babylonians under Cyaxeres and Nabopolassar, respectively, conquered the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, an event heralded by the book of Nahum. Regarding the demise of the power which had so long made the world tremble, G. Roux comments laconically: "No one, as far as we know, sat on the ruins of Nineveh to write a lamentation" (Roux 1980: 347).

The remaining Assyrian army went westward to Haran, where they joined Egyptian forces, which were still loyal to them (Mitchell 1991b: 390-391). In 610 B.C. the Babylonians and Medes took Haran, but in 609 the Assyrians and Egyptians, now under the new pharaoh Neco II (610-595), counterattacked.

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However, in spite of Egypt's vigorous attempts to resuscitate Assyria, the empire died.

It appears that because Josiah wanted to get rid of the Assyrians, he was opposed to Neco II marching north to help them in 609 B.C. Therefore, he attempted to cut Neco off at Megiddo, but the Egyptians shot Josiah, mortally wounding him. The "people of the land" put Jehoahaz on the throne, but Neco removed him, sent him to exile in Egypt and made Eliakim king, changing his name to Jehoiakim (609-598).

The clash between Egypt and Babylon reached its climax at Carchemish, where the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar II defeated the Egyptian army (605 B.C.) and shortly became master of Syria-Palestine (Hyatt 1956: 279-280). When Nabopolassar died in 605, Nebuchadnezzar took the throne. Daniel 1:1 provides evidence that during Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, before his first official regnal year began in the spring of 604 B.C., he besieged Jerusalem, took some vessels from the temple and exiled some people, including Daniel (cp. Josephus, *Against Apion* i. 19, citing Berosus, a Babylonian historian; ed. Nichol 1955: 747-748; Mitchell 1991b: 394).

While Jehoiakim preferred Egypt, which had put him in power, he found it expedient to become Nebuchadnezzar's vassal (604/603 B.C.). But the Babylonian Chronicles report that in 601/600 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar withdrew to Babylon after an unsuccessful attempt to invade Egypt (ed. Pritchard 1969: 564). Taking an apparent opportunity, Jehoiakim gambled on independence and withheld tribute. Nebuchadnezzar returned with a vengeance and besieged Jerusalem, which surrendered to him in 597 B.C. But by now Jehoiakim had died and his son Jehoiachin had succeeded him. Nebuchadnezzar exiled Jehoiachin and many leaders of Judah, including Ezekiel, and placed Mattaniah on the throne, changing his name to Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.).

A Babylonian administrative document referring to Jehoiachin as "the son of the king" (*mār šarri*) of Judah indicates that the Babylonians treated Jehoiachin as continuing his royal status (ed. Pritchard 1969: 308; Thomas 1950-51: 6; Malamat 1951: 81--82; cp. 2 Kgs 25:27). It appears that Nebuchadnezzar intentionally weakened Zedekiah's rule by not only removing political, military, and economic leaders from Judah, but also by maintaining the possibility that Zedekiah could be replaced by Jehoiachin. But this divisive and destabilizing policy backfired on Nebuchadnezzar and proved to be disastrous for Judah. Within Judah, there were now two factions. One group, including the false prophets, was opposed to submission to Babylon and wanted Jehoiachin to return (Jer 28:4). The other group, including Jeremiah, favored submission to Babylon and loyalty to Zedekiah as the best course for survival (Jer 29; cp. Malamat 1950: 224; 1951: 82-86).

It appears that Zedekiah wanted to remain loyal to Babylon. But he was under so much pressure from the anti-Babylon faction encouraged by the possibility of Jehoiachin's return (Malamat 1951: 87) that he finally gave in, made

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friendly contact with Egypt under Psammetichus II (595-689 B.C.), and broke his treaty with Nebuchadnezzar. Although Egypt had been defeated at Carchemish, it was still quite strong (Hyatt 1956: 280).

Deja vu

Zedekiah relied on help from Egypt against a Mesopotamian superpower, just as Hoshea, the last king of Israel, had done. And he met with a similar result. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem. An Egyptian army sent into Palestine by Apries (Hophra, 589-570 B.C.), a new pharaoh, did distract the Babylonians temporarily. But after two years of siege the food in Jerusalem ran out and the wall was breached. Zedekiah fled, but was caught by the Babylonians, who slaughtered his sons, put out his eyes and took him bound to Babylon. A few weeks after the Babylonians captured the city they burned it, including the temple, and exiled much of its populace.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed a governor over Judah: Gedaliah, who was not descended from David. But Gedaliah was assassinated. Afraid of Babylonian reprisals for this, many Judeans fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. A further deportation of Judeans in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year (581 B.C.; Jer 52:30) may have been punishment for Gedaliah's assassination.

Gedaliah's death did not change much. Judah had already lost her last vestige of independence. The era of the kings was over. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was no more. Many of the people were gone. There was nothing left to do but lament:

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! . . . She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks. (Lam 1:1-2)

Underlying Spiritual Causes

The Bible indicates that if the people of YHWH had remained loyal to their covenant with him, He would have protected them even from the mightiest military machines the world had to offer. The events of 701 B.C. show that YHWH's protection was not hypothetical. When Sennacherib invaded Judah and only the city of Jerusalem remained, there is no human reason why it should have survived when so many great cities were toppling before the inexorable Assyrian battering rams. But survive it did.

Even without the biblical record, we would be compelled to admit that some kind of miracle took place.⁶ In spite of Sennacherib's penchant for propaganda as an extension of his monumental ego, neither in text nor in pictures does he claim to have taken Jerusalem. This glaring omission is worth a thousand words. The fact that he lined the walls of his "Palace without a Rival" with

⁶M. Weinfeld, seminar on Isaiah 1-39 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986.

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reliefs vividly depicting his successful siege of the Judean fortress city of Lachish (see Shanks 1984) may be due to his need for a face-saving device. But for the grace of God, those reliefs would have shown Jerusalem instead.

Jerusalem survived in 701 B.C. because its king trusted in YHWH, believed His prophet and was faithful to His covenant. When Judah was connected to YHWH in this way, her enemies found themselves up against Ultimate Power.

The deliverance from Sennacherib shows that Jerusalem did not need to fall at all. Even though God's people had failed miserably in the past, YHWH was willing to forgive and help them if they would return to him and His covenant. But this deliverance in 701 B.C. also illuminates the real reason for its fall to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.: breach of YHWH's covenant rather than mere military inferiority.

Breach of YHWH's covenant involved a number of interrelated aspects which contributed to each other. These include royal insubordination to YHWH, false worship, ethical sins, and false hope combined with unwillingness to follow present truth revealed through prophets. The remainder of this section deals with these aspects.

Royal Insubordination to YHWH

After the unstable period of the "judges,"⁷ the Israelites thought that stronger, more permanent and institutionalized human leadership was the solution to their problems.⁸ The brief, disastrous reign of Abimelech (Judg 9) should have taught them differently. Nevertheless, they put intense pressure on Samuel to appoint a king (1 Sam 8:4-5,19-20). Samuel made it clear to the people that by taking a king they would reject YHWH as their king (v. 7; cp. 10:17-19) and they would lose their independence by becoming the king's servants (1 Sam 8:11-18). When the people persisted (vs. 19-20), YHWH gave Samuel permission to let them have their way (vs. 21-22).

⁷Israel's problem during the period of the judges was lack of regard for the theocratic rule of YHWH, the divine king (Judg 8:23; cp. Num 23:21). The end of the book of Judges notes: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25). YHWH's kingship was not guiding and restraining the people because they did not acknowledge his rule (Gane 1996: 84).

⁸There are significant ways in which the period of the kings parallels the earlier period of the judges. Both periods were defined by distinctive forms of leadership. Both involved downward spirals of decline from ideal times under Joshua and David, respectively. Both were punctuated by periods of reform which failed to permanently purify the nation from the contaminating influences of its neighbors. In the time of Samuel, the last judge, the ark was captured and the glory (*kābôḏ*) departed from Israel (1 Sam 4:22). In the time of Zedekiah, the last king, the glory (*kābôḏ*) left the temple (Ezek 9:3; 10:4,18-19) and the temple was destroyed. Jeremiah explicitly referred to a parallel between the late monarchy and the late period of the judges when he prophesied that the temple would become like Shiloh (Jer 26:6; cp. vs. 9).

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When Saul was crowned, “Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship; and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord” (1 Sam 10:25). Thus, while the people were responsible to the king, they and their king were still responsible to YHWH. YHWH maintained ultimate control and the king was His vice-regent (see Dumbrell 1980: 47), the mediator of the covenant between YHWH and His people (Robertson 1980: 235).

The reign of Saul, the first king, was paradigmatic for much of the history of the monarchy. Saul trusted his own judgment rather than obeying YHWH, his superior, whose will was conveyed to him through the prophetic role of Samuel. Because Saul was insubordinate, YHWH could not help him against his enemies, and the entire nation suffered the consequences.

In David, YHWH found someone He could use to make monarchy an instrument of His purposes. YHWH rewarded David for his loyalty by promising him a dynasty (2 Sam 7). Thus, whereas the Israelites had initiated the monarchy, YHWH took the initiative in pointing to David as the king whose relationship to himself subsequent kings were to emulate (see e.g. 2 Kgs 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2). YHWH’s covenant with David provided stability for Judah long after northern Israel had seceded from the union. Without such a covenant, northern Israel was frequently racked with strife over royal succession.

The Davidic covenant was not unconditional in the sense that it protected kings or their people from failure to enjoy YHWH’s blessings when they were unfaithful to him (Dumbrell 1980: 45; McConville 1989: 34ff). Even in David’s reign, 70,000 of his innocent Israelites died because of his sin in numbering Israel (2 Sam 24:15; 1 Chr 21:14). He was punished by losing his subjects. Because they had chosen to have a king, they suffered from his mistakes. Because Solomon turned to idolatry, he started to lose control of his mighty empire during his lifetime (1 Kgs 11:14ff) and the division of the kingdom left his son ruling only Judah in the south (1 Kgs 11:9-13,26-40; 12:1-24). When kings were arrogant, YHWH gave them less about which to be arrogant. Hezekiah foolishly showed Merodach-Baladan’s envoys all his wealth and was rebuked by Isaiah, who told him that all his possessions would someday be taken to Babylon (2 Kgs 20:12-18). Josiah’s disregard for God’s will as spoken to him through Neco II (2 Chron 35:22) led to his death (vs. 23-24) and the further subjugation of Judah to Egypt (36:4). The fact that Josiah had led Judah in a sweeping reform (2 Kgs 23) did not exempt him from paying the price for his error any more than Moses’ faithful service waived the consequences of his striking the rock at Meribah (Num 20:10-13). Notice that good king Josiah ended his life in the same way bad king Ahab did: shot by enemy archers while riding in his chariot (1 Kgs 22:34-37; 2 Chron 35:23-24).

Whereas the gift of prophecy was rare during the period of the judges (Judg 6:8), monarchy under YHWH necessitated a continuous line of prophets to remind kings that they were responsible to YHWH. Even good king David needed the pointed testimony of prophets such as Nathan (2 Sam 12).

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The way in which a king treated a prophet showed his attitude to YHWH. Because Zedekiah was insubordinate to YHWH, failing to “humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke from the mouth of the Lord” (2 Chron 36:12), he broke the oath which he had made to Nebuchadnezzar in YHWH’s name (v. 13; Malamat 1968: 145) and brought a disaster of biblical proportions down on himself and his people.

From the perspective of hindsight, it is easy for us to condemn the kings of Israel and Judah for their political blunders. But in worldly terms they were not stupid. They were independence oriented opportunists who counted the cost of confrontation with foreign powers. The problem was that at crucial moments they counted wrong. It would have taken superhuman insight for them to accurately weigh the circumstances which would determine their future (cp. Malamat 1968: 141). But through the prophets they had access to such insight. Nevertheless, they deliberately chose to reject it. They did not trust YHWH enough to depend upon His word.

The reaction of Ahaz to Isaiah when the king was threatened by the alliance of Syria and Israel illustrates the crucial relationship between royal trust and obedience in YHWH and national well-being. Through Isaiah, YHWH assured Ahaz that his enemies would fail (Isa 7:3-9). But Ahaz would not even ask for a sign to help his faith when YHWH offered it to him (vs. 10-12).⁹ YHWH gave him a sign anyway: A young unmarried woman (*’almâ*) would have a son and name him Immanuel, i.e. “God is with us” (v. 14).¹⁰ This sign was double-edged: It signified that Syria and northern Israel would be destroyed (v. 16) as Isaiah had already said (v. 8), but it also signified that because of Ahaz’ faithlessness Assyria would come upon Judah (vs. 17-20). Rather than heeding the prophet’s encouragement to trust YHWH, Ahaz turned to Tiglath-pileser III for help (2 Kgs 16:7-9), thereby causing the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that Assyria would come to dominate Judah. From this time on, Judah was never able to extricate itself from foreign domination (Motyer 1993: 87). As Isaiah had said to Ahaz, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (Isa 7:9, RSV).¹¹

⁹Contrast Judg 7:9-14.

¹⁰Immanuel is a nominal sentence in Hebrew like many other names: “God is with us” rather than simply “God with us.”

¹¹While it is clear that the birth of Immanuel was somehow relevant to the 8th century B.C. crisis, scholars have not succeeded in finding evidence that the prediction was fulfilled in Ahaz’ time (see e.g. Motyer 1993: 85-87). However, centuries later the incarnate Christ did signify that God is with us (Matt 1:23). More than ironically, he launched his ministry from Galilee, thereby fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy that the people of that region, who were the first to fall into darkness under the Assyrians, would see “a great light” (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:12-16). After centuries of domination by foreign powers, beginning with the time of Ahaz, Christ as Immanuel would bring relief by inviting his people into “the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 4:17).

False Worship

Idoltrous false worship was a major reason why YHWH gave up Israel and then Judah to destruction (2 Kgs 17:7-23; 2 Kgs 23:26-27; 2 Chron 36:14; Ezek 8). Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, value judgments on royal reigns are largely based upon actions of kings for or against idolatry. Ethical sins arising from weaknesses such as greed or lust violated YHWH's covenant law. But idoltrous worship rejected YHWH in a more direct sense by deliberately putting something in place of him.

State-supported idolatry of foreign deities was introduced at Jerusalem by Solomon, who built places of worship for his pagan wives (1 Kgs 11:1-8). When northern Israel broke away from Solomon's son, Jeroboam sponsored idoltrous shrines at Bethel and Dan so that his people would not maintain loyalty to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:25-33). Thus, idolatry was introduced very early in the history of the monarchy.

It is true that the calf-shaped idols at Bethel and Dan were designed to honor YHWH. But because YHWH rejects material representations of Himself (Exod 20:4-6; cp. Deut 4:15-19), worship of an idol representing him is worship of the object alone, which he regards as another god. It was a short step from worshipping a material object connected with YHWH (1 Kgs 12:25-33; cp. Judg 8:27) to polytheistic worship of foreign deities such as Baal (1 Kgs 16:31-33; cp. Judg 8:33).

Except for a few periods of reform carried out by rulers such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah in Judah and by Jehu in northern Israel, the kings were tolerant of idolatry or actively promoted it. Idolatry was like cancer. Because it was never wholly eradicated, it survived occasional surgery and always returned with a vengeance.

Partly because northern Israel lacked the religious anchor to YHWH which the temple in Jerusalem provided for Judah, the northern kings led the way in corrupting the worship of their people. Influenced by his Sidonian wife, Jezebel, Ahab began worshipping Baal and built a temple of Baal in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:31-33). In Judah, Ahaz and Manasseh followed a similar course. 2 Kgs 16:3 states that Ahaz "walked in the way of the kings of Israel." 2 Kgs 21:3 says that Manasseh "erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah pole, as King Ahab of Israel had done."

From reading the Bible, it is difficult for modern readers to understand the attractiveness of idolatry and polytheism to ancient people. But texts and cult objects discovered by archaeology have greatly illuminated the nature of non-Israelite worship and also the syncretistic practices of the Israelites, who attempted to blend pagan worship of other gods with worship of YHWH. It has become clearer that from a human point of view worship of deities such as Baal, Asherah, Shamash, etc. made a lot of sense. These gods were regarded as controlling forces which directly affected the people's physical well-being (see e.g. Oppenheim 1964: 194-197). There was plenty of evidence for the existence of

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the gods. The cycles of nature—springtime and harvest, periods of rain and dryness, fertility and barrenness—were all viewed as evidence of the activities of the gods. In an agricultural society, the forces of nature were the key to prosperity and wealth. That was the concern of the people: materialism, not spiritual or moral goodness.

Ancient people worshipped their gods by means of images. While they regarded the gods themselves as animate supernatural beings, the way they related to the gods was demonstrated by the manner in which they treated their idols.¹² To own an idol was to have access to some of the power of the deity, as if the idol had a kind of magic quality. This kind of thinking had already entered Israel by the period of the “judges.” Because a man called Micah had an idolatrous shrine with a levite as his priest, he was sure that YHWH would make him prosper (Judg 17:13). He was concerned with prosperity, not obedience to YHWH. For him, religion was viewed as a form of self-help which was valuable if it “worked for him.” Isaiah similarly describes the idolatry of his day. A person would make an idol in order to seek deliverance from some kind of distress (Isa 44:17), without reference to moral obligations. While modern Christianity is not tangled up with idolatrous worship of false gods such as Baal, the contemporary movement toward increasing materialism and self-help religion¹³ shares some of the same basic attitudes found in ancient idolatry.

In the time of Isaiah, even legitimate worship of YHWH was viewed selfishly as self-help. The people fasted, presumably on the Day of Atonement, which was the only fast day which YHWH had commanded (Lev 16:29,31). Then they asked YHWH: “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” (Isa 58:3). They thought that YHWH should bless them because they had obeyed His command. But Isaiah pointed out that on the day of the fast they were seeking their own pleasure (Isa 58:3), which probably means that they were working (cp. v. 13) and thereby breaking the command to keep sabbath on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29,31; 23:28,30-32). Furthermore, on the very day when their sins were being cleansed from the temple (Lev 16), they were adding to their sins and showing their disloyalty to YHWH by oppressing their workers and fighting (Isa 58:3-4). It is this kind of hypocrisy which explains prophetic denunciations of sacrifices. YHWH hated sacrifices offered by those whose hands were “full of blood” (Isa 1:15) because

¹²A modern analogy is the way people in many countries honor their leaders by displaying photographs of them. To show disrespect to such a photograph would be to show disrespect to the leader himself.

¹³“Once stern and prescriptive in worldly matters, religion has become nothing more than a source of psychological uplifting, a tool of therapy that buttresses individual choice and lets people feel good about whatever code of conduct they choose . . . the faithful go about their lives ‘pretty much the same as those who have no faith at all.’” (*U. S. News & World Report*, September 26, 1994: 82).

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these rituals were not heartfelt expressions of devotion, gratitude, or remorse for sin.

The people were treating YHWH as if He were some kind of magical vending machine: By pushing the right buttons they expected good things to come. YHWH insisted that He be regarded as a divine being with free choice rather than as an impersonal force (see McConville 1989: 46-47).¹⁴

The prophets attacked idolatry not only on the ground that it constituted rebellion against YHWH; they argued that it was stupid because it failed to achieve the purpose for which it was intended: namely, self-help. Because deities other than YHWH did not exist at all, the only reality of an idol was the material from which it was made, which had no power to think, see or do anything at all, let alone save anyone (Isa 40:19-20; 44:9-20; 46:1; contrast 46:4).

It would be expected that after northern Israel had been extinguished for clinging to idolatry (2 Kgs 17:7-23), Judah would wake up. But Ahaz, the king who reigned at the very time when northern Israel fell, carried Judean cultic disobedience to new depths of depravity. Not only did he follow the example of the kings of Israel;

He even made his son pass through fire,¹⁵ according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. (2 Kgs 16:3-4)

Ahaz was outdone by Manasseh, who enthusiastically bloodied his hands with every cultic and occult abomination he could find:

. . . he erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole . . . worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them . . . He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord . . . He made his son pass through fire; he practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. (2 Kgs 21:3-6; cp. 2 Chron 33:3ff)

Moreover, he put a sacred pole, i.e. a symbol/image of the goddess Asherah, in YHWH's temple, where YHWH had promised to put His name forever (1 Kgs 21:7)!¹⁶ M. Haran points out that in an ancient near eastern temple, images or symbols of deities were placed in the inner sanctum. Thus, Manasseh probably put the Asherah in the holy of holies in place of the ark of the covenant (Haran

¹⁴Cp. Joel 2:14: "Who knows whether he will not turn and relent . . ."

¹⁵Whether or not passing his son through the fire resulted in the child's death (see Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 266-267; cp. 2 Kgs 3:27; Mic 6:7), this foreign practice was explicitly forbidden by Deut 18:10. Not only was it a sin of idolatrous worship; it was a cruel violation of ethical morality.

¹⁶The forms of idolatry practiced in Judah during Manasseh's reign cannot be excused as the result of Assyrian imposition. It is true that vassal kingdoms were subject to some interference by Assyria in the area of religion (Spieckermann 1982: 307-372). However, 2 Kgs 21 and 2 Chron 33 do not mention Assyrian imposition of idolatry on Judah in the time of Manasseh (Gane 1997: 31). Furthermore, deities worshiped in Judah during Manasseh's reign were Canaanite and Aramean rather than Assyrian (Cogan 1993: 411; Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 272-273).

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1963: 50-51; cp. Mitchell 1991b: 373). The likelihood of such a direct affront to the God of Israel is reinforced by 2 Chron 35:3: Josiah later told the Levites to put the ark back in the temple.¹⁷

After Josiah's reform, idolatry rebounded again. Although the last kings were not as evil as Manasseh, when Ezekiel was carried in vision to the temple in Jerusalem, he saw Judeans carrying out abominations like those introduced by Manasseh (Ezek 8; see Smith 1975; Greenberg 1983: 168, 172). 2 Chron 36:14 describes all the leading priests and people at the time of Zedekiah as "exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem." The people had adopted the sins of Manasseh.

Ethical Sins

During the period of the monarchy, the Israelites broke all of the Ten Commandments which YHWH had given them as the primary stipulations for maintenance of His covenant with them (Exod 20; Deut 5). They broke the first four commandments, which addressed their duty to God, by embracing polytheism and idolatry (see above), taking God's name in vain (Jer 5:2; 2 Chron 36:13), and desecrating the Sabbath (Ezek 22:8; cp. Isa 58:13; Jer 17:19-27). They broke all six of the commandments which dealt with their duty to their fellow human beings by dishonoring their parents (Ezek 22:7), murdering innocent people (1 Kgs 21:5-14; 2 Kgs 21:16; Jer 22:17), committing adultery (Jer 23:14; 29:23), stealing (Jer 7:9; Hos 4:2), lying (Jer 29:23), and coveting (1 Kgs 21:1-4).

One of the most important functions of the prophets was to confront the people with ethical sins which separated them from YHWH. By mistreating other members of the covenant community, they were showing contempt for YHWH, the Lord and Protector of all Israelites. Sins against other people were sins against YHWH.

By means of "covenant lawsuits" communicated by the prophets, YHWH arraigned the Israelites for breaching their covenant with him. For example, in Isaiah 1 the prophet calls on heaven and earth as witnesses (cp. Deut 30:19; 31:28) to the fact that Israel was full of evildoing and had rebelled against its divine master (Isa 1:2ff; cp. 3:13; 41:21; Jer 2:9; Hos 14:1; Mic 6:2).

The prophets often vividly described and listed the sins of the people in order to impress upon them their moral sickness and need of YHWH. For example, Ezekiel laid bare the moral state of Jerusalem shortly before the Babylonians destroyed it:

Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the alien residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are

¹⁷This is the last reference to the ark in biblical history. When the temple was rebuilt after the destruction by the Babylonians, it had no ark.

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wronged in you. You have despised my holy things, and profaned my sabbaths. In you are those who slander to shed blood, those in you who eat upon the mountains, who commit lewdness in your midst . . . (Ezek 22:7-9; cp. Hos 4:1-2)

Zedekiah, whose name ironically means “YHWH is justice,” made a last-ditch attempt at social justice by calling on the people to free their Hebrew slaves as commanded in the laws of Moses (Jer 34:8-10; cp. Exod 21:2-11; Deut 15:12-18). But in spite of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar’s army was at their doorstep, they broke their commitment to obey YHWH by taking their slaves back into servitude (Jer 34:11).

Through sacrifices at the sanctuary, YHWH continually offered the people forgiveness. But this remedy required willingness to return to him and turn away from evil. Without repentance, expiatory rituals and prayers were hypocritical and worse than meaningless (e.g. Isa 1:11-15; Amos 5:21-27). As Samuel had said to King Saul, “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). So the prophets appealed to the Israelites to cleanse their lives and make positive practical efforts to help others in need (e.g. Isa 1:16-17).

False Hope Combined with Unwillingness to Follow Present Truth

In Jeremiah’s famous Temple sermon, he told the Judeans that if they would not listen to YHWH, obey His law and heed the messages of His prophets, He would make the temple like Shiloh and make Jerusalem a curse (Jer 26:4-6). But the priests and (false) prophets and all the people seized Jeremiah and condemned him to capital punishment for prophesying against their capital (vs. 7-11).

Jeremiah was saved by some leaders who argued that the prophet Micah had given essentially the same message (Jer 26:18-19; cp. Mic 3:12). Thus, Jeremiah’s message was shown to be consistent with that of Micah, whose prophetic authenticity was beyond dispute and who prophesied in the time of Hezekiah, the king who reigned when Jerusalem was delivered.

The leaders who saved Jeremiah understood that their assurance of YHWH’s protection was conditional. It was true that YHWH had promised through Isaiah that Jerusalem would not be captured by the Assyrians (2 Kgs 19:20-33; Isa 37:21-35). But it was also true that this promise was given when Hezekiah showed himself to be loyal to YHWH and thereby led His people out of the punishment prophesied by Micah. Jeremiah was holding out the same conditional hope to his audience at the temple:

Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. (Jer 26:13; cp. v. 3)

Jeremiah answered the false confidence of the priests and prophets, who clung to the earlier promise that Jerusalem would not be destroyed, as if that

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promise and the promises of the Davidic covenant were unconditional (see e.g. Jer 28:11; Overholt 1967: 245-246). Some modern scholars also claim that the Davidic covenant was unconditional because YHWH did not make any stipulations when He promised David a dynasty (see e.g. Weinfeld 1970: 189; cp. 2 Sam 7 and Ps 89). But this view overlooks the fact that the Davidic covenant was set up within the framework of the Sinaitic covenant, which was clearly conditional (cp. Overholt 1967: 245; Dumbrell 1980: 46).¹⁸

It is true that God's covenant promises are unconditional in the sense that He brings His purposes to ultimate fruition regardless of human cooperation (Walton 1994: 109). Thus, the promise to David is fulfilled in Christ, the "son of David," who is to reign eternally. But it is also true that each covenant phase is conditional in the sense that human beings must cooperate with God if they themselves are to enjoy the benefits of the covenant (Ps 89:29-32; Robertson 1980: 247; McCarthy 1982: 87; Dumbrell 1984: 150; Walton 1994: 113, 118). If God cannot work with a person or group of people, He finds others to take their place as His "remnant."

The assumptions of the Judeans regarding the covenant lulled them into false security, so that their natural sinfulness was unchecked by accountability to YHWH and His law of love:

For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. (Jer 6:13-14; cp. Jer 8:11; Ezek 13:10)

The leaders who sided with Jeremiah at the temple quoted Micah 3:12, which indicts the same groups of leaders who wanted to lynch Jeremiah: Priests and prophets were untrustworthy because they preached messages of human devising and were more interested in shekels than in the Shekinah. Judah's spiritual state had reverted to what it was at the time of Micah's prophecy before the reform of Hezekiah. Because history had repeated itself, present truth had come full circle, and again Jerusalem stood under judgment.

¹⁸Several factors indicate that the Davidic covenant functioned under the Sinaitic covenant. For example: (1) The covenant with David was analogous to the covenant with Phinehas (Num 25:12-13) in the sense that an individual was chosen on the basis of loyalty to God to have his line of descendants fill an existing institutional position of national leadership. (2) At least since the covenant with Noah, ratification of major covenants which defined phases of salvation history involved sacrificial ritual (Noah—Gen 8:20; Abraham—Gen 15; Israel—Exod 24). But no ritual was involved in the ratification of the Davidic covenant. (3) Deut 17:14-20 recognized the possibility of kingship and regulated this institution under the Deuteronomic restatement of the Sinaitic covenant. (4) Covenant reform/renewal during the monarchic and post-exilic periods meant primarily returning to faithful observance of the Sinaitic Covenant (2 Chron 29-31; 2 Kgs 23; 2 Chron 34-35; Neh 8-10).

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The sentence of judgment was even more serious in the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel than it was in the days of Micah. The main reason was Manasseh, Hezekiah's prodigal son, who led his people to unprecedented depths of apostasy. It is true that when he was arrested by the Assyrians he humbled himself before YHWH (2 Chron 33:12), and when YHWH restored him to Jerusalem he undid some of the evil which he had caused (v. 13-17). But the results of his earlier years continued to have a disastrous effect upon Judah.

YHWH's reaction to the intensely wicked part of Manasseh's reign had been to sentence Judah and Jerusalem to destruction (2 Kgs 21:10-15). Even after Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, began to repair the temple and humbled himself before YHWH when the "book of the law" was read to him, the prophetess Huldah confirmed that the evil described in the book, i.e. the covenant curses (see Deut 28:15-68; cp. 29:16-28; Lev 26: 14-39), applied to Judah (2 Kgs 22:16-17). This is not so surprising. But even after Josiah subsequently carried out the most sweeping reforms in the entire history of Judah, the country was still doomed:

Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. The Lord said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there." (2 Kgs 23:26-27)

The persistence of the sentence of doom on the basis of the sins of Manasseh raises a serious problem of theodicy (= divine justice; Smith 1975: 12-14), as recognized by the Judeans themselves. They repeated a proverb: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel answered this proverb with a message vindicating YHWH's justice: Sinners die, i.e. suffer unnatural death as punishment, for their own sins (Jer 31:30; Ezek 18:3-29; cp. Deut 24:16). After devoting an entire chapter to detailed exposition of this principle, Ezekiel called upon his people to repent so that they would live (Ezek 18:30-32).

If YHWH would be true to His own principle of justice, how could He punish Judah for the sins of Manasseh after he was dead and after they had experienced corporate repentance under Josiah? Connected with this, scholars have perceived a discrepancy between 2 Kgs 23:25, where Josiah is highly praised for his reform, and verses 26-27, where Judah's fall already appears irrevocable in the time of Josiah due to Manasseh's sins. Furthermore, such irrevocability seems contradicted by prophetic messages after Josiah's death such as Jer 26:3,13, where the people could still escape calamity if they repented.¹⁹ This

¹⁹T. R. Hobbs finds that judgment for the sins of Manasseh was delayed just as judgment on Hezekiah for showing his possessions to the Babylonian envoys was delayed (Hobbs 1985: 338; cp.

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complex of problems is so serious that some scholars can deal with it only by postulating conflicting strands of authorship in the books of Kings (see e.g. Cross 1973: 274-290) and/or by supposing that Ezekiel justified the punishment of Judah in the time of Zedekiah by falsely attributing the wickedness of Manasseh's time to subsequent generations (see e.g. Ezek 8).²⁰

While the difficulties just raised are indeed challenging, they are not insurmountable. The early messages of Jeremiah, dating to the reign of Josiah (see Jer 1:2), indicate that while the reforms initiated by this king were wide in scope, they did not deeply affect the spiritual lives of the people (Keil 1952: 492; Kent 1981: 11). This is confirmed by the rapidity with which they slid back into apostasy after Josiah died. Jer 44 is especially revealing in this regard. After the fall of Jerusalem and the assassination of Gedaliah, the refugees to Egypt said to Jeremiah:

“As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you. Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine.” (v. 16-18)

Thus, the people actually blamed their troubles on the interruption of their idolatry!²¹ It appears that they were true believing pagans all along. This helps to explain 2 Kgs 23:26-27. The reform of Josiah was not enough to turn aside the punishment of the nation which it had incurred during Manasseh's reign.

We have already found that the Judeans adopted the practices of Manasseh to the extent that at the very end, in the time of Zedekiah, these evils flourished even without the level of aggressive royal sponsorship which Manasseh provided. By not turning away from the sins which their forefathers committed in the time of Manasseh, later generations continued to reap the results of these sins.

2 Kgs 20:16-19). But the punishment for the sins of Manasseh is much greater in scope, involving the entire nation and thus raising the question of YHWH's fairness.

²⁰For references to arguments of C. C. Torrey, Y. Kaufmann, and M. Greenberg, see Smith 1975: 11-12.

²¹M. Smith argues that the interruption of idolatry referred to in this passage does not fit the reform imposed by Josiah, as scholars such as M. Greenberg have held, because this reform was followed by a period of prosperity. He explains the suspension of idolatry as a result of the siege of Jerusalem, when incense and sacrificial materials became impossible to obtain (1975: 15-16). Thus, Smith suggests that private practice of idolatry continued throughout the reign of Josiah and only ended at the time of the siege (1975: 16). However, Smith's argument is weakened by the fact that in Jer 44:16-18, the cessation of idolatry is viewed as the cause rather than the result of troubles such as the siege of Jerusalem.

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YHWH had warned of this dynamic in the second of the Ten Commandments, which deals with the chief sin of Manasseh's time, namely, idolatry:

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me. (Exod 20:5)

At first glance, this law seems to conflict with Deut 24:16, which states: "Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death." But the difference is that in the second commandment, those who suffer the consequences of the sins of their ancestors are those who reject YHWH. If people turn from the ways of their evil parents, love YHWH and keep His commandments, He promises to treat them with "steadfast love to the thousandth generation" (Exod 20:6).

2 Kgs 23:26-27 does not contradict Ezek 18, but complements it in the same way that Exod 20:5 complements Deut 24:16. Although it is true that people are punished for their own sins and they can escape punishment by turning from their sins, it is also true that those who continue the rebellion of their ancestors suffer the accumulating consequences of disobedience. Thus, to reverse the effects of Manasseh's reign would require a much stronger reformation than that which was needed earlier in the time of Isaiah and Micah. The people needed to follow the present truth which YHWH revealed to them through Jeremiah and Ezekiel rather than thinking that they could get by with the earlier prophets alone.

Jeremiah preached his Temple sermon at the twilight of the monarchy. The captivities of 605 and 597 B.C. had already occurred. Whereas the people were inclined to resist these judgments, Jeremiah appealed to them to submit to God. In a letter to the exiles in Babylon, Jeremiah told them to build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children, and seek the welfare of Babylon (Jer 29:5-7), because their exile would not end for 70 years (vs. 10-14). The main purpose of the letter was to counter the false hope of the false prophets, which would lead the people to make decisions counterproductive to their well-being and survival (cp. Overholt 1967: 247).

False hope had disastrous results:

1. Because they thought God was with them, the people pressured Zedekiah into rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem.

2. The people ignored their real problem, namely, unfaithfulness to God which separated them from His protection:

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called

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by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations? (Jer 7:9-10)

3. The people ignored the voice of God through the true prophets, thereby resisting His leading and renouncing loyalty to him (Jer 29:17-19; contrast 2 Chron 20:20).

In their refusal to follow YHWH through changing circumstances (Overholt 1967: 245), the Judeans paralleled the experience of their ancestors at Kadesh. When the people accepted the report of the ten spies and were overcome by rebellious unbelief (Num 13:27-29,31-33; 14:1-4), YHWH sentenced them to what they had chosen: more years of wandering in the wilderness (Num 14:28-35). But when Moses told this to them, they attempted to undo their fate by obeying the earlier message to take the land immediately. By attempting to follow that message, which no longer applied, they rejected present truth and rebelled against YHWH again. The result was a humiliating defeat (Num 14:39-45).

The experiences of the ancient Israelites should teach us the importance of accepting and following the light given for our time by the latest of the prophets, even if her writings are not canonical, just as the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were not canonical when they had their most immediate application. We are responsible not only for the truth revealed to our ancestors, but also for the additional truth entrusted to us.²²

In a stupendous effort to save His people, YHWH appealed to them through the prophets by means of remarkable oratory which was vivid, impassioned, poetic, dramatic, startling and at times of such soaring literary quality that it has few rivals in any language (see e.g. Isa 40-66; Ezek 19; Brownlee 1972: 93). Moreover, YHWH had the prophets do highly unusual things in order to arrest the people's attention. For example, He told Ezekiel to make a model of the siege of Jerusalem and act out siege conditions by eating "bread" made of bits and pieces of various ingredients (Ezek 4:9-10). In the third century A.D., some Jews experimented by following Ezekiel's recipe for siege bread. Not even a dog could eat it (Babylonian Talmud *Erubin* 81a; see Greenberg 1983: 106). But not only did YHWH command Ezekiel to eat these miserable morsals; He told him to bake it in public on human dung (Ezek 4:13,9-13). When the prophet protested, YHWH allowed him to use cow's dung (vs. 14-15). If this episode was humiliating to the prophet, he really suffered when YHWH took his wife from him without letting him mourn her death, as a sign to the people that the tem-

²²"Greater light shines upon us than shone upon our fathers. We cannot be accepted or honored of God in rendering the same service, or doing the same works, that our fathers did. In order to be accepted and blessed of God as they were, we must imitate their faithfulness and zeal,—improve our light as they improved theirs,—and do as they would have done had they lived in our day. We must walk in the light which shines upon us, otherwise that light will become darkness" (White 1948: 262).

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ple would be destroyed (Ezek 24:15-27)! Through such drastic means of communication YHWH cried out to His people to repent before it was too late.

YHWH kept on trying to win back His people until no further hope remained. In his love-song concerning YHWH's vineyard, Isaiah quotes YHWH as lamenting: "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?" (Isa 5:4). These are ominous words. In the next verses, YHWH says that He will destroy the vineyard (vs. 5-6). Isaiah was presenting a powerful warning. But because this and many other prophetic messages were not heeded, YHWH could do nothing more for the Israelite monarchy, so its probation closed. In the end, Chronicles had to report:

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy. (2 Chron 36:15-16)

The very next verses recount the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians (vs. 17-21). The terrible "day of the Lord" had come for the Jewish people (cp. Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18).

Results

Even though His people were in exile, God encouraged them by giving to Ezekiel and Daniel visions of Himself upon His throne (Ezek 1; Dan 7:9-14). He was still in charge, watching over their destiny. Although He allowed Judah to fall, He controlled circumstances so that God's people would not be blotted from the face of the earth, but a purified remnant could arise from the ashes of the great conflagration and revive the nation. The following factors involved in the fall of the monarchy contributed to the survival of the nation and/or its purification:

1. Judah fell to the Babylonians rather than the Assyrians. If Judah had been completely conquered by the Assyrians in the time of Hezekiah or Manasseh, it is likely that her population would have been scattered, absorbed, and replaced according to the Assyrian policy which vaporized the national identity of conquered peoples such as the northern Israelites. There would have been no Jewish nation into which the Messiah could be born. The fact that Judah fell more than a century later to the Babylonians, whose tactics were different, made possible a return from captivity.

2. If the nation had fallen in the time of Manasseh, it is possible that the remnant who survived Manasseh's depredations would not have been strong enough to carry the nation through the crisis. The reform of Josiah strengthened the faithful remnant before Judah fell.

3. YHWH addressed royal insubordination, which had led the nation into apostasy, by removing the monarchy. But the prophets outlived the monarchy and continued to guide the people.

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4. YHWH dealt with idolatry and hypocritical worship at the temple by allowing the temple to be destroyed and His people to be carried far from it where they could interact with him only through sincere prayer (e.g. Dan 6:10). The effectiveness of the captivity in removing idolatry, even of the kind which was practiced by the common people at their homes, is shown by archaeology. Ephraim Stern reports that thousands of cult figurines representing various deities have been found all over Palestine, all of them dating to pre-exilic periods. But not a single cultic figurine has been found which dates to the Persian period, after the exile (Stern 1989: 53-54). This does not mean that idolatry posed no threat after the exile. The main thrust of Ezra's reform was to do away with mixed marriages which were causing assimilation of foreign culture and thereby paving the way for re-introduction of idolatry (Ezra 9). However, there is no question that the captivity had dealt idolatry a deadly wound.

5. In much of their preaching and writing, the prophets gave the people life-preserving hope by pointing them to a new dawning in the future, a time when YHWH would comfort His people and feed His flock like a shepherd (Isa 40:1,11). His messianic suffering "Servant" would bear their griefs, carry their sorrows and take the punishment for their iniquities (Isa 53:4-6). He would establish a new covenant with them, based upon forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34), and give them hearts of flesh instead of stone (Ezek 36:26). He would revive and unite their nation (Ezek 37) and give them a new temple (Ezek 40-47). He would restore their land, as shown by Jeremiah's purchase of a field at Anathoth during a lull in the final siege of Jerusalem (Jer 32; Kent 1981: 16). Without prophetic hope, the people could easily have given up.

6. The searing indictments of Jeremiah and Ezekiel sounded harsh. But harshness paved the way for hope. When prophecies of doom turned out to be reliable and realistic, there was basis for belief that prophecies of restoration would also come true. If true prophets had only emphasized good times as the false prophets did, the people would have lost all hope before those times came. The pointed testimonies, guidance, and foresight of the prophets was not appreciated by many while they lived. But the effect of these messages was to preserve the nation's identity by taking a remnant from a state of denial and anchoring them in reality, especially the reality of their relationship with YHWH.

Conclusion

For the people of Israel and Judah, the late monarchy was a time of bewildering complexity, radical paradigm shifts and accumulating stress in all areas of life. Powerful internal and external forces threatened to obliterate the covenant and its community. Leaders and people pulled each other in various directions. Conflicting theologies were espoused by credible individuals who claimed to have messages from YHWH (Overholt 1967: 241). Greed and misery fought in the streets. In their daily struggle for survival and identity, some puffed the deadly vapors of vain euphoria and others withered in despair.

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Through it all, YHWH was there, waiting for His prodigal people to come home after tasting the bitter alternative to His benevolent rule (see Hosea; cp. Lk 15:11-24). Even after He left the temple and the Judeans were in captivity, He Himself was a sanctuary to them (Ezek 11:16). His prophets stayed with their people--weeping over them (Jer 9:1; 13:17), thundering at them (Jer 25), persecuted by them (Jer 37-38), but going with them into exile (Jer 43:1-7; Kent 1981: 17).

When the Assyrians and Babylonians rampaged across the stage of history, many little peoples like the Israelites were trampled into the dust and vanished. But the Israelites survived and were transformed. In spite of all the suffering and perplexity, the visions of hope which awaited their time were trustworthy and the just did live by faith (Hab 2:3-4). It is true that the Jews had many problems after the exile, but the fact that they survived at all is a tribute to the faithfulness of the few who obeyed when it was popular to disobey and who spoke when nobody seemed to be listening. But even more it is a tribute to the love and power of the Most High, who "rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (Dan 4:17,25; cp. 5:21).

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Temple and Sacrifice

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In his magnificent book entitled *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey struggles with the Ascension of Christ:

So many times in the course of writing this book I have felt like one of those disciples, peering intently at a blank blue sky. I look for some sign of Jesus, some visual clue . . . Like the disciples' eyes, mine ache for a pure glimpse of the One who ascended. Why, I ask again, did he have to leave? . . .

I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles. (Yancey 1995: 227,229).

Like most Christians, Yancey has little idea of what Jesus has been doing in heaven, aside from waiting. His prolonged absence is a mystery.

This is where Seventh-day Adventists come in. It is our privilege and special contribution to put people in touch with the post-Ascension Jesus by showing them how the Bible plainly reveals His on-going and intimate interaction with their lives. According to the book of Hebrews, Christ is working as our perfect and perfectly empathetic High Priest in God's heavenly sanctuary, continuing the restoration which He began at the Cross (Heb 4:14-16; 7:1-10:25).

Christ's present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is illuminated by the prophetic rituals of the ancient Israelite sanctuary (Heb 8-9). There are no topics more relevant to Christians today than the profound ideas conveyed through the sanctuary and its services, namely, the *presence* of God, the *power* of His salvation through Jesus Christ, and His *promise* of restoration to immortality and full intimacy with him. The sanctuary is worthy of our highest attention because it is about Jesus where He is *now*.

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The Adventist sanctuary doctrine is not merely a curious relic of our pioneers, to which we should cling from respect for our historical tradition. It is our access to Jesus, our dynamic model of righteousness by faith and our revelation of the character of God. The sanctuary answers our questions about salvation and keeps in proper balance the nearness and transcendence of God, the “legal” and experiential aspects of atonement, and the successive phases of atonement.

Since the aspects of balance just mentioned address areas of theology which are currently debated, the remainder of this paper examines these aspects by investigating the ancient Israelite sanctuary and its services against its ancient Near Eastern background. While the worship of the Israelites had significant elements in common with that of non-Israelites, the distinctive features of the Israelite ritual system highlight the nearness and transcendence of God, legal and experiential atonement, and phases of atonement.

Nearness and Transcendence of God

Gen 1:27 tells us that God made man, including male and female, in His own image. We are like God, but we are not the same as God. This tension in nature is paralleled by a tension in encounter. Even after the human fall into sin limited the divine-human encounter, God has drawn near through assuming human form (Gen 18; Judg 6:11-23; 13:3-20), through the Shekinah at the Israelite sanctuary (Exod 40:34-38), through the incarnation of Christ (Matt 1:18-23; John 1:14) and through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18; 16:12-15). But amidst all this nearness, God reminds us of His transcendence:

It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Tim 6:16; NRSV here and in subsequent biblical quotations unless indicated otherwise).

God interacts with us, but this is no ordinary encounter. For our interactions with God to have divine efficacy and power, we should always, within the contexts of our respective cultures, acknowledge that while God makes Himself familiar, we must maintain our sense of awe rather than slipping into undue familiarity.

The Israelite sanctuary provides one of the clearest expressions of the balance between God’s nearness and transcendence as it impacts divine-human interactions. The following paragraphs show that while ancient Near Eastern people commonly believed that their deities resided among them in temples, the unique residence of the Shekinah in the Israelite sanctuary made a unique statement about God’s transcendent nearness.

In the last two centuries, archaeologists have unearthed a wealth of textual material relevant to the religious life of ancient Near Eastern people, such as

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Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Egyptians.¹ Like the Israelites, these peoples believed their well-being depended upon healthy relationships with their deities. For example, a Sumerian hymn to the goddess Nanshe (c. 2100 B.C.) refers to the benefits of Nanshe's presence among the people of Lagash and the surrounding area:

The living quarters of the land prosper in her presence . . .
Does not propriety shine brightly in the presence of the lady? . . .
In the presence of Nanshe abundance triples in Lagash . . .
(lines 12, 32, 33; Heimpel 1981: 83, 85; cp. e.g. Deut 28:11)

Ancient Near Easterners practiced some forms of religious expression which have continued until modern times, even in our own religion. These include prayers, recitations, hymns, and symbolic ceremonies (ed. Pritchard 1969). Through such expressions ancient people believed they interacted with transcendent beings who lived and moved in the heavens, in the air, on earth, in the region of subterranean freshwater, or in the netherworld (see e.g. Oppenheim 1964: 194-197). They could learn about the origins, powers, and exploits of their gods from various sources, including myths (ed. Pritchard 1969: 3-155).

It was not enough for ancient people to worship their deities from a distance. They desired tangible evidence of divine presence dwelling among them and believed it was their duty to provide temples as palaces for their gods. Thus, the Sumerian "Cylinder A" claims that Gudea, the Ur III period governor of Lagash (c. 2141-2122 B.C.), followed divine orders in building a temple for the god Ningirsu (ed. Pritchard 1969: 268). Similarly, Exod 25:8 tells us that YHWH² ordered the Israelites to build Him a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them.

The idea that the Israelite portable sanctuary was the earthly dwelling of YHWH was conveyed by its designation as *miškān*, "tabernacle" (Exod 25:9), from the root *škn*, of which the verb means "dwell" (Exod 25:8). The postbiblical word Shekinah, referring to the resident divine presence (Jastrow 1975: 1573), is a noun derived from the same root.

The dwelling function of the tabernacle was reflected in its architectural layout (Exod 25-27, 30). There were two rooms:

1. An inner "throne room" containing the ark of the covenant over which YHWH was enthroned (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Isa 37:16).

¹If the sheer number of religious texts is any indication, these people must have been very religious. For example, of the thousands of Hittite texts which have been discovered, the largest genre consists of descriptions of religious festivals.

²This is the personal name Yahweh/Jehovah, written in Hebrew with four consonants (YHWH) for which the original vowels are not known with certainty.

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2. An outer “living room” containing several kinds of items which were found in residences of well-to-do people: a table for food, a lampstand, and an incense burner to sweeten the atmosphere.³

The layout of the portable tabernacle and the permanent temple which superseded it (1 Kgs 6-7) showed remarkable similarities to other ancient Near Eastern shrines. For example, archaeologists have found Syrian temples which are like Solomon’s in that they each have an inner room or area (i.e., holy of holies), a main hall (i.e., holy place) and a portico (Fritz 1987).

Ceremonies at the Israelite sanctuary reinforced the concept that YHWH was in residence. Regular (*tāmîd*) rituals performed by the priests every morning and evening constituted the work of servants for their Lord (Haran 1985: 216-219). These rituals included tending lamps (Exod 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4), burning incense (Exod 30:7, 8), and performing a regular burnt offering with its cereal and drink accompaniments (Num 28:1-8). Thus the divine king of Israel (Num 23:21) was treated to a significant extent as if He were a human king.

Not only did YHWH reside at a sanctuary made by human hands and receive service from human priests; He even received token offerings of human food. Sacrifices offered at the outer altar before YHWH were called the *lehem*, “food” of God (Lev 21:8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25; cf. Num 28:2), and *lehem (hap)pānîm*, the “bread of the presence,” was regularly placed on the golden table in the holy place (Exod 25:30; Lev 24:5-9).

Quasi-human treatment of YHWH paralleled ceremonies outside Israel, where deities represented by their idols received service by human beings. Laying out bread before deities was an early kind of ritual, appearing, for example, in a Sumerian inscription of Urukagina of Lagaš,⁴ whom J. Cooper dates a little before 2350 B.C. (Cooper 1983: 60). That is most of a millennium before the Israelite sanctuary was constructed. The regular placing of bread on tables or stands, which is also attested among the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Hittites, was part of the daily care and feeding of the gods (Kingsbury 1963; Blackman 1918-19; Hoffner 1974: 216). The Babylonians were known to lay out loaves in multiples of twelve, a number to which they apparently attached astral significance (Zimmern 1901: 94-95; cp. Lev 24:5-6). In addition to being served food and drink, such as meat, bread, and beer, twice every day (Blome 1934: 249-250; ed. Pritchard 1969: 343-345; Oppenheim 1964: 188-192), idols were washed, clothed, and in some cases even provided with makeup paint (Goetze 1957: 162-163; Erman 1907: 46).

Outside Israel, deities represented by their idols were regarded as actually consuming human food and drink. For example, Oppenheim describes food consumption by Mesopotamian deities:

³On incense in non-cultic use see Nielsen 1986: 90.

⁴Ukg. 4-5, x:14-15ff, transliterated and translated by Steible 1982: 304-305.

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Food was placed in front of the image, which was apparently assumed to consume it by merely looking at it, and beverages were poured out before it for the same purpose. A variant of this pattern consisted of presenting the offered food with a solemn ritual gesture, passing it in a swinging motion before the staring eyes of the image. (Oppenheim 1964: 191-192).

In the Hittite cult, consumption of bread by a deity could be symbolized by breaking the bread. (Hoffner 1974: 217).

Food consumption by non-Israelite deities was regarded as filling a real need: The gods were at least to some extent dependent upon human service and sustenance. For example, in the Old Babylonian epic *Atrahasis*, when the flood annihilated the human population, the gods suffered terribly from hunger and thirst. Then when *Atrahasis* offered his sacrifice after the flood (cp. Gen 8:20-21), the gods smelled the offering and crowded around like flies.⁵ Since humans were at the same time dependent upon the gods, divine-human relationships could be characterized as symbiotic (Gane 1992a: 191).

Unlike other deities, YHWH was not viewed as consuming the food set before him in order to satisfy His hunger. The “food” on the outer altar was burned up and YHWH enjoyed only the smoke (e.g. Lev 1:9). Although the “bread of the presence” was not burned, the following aspects of the ritual show that YHWH distanced Himself from excessive anthropomorphism by denying His need for human food (Gane 1992a).

1. Unlike other regular rituals, which did not carry the same danger that YHWH would be viewed as consuming human food, the bread was arranged only once a week (Lev 24:8).

2. YHWH assigned the bread to His priests when it was removed from the table at the end of the week (Lev 24:9). Thus, He did not merely have a slow metabolic rate; He did not consume the bread at all.

3. YHWH appropriated the frankincense offered with the bread as His *’azkārāh*, “memorial portion,” at the same time the priests received the bread (Lev 24:7; Gane 1992a: 196-197). Thus, when the priests ate the bread this was not secondary utilization following consumption by the deity, which took place in the Hittite cult (ed. Pritchard 1969: 208).

The Israelite bread ritual did not simply deny that YHWH needs human food (cp. Ps. 50:12-13); it indicated the opposite idea: YHWH the Creator feeds Israel (Gane 1992a: 199-203). The ritual took place on the Sabbath (Lev 24:8), the memorial of Creation (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11; 31:16-17). To strengthen the Sabbath connection, Lev 24:8 calls the twelve loaves an “eternal covenant,” that is a token of the covenant between YHWH and the twelve Israelite tribes. The only other thing which YHWH called an “eternal covenant” between Himself and the Israelites during the wilderness period was the Sabbath (Exod 31:16).

⁵Atrah...asis III v:30-36. For transliteration and translation, see Lambert and Millard 1969.

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Within the framework of the Sabbath and the covenant, the bread, i.e. basic food (cp. Ecclesiasticus 29:21), constituted a token acknowledgment of the fact that YHWH as Israel's Creator-in-residence continued to provide for and sustain His people (cf. Ps 145:15-16; Job 12:10; Dan 5:23). But God wants His people to enjoy more than maintenance of mortal existence. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life . . . Whoever eats of this bread will live forever" (John 6:48,51).

We have already found that the rituals of the Israelite sanctuary uniquely preserved YHWH's transcendence by denying that He needs human food. But there was an even more striking difference between the Israelite sanctuary and other shrines: The Israelite sanctuary contained no material representation of Israel's deity. The Israelites did not need idols, because unlike other gods, YHWH drew near to them (Deut 4:7), especially in the form of the Shekinah (Exod 40:34-38).

For normative biblical religion, idolatrous worship of YHWH was ruled out because no human being living on earth has seen His face (Deut 4:15-18). Thus, an idol can only be an inaccurate representation which fails to do justice to His transcendent glory.

There was another problem with an idol of YHWH: It would deny the sufficiency of the Shekinah, as if YHWH did not really dwell among His people. Even before the sanctuary was built, it was when the people lost their faith in the assurance of YHWH's presence manifest in the cloud on Mt. Sinai (Exod 24:15-18) that they made and worshipped a "golden calf" to give them false assurance (Exod 32:1-6).⁶

Now that deity has become flesh and has tabernacled among us (John 1:14), one who denies the incarnation of Christ in any way is "antichrist" (1 John 2:22; 2 John 1:7). In Old Testament times, an idolatrous Israelite was the equivalent of antichrist because he/she implicitly denied the Shekinah by making a false substitute.

At the heart of Israelite worship, the sanctuary and its services expressed the central concept of YHWH's religion: The awesome Creator desires an intimate relationship with His created beings. Other ancient Near Eastern cults were believed to have resident deities. But the Israelite sanctuary with its Shekinah was unique in the way it simultaneously affirmed the nearness and transcendence of God, *without compromising either*.

If we ever doubt the importance of theological balance, we should remember how YHWH in His sanctuary walked a theological tightrope to provide assurance for His people without having them fall into idolatry. The ancient Israelites

⁶Due to Moses' first intercession, YHWH did not destroy the Israelites or totally abort the covenant (Exod 32:7-14). But because the people had denied His presence, He would not be present (Exod 32:34; 33:1-5). The punishment would fit the crime (cp. Judg 10:10-14; Prov 1:24-31). It is implied that even though YHWH had already given Moses the directions for building the tabernacle (Exod 25-31:11), He threatened to call off the whole project (Moberly 1983: 63) because idolatry and Shekinah were mutually exclusive.

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had much in common with other peoples, just as Seventh-day Adventists have much in common with other Christians. When the Israelites neglected and then abandoned the unique balancing aspects which made their religion distinctive, they lost their reason for existence and their identity as a people. May the Lord save us from that kind of experience!

Legal and Experiential Atonement

Once YHWH was installed in His sanctuary (Lev 9), His continuing residence there was not guaranteed unconditionally. The Israelites were obliged to recognize His benevolent sovereignty by providing him with offerings daily and on special occasions (Num 28-29). Burnt offerings performed daily and on festivals and purification offerings on festivals carried an additional meaning: They provided “atonement” for the Israelites (cp. Lev 1:4; Num 28:22, 30; 29:5).⁷ Thus, they addressed a problematic dimension of the divine-human relationship: while YHWH was perfect, the Israelites were faulty.

While the Shekinah brought YHWH near, the fact that He had to veil Himself within a cloud (Exod 40:34-38) and limit access to His presence within the sanctuary precincts (Lev 16:2) shows that intimacy was not full and ideal, as when Adam and Eve met face-to-face with their Creator in the garden (Gen 2-3). While the sanctuary provided a controlled setting for divine-human encounter, its very existence was necessitated by the faulty human condition resulting from the Fall into sin (Gen 3). When perfection and complete intimacy are again restored through Christ’s atoning ministry in the heavenly temple, we will no longer need mediation involving a temple (see Rev 21:22).

In a world of sin and death, having God’s presence requires atonement. This is clear in Lev 16:16: The high priest was to atone for the sanctuary, where YHWH resided among a faulty people. The condition and fate of the Israelites was inextricably linked with the sanctuary, which provided them with access to God in His “tent of meeting” (cp. Lev 1:1). If their sins accumulated too much in the sanctuary, YHWH would be forced to abandon them to destruction, as vividly depicted by Ezekiel (Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; Hasel 1981: 119; Milgrom 1991: 258; Schwartz 1995: 21).

The idea that YHWH could abandon His people was paralleled outside Israel. For example, the Moabite stone refers to the god Chemosh becoming angry with the Moabites so that he allowed them to be dominated by the Israelites (ed. Pritchard 1969: 320).

Outside Israel, restoring a relationship with a deity who had become angry for some reason was similar in some ways to Israelite atonement with YHWH. People could make amends for wrong-doing by reforming their behavior and/or

⁷While the festivals continue to teach us and the antitypical fulfillment of the “feast of tabernacles” is yet in the future, we cannot literally keep the Old Testament festivals because we lack the earthly sanctuary and its rituals, which were central to their observance (Lev 23; Num 28-29).

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by restoring the temple and ritual service of the deity (ed. Pritchard 1969: 315-316). But there were crucial differences between Israelite and non-Israelite atonement:

1. YHWH held the Israelites to a higher standard of life. Not only were they responsible for their deliberate offenses (see e.g. Num 15:30-31), but also their inadvertent violations (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; Num 15:22-29) and even their attitudes (Exod 20:17; Lev 19:18).

2. Maintenance of YHWH's presence and favor required much more atonement than was necessary for non-Israelite gods. Even regular and festival offerings to YHWH made atonement (see above). Thus, the Israelites were continually obliged to acknowledge that they were faulty even when YHWH was not angry. The most dramatic acknowledgment was the high priest's confession of the sins of all Israel over the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21). By contrast, when the Babylonian king came before the god Marduk on the fifth day of the Akītu Festival as the representative of his people, he uttered a self-righteous plea of his own innocence (ed. Pritchard 1969: 334; Milgrom 1991: 1069).

3. In Israel, emphasis on atonement included a unique form of ritual expression: application of blood to parts of the sanctuary (Lev 1:5, 11; 4:6, 7, 17, 18, 25, 30, etc.). In Babylon and Egypt, sacrifices were presentation offerings which were placed before deities as food (see above). In Syria/Palestine and Greece, some sacrifices were similar to those of Israel in that they were designated by similar terms and involved slaying animals, burning up parts of the animals on altars, and in some cases eating some of the meat in cultic meals (Selman 1995: 97-102). But only in Israel was blood manipulated by priests as a special instrument of atonement (Kedar-Kopfstein 1978: 239, 247-248). It is true that draining the blood would make an offering to YHWH kosher (Gane 1992b: 100). But the blood was not simply disposed of (cp. Lev 4:7, 18); it was assigned to YHWH by applying it to His altar to ransom/atone for life (Lev 17:11; Schwartz 1991: 52-59).

It was not enough for the Israelites to have a "legal" work of ransom done for them by the priests. Their participation was required so that they would experience acknowledging and turning away from their evil and a restored relationship with God. A person who sinned or had a ritual impurity was required to take the initiative in utilizing the remedy which YHWH prescribed. Failure to do so constituted rebellious, wanton neglect for which no sacrificial expiation was available and the divine penalties were to die (Lev 15:31) or be "cut off" (Num 19:13, 20), i.e. to suffer extirpation of one's line of descendants (Wold 1978).⁸

⁸See e.g. Lev 20:2-3, where "cutting off" is in addition to capital punishment by stoning. The punished person would not even be history! For an Israelite, losing the descendants through which in a sense one's existence continued would have been a fate worse than death (cp. Deut 25:5-10;

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Some have explained Christ's atonement as including only a legal/forensic dimension or, on the other extreme, only an experiential dimension. Such theories do not take into account the ancient sacrifices which pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice. In Leviticus and Numbers there is no room for debate: Legal and experiential elements were integrated and essential to the atoning process. Neither could be safely denied or put out of functional existence by neglect or de-emphasis.

Even on the Day of Atonement, the day of legal atonement *par excellence*, the experiential element was essential for the Israelites to receive atonement. Even though they were not required to come to the sanctuary, they were obliged to identify with the cleansing of the sanctuary on their behalf by "afflicting themselves," i.e. practicing self-denial, and abstaining from work (Lev 16:29, 31). There were "legal" penalties for neglect of these observances: divine extirpation and destruction (Lev 23:29-30). The reason for self-denial and keeping sabbath is given in Lev 16:30:

"For on this day shall atonement be made *for you*, to cleanse *you*; from all *your sins you* shall be clean before the Lord" (emphasis supplied).

Do you get the impression that the cleansing of the sanctuary is relevant for *you*? If the high priest did his work properly the sanctuary would be cleansed, but unless the people entered into the experience they would not receive the benefit promised by Lev 16:30.

Atonement is a dynamic transformation process through which God's people are restored to a proper relationship with Him by the means He has provided (Col 1:19-23; cp. Titus 3:4-7).⁹ The "legal" element is essential because sin creates "debt" which must be paid and which is completely beyond reach of human capability to pay. This is why Jesus instructed us to pray, ". . . forgive us our debts" (Matt 6:12). Debt is a legal matter. If you doubt that, check the fine print on your mortgage. The experiential element is indispensable because human beings cannot experience restoration of relationships against their will. But although repentance involves the human response to God, the ability to respond is a divine gift (Acts 5:31). There is no "righteousness by works" here.

The following paragraphs will explore legal and experiential atonement through consideration of the following questions:

1. Did some ancient sacrifices emphasize legal or experiential aspects more than others?

Ruth 4). At least to some extent this penalty seems to foreshadow the final Second Death (Rev 20:14). Notice the Messiah is "cut off" in Daniel 9:26! This seems to indicate that Christ suffered for us the equivalent of the Second Death (compare Rev 20:14).

⁹Cp. White 1955: 114—"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."

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2. Did an Israelite who had sinned have “assurance”?
3. Why was atonement necessary for “ritual impurity”?

Varying Emphases in Ancient Sacrifices

Much of Leviticus reads like a complicated handbook of veterinary biology. Rather than getting involved in all the technical language, blood, and gore, it is much simpler to jump straight to the real sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament.

By neglecting Leviticus, though, we suffer inestimable loss. The variety of ancient sacrifices highlighted various aspects of Christ’s sacrifice, which is so rich in meaning that one kind of animal sacrifice could not possibly have represented it adequately. The Israelite sacrifices broke into parts the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice the way physiology textbooks show organisms dissected so that they can be understood. This breakdown necessarily involved a certain amount of distortion, particularly because animals and human priests represented our perfect Redeemer and Mediator. But viewing Christ’s sacrifice through the lens of Leviticus is like turning a diamond around in the light to reveal otherwise obscured facets of stunning beauty. Together the “shadow” (Heb 8:5) and the Shekinah help us to grasp the full picture in such a way that it explodes into our consciousness and etches our Savior indelibly into our very being.

All of the sacrifices involved an experiential element because all were brought to the sanctuary by those who offered them. But the degree of participation in the ritual by the offerer varied. A bird or cereal offering was simply handed over to the priest (Lev 1:14-15; 2:2). But with a four-legged animal the offerer leaned (verb *smk*; cp. Amos 5:19) one hand on its head and slew it (Lev 1:4-5; 4:24,29), acknowledging that Christ would bear the weight of his/her iniquities and diseases (Isa 53:4) and human evil would slay Christ. In the case of a well-being offering, the offerer even ate the flesh (Lev 7:15-21), pointing to the life-giving power of Christ, who said: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54; cp. Matt 26:26).

The sacrifices varied in their emphasis on legal atonement. This is partly because not all sacrifices provided atonement in the sense of restoration from faults.

Atonement is not even mentioned in connection with grain offerings (Lev 2), which were simple gifts of devotion to God, except for the grain offering which functioned as a poor person’s substitute for a purification offering (Lev 5:11-13).¹⁰ Even though well-being offerings (so-called “peace offerings”; Lev 3) involved blood, to which YHWH assigned an atoning function (Lev 17:11), they did not atone for specific wrongs. Rather, they could be presented from a

¹⁰Cp. Heb 9:22—“under the law *almost* everything is purified with blood” (emphasis supplied).

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variety of motivations, including thanksgiving (Lev 7:12-15), fulfillment of a vow, or as a free expression of devotion to God (Lev 7:16). The blood of well-being offerings reminds us that even joyful praise and worship by faulty people require the atoning blood of Christ to find acceptance with God.¹¹

Sacrifices which atoned for specific faults highlighted the legal element. The flesh of such a sacrifice could not be eaten by the offerer, even if the offerer was the high priest (Lev 4:11-12), because a debtor cannot take back part of a debt payment (Milgrom 1991: 253).

While burnt offerings provided atonement from unspecified faults (Lev 1:4), purification (so-called “sin”) and reparation (so-called “guilt”) offerings remedied specified classes of evils. Purification offerings were generally for inadvertent sins (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27) or severe ritual impurities (Lev 12:6-8; 15:13-15). Ransom/atonement (Piel of *kpr*) for life (Lev 17:11) was emphasized by elevation of the blood, which was daubed on the horns, i.e. highest points, of the outer altar (Lev 4:25, 30) or the altar of incense (Lev 4:7, 18) rather than simply dashed against the sides of the outer altar (e.g. Lev 1:5; 3:2). Cp. Matt 20:28: Christ came “to give his life a ransom for many.”

Reparation offerings were for cases involving some form of sacrilege (Lev 5:15; 6:2 [Hebrew 5:21]) or possible sacrilege (Lev 5:17-19; Milgrom 1991: 332-333). While the blood of a reparation offering was only dashed against the sides of the altar (Lev 7:2), this sacrifice was associated with payment of debt because it was preceded by literal payment of reparation/restitution to God or man (Lev 5:16; 6:5 [Hebrew 5:24]). The combination of restitution + sacrifice shows that even when we correct our wrongs to the best of our ability, sin creates additional debt which must be paid by Christ’s sacrifice (cp. Matt 6:12; see above).

It is important to recognize that the Bible uses terms such as “ransom” and “debt” as metaphors by which we understand Christ’s atonement through analogy with mundane life. We should not seize upon one or another of these metaphors to the exclusion of others any more than we should explain the Kingdom of God by referring to only one parable of Jesus. It is only when we look at all the biblical evidence regarding Christ’s atonement that we gain a balanced picture so we can have the full benefit of that which God provides for our salvation.

Assurance

An Israelite’s assurance was based on his/her covenant connection with YHWH within the community. That connection depended upon loyalty to

¹¹Ellen White expresses this idea: “The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God” (1958: 344).

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YHWH. As long as basic loyalty remained, there was abundant provision for atonement from non-rebellious sins and from ritual impurities.

A transgression of YHWH's law could sever the covenant connection if it was committed "with a high hand," i.e., rebelliously (Num 15:30-31). For such a sin there was no ritual remedy (see also verses 32-36).¹² If an Israelite committed a non-rebellious sin, such as inadvertent violation of a divine commandment, or contracted a ritual impurity, he/she was obliged to use the means which God had provided for atonement or purification. God did not punish a person before there was a reasonable opportunity to utilize the designated ritual remedy. But a guilty or impure Israelite could not simply do nothing and maintain the covenant connection. Wanton neglect to purify oneself was a rebellious sin (Num 19:13,20; cp. Lev 15:31) and culpability for a non-rebellious sin (Lev 5:1) continued unless a sacrifice was brought. Such a sacrifice relieved the sinner by transferring the sin to YHWH (Exod 32:32), who bore it through the mediation of a priest (Lev 10:17).

Now we can consider the status of a Christian who has committed an act of sin and knows it, but has not apostatized (Heb 6:4-8) or committed the unpardonable sin of irrevocably shutting out the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32). In light of Leviticus and Numbers, such a person is not punished before he/she has opportunity to receive forgiveness. Willful neglect of this provision would constitute rejection of Christ.

The only thing that stands between us and the Second Death is the blood of Christ. Only Christ can save us (Acts 4:12). His blood, daily received and applied, is our *only* assurance.¹³ But Christ's blood, freely available, is abundant provision!¹⁴

Arguing about whether an individual is "in Christ" or "out of Christ" is confusing because it is too simplistic. When a person commits a sin, he/she is not necessarily immediately punished by God, but there is something to make right. Compare the status of a person who fails to pay income taxes to the U.S. government. He/she is not immediately thrown in jail, but unless the debt is paid, jail can be the result.

There is more to accepting Christ's blood than acknowledging sin. Even when an ancient Israelite who had sinned offered a sacrifice, forgiveness was not

¹²It is true that God showed astonishing mercy to rebellious King Manasseh (2 Chron 33) and to David when he took Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12). But God forgave them on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice outside the bounds of the ritual system. As David recognized: "For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased" (Ps 51:16 [Hebrew v. 18]). While the ritual system was restricted by the need for YHWH to teach His people the standards of His government, Christ's sacrifice is freely available to all who will accept it.

¹³Cp. White 1958: 397—"Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained."

¹⁴see Rom 5:17—"abundance of grace."

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automatic. The priest did not forgive the offerer; he carried out ritual actions “that he/they may be forgiven” (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; Num 15:25-26, 28). Notice the passive construction, which implies that the offerer was forgiven directly by YHWH (Hasel 1981: 120; Milgrom 1991: 245). Thus, sacrificial activity officiated by the priest was *prerequisite* to forgiveness by YHWH. Rituals did not automatically provide forgiveness, and God has never given to human priests the authority to forgive sins. A hypocritical person could not gain forgiveness because it was granted by YHWH, who sees the heart and who values obedience even more than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). Our religious exercises are of value only insofar as they express the *reality* of our relationship with God.¹⁵

Even Israelites who gained forgiveness during the year did not have final assurance until they were cleansed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30). Atonement goes beyond forgiveness (see below). But even the final stage of atonement was through blood which represented Christ’s blood. The bottom line is that in Christ we have abundant assurance as long as we accept and keep on accepting each wave of His transforming atonement.

Ritual Impurity

Physical ritual impurities of the Israelites made the environment of the sanctuary less than ideal and defiled it so that it needed to be cleansed on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:16, above).

Outside Israel, impurities which polluted sacred precincts could come from demons (Milgrom 1991: 1068). For example, the ritual for exorcising impurity from the cella of the god Nabū on the fifth day of the Babylonian Akītu Festival has an incantation, called a “loud cry,” which includes the following words:

- (378) Marduk purifies the temple,
 - (379) Kusug draws the plan,
 - (380) The deity Ningirim casts the spell.
 - (381) Any evil that is in this temple, get out!
 - (382) Great evil demon, may Bēl kill you!
 - (383) Wherever you are, be suppressed!
- (translation by Gane 1992b: 267-268; cp. ed. Pritchard 1969: 334).

A Seventh-day Adventist cannot help noticing the irony of comparison between the Babylonian exorcism and Rev 18:2, where a “loud cry” announces that “Babylon” is fallen and has become a dwelling place of demons!

Israelite impurity was not caused by demons, but by the Israelites themselves (Milgrom 1991: 1068-1069). With YHWH’s presence among them, their

¹⁵Hypocritical religion without heartfelt devotion or obedience was not simply worthless; it constituted sin (see Isa 1:11ff). The same is true of flippant or hypocritical participation in Christian rituals such as Communion (1 Cor 11:17-34) or going through the motions of confessing sin to God when there is no intention to accept reformation of life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; Titus 3:4-7).

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only fear was that they could alienate Him.(cp. Num 22-25). They were their own worst enemies.

Although Israelite ritual impurities resulted from physical factors such as death (see Lev 11:24ff; Num 19), scaly skin disease (so-called “leprosy”; Lev 13-14), genital flows (Lev 12, 15), etc., it was not the same as ordinary physical dirtiness. Comparison between passages dealing with cases of ritual impurity (esp. Lev 11-15; Num 19) yields a common denominator: impurities have an aspect of death about them (Milgrom 1991: 1002). The holy God in residence could not be approached too closely by mortals under the curse of death resulting from sin (cp. Gen 3:22-24; Rom 6:23), especially when they were affected by physical factors which emphasized their mortality. Thus, impure Israelites were disqualified from coming into contact with holy things. For example, it was forbidden to eat the flesh of a well-being offering while in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20).

Ritual impurities were not sins, even though they resulted from a mortal state which came from sin (compare Rom 6:23).¹⁶ They required purification, but not forgiveness. To be cleansed from a light impurity it was enough to launder one’s clothes, bathe and wait until evening (e.g. Lev 15:5-8). This washing was the forerunner of Christian baptism, which represents purification from a *morally* evil life by burial of the old life with Christ (see Rom 6:1-14; cp. Zech 3:4).¹⁷

Severe impurities which lasted a week or more required atoning sacrifices as part of the purification process (e.g. Lev 12:6-8; 15:13-15; Num 19). Why should atonement be made for something which was not sin? The answer is a neglected concept: Christ not only forgives and cleanses us from our sins (1 John 1:9); He cleanses us from our *mortality* and gives us *eternal life* (John 3:16)! The two aspects of restoration are expressed in Ps 103:3, which refers to YHWH “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.” Thus, atonement is bigger than we may have thought: it includes restoration not only from the guilt of sin, but also from the state of mortality which results from sin. Christ has paid a legal price to give us a new experience.

Phases of Atonement

Christians commonly believe that Christ’s death on the cross constituted the sum total of “atonement,” and therefore atonement was completed at the cross. It is true that the cross represents the one and only, once for all, truly efficacious atoning death (Heb 9:28). It is only on the basis of Christ’s death

¹⁶Some causes of ritual impurity such as menstruation (Lev 15:19) and nocturnal emission (Deut 23:10-11) were normal, involuntary functions of the human body. Other kinds of ritual impurity, such as defilement by a corpse, could usually be avoided, and becoming impure was wrong only if God prohibited it (see e.g. Lev 21:1-4,10-11).

¹⁷Perhaps waiting until evening pointed forward to the time of Christ’s death: about the time of the “evening” sacrifice (Matt 27:46-51; cp. Num 28:4).

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that any atonement can be made. But the Bible clearly shows that atonement did not end at the cross; atonement is a grand process which began at the cross and which continues until we are completely separated from sin and united with God.

Viewing the cross through Leviticus, we cannot even say that Christ's sacrifice was completed at the cross. Sacrificial death, yes, but not sacrifice as a whole. An ancient Israelite sacrifice included not only the slaughter of the animal, which pointed forward to Christ's death, but also priestly mediation which prefigured Christ's ministry in heaven from His Ascension (Heb 7:25-27) until the time when mediation for sin is no longer needed (Rev 22:11). In the purification offering it was what the priest did, following slaughter of the animal by the offerer, which was called atonement (Piel of *kpr*; Lev 4:26, 31, 35). The death made provision for atonement to be carried out, but without mediation there would be no atonement. Similarly, Christ's death alone without His resurrection, which made possible His mediation, would have availed nothing: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).

In Israel, following the first stage of atonement accomplished by death + mediation, the second stage took place on the Day of Atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary was called "atonement" (Piel of *kpr*) at each of its phases (Lev 16:16, 18). These multiple "atonements" confirm that atonement is a process involving several phases.

The idea that atonement was completed at the cross is unbiblical in its exclusion of subsequent atonement. There would be no need for Christ's mediatorial ministry to transfer sins into the heavenly sanctuary, so that these sins would later need to be cleansed out of the sanctuary through an end-time "Day of Atonement" judgment. In Adventist terms, 1844 would be a non-event. Stages of atonement are foundational to SDA theology.

The relationship between the stages of Christ's atonement can be summarized metaphorically: Christ's death put abundant money in the checking account to cover the salvation of all human beings. During His mediation Christ writes checks of salvation to all who will accept them. During His judgment, Christ makes sure that those who received checks have not thrown them away. Each stage of the process is essential to salvation, just as an ancient Israelite would be destroyed or "cut off" if he/she did not receive the benefit of each stage.

Does the idea that atonement was not completed at the cross diminish the sacrifice and atonement of Christ? No way! We magnify what Christ is doing. Christ's sacrifice and atonement are much bigger than they are commonly thought to be!¹⁸

¹⁸Cp. the statement of R. Folkenberg: "To see Jesus only on the Cross limits the meaning of the Cross" (newsletter "From the G.C. President," June 3, 1996).

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Aside from the idea that atonement was completed at the cross, there is another way to wipe out an end-time Day of Atonement judgment. Some have argued from Lev 20:3 and Num 19:13, 20 (cp. Lev 15:31) that sins and ritual impurities automatically defiled the sanctuary, so that the purpose of sacrifices during the year was not to cleanse the sinner or impure person by transferring evil to the sanctuary, but to cleanse the sanctuary from defilement which had already reached it automatically when the sin or impurity occurred (Ballenger 1911?: 58-82; cp. 1913?: 106-12; Ford 1980: 216-220; Milgrom 1976; 1991: 254-258, citing *Mishnah Šebu*^{ot} 1:4-5).¹⁹

The approach just described leaves the Day of Atonement to purge the sanctuary from rebellious sins of Israelites (Milgrom) or, in Christian antitypical application, to atone for Satan's guilt (Ballenger) or from the wickedness of Satan's followers (Ford). But the Day of Atonement is not regarded as dealing with the sins of those among God's professed followers who are saved. According to this view, the sins of the saved are handled throughout the year before the Day of Atonement.

The above theory has serious implications for SDA typology. If the sanctuary is cleansed throughout the time preceding the Day of Atonement, the cleansing begins in A.D. 31, not in 1844. Furthermore, the eschatological Day of Atonement is not a judgment of God's true people; instead it fixes the fates of those who are lost. Thus, this judgment is not relevant to us in the sense that because Christ's most holy apartment ministry determines our destiny, we should by faith enter the experience with Him behind the veil.

It is true that in Lev 20:3 and Num 19:13, 20 severe offenses, i.e. Molech worship and neglect to have oneself purified from corpse contamination, defile the sanctuary in an illegal/illegitimate way which short-circuits the sacrificial process (Treyer 1986: 221; Adams 1993: 87-8). The sanctuary is defiled from a distance; there is no evidence that this defilement depends upon the sinner entering the sacred precincts. Nor is there evidence that "atonement" accomplished by punishment of the sinner (cp. Num 25:13) cleanses the sanctuary from such defilements.

Following are seven points of exegetical evidence which rule out the theory described above. The positive value of these points is that they confirm the two stages of atonement which are foundational to SDA sanctuary theology.

¹⁹See Ford 1980: 217—"Neither the Old nor the New Testament teach what we have traditionally taught about the confessed sins of the saints defiling the heavenly sanctuary. Even on earth the sanctuary was defiled by the *act* of sin, not its confession. See Num. 19:13, 20; Lev. 20:3." Milgrom, my teacher, holds that the various kinds of purification offerings, including those of the Day of Atonement, had differing degrees of efficacy in proportion to the extent to which evils of varying degrees of severity had "aerially" penetrated into the sanctuary. His evidence for these degrees is Lev 4, where sacrifices for more serious situations of sin by the high priest or the entire community involved application of blood inside the sacred Tent rather than simply at the outer altar (Milgrom 1976).

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1. Sins which defiled the sanctuary automatically were rebellious sins for which no sacrificial atonement was available to benefit the sinner (Lev 20:3; Num 19:13, 20). The sanctuary had to be cleansed from this category of sins (*p^ešā^cîm*; Lev 16:16) because they were committed by people who had a professed connection to God. But these sins were not cleansed from the sinners themselves,²⁰ who continued to bear their culpability. Automatic defilement of the sanctuary and the sinner receiving atonement were mutually exclusive. Therefore, there is no basis for saying that during the year such a sinner could bring a purification offering to have the sanctuary cleansed on his/her behalf.

2. There is no evidence that sacrifices during the year cleansed the sanctuary. They atoned only for persons, whether from sin or from ritual impurity (Rodriguez 1979: 104-5; 1986: 173 n. 6, 189; Treiyer 1986: 216-7).²¹

3. According to Lev 16:16, the Day of Atonement rituals cleansed the sanctuary from “all” non-rebellious sins of the Israelites (*ḥattā’ôt*; cp. vs. 30,34). There is no indication that this collection of sins was limited to those for which sacrificial expiation had not already been made during the year (Hasel 1981: 119; Kiuchi 1987: 156).

4. While atonement for ritual impurities resulted in the cleansing (root *thr*) of persons during the year (Num 8:21; cp. Lev 12:8), persons who had committed sins did not reach the cleansed state until the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew terminology clearly indicates two stages of atonement: individual forgiveness (verb *slh*) through sacrifices during the year (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; cp. Shea 1986: 165-6) and corporate cleansing (*thr*) granted when the sanctuary was cleansed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30; cp. Kiuchi 1987: 157). Compare 1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will *forgive* us our sins and *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness.”²²

5. Careful comparison between purification offerings during the year (Lev 4) and on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) shows that there was a *reversal in the order of blood applications* performed in the outer apartment of the sanctuary (Gane 1992b: 175, 186-194).

On the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed from the inside out, as we would expect for a “house-cleaning” job: inner sanctum → outer sanctum → outer altar (cp. Shea 1986: 155). Within these areas, blood was applied

²⁰In Lev 16:30, Israelites were cleansed only from *ḥattā’ôt*, non-rebellious sins.

²¹It is true that these sacrifices involved applications of blood like those performed on the Day of Atonement which cleansed the sanctuary (Lev 16:16, 18; Milgrom 1991: 255). However, it is a fundamental principle of ritual theory that because a physical action has no inherent meaning, the same action can be assigned different meanings at different times (Staal 1989: 127-129, 131, 134, 137, 140, 330). This principle is exemplified in Lev 16 itself, where sprinkling blood seven times has two meanings in the same ritual: it purges part of the sanctuary (vs. 14, 16) and reconsecrates the outer altar (v. 19; Milgrom 1991:1037).

²²It is true that experiential cleansing occurs throughout the Christian era along with forgiveness (Titus 3:5), but comparison with Lev 16:30 suggests that a final dimension of cleansing occurs during an antitypical Day of Atonement (see Andreassen 1947: 187).

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in locations which moved progressively *away from* the ark of the Covenant (Lev 16:14-15). Lev 16:16b abbreviates the prescription for blood rites in the outer sanctum by referring to the procedure in the inner sanctum. However, we know from Exod 30:10 that the outer sanctum object that received the blood was the incense altar (on its horns), and we know from Lev 16:14-15 the pattern of blood applications in the inner sanctum: object and in front of that object. Therefore, we can reconstruct the blood applications in the outer sanctum as follows:

- a. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.
- b. Sevenfold sprinkling east (in front) of the incense altar.

During the year, in purification offerings for the high priest or the community, the blood applications in the outer sanctum moved in the opposite direction, *toward* the ark of the Covenant, where God's Presence is located.²³ The blood applications were (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18):

- a. A sevenfold sprinkling "in front of the veil,"²⁴ i.e. east (in front) of the incense altar as on the Day of Atonement.²⁵
- b. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.

This reversal of blood applications indicates that during the year evils went into the sanctuary and on the Day of Atonement they were brought out. What goes in must come out!

6. On the Day of Atonement, incinerating the carcasses of the purification offering animals (Lev 16:27) required the personal purification of lay performers (vs. 28), but in Lev 4 the same activity (vss. 11-12, 21) did not (Gane 1992b: 175).²⁶ Thus, it is clear that on the Day of Atonement the animals were contaminated by their function as ritual "sponges" for cleansing the sanctuary, but they were not contaminated in this way on other days because at those times they did not have the function of cleansing the sanctuary.

7. Unlike other days, the Day of Atonement was clearly a day of judgment for all Israelites, including those who were faithful.²⁷ By the end of the day

²³Pouring out remaining blood at the base of the outer altar (vs. 7, 18) simply disposes of it (Milgrom 1991: 238); this was not an application of blood to the altar.

²⁴Not "on" the veil/curtain (against Wenham 1995: 83).

²⁵Other blood applications performed both during the year and on the Day of Atonement took place in the same locations (Lev 4:7, 18; Exod 30:10; Lev 4:25, 30, 34; 16:18-19), so it is reasonable to believe that the location of the sevenfold sprinkling would be the same as well.

²⁶Against rabbinic tradition, which assumes that the rules in Lev 16 apply to the cases in Lev 4 (*Mishnah* Para 8:3; *Tosefta* Yoma 3:16). The prescription for the incineration in Lev 16:27 assumes knowledge of 4:11-12, not the other way around. Aside from the fact that the list of animal parts is fuller in Lev 4 than in Lev 16, only Lev 4 provides the important specification as to where outside the camp incinerations of purification offering animals sacrificed at the sanctuary are to take place: "A pure place . . . the ash dump" (v. 12).

²⁷According to rabbinic tradition (*Mishnah* Roš Haššanah 1:1-2 and *Babylonian Talmud* Roš Haššanah 16b), which is followed by Bacchiocchi (1996: 51-80), judgment took place at other times, including especially the "new year" of the first day of Tishri (so-called "feast of trumpets");

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there were only two classes of people: “cleansed” (Lev 16:30), i.e., restored to a status in which there were no impediments to the covenant relationship with YHWH, and “cut off” or destroyed (Lev 23:29-30), i.e., rejected by YHWH. Fates were determined upon the basis of loyalty to YHWH throughout the year and on the Day of Atonement. Throughout the year an Israelite was to refrain from rebellious sins (Num 15:30-31) and seek forgiveness for other sins (Lev 4-5). On the Day of Atonement he/she was to show remorse and humility by practicing self-denial (Lev 16:29, 31; cp. Ezra 8:21; Dan 10:2, 12) and was to abstain from working in order to fully enter into the experience of the day (Lev 16:29, 31).

The Israelite two-stage restoration to full favor with the deity, in which atonement was begun throughout the year and completed on a particular day, was unique in the ancient Near East. Non-Israelite cults did have special days which functioned like the Day of Atonement in that they involved the cleansing of sacred objects and/or areas. But these days did not culminate restoration processes which were begun earlier in the year.

For example, on the fourth day of the Ninth Year Festival of the god Telipinu, the Hittites cleansed their cult by taking idols and a pedestal to a river and washing them in the river (Haas and Rost 1984; Gane 1992b: 295-312). Another example is the fifth day of the Babylonian Akītu Festival, when the Babylonians purified the enormous Esagila temple complex of the god Marduk by sprinkling it with water, sounding a copper bell, and carrying around a censer and torch. Then they purified the Ezida cella of the god Nabū by sprinkling holy water, carrying a censer and torch, smearing the doors with cedar oil, and wiping²⁸ the cella with the decapitated carcass of a ram. As in the Israelite ritual for purging the sanctuary, the animal functioned as a ritual sponge and contaminated its handlers. A further phase of purging the Ezida consisted of setting up a kind of canopy and reciting the “loud cry” to which I referred earlier (ed. Pritchard 1969: 333-334; Gane 1992b: 257-270).

Although the Sumerian Nanshe Hymn (c. 2000 B.C.) is earlier than the Babylonian and Hittite purifications, it describes a New Year celebration which was closer to the Israelite Day of Atonement in that it involved judgment of persons on the basis of loyalty which they demonstrated toward a deity and his/her personal moral standards. Contracts of persons employed by the temple of Nanshe were reviewed in terms of their ritual and ethical behavior during the previous year and their presence on the New Year (Heimpel 1981). This is a particularly striking parallel with the Day of Atonement, on which covenant loyalty was reviewed in terms of behavior during the year and on the great Day

Lev 23:23-25). But although the *t̄rūāh*, “(trumpet) blast,” of Tishri 1 most likely acclaimed YHWH as king (cp. Num 23:21) and therefore announced the coming of His judgment, there is no biblical evidence that judgment actually began until ten days later on the Day of Atonement.

²⁸Akkadian *kuppuru*, cognate of Hebrew *kipper*, “atone.”

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itself (see above). However, the Sumerian review did not include the element of forgiveness or consideration of forgiveness earlier received. It was a one-stage judgment.

Having demonstrated that biblical atonement uniquely involves two stages—forgiveness and cleansing—we are left with a crucial question: What was the purpose of the cleansing stage? “Cleansing” is a metaphor. What does this cleansing mean? When we come to the antitype, the question becomes: What is the reason for the cleansing of the sanctuary (Dan 8:14), which is the same event as the pre-Advent judgment (Dan 7:9-14)? If a person is forgiven by the King and Judge of the universe, why would a further stage of atonement be necessary?

For me, the clearest starting point is 2 Sam 14, where a woman from Tekoa tells a story about having a son who murdered his brother, and then asks King David to forgive the murderer. Recognizing that a king acting as judge is morally responsible for his judgment if he forgives a murderer, she offers: “On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father’s house; let the king and his throne be guiltless” (vs. 9). Notice the wording: “. . . let the king *and his throne* be guiltless.” The throne is the place where the king rules. It represents royal authority and justice. So when God forgives people, His authority and justice, i.e. His character, are open to question and must be vindicated by judgment (cp. Davidson 1991: 21).²⁹ Since God’s throne is at His sanctuary (cp. Jer 17:12), the sanctuary represents His character (Treiyer 1986: 245). Therefore the sanctuary must be “justified” (Niphal of *šdq*), i.e. vindicated or legally “cleansed” in an end-time Day of Atonement (Dan 8:14; cp. Job 4:17).³⁰ This vindication simultaneously vindicates God’s people, because it is forgiveness of their sins which has been under review (Davidson 1991: 6-7).

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest did not wipe off bloodstains from earlier sacrifices, which could be regarded as a “record” of forgiven sins (Andreasen 1947: 141, 143, 147, 179). Rather, the high priest overlaid them with more blood, also representing the blood of Christ, in the same places (cp. Andreasen 1947: 148; Shea 1986: 156). This expresses the idea that the judg-

²⁹See also Ford 1980: 223, commenting on Dan 9: “In harmony with his prayer regarding the iniquity, transgressions, sins, of his people, pleading the everlasting righteousness of God as witnessed by prophets, the prophet is visited by Gabriel, who takes all the key elements of his prayer and weaves them into heavenly promises. Part of the angel’s message has to do with atonement for iniquity. The three words here used by the angel for sin had their chief combined usage in connection with the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:21 and cf. Dan. 9:24). Only in one other place in all the Bible are the three items conjoined—Ex. 34:7, where the character of God—which is to be vindicated in the judgment—is described.”

³⁰Notice that in Dan 8:14 justification is the functional equivalent of atonement in Lev 16. Therefore it should not be surprising that justification, like atonement, involves both legal and experiential dimensions (Titus 3:4-7). In Titus 3:7 the NRSV correctly renders the Greek aorist participle: “having been justified . . .” Thus justification is not separate from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit described in verses 5-6.

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ment (Dan 7:9-14), through which the sanctuary is cleansed/vindicated (Dan 8:14), is not primarily about who has sinned, because all have sinned (Rom 3:23), but about who has really been forgiven! The judgment is a review of forgiveness already granted. God saves those who are in a “new covenant” relationship with Him, and that covenant is based upon forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34).

On the Day of Atonement God vindicates Himself by vindicating the forgiveness which He has previously granted. But Rom 3:26 says that Christ’s sacrifice has *already* vindicated God as just when He justifies those who believe. What further vindication could possibly remain?

The key here is that God is just when He justifies *those who believe*. Compare Eph 2:8—we are saved by grace *through faith*. But God cannot save a person who does not really have faith or who abandons faith after receiving forgiveness. See Col 1:21-23:

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — *provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard . . .* (emphasis supplied).

So God’s justice depends not only on paying the debt for sin by the sacrifice of Christ; He must also demonstrate that those whom He saves continue to have true faith.

How can faith be tested? James 2:26 gives a clue: Faith without works is dead. Faith and works are not separate; works are part of faith. Faith that is not working through love (Gal 5:6) is not the kind of living faith which grasps divine saving grace. God uses the evidence of human works in the judgment (Eccl 12:14; Dan 7:10)³¹ not because works save, but because they testify whether or not sinners have truly accepted and followed through on the forgiveness freely granted them. Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:11). The parable of the unjust steward (Matt 18:23-35) illustrates that forgiveness already granted is revoked if the one to whom mercy is shown does not subsequently treat others with corresponding mercy (cp. Andreasen 1947: 177-8).

Since atonement continues into the end-time, righteousness by faith and eschatological salvation are inseparable. For example, a pre-Advent “close of probation” when mediation for sin ceases (Rev 22:11; cp. 15:5-8) requires personal transformation to a life of obedience. This obedience is a divine gift through the Holy Spirit, which pours love (Rom 5:5)—the basis of God’s character (1 John

³¹Why does God use records of works in the judgment (Dan 7:10) when He can read thoughts (cp. Ps 139:23; Luke 7:39-40)? Because works of faith, without which true faith does not exist, constitute evidence which can be witnessed by God’s created beings, before whom He must be vindicated. They cannot read thoughts as He can.

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4:8)—and law (Matt 22:36-30) into the heart. The close of probation and a legal-only view of atonement are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, if atonement consists only of a “moral influence” experience, there is no need for mediation and judgment to deal with the “debt” of sin. Once again, both legal and experiential aspects are essential.

The process of atonement shows that mercy has a cost which God takes very seriously. God’s love, the only principle by which intelligent beings with free choice can co-exist harmoniously, embraces both justice and mercy, demands of the law and experience. Neither can be compromised. Both are balanced in the sanctuary. As the Psalmist put it: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Ps 85:10).

Conclusion

We have found that theological balance was crucial for the Israelites, as it is for us. For them the sanctuary was a safe guide to aspects of God’s nature, character, and interactions which could seem opposed and paradoxical, but which could not be compromised. Other nations had much in common with Israel, but without the Shekinah they lacked everything. For Israel to remain distinctive she had to hold on to the distinctives of her faith. Once neglect blurred significance of the unique aspects, it was a short step to counterfeit religion.

For us, careful study of the sanctuary services is a safeguard from errors or extremes in our understanding of God and the way He saves us. More importantly, the sanctuary puts us in touch with Jesus and what He is doing for us and with us now. Rather than staring forlornly into the blank blue sky, we can come boldly before the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) and humble ourselves (Lev 16:29) as Christ is reaffirming the forgiveness which He has granted through His blood.

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The Fall of Athens and the Challenge of Postmodernity

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The Athenians achieved a higher level of culture than their countrymen. Athens became the literary and artistic center of Greece. Yet, “the ‘great age’ of Athens lasted less than fifty years.” Why? Who brought an end to this mother of arts and invention? “It was the Sophists who popularized Protagoras’s phrase Man is the measure of all things and translated it to mean that individuals are not responsible to any transcendent moral authority for their actions.”¹

The Sophists were not concerned with “reaching the truth. Some even denied that there was any truth at all. They said that all knowledge is relative, and that things are correct or incorrect only as people consider them so. So many voices were the problem. Each person’s view had equal value at the table. There was no certain authoritative voice—no voice of God, no accepted standard by which to judge the plurality of voices. The Sophists also claimed that there are no absolute standards of morality. They declared that the will of those in power determines what people consider right or wrong.”²

As Russell Kirk observed, “It was the clear relativism of the Sophists, not the mystical insights of Plato, nor Aristotle’s aspiration after the Supreme God, which dominated the thinking of the classical Greeks in their decadence. The failure of the Greeks to find an enduring popular religious sanction for their order of civilization had been a main cause of the collapse of the world of the

¹Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture*, (Dallas: Word, 1996), 37-38.

²*The World Book Encyclopedia*, (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1973), 15:351.

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polis.”³ No ancient Greek philosopher defended Protagorean relativity. Socrates and Plato taught that truth was absolute.⁴

The Sophists opposed religion and promoted relativism. Ravi Zacharias warns, “In our time, the gods of relativism who shape our ideas may well be in the same mold and worthy of abandonment if we are to avert the debacle that overtook the Greek soul.”⁵ I believe the problem today is even more disturbing. For the Sophists promoted relativism from outside, but now relativism thrives within Christianity itself, and even in the Adventist church.

Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) must burn deep within every Seventh-day Adventist conscience. Do we know the truth? We are told that, “None but those who have fortified their minds with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”⁶ We are told that the coming sealing work of the Latter Rain Holy Spirit is a “settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved . . .”⁷ Those sealed will be those who hear the voice of God above the multiplied voices of mankind.

The Fall of Babylon:

Loss of the Reformation Biblical Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

We live in the time of the fall of Babylon. Scripture speaks of end-time error as Babylon. The term Babylon reminds one of the tower of Babel, where confusion came through multiplied voices as foreign languages. Modern Babylon is confusion due to multiplied human ideas about divine truth. This is why Babylon is fallen (Rev 14:8; 18:2-3). Scripture never calls people to relativism, to pluralism, or to secularism. It calls people to Christ (Matt 11:28), the One who is the Truth (John 14:6), and it therefore calls people out of Babylon, as seen in the final end-time invitation, “Come out of her my people” (Rev 18:4).

It was the Babylonian-like confusion over truth that led to the demise of Athens, and it is this same confusion over truth that is leading to the rapid collapse of much of Christendom. Scripture warns, “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings” (Heb 13:9), for “The Spirit clearly says that in the latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim 4:1). Babylon is confusion because conflicting human voices drown out the voice of God. Allowing the Bible to interpret itself is dragged in the dust as human interpreters scramble to push their views at the table.

³Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, 93-94.

⁴Kathryn R. Ludwigson in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, (Wheaton, IL, Victor, 1995), 289-290.

⁵Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 40.

⁶Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950) 593-594.

⁷Ellen G. White, MS 173, 1902, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, (Takoma Park: Washington D.C., 1955), 4:1161.

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The Catholic church believes the canon of Scripture is the product of the church, rather than the church being the product of the Biblical canon.⁸ This positions the church above Scripture. This is why the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) stated, “For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”⁹

This has been the consistent teaching of the Catholic church throughout its history. This sitting in judgment on Scripture is the basis of all the false doctrines espoused by Roman Catholicism. The Reformers revolted against this error with the cry *sola Scriptura* (*scriptura sui ipsius intepres; scripturam ex scriptura explicandam esse*). This means that the Bible is capable of interpreting itself and does not need tradition, philosophy, church, or any other human experience to interpret it. It is the *sole* interpreter of itself. The word *sole* is vital. It is the erosion of this word *sole* that has led to pluralism and relativism and that constitutes the fall of Babylon. For today, the landscape is literally crawling with outside or external interpreters, all claiming to be the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.

The battle today is between the internal interpretive role of Scripture versus the external interpreters who reject Scripture’s self-interpretive role. Experience, reason, and tradition are not the interpreters of Scripture. Neither do they share the interpretive role with the Bible’s self-interpretation (though we would be naïve to claim we no not use them as tools or aids as we search for Scripture’s self-interpretation).¹⁰ Seventh-day Adventists must be clear that Scripture is not just the primary interpreter, but the only interpreter. The Bible is not the first among equals in this task. The written Word of God does not share its interpretive role with other contenders anymore than the Living Word of God shares His salvation mission with others. Just as there is only one Saviour, there is only one method of Scripture interpretation. The fall of Babylon resulted from failure to hold to this Reformation Scripture principle of *sola Scriptura*.

This failure was dramatically demonstrated on March 29, 1994, when thirteen persons,¹¹ Catholic and Evangelicals, issued a Document entitled “Evan-

⁸*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994), 34 (2.4.120).

⁹*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 121 (2.3.12).

¹⁰By reason in this admission I do not mean rationalism or rationalization, but careful thought. By experience I do not allow for experience as an authority over Scripture but only that which confirms its doctrinal infallibility. By tradition I mean only that those who go before us have had insights worth our consideration. “Private interpretation” also leads to interpretive error.

¹¹Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship), Juan Diaz-Villar, S.J. (Catholic Hispanic Ministries), Avery Dulles, S.J. (Fordham University), Bishop Francis George (Diocese of Yakima, Washington), Kent Hill (Eastern Nazarene College), Jesse Miranda (Assemblies of God), Msgr. William Murphy (Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Boston), (Richard John Neuhaus (Institute on Religion and Public Life), Brian O’Connell (World Evangelical Fellowship), Herbert Schlossberg, Archbishop Francis Stafford (Archdiocese of Denver), George Weigel (Ethics and Public Policy Center) and John White (Geneva College and the National Association of Evangelicals).

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gelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the 3rd Millennium.” It was endorsed by twenty-five well known Catholic and Evangelical leaders.¹² The document caused a furor in Catholic and Evangelical circles. Dave Hunt wrote, “The document in effect, overturned the Reformation and will unquestionably have far reaching repercussions throughout the Christian world for years to come.”¹³

One of the key differences between Catholic and Evangelical theology has to do with justification by faith alone through Christ alone. Martin Luther discovered in Romans that, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). This was the heart of the Reformation. It was against the Catholic notion that justification is through faith plus works. Any human works detract from the one saving work of Jesus Christ. “The doctrine of Justification,” wrote John Calvin, “is the principal ground on which religion must be supported.”¹⁴

R. C. Sproul’s book, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, calls in question the document on Catholic and Evangelical unity. He rightly points out that justification by faith is understood differently by Catholics and Evangelicals. Even the Council of Trent taught justification by faith. But it was not *only* by faith. That was the key issue of the Reformation. “The word *alone* was a solecism on which the entire Reformation doctrine of justification was erected. The absence of the word *alone* from *ECT’s* joint affirmation is most distressing.”¹⁵

The key word “alone” is missing throughout Catholic thinking. Evangelicals believe the gospel is justification through faith *alone* by Christ *alone* found in Scripture *alone*. By contrast, Catholics see faith as a human work, so there is no faith alone, Christ alone, nor Scripture alone. Human penance is added to justification and to Christ’s work, and the tradition of the Magisterium is added to Scripture. It is the human additions to the work of Christ in salvation and revelation that denies the free gift of the gospel.

¹²William Abraham (Perkins School of Theology), Elizabeth Achtemeier (Union Theological Seminary—Virginia), William Bently Ball (Harrisburg Pennsylvania), Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ), Robert Destro (Catholic University of America), Augustine DiNoia, O.P. (Dominican House of Studies), Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, S.J. (Fordham University), Keith Fournier (American Center for Law and Justice), Bishop William Frey (Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry), Mary Ann Gledon (Harvard Law School), Os. Guinness (Trinity Forum), Nathan Hatch (University of Notre Dame), James Hitchcock (St. Louis University), Peter Kreeft (Boston College), Matthew Lamb (Boston College), Ralph Martin (Renewal Ministries), Richard Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary), Mark Noll (Wheaton College), Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute), Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor (Archdiocese of New York), Thomas Oden (Drew University), J.I. Packer (Regent College, British Columbia), Pat Robertson (Regent College), John Rodgers (Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry) and Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J. (Archdiocese of San Francisco).

¹³Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 5.

¹⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (London: James Clarke, 1962), 2:37 (3.11.1).

¹⁵R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 36.

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Any placing of human experience, reason, or tradition as interpretive tools above Scripture's self-interpretation rejects the important distinction between Catholic thinking and that of the Reformers. Any Seventh-day Adventist who places these "outside authorities" above or equal to Scriptural authority¹⁶ have a Catholic view of Scripture, not a Protestant view, whether they know it or not.

John MacArthur said, "Despite all the recent dialogue among those desiring to reunite Rome and Protestantism, there has been no suggestion that Rome will ever repudiate its stance against justification by faith. For that reason, I believe the trend toward tolerance and cooperation is a destructive one because it blurs the distinction between biblical truth and a system of falsehood."¹⁷

The Fall of John Hick: Case-Study: "From *Sola Scriptura* to Pluralism"

We have noted the fall of Athens and the fall of Babylon. We have seen how Protestants joined with Catholics in the ECT document, oblivious to their violation of the *sola Scriptura* biblical principle. In fact, the Ecumenical Movement is replete with examples of Evangelicals and Catholics uniting over a social agenda while ignoring their differences in biblical interpretation. To them culture and values are more important than truth.

We come now to see the fall of one man who is representative of so many Bible believing youth who went off to seminaries and universities and lost their way. It is a story that, in various degrees, has happened and is happening to some Seventh-day Adventists. It is a story of one conservative who gave up the *sola Scriptura* principle and plunged into pluralism with its deafening voices and its dark, dismal, dangerous outlook.

In the recent book *More Than One Way?*¹⁸ John Hick speaks of his journey away from a conservative Christian thought-world to a liberal worldview. Like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolph Bultmann before him, Hick questioned the biblical documents because he was driven by a desire "to preach the gospel in a way that made sense to ordinary twentieth-century men and women, both young and old."¹⁹ He speaks of the evangelical package that he once accepted. It included "verbal inspiration of the Bible; Creation and Fall; Jesus as God the Son incarnate, born of a virgin, conscious of his divine nature, and performing miracles of divine power; redemption by his blood from sin and guilt; Jesus' bodily resurrection, ascension, and future return in glory; heaven and hell."²⁰

¹⁶Vatican II states that "Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God." (2.2.10). Yet it clearly concludes, "For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church." (2.3.12). *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M Abbott, S.J., (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 117, 121.

¹⁷John MacArthur, quoted by Davis Duggins, *Moody Monthly*, Nov. 1993, 15.

¹⁸Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

¹⁹Hick, 33.

²⁰*Ibid*, 30.

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Most of these are biblical doctrines. Yet, Hick says this package for him “has long since crumbled and disappeared.”²¹ Thus, for Hick, Jesus is not unique in the process of salvation/liberation/enlightenment. Nor is the function of the Holy Spirit to make Jesus known.

Basic to this jettisoning of biblical doctrines is Hick’s rejection of propositional revelation. He said, “I do not believe that God reveals propositions to us, whether in Hebrew, Greek, English, or any other language.”²² This dismissal is itself a proposition, yet a proposition that Hick never evaluates. He never attempts to see if it is true. As Ronald Nash rightly says, “it apparently never occurred to Hick to examine critically the faulty presuppositions that led him to deny even the possibility of divinely revealed truth.”²³ Rather than do that, Hick turns away from particular revelation in Scripture to God’s alleged revelation in all world faiths. In doing this He rejects the unique work of the Holy Spirit in biblical revelation and so jettisons *sola Scriptura*.

The early Hick called this a Copernican revolution. He claimed that the Ptolemaic worldview of Christianity was exclusivistic, where salvation is thought to be impossible beyond God’s revelation in Scripture or outside the church. Hick claimed that salvation is possible in every religion. All religions are “revelations of God’s activity.”²⁴ Hick replaced the centrality of Christ by an all-loving God who works through all religions to save mankind. The problem with this idea is its focus on a personal being, whereas many religions believe in an impersonal god (e.g. Pantheism and Mysticism).

Beyond that, if the same God works through all religions, why are their doctrines so divergent and contradictory? For example, as far as salvation is concerned, how can God be at work through all religions when salvation is a gift in Evangelical Christianity but has to be earned in non-Christian religions? How can it be the same God working in all when this life is the only time for accepting salvation in Evangelical Christianity, but is only one of many life-times for earning salvation in the reincarnational *samsara* of Hinduism and Buddhism? Here are two concurrent soteriologies that speak more about a schizophrenic God than about a God of love, who as such must necessarily treat everyone alike. One is tempted to think that Hick has rejected all propositions in non-Christian religions as well as in Scripture. At best his position demonstrates a meaningless pluralism.

By contrast, Muslims really believe in their propositions. Journeys to Mecca are sought on the basis of propositions about its benefits. Reincarnation is a propositional view found in a number of Eastern religions. Becoming a god, or enlightenment, is a propositional belief in Eastern mysticism. Even Hick’s theory

²¹Ibid, 33.

²²Ibid, 36.

²³Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 15.

²⁴Gavin D’Costa, *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation* (New York: U P of America, 1987), 21.

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about pluralism is given in propositions throughout his writings. He uses the very method he denies. He reminds me of Karl Barth, who denies propositional truths in Scripture and yet fills his thirteen volumes with propositional truths from Scripture. It's true that Barth is considered more orthodox than Hick. Yet both are liberal, even if at different points along the liberal spectrum away from Scripture. Both share the common problem of rejecting biblical propositional truths and the importance of *sola Scriptura*.

It is important to recognize that the principle of non-contradiction necessitates that truth claims that differ cannot all be truth. How can religious beliefs that differ all come from the same source? Mutually incompatible truth claims concern the following: Is there one God or a plurality of ascended masters who were once human? Are humans fallen beings, having rebelled from God, or simply experiencing lower vibrational levels? Is salvation a restoration of a broken relationship between God and humankind or merely a revelation of knowledge that enlightens. Is God impersonal or is He a person revealed through Christ? Truth claims do matter. Nor can religions claim a bipolar view of religious truth, where the second pole transcends the logic of propositions. Zen Buddhism and Japanese Shintoism are examples of this kind of truth claims. Harold A. Netland, in his book *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, shows that this antipathy to the principle of non-contradiction is not limited to Eastern traditions, but is increasingly being found in the Christian community.²⁵ But that doesn't make it right. Religious truth claims cannot escape the principle of non-contradiction and still claim to be truth.

Hick opposes exclusivism in his thinking about God working beyond Christianity in all religions. But to get there he has been an exclusivist by truncating all biblical data that calls his theory in question. Paradoxically he apparently overlooks the exclusivist teaching found in the different religions. It is not just a problem of Christianity being exclusivist, but exclusivity is found in all. This is the very reason why there are so many different religions. I concur with Stephen T. Davis, who noted that, "some of the religions of the world are clearly exclusivist."²⁶ The very fact of the multiplicity of religions proves the relevance of unique propositional ideas found in all, and should have given Hick pause when rejecting the propositional truths found in Christianity.

Although in his later thought Hick's god became an unknown god, at least Hick knew enough to say he was unknown. To that extent He really was not unknown. Yet, even a belief in an unknown god is itself a propositional truth. Hick rejects biblical revelation and opts for an awareness of God as revelation.²⁷ He leaves the primary location for the Spirit's work and goes into a supposed

²⁵Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 142.

²⁶Stephen T. Davis, "Evangelicals and the Religions of the World," *The Reformed Journal*, 6/6 (June 1981): 9.

²⁷Hick, 33-34.

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universal revelation. He goes from a God who is known in biblical revelation to an unknown god in universal revelation. He ends up saying, "Should not the fruit of the Spirit, which according to Paul is 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' (Gal. 5:22-23), be more evident in Christian than in non-Christian lives? Yet it does not seem to me that in fact Christians are on average noticeably morally superior to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists."²⁸

Hick hopes that people "will open their minds to the glorious reality of God's presence throughout the entire world and recognize that different faith communities see and respond to different 'faces' of the infinite transcendent Reality."²⁹ This is based on his acceptance of Kant's view that God is never known as He is in Himself (*noumena*), but only as He is experienced (*phenomena*), so that each religion has an approximate knowledge of God. But anyone who opens their mind to these so called different "faces" is shocked by the incompatibility among them. In the end Hick not only jettisons the propositional self-revelation of God in Scripture, but jettisons any meaningful revelation of God and utterly fails to understand the function of the Holy Spirit to make God known through incarnation and inspiration.

We see then that the conservative John Hick, who had a reasonable faith based upon biblical propositions, gave them up and found himself floundering in a maze of meaningless contradictions. To this degree he mirrored the problem of postmodernity, to which we now turn.

Postmodernity

Today we're in the midst of a profound transition from modernity to postmodernity. The human race has entered a new era that presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities to Seventh-day Adventists' mission as we approach the third millennium. A number of non-SDA scholars have recognized these opportunities.³⁰

Many have attempted to describe postmodernity. "A massive intellectual revolution is taking place," says Diogenes Allen, "that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modern world are collapsing, and we are entering a postmodern world. The

²⁸Ibid, 41.

²⁹Ibid, 91.

³⁰Some include R. Albert Mohler, Jr. President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky; Stanley J. Grenz, Pioneer MacDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage and Theology at Carey Hall/Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia; Dan R. Stiver, Associate Professor of Christian Philosophy, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; William E. Brown, President of Bryan College, Dayton, Tennessee; John A. Sims, Professor of Religion, Lee College, Cleveland Tennessee, and Thomas C. Oden, Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics, Theological School and Graduate School, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 84, 101, 248, 321, 336, and 402, respectively.

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principles formed during the Enlightenment (c. 1600-1780), which formed the foundations of modern mentality, are crumbling.”³¹

“We are experiencing enormous structural change in our country and in the world,” says Leith Anderson, “—change that promises to be greater than the invention of the printing press, greater than the Industrial Revolution, and greater than the rise and demise of communism. Our world is changing so quickly that we can barely keep track of what is happening, much less figure out how to respond.”³²

Postmodernity Defined. We begin our definition with a simple fact: Postmodernity is *after* modernity. Modernity was launched by the 17th century Enlightenment, which dominated human quest for knowledge and understanding for two hundred years. Scientific method brought multiplied technological benefits to human living, but it also brought a negative impact on global ecology, as well as bringing the race to the brink of a nuclear holocaust. In this way belief in knowledge as good came to a shattering end. Thus, in the last half of the twentieth century the modern worldview was challenged and continues to be questioned.

Postmodernity is also *antimodernity*. The modern worldview included the acceptance of man’s inevitable progress, based on evolutionary theory. We have now come to a generation which, for the first time, does not see any future. The optimism of the Enlightenment, with its vaunted belief in human reason and evolution, has given way to pessimism and meaninglessness. It’s as if the world has suddenly awakened to a reality check. Whereas the modern worldview was influenced by scientific method, reason, and universal objectivity, postmodernity rejects scientific method, reason, and universal objectivity. The collapse of a unified, rational, and meaningful worldview has thrown the human race into a period of unprecedented pluralism and polyvalence where perspectival views dominate, with each person coming to reality from his or her own presuppositions and assumptions. There is no worldview to provide meaningful assessment of reality. “Defining the idea of postmodernism,” says Gary Phillips, “is a bit like nailing down Jell-O.”³³

Differences Between Modernity and Postmodernity. When it comes to comparing modernity and postmodernity, there’s some continuity between the two, but also a radical discontinuity. First to an example of continuity. The modern antipathy to metaphysics and the transcendental is continued in postmodernity. “While modernism categorically denies the transcendent and spends a great deal of time and effort attempting to prove that the transcendent does not exist,”

³¹Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 2.

³²Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1992), 17.

³³Gary Phillips, “Religious Pluralism in a Postmodern World,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: 1995), 254.

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says William E. Brown, "Postmodernism confronts the transcendent with a yawn."³⁴

In this confined context, postmodernity champions liberation causes. If there's no transcendent God, then humans are left to be revolutionaries, to bring change in their own strength, in their own way. There's a cause for the marginalized. Yet this is the time, as Carl F. H. Henry notes, when "religion is marginalized and trivialized,"³⁵ and "Postmodernists have genuinely given up on the idea of absolute truth."³⁶ What a paradox—they have an absolute mission or right (to liberate) without absolute mandate or truth, which leaves one wondering how even liberation can be an absolute truth for them!?

In modernity God was shut out of this part of His universe. This closed continuum worldview rejected any inbreaking of the Supernatural within the natural nexus of cause and effect on planet earth. Huston Smith suggests that the modern mind thought that "seeing further in a horizontal direction would compensate for loss of the vertical." But modernity failed to realize that vision on the horizontal plane is still confined within a closed universe, and therefore shut up to its own subjectivity. Smith illustrates this vision with a line silhouetting the Himalayan range. Modernity grabbed both ends and pulled it into a straight line.³⁷

Modernity flaunted human reason as the savior of all human problems. This extreme rationalism was not enlightened, although a product of the Enlightenment. Postmodernists rightly call in question this arrogance, but go too far by rejecting reason altogether.³⁸ The solution lies between the two extremes, where a proper use of reason under Scripture is necessary to arrive at solutions. For the God of all truth invited mankind, "Come now, let us reason together" (Isa 1:18).

Difficulties in Postmodernity for the Presentation of Truth. My thesis is this: Postmoderns accept a number of voices (ideas) that are only theoretically relevant, but which cannot be sustained at the level of living. This makes postmoderns vulnerable to the certain voice of Truth. We will give examples of this fact as we proceed.

There are major difficulties for the presentation of biblical to postmodernity. To be relevant to this generation, one must give full attention to the challenges that postmodernity poses. The first thing to be stated is biblical truths need to be thought through for this generation, and not for a generation that has

³⁴William E. Brown, "Roots of Post-Modernism: Also Sprach Nietzsche," professional paper read to the Evangelical Theological Society, Southern Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina, March 10, 1995.

³⁵Carl F. H. Henry, "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 41.

³⁶David S. Dockery, "The Challenge of Postmodernism," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 14.

³⁷Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical, 1989), 6-7.

³⁸Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 68.

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gone. It's important to stress that biblical truths must be presented afresh for every generation. This does not change the content but may involve a change in communication techniques. We must understand postmoderns before we attempt to speak to them. The following characteristics give us insight to their thinking.

Opposed to System. How can one present a systematic understanding of biblical truth when such systems are irrelevant to Postmoderns? One must realize it's one thing to reject a system, and another thing to live a muddled life. Often the very ones rejecting systems organize their day, plan their vacations, and work in a routine manner, arriving at appointments on time. Modern life demands schedules, whether for travel, business, or the time to listen to the evening news. There's an inbuilt orderliness in air flights (sometimes), television programs, and publishing of *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, to name some.

Opposition to systems takes place only on the theoretical level, not where life is lived. Yet there's no advantage in rejecting something at the theoretical level which proves eminently workable at the level of living. Rejection of the strictures of modernity, the science that led to ecological and nuclear threats to the planet, are understandable and worthy; but there's more to modernity than that. There's a good side to modernity which lives on in postmodernity because life is more orderly than the theory of postmodernity allows.

Opposed to a Center. Postmodernism's rejection of a center in theory cannot be lived in practice. If God is not the center of a person's life, then someone or something else will be. Idolatry was a recurring problem throughout the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments deal with the problem up front. The very first commandment says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:2-3). This was repeated in the Deuteronomy account (Deut 5:6-7).

Humans are incurably worshipers. This is true of postmoderns, as well. This is important to remember, because the end-time confrontation will involve worship, and all mankind will participate (Rev 13:3, 4, 12). The fact that humans are worshipers stems from their creation by God (Gen 1:26-31; 2:7, 20-25). They were made for God. If they do not worship God, they will worship some other god or gods. This is why religion is found in every culture, however primitive or advanced. Humans are programmed through creation to seek a center to their life, to give it meaning and security. Postmodernity has not decreased the number of football and baseball fans. Basketball still draws crowds, as does tennis, golf, and car racing. Hollywood stars are still sought after and praised on Oscar nights and between. Work is often central to those wanting to get ahead, whether professional or business. Workaholism didn't recede with the advent of postmodernity. The effects of creation and modernity still live on in spite of the de-centering theory of postmodernity.

Opposed to Any Worldview. There's no overarching worldview for postmodernity as there has been for all prior ages. Yet it's not possible to live up to

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this theoretical position. Postmodernity is a revolt and is expressed in many different ways. One way is through liberation theology. It's a quest for political power, influenced by Marxism. Liberation theology has a worldview. God is in the business of liberating marginalized people, and liberation is the center to this worldview. This is one example of how a movement within Postmodernity does have a worldview in practice.

Modernity had a center and a worldview. Postmodernity has neither. Yet, paradoxically, postmodernity finds itself in a shrinking world that thinks more in global terms, from economy to ecology. At the very time when order has been thrown to the winds, a global village has emerged. To this extent, in many areas of life, a worldview has been thrust upon the very revolution that abandoned all worldviews.

Relativism. With the rejection of any system, center, or worldview, the only option left to postmodernity was relativism. But relativism means that every individual has a right to his or her own view. Perspectival thinking replaced worldviews, the local situation replaced the broader context, situation ethics replaced the moral code, and personal preference replaced values. "If it feels good" replaced an objective norm. Theoretically each human is left to his or her own world. Order gives way to chaos, hope to nihilism, and the future to the ever present. There is no goal, purpose, or fulfillment. Humanity has become less than human. Thus, postmoderns have no protection from the eschatological and universal delusion of Spiritualism (Rev 16:12-16, 13:12-17).

Such dysfunctionality cannot sustain viable human existence. Postmoderns are desperate for meaning and a future. More than ever, they need to know the good news of the gospel. They are vulnerable to a certain voice. They need to hear the voice of God in Scripture.

Postmodern Theory Cannot Be Lived

We have been introduced to the fact that some postmodern theories cannot be lived. We now take a closer look at this fact. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Father of postmodernism, proclaimed God is dead and promoted Nihilism, or meaninglessness. Yet he discovered meaning in a social movement of his time and promoted it with gusto. He could not live his theory. The world of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) seemed meaningless, a world without morals. Yet he couldn't live up to this theory when he signed the Algerian Manifesto, "taking a position as though morals have real meaning."³⁹

A. J. Ayer suggested that only mathematico-logical truths and empirical truths are meaningful. All other statements that cannot be verified by sense data are "non-sense." Thus all biblical statements are meaningless. This immediately confined truth statements, or statements of meaning, to a very narrow slice of

³⁹Francis Schaefer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaefer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 1:134.

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life. All other statements of poetry, music, religion, and art were renounced. But how can anyone live in such a narrowly prescribed world? Furthermore, the theory could not stand under its own test for a truth statement. For how can a theory of language that accepts only mathematico-logical and empirical statements be tested by that standard?

René Descartes (1596-1650), the Father of modernity, used the method of doubt. It was David Hume (1711-1776) who took this method to its ultimate, and it plunged him into utter skepticism. David K. Clark speaks of this effect. "Hume's philosophy left him completely in the dark about what to think, whom to trust, what cause to defend, or what activity to pursue. Given modern requirements, reason could not dispel his doubts. But he noticed that the company of friends put him in better spirits. So he turned to dining and backgammon to heal his epistemological depressions. His philosophy, however, proved utterly impotent to avoid skepticism."⁴⁰ Hume needed to get relief from his theory, for it could not be lived.

Jacques Derrida claims that "all interpretations are misinterpretations," and that a text has no clear meaning. But he jettisoned his theory once when he was misunderstood in a debate with John Searle. "Believing that Searle's exposition of his position had been unfair to him, Derrida could not resist saying, at several points in his reply, that Searle had misunderstood him and misstated his views, even adding at one point that what he, Derrida, had meant should have been clear enough and obvious to Searle. This was indeed a very far cry from Derrida's theory that a reader should not try to grasp the author's intent. Derrida thus abandons this position, just as others do, when he feels the need to replace a misstatement of his view with an adequate statement of it."⁴¹

Stanley Fish is "one of the most influential literary theorists"⁴² and "radical" reader-response theorists, focusing on meaning in the reading community rather than on the text.⁴³ Reader-response theory is an important part of the postmodern scene. Fish goes so far as to maintain that "the text as a formal entity does not exist apart from the reader's interpretive act."⁴⁴ In fact, reader-response theorists believe that readers are co-authors with the biblical writers, and they give to the text the meaning it should have. (Elsewhere I have critiqued

⁴⁰David K. Clark, "Narrative Theology and Apologetics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35/4 (December 1993): 510.

⁴¹John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstructionism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 1989), 13-14.

⁴²Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 474.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 515-516.

⁴⁴Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 378.

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Reader-Response theories in postmodern hermeneutics, noting their challenge to Evangelical theology).⁴⁵

How could life operate on Fish's theory? There could be no agreement on the American Constitution, or any other one, so citizens would interpret it as they choose. The very context of governance would be in jeopardy. Traffic signs would have no standard meaning, and driving would be hazardous. Some may choose to drive on the opposite side of the road, others agree that red traffic lights mean drive straight through, and stop signs mean you have the right of way. Contracts would be impossible, and business would be brought to a grinding halt, for the same wording would mean different things to different people.

If a text has no meaning in itself, but only in the mind of the reader, then no language would have meaning either, but only in the mind of the hearer. Life would simply break down on these terms, for no one could ever be sure that he or she could communicate. How could one order from Sears or Penney's over the phone? How could any TV station present the evening news? What purpose would weather reports have? What purpose would an emergency 911 call have? What meaning would a doctor's diagnosis have? What meaning would university teaching have? How could you grade exams if every answer is equally valid? The list is endless. There's simply no way to accept Fish's reader-response theory and make sense out of life.

Limits to Pluralism. The pluralism of postmodernity cannot be lived in certain contexts. As Mortimer J. Adler reminds us in his book *Truth in Religion*, "a stable and peaceful society cannot exist under the domination of two or more competing governments unless one is subordinate to the other."⁴⁶ Adler shows that pluralism has always existed when it comes to matters of taste, and is tolerable in that context, but not in the context of truth, and notes that "Anything that is transcultural is clearly in the sphere of truth."⁴⁷ Thus the pluralism endemic in postmodernity cannot survive in practice in certain contexts.

Pluralism began on planet-earth in Eden, when Satan denied God's word (Gen 3:1-5). We find it expressed well in the time of the Judges, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). When everything is right, then nothing is right. And how can anybody know anything is right if there is no objective standard accepted by all who make that decision. Such is the limit of pluralism. It is simply intolerable where life is lived.

Opportunities for Truth in Postmodernity. Postmodernity gives opportunity for truth to regain what it lost to modernity. Too often the threat from modernity was accepted by the church, instead of being resisted. The modern world-

⁴⁵Norman R. Gulley, "Reader-Response Theories in Postmodern Hermeneutics: A Challenge to Evangelical Theology," *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 208-253.

⁴⁶Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth, An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 2.

⁴⁷Ibid, 2-4.

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view had more influence than the biblical worldview, and the church gave in. The tragedy is now obvious as the modern worldview has been forced to give way to that of postmodernity.

Christianity's Capitulation to Modernity. Postmodernity has called modernity into question. Yet this is the modernity to which the church so often capitulated to keep its intellectual respectability. Since the 1960s, in the post-Vietnam era, many people have turned away from the materialism of the west to the mysticism of the east. Many of these are seeking for that which they sense is missing in the west. They turn to the east for fullness. They seek after Hinduism and Buddhism. "Those dissatisfied with secular modernity most often turn to the East or to the distant mythic past," says William C. Platcher, "One reason seems to be that Christianity cannot criticize our culture very effectively if it has already accepted many of the assumptions of that culture as the price of intellectual respectability."⁴⁸

The fact is, as Stanley Grenz points out, "most major Protestant denominations" "'defected' to 'modernism.'"⁴⁹ The tragedy is they capitulated—because unsure of their own biblical foundation—to science and culture. With the collapse of modernity the limitations of science have been demonstrated. Science cannot deal with ultimate or existential meanings. "Theology need cater to our prevailing styles of thought only if it wishes to," says Huston Smith. "Nothing in the way of evidence requires that it do so."⁵⁰ Accommodation follows close after the desire for acceptance. To confine Scripture to a cultural artifact is a case in point. Then Scripture ceases to be the Word of God to culture. It is judged by culture instead of the reverse.

More Room for Religion. Modernity stifled religion. It closed the door to the transcendent with its rejection of metaphysics. It confined the parameters to a closed continuum of cause and effect, so that God was removed from the realm of human history. Science limited reality to the observable, so that the religious dimension of human experience could only occupy an interior immanent substitute for objective reality. Now, with the collapse of this modern worldview, the strictures and confinement have been radically called in question.

"In a way that has never been possible in modernity, one can find philosophical or rational space for 'giving an account for the hope that is in you,' comments Don R. Stiver. "In other words, there is no philosophical hindrance that *a priori* calls such a response into question. And given the importance of reason in modernity, this renewed sense of the rationality of religion opens up a new social and cultural space for religion. In other words, if the opportunity can be seized, postmodernity allows conceptual space for religion's stretching its arms

⁴⁸William C. Platcher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 12.

⁴⁹Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 25.

⁵⁰Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, 146.

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and walking about in a way not possible in the cramped quarters allowed for it since the onset of modernity. The danger is that it may continue to pace back and forth in its all-too-familiar constricted confines, not knowing that the surrounding bars have long ago rusted away.”⁵¹

Intellectual Strength of Christianity. Diogenes Allen, in his book *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction*, speaks of “A new openness for faith.” He reminds us that Christianity has been on the defensive intellectually during modernity. During that period many have declared that the post-Christian age has dawned “on the basis of physics, biology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology.”⁵²

We are now in an age when philosophy and science, once used to attack Christianity, are themselves under attack. It was during modernity that Christianity came under severe attack for the first time. This was a revolt against authority found in church and Scripture. Humans became their own authority, and human reason reigned supreme. This was the time when the historical critical methods of biblical study did their devastating work in the biblical documents. This is when evolutionary theory radically called in question the Genesis account of creation, and when geology questioned the universal flood. This was the time when human reason was elevated above divine revelation, thus bringing into captivity God’s Word to mankind. It’s this worldview that is collapsing.

As Allen notes, “No longer can Christianity be put on the defensive, as it has been for the last three hundred years or so, because of the narrow view of reason and the reliance on classical science that are characteristic of the modern mentality.” We have come to a new opportunity to reevaluate the viability of Christianity.⁵³

Purpose in the Biblical Worldview. There’s so much meaninglessness and purposelessness in postmodernity. If there was ever a time for the clear purpose of the biblical worldview to be heard it is now. Scripture tells mankind where it came from, why it is here, and where it is going, and thus answers the three basic philosophical questions that have interested mankind for millennia. This sure word about purpose needs to be heard today. As George G. Hunter rightly notes, “We have the opportunity to reintroduce purpose to a secular world that, because of science’s conditioning, is preoccupied with cause and effect and blind to the issues of purpose for human life and history.”⁵⁴

Foundation for Truth. Because biblical or any other texts have no meaning in themselves to postmoderns, and because they have no authoritative word to them, this has left postmoderns in a morass of meaninglessness. They wander around aimlessly without a purpose or goal. Yet they were made in the image of

⁵¹Dan R. Stiver, “Much Ado About Athens and Jerusalem: The Implications of Postmodernism for Faith,” *Review and Expositor*, 91 (1994): 94.

⁵²Diogenes Allen, 2.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴George G. Hunter, III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 95.

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God, with a desire to worship. They need to hear the certain Word of God from Scripture. Under the Holy Spirit of God this will meet their deepest needs.

Paradoxically, this is the time when people are standing up for their rights in an unprecedented way. The various liberation movements are an integral part of postmodernity. Yet these very movements reach beyond the relativism of culture to absolutes that belong to the biblical worldview. Gene Edward Veith, Jr. said it well: “Postmodernists, more than most people, complain about how various power structures are unfair, and they are always demanding sensitivity, tolerance, and justice. Do they not realize that they are appealing to transcendent, authoritative moral absolutes?”⁵⁵

Here’s another example that postmodern theory cannot be lived in practice. There is in humankind a reality that cannot be confined within any passing worldview that is out of sync with the biblical worldview. It’s this fact that gives Scripture a point of contact with its audience, even with postmoderns.

How to Reach Postmoderns with Biblical Truth: The Gospel as Transcultural, Transgenerational

The Gospel is everlasting (Rev 14:6), first given after the Fall of mankind (Gen 3:15) and consistently the same throughout Scripture. It’s this Gospel that Christ commissioned to be taken to the world (Matt 28:18-19), “to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev 14:6) to the end of the world (Matt 28:20)—which includes postmodernity. It’s the good news about salvation that every human needs to hear. This presupposes that it’s possible to be heard by all, whatever their culture or experience.

Scripture states that “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Paul speaks of the Gentiles having the law “written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness” (Rom 2:15). This includes postmoderns.

Humans were made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) with a point of contact for God to communicate. Although this image has been defaced through the Fall (Gen 3:1-7) and subsequent sins, it’s not destroyed. This is why Christ is still the light that lightens everyone coming into the world (John 1:9). The fact of the *image* in no way discounts or detracts from Christ as the light to the world. Christ as Creator (John 1:1-2, Heb 1:1-2) chose to make mankind in such a way that after the Fall it would be possible to reach mankind in its fallen condition and bring enlightenment, even to postmoderns. It is also vital to recognize the function of the Holy Spirit in this process. For two things are crucial—to not underestimate the longing in the hearts of postmoderns, and to not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to satisfy that longing.

⁵⁵Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times*, 62.

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If Christ made all mankind in His image, this includes postmoderns. If Christ put within the human mind a longing for Himself, this includes postmoderns. If conscience is the location where God speaks and His voice is heard, then this includes the consciences of those who espouse postmodernity. Yes, postmoderns have overthrown the unified worldview of modernism. Yes, they are awash in a seemingly meaningless sea of pluralism without chart or compass. Yes, their lives are hectic, stress-filled and often dysfunctional. Yet still they bear the image of God and have a receiver on board to hear the good news of the gospel. Their case may seem hopeless, but their very hopelessness makes them long for hope, and open to the only One who can bring them meaning out of chaos. As Augustine of Hippo said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Reaching Generation X with Biblical Truth. Generation X is a product of postmodernity. The question, "how do we reach postmoderns with Biblical truth," must also be asked of the Xers. In their book *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World*, William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi (an Xer) explain what the X generation is like. The X generation were born between 1961-1981. It was called the X generation because it was perceived that they stood for nothing and believed in nothing.⁵⁶ It's a generation dominated by technology, half of them are divorced, one in three were abused, and it is the most aborted generation ever. Born in the time of President Nixon, they have never known trust in leadership. For the first time in American history, this is the generation, for the most part, who will not have it better than their parents.⁵⁷

Mahedi and Bernardi claim, "Einstein's relativity theories along with quantum mechanics and recent discoveries in astronomy have rendered all previously held positions obsolete. Reality is far more complex than we had imagined it to be."⁵⁸ It's true that for some the new science has contributed to the insecurity in postmodernity. But far more than a new way to look at reality (for example, light as a particle or wave) is the insecurity produced by nuclear science. Postmoderns believe the world began with a "big bang" and wonder if it will end that way. The Xers have had a rough life and find themselves in a rough environment. "Aloneness defines the generation. This is not loneliness, rather it is a life of activity without 'family and friends.' Postmoderns struggle with "issues of abandonment, alienation and aloneness." Their greatest need is for a cohesive family unit.⁵⁹ This is where we must begin. Not with Daniel 2. But with their needs, and attempt to meet them.

In fact, "Generation X has been spiritually starved, emotionally traumatized, educationally deprived, condemned to a bleak economic future and robbed

⁵⁶William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 10.

⁵⁷Ibid, 14-18.

⁵⁸Ibid, 42.

⁵⁹Ibid, 19, 21, 32.

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of the hope that should characterize youth.” They live in a time when the world has become a “global village,” when the major problems half way around the world are graphically displayed on the nightly news. In such a time “a great spiritual hunger has arisen around the world as we repudiate the moral and intellectual emptiness of modern life and resist the impersonal forces of vast and dehumanizing systems”⁶⁰

We must not underestimate this genuine spiritual hunger. The emotionally wounded and spiritually empty postmoderns face an end of their civilization very much like the ancient Athenians. They lack security. In spite of all the relativism, pluralism, lack of worldview, center, with dislike of systems, objectivity, absolutes, and the transcendent, the needs of postmoderns cry out for the very things they have rejected. This is crucial. Here again we see that they cannot live their own theories.

Perhaps the best way to help postmoderns is to come close to them and share with them what Christ has done for us and offer them a relationship with a personal and present God who loves them. Tell them they belong to His family. Christ lived and died for them. There is a certain future for them so much better than the present. Christ is coming for them, to give them that which they do not have and cannot get from the relativism and confusion of postmodernity. Christ’s presence with them now and His coming for them soon can give them the security that propositional truths bring, and set them free from the meaninglessness that comes from the many voices.

For after all, postmoderns were made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), and though that image is ever so damaged, it still provides a point of contact for the Holy Spirit to enlighten them (John 1:9). It is to postmoderns that the final cry will go forth, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great . . . Come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:2, 4). It will be an authoritative, certain and welcome voice to free postmoderns from the Babylonian confusion of pluralistic voices. Like ancient Athens, modern Babylon crumbles. It has nothing lasting to offer. The invitation to come out of her goes forth under the Latter Rain (Joel 2:28-29) “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17), Who authored the Scriptures (1 Pet 1:10, 11; 2 Pet 1:21). He will come to “guide into all truth” (John 16:13). Christ the Living Word and Scripture the written Word, with its *sola Scriptura*, are the only hope for postmoderns. The Savior and Scripture provide the only optimistic worldview, with glorious love, purpose, peace, security, and hope which alone negates the meaninglessness, purposelessness, pluralism, relativism, and confusion of postmodern life.

Postmoderns are open to all voices and thus open to the voice of God. Many postmodern theories cannot be lived. Postmoderns are vulnerable, caused by disappointed relationships and disappointed theories. These make them vulner-

⁶⁰Ibid, 25, 43.

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able for a certain voice. We must not underestimate their need nor the ability of the Holy Spirit to meet it as we mingle among them as their friends.

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Modern Feminism, Religious Pluralism, and Scripture

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A passing comment in a textbook kindled the initial spark for this study: “Goddess worship has actually come back into vogue in modern culture, taking delight in its Canaanite roots.”¹

I was aware of the feminist movement, but ignorant of its contemporary drive for goddess worship. A subsequent article in *Christianity Today*² reporting the worship of “Sophia,” the goddess of wisdom, at a major American conference intensified my interest. Modern feminist writers have a profound grievance against Scripture because of what they describe as its “male” God and because of its “patriarchal” religion.³ As a result, some radically revise the biblical text; others determine to be rid of it altogether. The majority concur that the Bible has been a curse to humankind, and they insist they “are going to make a new place for women in contemporary religious life and thought.”⁴

¹Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 88.

²Susan Cyre, “Fall-Out Escalates over ‘Goddess’ Sophia Worship,” *Christianity Today*, 38/4 (April 1994): 74.

³“Mary Daly’s anti-Christian diatribe is often quoted: ‘If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated’ (*Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, 2nd ed. [Boston: Beacon, 1985], 13). Carol P. Christ writes: ‘I left the church . . . because I concluded that patriarchy was deeply rooted in Christianity’s core symbolism of God the Father and Son.’ Daly and C. Christ are now witches.” Aida Besançon Spencer, “Father-Ruler: The Meaning of the Metaphor ‘Father’ For God in the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/3 (September 1966): 433. In *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Good News, 1992), Mary Kassian provides an informative short biography of Mary Daly’s life, 227–233.

⁴Feminism regularly denounces Scripture, yet interestingly, many feminists continue to seek to unite themselves with the Church—some trying to destroy it, others trying to alter it dramatically.

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Feminist writer Naomi Goldenberg describes the radical nature of this modern “sisterhood”:

Every woman working to improve her own position in society or that of women in general is *bringing about the end of God*. All feminists are making the world less and less like the one described in the Bible and are thus helping to lessen the influence of Christ and Yahweh on humanity

Contemporary feminist critics of religion can be placed on a spectrum ranging from those who revise to those who revolt.⁵

Goldenberg’s own words place her in the “revolt” category:

Everything I knew about Judaism and Christianity involved accepting God as the ultimate in male authority figures. A society that accepted large numbers of women as religious leaders would be too different from the biblical world to find the book relevant, let alone look to it for inspiration.

“God is going to change,” I thought.” *We women are going to bring an end to God*. As we take positions in government, in medicine, in law, in business, in the arts and, finally, in religion, *we will be the end of Him*. *We will change the world so much that He won’t fit in anymore.*”⁶

See Kassian, “The Inevitable Intersection” and “The Slippery Slope,” 219–240. Also Thomas Oden, “Can a Goddess Be Politically Correct?” in *Requiem: A Lament In Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 140–151.

⁵*Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon, 1979), 10, 13, emphasis added. Goldenberg seems to take inspiration from Elizabeth Cady Stanton from the 19th century:

“The first feminist critic of biblical traditions understood that Judaism and Christianity had to be eliminated for the position of women to be significantly improved. In 1895 American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her revising committee began work on *The Woman’s Bible*. Stanton wanted people to realize how much the Bible degraded women. . . . Stanton was tired of hearing the scriptures used to hold women back. . . .

“In order to question biblical prescriptions for human behavior, Stanton had to take a stand against the sacredness of the Bible itself. ‘The time has come,’ she said, ‘to read [the Bible] as we do all other books, accepting the good and rejecting the evil it teaches.’ In her memoirs, she added, ‘the more I read, the more keenly I felt the importance of convincing women that the Hebrew mythology had no special claim to a higher origin than that of the Greeks, being far less attractive in style and less refined in sentiment. Its objectionable features would long ago have been apparent had they not been glossed over with a faith in their divine inspiration.’ Relativizing the Bible by placing it alongside other mythologies as well as ‘all other books’ is a radical step that many feminists both in Stanton’s day and in the present are reluctant to take. Many feminists recommend ignoring parts of the Bible, but still claim that the book as a whole is God-given. It is hard to deny that an eventual consequence of criticizing the correctness of any sacred text or tradition is to question why that text or tradition should be considered a divine authority at all. It is to Stanton’s credit that she never hedged on this issue” (ibid., 10, 13).

⁶Ibid., 3, emphasis added. Goldenberg’s assertions are bold: “Jesus Christ cannot symbolize the liberation of women. A culture that maintains a masculine image for its highest divinity cannot allow its women to experience themselves as the equals of men. In order to develop a theology of

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She cites Sigmund Freud as an ally:

In the case of religion, Freud called for nothing less than the complete and total overthrow of Judaism and Christianity—and he did this precisely because the religions were patriarchal.⁷

Goldenberg is not the only feminist writing this stridently. Cynthia Eller is one of many others:

This feminist rejection of established religions saw women's oppression in patriarchal religion occurring along many axes—theological, biblical, institutional, and so on—and all of these came in for feminist criticism. But the entire interlocking system of oppressions was finally summed up in a single metaphor: the maleness of God. Simply put, a religion with a male god is no religion for women.⁸

Feminist writing is often forceful, bitter, and uncompromising. However, these women are not issuing impulsive, ungrounded complaints. They regularly couple their arguments with descriptions of offensive personal experiences which have propelled them:

I am a woman. I have experienced the scorn and prideful superiority with which men have, at times, treated me. I have listened

women's liberation, feminists have to leave Christ and Bible behind them. Women have to stop denying the sexism that lies at the root of the Jewish and Christian systems" (ibid., 22).

⁷Ibid., 26.

⁸*Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 47. Eller describes various other aspects negative to Christianity. For example:

"The effects of spiritual feminists' feelings of marginality are perhaps most acutely present in relationship to traditional religions, where spiritual feminists exhibit a striking ambivalence. This ambivalence was in full flower at one workshop I attended on feminist witchcraft. Discussion during the workshop had been full of casual slurs on Christianity: how wonderful Europe had been before it was Christianized; how the church denied and punished women's sexuality; how the crucifix was a perfect illustration of how men fetishize pain. Finally, one woman began to speak with great agitation about how difficult it was for her when other women criticized Christianity. She said that though she recognized the church had some serious problems where women were concerned, she thought it unfair for spiritual feminists to characterize the church as the unrelieved enemy of women, and she said she found it personally hurtful when women around her called the pope 'an - - - - -' [deleted by *JATS* editor].

"Almost all the women present immediately retracted earlier statements, apologized for having upset her, and said that they had no intention to speak ill of her religion, which was in fact a beautiful religion. Some expressed regret for having felt driven to leave Christianity themselves; some said that while it was not for them, they did not want to dictate anyone else's choices; others praised her for sticking it out in the church and standing up for women in an arena where women's voices were so desperately needed. But at last, two women intruded on the apologetics to say that though they were sorry it hurt her, they had to stand firm: the church hurt women, historically and currently, and women needed to have that shown to them. Though they tried to be delicate in their phrasing, they intimated very strongly that women who remained within Christianity were collaborating in their own oppression and that of other women" (ibid., 223–224).

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to insults against my capabilities, my intelligence, and my body. I have burned with anger as I have wiped the blood from a battered woman's face. I have wept with women who have been forcefully, brutally raped—violated to the very core of their being. I have been sickened at the perverted sexual abuse of little girls. I have boycotted stores which sell pornographic pictures of women. I have challenged men who sarcastically demean women with their "humor." And I have walked out of church services where pastors carelessly malign those whom God has called holy. I am often hurt and angered by sexist, yes, SEXIST demeaning attitudes and actions. And I grieve deeply at the distortion of the relationship that God created as harmonious and good. As a woman I feel the battle. I feel the sin. *Feminism identifies real problems which demand real answers.*⁹

Such writers call attention to the pain women regularly experience. Though they often disagree in their solutions, they are correct that serious problems exist for women that need to be addressed.

Feminists claim that Scripture has caused this degradation of women. They especially delight in quoting the early Church Fathers' graphic descriptions of the "inferior sex." These include the Latin Fathers:

And the women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—maybe even to baptize (Tertullian, AD 160-225).

You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man [writing to Christian women concerning their dress] (Tertullian, AD 160-225).

Whoever does not believe is a woman, and she is still addressed with her physical sexual designation; for the woman who believes is elevated to male completeness and to a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; then she no longer bears the worldly name of her physical sex (Ambrose, AD 339-397).

[T]he woman is inferior to man, for she is part of him, because the man is the origin of woman; from that and on account of that the woman is subject to the man, in that she is under his command The man is created in the image of God, but not the woman [commenting on 1 Cor 11] ('Ambrosiaster': pseudo-Ambrose).

In Holy Scripture [the word] "woman" stands either for the female sex (Gal 4:4) or for weakness, as it is said: A man's spite is preferable to a woman's kindness (Sir 42:14). For every man is called strong and clear of thought, but woman is looked upon as a weak or muddled spirit (Gregory the Great, AD 540-604).

⁹Mary A. Kassian, *ibid.*, 242, emphasis added. She eloquently argues this point though she is not a Feminist herself.

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And the Greek Fathers:

What is seen with the eyes of the creator is masculine, and not feminine, for God does not stoop to look upon what is feminine and of the flesh. (Origen, AD 185-254)

For the female sex is easily seduced, weak, and without much understanding. The devil seeks to vomit out this disorder through women We wish to apply masculine reasoning and destroy the folly of these women [attacking a group which praised Mary as divinely honored] (Epiphanius, AD 315-403).

Should you reflect about what is contained in beautiful eyes, in a straight nose, in a mouth, in cheeks, you will see that bodily beauty is only a white-washed tomb, for inside it is full of filth [writing to a monk considering marriage] (John Chrysostom, AD 347-407)

Somehow the woman, or rather, the female sex as a whole, is slow in comprehension [explaining Mary Magdalene's failure to recognize Jesus after the resurrection] (Cyril of Alexandria, AD 376-444).¹⁰

As feminist Mary Daly summarizes:

The history of antifeminism in the Judeo-Christian heritage already has been exposed. The infamous passages of the Old and New Testaments are well known. I need not allude to the misogyny of the church Fathers—for example, Tertullian, who informed women in general: “You are the devil’s gateway How easily you destroyed man, the image of God. Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the Son of God had to die,” or Augustine, who opined that women are not made to the image of God. I can omit reference to Thomas Aquinas and his numerous commentators and disciples who defined women as misbegotten males. I can overlook Martin Luther’s remark that God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all. I can pass over the fact that John Knox composed a “First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.”¹¹

¹⁰ Leonard Swidler has compiled these quotes (and others) from the Latin and Greek Fathers in his book *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).

¹¹ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 3. See also Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 128–132:

“Already by 20 C.E. . . . Christianity was well on its way to becoming precisely the kind of hierarchical and violence-based system Jesus had rebelled against. And after Emperor Constantine’s conversion, it became an official arm, that is, the servant, of the state. . . .

“According to Christian histories, it is said that in 312 C.E., on the day before Constantine defeated and killed his rival Maxentius and was proclaimed [YOU’VE LEFT A LINE OUT OF THIS QUOTE, JO ANN] with the words *in hoc signo victor seris* (in this sign you will be victor). What Christian historians usually fail to report is that it is also said that this first Christian emperor had his wife Fausta boiled alive and ordered the murder of his own son Crispus. But the bloodshed and repression that ushered in the Christianization of Europe was not confined to Constantine’s

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A more modern “insult” for feminists is perceived in Pope Paul VI’s 1977 assertion that women are barred from the priesthood “because our Lord was a man.”¹² Feminists thus resolve that male-dominated Christianity has wreaked havoc on the lives of women for thousands of years.

However, the prime origin of all these accumulated abuses, they argue, occurred even before the formation of the canon with an alleged pivot away from an ancient matriarchal society and its worship of the Mother Goddess. They cite seeming evidence for ancient goddess worship, arguing that there are such hints in the OT at those points where Canaanite worship is summarily denounced.

They also cite examples from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, along with more minor kingdoms where the Primal Matrix supposedly ruled supreme. A major evidence for them is the thousands of female goddess figurines and carvings that have been discovered by archaeologists, coupled with the paucity of male idols. Rosemary Radford Ruether contends that the Asherah was a stubborn adversary to Yahweh in ancient Near Eastern history:

Old Testament religion is traditionally presented to us as an uncompromising war against nature religion. The worship of Yahweh (the LORD in English translations of the Old Testament) totally rejected that religion of Canaan expressed by the worship of the god-king Baal and she-goddess Anath. This struggle between Yahwism and the religion of Canaan was one of the most important influences in shaping Old Testament religion. The Old Testament rejection of female symbols for God, and perhaps also of female religious leaders, probably had something to do with this struggle against Canaanite religion, with its powerful goddess figures and its female-dominated ceremonies or worship.¹³

One corollary of this alleged primal Old Testament shift to “male god-ism” and patriarchy, feminists maintain, is the conspicuous male bias in all subsequent historical documents. Not only in Christian history—where they point out rarely is a female saint acknowledged as compared to the vast representation of

private acts. Nor was it confined to his public acts and those of his Christian successors, such as later edicts that heresy to the Church was now a treasonous act punishable by torture and death” (131).

¹²Ibid., 132. Each of the feminist authors describe their own disgust at male domination. For example, Carol Christ: “During my years there, Yale’s president was to make the infamous statement that Yale would never admit women as undergraduates because its mission was to educate 1000 male leaders each year. But I had not expected this experience. I had come to study truth, and truth was no respecter of gender, I thought.” (In *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* [Boston: Beacon, 1980], xi.) An exhaustive collection of all such accounts would be astonishing.

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 19.

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men¹⁴—but also in national historical records, where women rarely have been included.¹⁵ Such male bias, they insist, has also affected literary expression:

. . . Elaine Showalter [has] concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice—i.e., the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history. . . . Through women-centered analysis, feminists sought to draw attention to the sexual inequities of language and to change social attitudes and practices through the changing of language.¹⁶

In response, feminists seek to rewrite history—calling it HERstory. For example, feminist writer Merlin Stone refers to an ancient Sumerian myth where the female, like Eve, makes wrong choices, but is instead deified. By contrast, Stone notes, the Eve of biblical patriarchy has been “dammed by all subsequent generations for her deed.”¹⁷

Moreover, in the biblical narrative of Hosea, Gomer’s desertion of her husband and blatant prostitution is now celebrated. Old Testament Queen Jezebel, feminists suggest, represents flourishing female pagan worship in Israel and is cheered.¹⁸

Along with this, feminists adjust the spelling of words. For example, “theology” becomes “*thealogy*” to avoid the masculine gender of “*theos*.”

Witchcraft. Another definitive feminist posture is their endorsement of witchcraft. They argue that it is one of the many lost “arts” of ancient goddess religion, a treasured remnant which earned its “bad reputation” only through persistent male persecution.¹⁹ Feminists aspire to detoxify witchcraft by tracing a

¹⁴For example: “Looking at the list of the lesser saints in the Church of England’s Alternative Services Book, Janet Morley comments that it is inherently improbably that one sex, the male sex, should be nearly seven times as saintly as the other, a balance which would be startling if the preponderance were the other way. She is therefore right to ask why it is that saintly women are less remembered or deemed to be less important.” Ann Loades, *Searching for Lost Coins: Explorations in Christianity and Feminism* (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1987), 4.

¹⁵See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 262–263.

¹⁶Kassian, 73–74. Denise Lardner Carmody concurs: “. . . one is struck by the richness and ambiguity in the religions’ symbolization of women’s holiness and evil. Clearly, one of the most pregnant signs of women’s subordinate status has been the tendency to view them as either much better, or much worse, than men, for this implies that only men have normal, mid-range humanity. So women have been elevated as goddesses, virgins, mothers, symbols of purity, mercy, love. Likewise, they have been denounced as whores, witches, seducers, symbols of treachery, malice, lust. What they have not been, historically, is equal sharers of humanity whose social and religious offices have been determined principally by their talents” (*Women and World Religions* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1979], 17).

¹⁷Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Dial, 1976), 8.

¹⁸See Stone, 188, for an example.

¹⁹See, for an example, Eller, 6, 12–13, 17, 35. She cites many female testimonies of conversion to *wicca*: “. . . a woman named Antiga describes her discovery of witchcraft like this: As I

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supposed “glorious” manifestation through prehistorical myths, biblical history, and the Middle ages, claiming that it was forced to go into hiding because of male determination to destroy any remnants of female power. But now, they maintain, “wicca” is finally being restored and liberated from male destruction.

In close connection with this, feminists imperiously affirm the symbol of now-exonerated witchcraft—the snake or serpent:²⁰

In fact, it is only from the historical perspective that the story of Eve taking counsel from a serpent makes any sense. The fact that the serpent, an ancient prophetic or oracular symbol of the Goddess, advises Eve, the prototypical woman, to disobey a male god’s commands is surely not just an accident. Nor is it an accident that Eve in fact follows the advice of the serpent; that, in disregard of Jehovah’s commands, she eats from the sacred tree of knowledge. Like the tree of life, the tree of knowledge was also a symbol associated with the Goddess in earlier mythology. Moreover, under the old mythical and social reality . . . a woman as priestess was the vehicle for divine wisdom and revelation.²¹

Modern feminists insist that the Christian patriarchy-stained Scripture forces all women into submission to all men, reminding us how even the Church Fathers have so understood the canon (as we saw above). But it is significant to note that radical feminists never seem to question this early Church exegesis. With their acceptance of the Church Fathers’ position on women (by which they unwittingly reflect Catholic male interpretation read into Scripture long ago), feminist authors snarl that Scripture as a whole degrades women; and that centuries of male dominance have clouded most people’s minds from even recognizing this.

studied witchcraft, in spite of the bad name it always had, I thought it makes perfect sense for any woman to be a witch, because of the way patriarchy has treated and defined women. Any religion that gives us a female divinity, that gives us a goddess, that gives us respect for women, it just made sense to me. I still didn’t think that I might ever be a witch, or that I was in fact already practicing what some other people call witchcraft, but I went on with a new moon group. The question it was based on was, what would spirituality be like if it were based on women’s experience? We did what felt right to us, and a lot of what felt right to us, I later learned, were the things that witches do. One of the things was telling our story in an environment where whatever we said would be OK. Another was involving the goddess, the female divinity, who is both inside and around us. Chanting, using candles, using incense: a lot of these things that engaged our other senses too just felt really, really good to me” (53–54). Mary Kassian also comments: “Feminists dethroned the Judeo-Christian male God and proudly set themselves in His place. Lest this seem overly brash and presumptuous, they justified it by pointing to the ancient practice of goddess worship and witchcraft (which they claimed predated the Judeo-Christian religion) and which presumably exalted women and the female power” (155).

²⁰Riane Eisler comments at length on the serpent as a symbol for the goddess in many ancient culture, such as Egypt, Crete, Greece, and Rome, in *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 70, 86.

²¹Eisler, 88, 89.

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Critique of Feminist Reconstruction

Historical Selectivity. Although their historical analysis is extensive, feminist writers exhibit great selectivity in their research. Major theories are propounded without substantiation. For example, it is argued that the whole basis for biblical “male god-ism” is to prop up the male ego, citing Mother Goddess history as support for their argument. As Denise Carmody writes:

When the patriarchal, prophetic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) met the Middle Eastern Goddess practices, powerful interests came into conflict. Masculine self-control, social authority, and theological construction (a masculine God) were all bound to see the Goddess temple worship as extremely threatening. Since the patriarchal religions won the battle, their scriptural and cultural authorities became ‘orthodoxy,’ and the female-oriented fertility religion became foul deviance.²²

In support of what feminists portray as primeval Mother goddess worship, many feminists attempt to authenticate an ancient matriarchal culture of supposed peace and tranquility. In so doing, they somehow ignore the extensive evidence of weapons found in tombs of even the earliest archaeological sites.²³ They exclude mention of the many ancient inscriptions also discovered by archaeologists that include grotesque descriptions of wars and butchery carried out by female gods.²⁴ Instead, feminists confidently describe the ancient matriarchal society as a now-lost utopia, or “Paradise.”²⁵

²²Carmody, 32.

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An EcoFeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 152.

²⁴William F. Albright is one of many archaeologists reporting this. See his *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968), 77, on Anath or Astarte. The feminist movement has been faulted for selective reading of history. Extant ancient historical records and myths give no indication that cultures adopting goddess worship were filled with peace and prosperity. Even the most ancient tombs include remains of weapons of destruction. Moreover, many male skulls are found with head wounds indicating something less than Paradise.

²⁵Ruether suggests: “Stories of a lost paradise have two major roots in Western thought, the biblical story of Eden and the Greek story [told by the Greek poet Hesiod about Prometheus and Pandora] . . . Both of these stories are shaped by males to blame women, especially as wives, for all the troubles of hard labor and physical illness. Both of them imagine the idyllic time as one prior to hunting, agriculture, and technology, a gatherer paradise when humans could simply stretch forth their hand to pluck the fruits of an abundant earth. The stories seem to be compounded of two elements, an idealized memory of preagricultural societies and idealized (male) childhood. The adult male resents the wife, whom he must support by his labor, and idealizes his lost nurture by an all-giving mother. Woman-blaming for the lost paradise may have psycho-familial roots, roots that go back to primal human social patterns.

“Ecofeminist theories of the lost paradise often include the idea of original matriarchy. This story envisions a time prior to patriarchy, in which women ruled over men. It is a story found in many cultures, often associated with male puberty rites” (*Gaia*, 144).

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Critics of feminist re-interpretation of history decry this selectivity. Joan Townsend, anthropologist and archaeologist, insists that the Goddess movement is flawed by its “arm chair” archaeology and survey of ancient history:

The existence of a “universal” or Mediterranean/European-wide Goddess religion, which is claimed to have existed from the Upper Paleolithic through the neolithic and beyond, cannot be validated. The supposition that there existed a peaceful matrilineal/matrilocal kinship organization and/or matriarchy as a political organization in these areas during that period is also unfounded. . . . Sadly, it is this kind of pseudo-history that many women listen to, partly because it is so readily available, and because it appeals to them by giving the illusion of an effective means of acquiring social and political power in contemporary society.²⁶

Feminism exhibits strong commitment to evolution, apparently failing to see the inconsistency of this presupposition with their main argument. For evolutionary theory claims a fundamental *progress* along its developing continuum. Nevertheless, feminist authors contend that when humanity shifted from goddess worship to male god-ism about 6,000 years ago, it caused a disaster of great magnitude.

Misuse of Scripture. All the primary expressions of modern feminism are either condemned in the Bible, or are in direct antithesis with its implicit principles, such as the following.

Witchcraft. Many feminists boldly exalt it. They insist that witches are not evil sorcerers, but rather spiritual women who have a knowledge of healing. “They were burned as witches [in the Middle Ages] *because they were women*

²⁶Townsend continues: “Similarly, the assertion that violent Indo-European patriarchal pastoralists with a male paramount deity swept over the peaceful Goddess-oriented matriarchy is not accepted by most researchers. Rather, the Indo-European *linguistic* encroachment into Europe appears to have been gradual, intermittent, of long duration, and not related to undue violence. The effect of those linguistic and perhaps social migrations on the religious and social organizations in specific areas is problematic.

“I do not deny that female as well as male and non-sexed humans and animals have been revered as deities in the past and today in various parts of the world. Unfortunately, the literature dealing with the cult of ‘The Goddess’ and her relationship to female supremacy of the past is *often* founded on extremely poor research. Much is taken from archaeological data, with little understanding of prehistory or archaeology. On the basis of selected material finds, assumptions are drawn; then speculations and conclusions are drawn from those assumptions. Attempts have been made to synthesize religion and belief systems as well as social and political systems by taking data that seem to support the argument from various times and places with little critical use of sources. These are melded into a hodge-podge, apparently without any real comprehension of the role and functions of religion and belief in human society, the relation of belief systems to the rest of culture, or of the mechanisms and dynamics of social and political organization at various levels of socio-cultural complexity.”

Joan B. Townsend, “The Goddess: Fact, Fallacy and Revitalization Movement,” in *Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate*, ed. Larry W. Hurtado (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 196-97.

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and because they possessed a power to heal that was unacceptable to the male establishment."²⁷ Goldenberg elaborates:

Even the high priestesses of the feminist witchcraft movement emphasize that all women are priestesses and Goddesses. Every woman is encouraged to keep a small altar in her home to be used for meditation and focusing her will. At the Boston conference, women were advised to use mirrors on their altars to represent the Goddess. That way, they would be continually reminded that they were the Goddess and that they had divine beauty, power and dignity. . . . Witchcraft is the only Western religion that recognizes woman as divinity in her own right. Mary, the only remnant of a Goddess left in the Christian tradition, is recognized solely because of her son.²⁸

Lesbianism. This sexual orientation is urged as the ultimate expression of freedom from male dominance. As prominent feminist Kate Millet declares:

Women's liberation and homosexual liberation are both struggling towards a common goal: a society free from defining and categorizing people by virtue of gender and/or sexual preference. "Lesbian" is a label used as a psychic weapon to keep women locked into their male-defined "feminine role." The essence of that role is that a woman is defined in terms of her relationship to men.²⁹

²⁷"Feminists and pagans are both coming from the same source without realizing it, and heading toward the same goal without realizing it, and the two are now beginning to interlace." Kassian, citing Pagan witch Margot Adler, 219. See also 78 (emphasis Kassian); Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, 93-94, 98.

²⁸Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, 93-94, 98. Goldenberg also lists the 12 factors of witchcraft:

- 1) female deities;
- 2) no body and soul dualism;
- 3) viewing nature as sacred;
- 4) value of the individual will;
- 5) spiraling notion (rejecting "the notion of the linear progress of time to some judgment day of euphoria or catastrophe");
- 6) cyclic notion of bodily growth and decay;
- 7) no original sin ("nor does it have a concept of a covenant against which one can sin");
- 8) no division of good and evil;
- 9) absence of a sacred text;
- 10) no rigid law of discipline;
- 11) sex ("is understood as having its own regulatory principle");
- 12) fun ("Rituals always have fun and jokes that are encouraged and truly spontaneous. No such attitude is possible in the Jewish and Christian stance toward worship."). *ibid.*, 111-114.

²⁹Cited by Kassian, 85. She then comments: "In the years that immediately followed NOW's proclamation, lesbianism became much more than 'a legitimate concern of feminism.' For those within the inner circles of feminism, it became a water-shed issue—the acid test of one's allegiance to the feminist cause. Sexual intercourse with men was equated with male power over women. Many feminists argued that by rejecting sexual liaisons with men women would become

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Family Relationships Dissolved. Women are urged to liberate themselves from Western patriarchal shackles by freeing themselves from their husbands and children to pursue authentic personal fulfillment.³⁰

Abortion. This practice is championed as another essential freedom from bodily restraints and especially male-dominated sexuality.

In *The Grandmother of Time*, Zsuzsanna Budapest gives a religious argument in favor of abortion rights: "Where does it say that every little soul that manages to land a fertilized egg is entitled to occupancy? Abortion is the prerogative of the Dark Mother; she aborts us monthly; it is called menses. The shadow of motherhood is abortion, which is also our responsibility, making the choice of life and death as much a part of the Goddess as her life-giving good nature."³¹

Salvation in Self.

Starhawk, a feminist priestess . . . maintained that the importance of the goddess symbol for woman could not be overstressed. . . . The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy . . . God is in all, and God exists within the feminine psyche. Self is God. . . . Z. Budapest, founder of the Susan B. Anthony Coven, stated this precept quite succinctly when she observed: There was opposition within the feminist movement toward the spiritual movement. Those who didn't share the experiences wondered why intelligent women would want to 'worship the Goddess.' They missed the crucial meaning: *It is self-worship*" [emphasis Budapest].³²

The accumulation of these anti-biblical positions should disturb orthodox Christianity. Though not all feminists espouse all of these positions, they are some of the most prominent attitudes revealed in radical feminist literature. The underlying attitude is a bitter opposition to Scripture and biblical patriarchy.

A More Accurate View of Womanhood in Scripture.

Recently there has emerged another group of women who, taking the canon authoritatively, have drawn attention to many details regarding women that have been overlooked or ignored. One valuable consequence has been a better comprehension of biblical patriarchy. Moreover, a number of male scholars have begun to provide a much-needed corrective to previous. Trevor Dennis is one who so comments:

entirely independent from men. . . . Feminists proposed that by participating in the lesbian experience, a woman freed herself from patriarchy in order to know and experience her true self."

³⁰Gloria Steinham, for example, writes extensively thus.

³¹Eller, p. 194.

³²Cited by Kassian, p. 160, 162.

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Looking at these texts consistently from the points of view of their female characters has for me been exhilarating and liberating, but it has shaken me and disturbed me more than I could have anticipated. It has put me in touch with my own sexism, with destructive stereotypes about women, and about men also, deep rooted within me. . . . Shall I conclude that God always gives his more important tasks to men? But that would be absurd. Shall I think he prefers dealing with me? But such a notion is so patently silly as to be close to blasphemy. Shall I believe that he calls men and not women to be the conspicuous bearers of his promises? But I for one have had more than enough of that belief in the Church, and wish to see no more of the great harm it does to those who hold to it, or of the greater harm it does to their victims.³³

What is now being increasingly recognized is that throughout both the Old and New Testaments women are affirmed not only in home/family administration, but also in public and religious spheres. The roles of women in Scripture are varied and vigorous. At first glance, males can appear to predominate by sheer numbers. However, even this fact must be understood with a correct perception of historical writing itself.

No history book is exhaustive. Each historical document includes certain events/people/ideas deemed by that historian as the most crucial, effecting subsequent human life. Scripture, though including much historical material spanning multiple centuries, is also not exhaustive.³⁴ One cannot help but notice great time voids.

Christians have long believed that the development of the canon was superintended by God to include those people and events that are decisive in Salvation History from the divine perspective.³⁵ The historical panorama, thus, is lengthy yet basically narrow in scope. The reader is informed of patriarchs and matriarchs, kings and queens, prophets and prophetesses, couched between significant

³³Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 176, 179.

³⁴Biblical writers themselves allude to this fact: John 21:25, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." Also: Heb. 11:32, 35, 36 "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of . . . And others . . . still others . . ."

³⁵Ellen White is sensitive to this issue. For example, during the patriarchal period the first OT Deborah is mentioned. Gen 35:7-9 records that when Jacob returns to Bethel, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies. This woman is mentioned only twice in Genesis (24:59, 35:8). Yet her death and burial are included in the Genesis narratives. Ellen White movingly comments: "Deborah was buried with expressions of so great sorrow that the oak under which her grave was made, was called 'the oak of weeping.' *It should not be passed unnoticed that the memory of her life of faithful service and of the mourning of this household has been counted worthy to be preserved in the word of God* (PP 206).

Furthermore, the issue of women in patriarchy (in the OT) or women in ministry (in the NT) is not the primary issue being addressed in Scripture. Rather, as the biblical writers focus the reader on Salvation History, these peripheral (to the writers) issues are brushed up against tangentially—and it is these which later readers must comb for such papers as this.

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historical voids regarding other female and male personages throughout the many centuries connected by Scripture. In this light, it becomes more precarious to insist that males have *always* dominated women. It is just not possible to substantiate that position.³⁶ Furthermore, recent probing into the biblical text itself also suggests that this is not the case.

Carol Meyers advises,³⁷ for instance, that patriarchy itself must be carefully defined in the light of its original context. Feminists appear uniformly biased against it. But recently other studies have proposed that the Old Testament seems to indicate an equitable situation between male and female up to the time of the Israelite monarchy. The establishment of the throne in Israel, Meyers argues, brought great changes to Israelite society, with the position of the female slowly diminishing from that time on.³⁸ Meyers also suggests other contributing factors:

Greco-Roman culture brought a dualistic way of thinking to the Semitic world: pairs such as body and soul, evil and good, female and male became aligned. Eve was the victim of this alignment: female was linked with body and evil. Relegated to a position of decreasing power as the household lost its prominence, she then became associated with negative aspects of life. The misogynist expansions of the Eden story in early Christian Jewish literature begin to emerge. A new concept of Eve associated with sin, death, and suffering is superimposed so indelibly on the assertive and productive figure of the Eden narrative that we can hardly see the original woman of Genesis 2-3.³⁹

³⁶Carol Meyers argues further: "the Hebrew Bible . . . contains some statements that appear to value men more highly than women or to give men certain legal privileges that are not extended to women. From our contemporary perspective, these texts give incomplete evidence of biblical patriarchy. They do not tell us how Israelite women felt about differential treatment. In the context of the specific social and economic structures that characterized ancient Israel, the existence of gender asymmetry, with men accorded a set of advantages apparently unavailable to most women, must not automatically be perceived as oppressive. . . . and the lack of evidence that the Eves of ancient Israel felt oppressed, degraded, or unfairly treated in the face of cultural asymmetry. Gender differences that appear hierarchical may not have functioned or been perceived as hierarchical within Israelite society." *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 34.

³⁷*Ibid.*, passim.

³⁸"The formation of the monarchy was perhaps the most significant change in the millennium-long history of ancient Israel's national existence. Even before socioeconomic analysis became a prominent concern of the study of ancient Israel, scholars recognized the dramatic changes brought about by state formation: 'The monarchy, owing to its nature and its effects, was the most radical revolution in ancient Israel. It aimed to give Israel an international status, . . . to industrialize the country, and to develop the city at the expense of the village.' (E. Neufeld, "Emergence of a Royal-Urban Society in Ancient Israel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 31 [1960]:37.)

³⁹*Ibid.*, 196.

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Meyers' reasoning appears to have strong validity as one becomes more observant of intriguing, previously overlooked details within biblical narratives. Even Christ's treatment of women, in contrast with many in His society, is also remarkable. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul, whom feminists regard with the greatest scorn, can be seen reflecting Christ's positive behavior to women. A brief survey of the canon is indicative.

Old Testament Women Women in Genesis.

Sarah. Abraham's life of faith has been extensively (and rightly) studied and admired. His wife, Sarah, though rarely acknowledged on a par with her husband, is equally remarkable.⁴⁰ Consider that:

As Sarah and Abram are approaching Egypt [during the famine], he does not order her to comply with his planned deception. Rather, Abraham must ask her to say that she is his sister. He cohabits with Hagar because Sarah wants him to; and when she decides that Ishmael is a threat to her own son's inheritance, Sarah succeeds in expelling both mother and child. Indeed, God defends her demand; and this is not the only time that the Lord acts on Sarah's behalf. In Pharaoh's court, and within the household of Abimelech, God is concerned that Sarah be protected and returned to her husband.⁴¹

Nunnally-Cox also argues that, given their social context, Sarah and Abraham are amazingly equal:

She appears to say what she wants, when she wants, and Abraham at times responds in almost meek obedience. He does not command her; she commands him, yet there seems to be an affectionate bond between them. Abraham does not abandon Sarah during her barrenness, nor does he gain other wives while she lives, as far as we know. . . . and when Sarah dies, Abraham can do nothing but weep. Sarah is a matriarch of the first order: respected by rulers and husband alike, a spirited woman and bold companion.⁴²

⁴⁰In fact, A. Savina Teubal, when appraising the many narrative details about her life in Genesis, has gone so far as to suggest that she may have been an early priestess. It is, of course, impossible to confirm this idea textually, and it seems highly unlikely, but Teubal's assertion does draw attention to the exceptional portrait of Sarah that Genesis presents. For, as Teubal notes, details of Sarah's narratives include the following: Sarah is the only matriarch with her age recorded when she died, as is always done for all the patriarchs. Furthermore, why does her mural at Mamre receive so much attention? Why did Isaac consummate his marriage to Rebekah in his mother's tent? Also, she argues that her theory could possibly help explain the interest Abimelech exhibited in Sarah though she was ninety years old. *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Chicago: Swallow, 1984), 110–122. These questions are also raised by Jack Vancil in "Sarah—Her Life and Legacy," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, vol. 2, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1995), 61–63.

⁴¹Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 9.

⁴²Janice Nunnally-Cox, *Fore-Mothers: Women of the Bible* (New York: Seabury), 9.

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The Genesis record depicts Sarah as being just as crucial to the Covenant as Abraham himself. For God maintains that it will be *Sarah's* offspring who will fulfill the covenant promise—even when Abraham argues that he already has a son, Ishmael:

And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!' Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant' (Gen 17:18-19).⁴³

This particular era of patriarchs and matriarchs deserves renewed attention, as Teubal suggests:

In particular, women have traditionally been depicted as primitive and childish in their aspirations and generally lacking in vision. Fresh study of our female forebears, however, invalidates this view and shows us that the matriarchs were learned, wise women who were highly developed spiritually.⁴⁴

Sarah's life surely demonstrates this:

1. When Abraham pleads with her to misrepresent their marital relationship [as they travel to Egypt], Jack Vancil notes:

Instead of being a proud and overbearing patriarchal figure, Abraham begs Sarah to lie for him. This appears uncharacteristic for a totally dominant patriarchal society. Is Sarah a completely submissive wife, or does she retain some right and control? The text does suggest that she maintained some sort of authority and that Abraham was not the absolute master figure that might be assumed even though the story is set within the patriarchal period.⁴⁵

⁴³Ellen White addresses this issue forcefully: "The instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages. It declares that the rights and happiness of this relation are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. Her rights as wife and mother no other person was entitled to share. She revered her husband, and in this she is presented in the New Testament as a worthy example. But she was unwilling that Abraham's affections should be given to another, and the Lord did not reprove her for requiring the banishment of her rival." PP 147.

See also Is 51:1-2, where God declares Sarah's position:

Listen to Me, you who pursue after righteousness,
You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.
Look to *Abraham* your father,
And to *Sarah* who bore you."

⁴⁴Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, xii.

⁴⁵Vancil, "Sarah—Her Life and Legacy," 48-49. Nunnally-Cox concurs: "Several things are readily apparent in the story of Sarah and Abraham. First, she holds powerful sway over Abraham. It is he who asks her permission to call her sister, however questionable his actions may be. In the instance of Hagar, Sarah is the one who suggests the liaison, and Abraham does her bidding. . . . And when Sarah later insists that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out, Abraham once again complies with her wishes, even though it means losing a son and an heir" (*Fore-Mothers*, 8).

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2. When Abraham offers hospitality, the patriarch shares in the domestic preparations along with his wife (Gen 18:6–8).⁴⁶

3. After Sarah's death, little is recorded about Abraham. Genesis 24 deals with the marriage of Isaac, and chapter 25 records Abraham's marriage to Keturah and their offspring in his remaining forty-eight years. The remaining verses in the Abraham narratives deal briefly with the distribution of his wealth. However, the record of Sarah's funeral involves an entire chapter in the book of Genesis.

Hagar. Hagar is the victim of a grave mistake by Abraham and Sarah. Yet consider the poignant details recorded in Scripture after she and her son have been excluded from Abraham's family. This Egyptian slave woman is "more highly honoured in some respects than almost any other figure in the Bible."⁴⁷ For example, the "Angel of the Lord" appears, for the first time in biblical history, to this rejected woman (Gen 21:17). Indeed, He even calls her by name! Abraham and Sarah have not even granted her this dignity, but typically refer to her only by her status, as "slave woman."⁴⁸

God has not abandoned Hagar or her son Ishmael in this extremely devastating situation caused by human error. His word regarding the Covenant is eternal, yet He pointedly provides for this mother and her son. He promises to make Ishmael a great nation, too. In fact, it is arresting how similar His promise regarding Ishmael is to the one they had been hearing for years in Abraham's household.⁴⁹ This divine affirmation to Hagar is also the solitary time that a covenant-type promise is announced to a woman:

. . . how very surprising is the honour which is bestowed upon Hagar (and upon Ishmael too) in Genesis 16. For a start, annunciations are a rare commodity in the Bible . . . In only three cases, those of Hagar, Manoah's wife, and Mary in Luke, is the promise of a son made to the one who will be the mother of the child (although Sarah overhears in Genesis 18, the words are addressed to her husband). In only four cases does God make the announcement himself. . . only two women in the entire Bible receive annunciations from God himself, Hagar and the unnamed wife of Manoah.⁵⁰

⁴⁶As observed with Abraham and Sarah, there does not seem to be a distinct division of labor between men and women in the household. Either gender could be a shepherd. Rebekah and Laban (her brother) share farm chores and the particulars of family hospitality. Later, the text reveals that both her sons knew how to cook (Gen 25:29).

⁴⁷Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, p. 176.

⁴⁸Sarah speaking to Abraham, "Go, please, to my slave-girl" (Gen 16:2b). Sarah does not use Hagar's name but refers only to her position. Up to this point only the narrator has given Hagar's name.

⁴⁹"Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude'" (Gen 16:10). Later to Abraham, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation" (Gen 17:20).

⁵⁰Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 68.

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It is also significant to notice that Hagar, a woman, chooses the wife for her son. Moreover, she is also the only person in all of Scripture to give deity a name. “So she named the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are El-Roi’” (16:13a).

The name El-Roi occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. It is Hagar’s name for God, and Hagar’s alone. It arises out of, and speaks eloquently of, her own private encounter with him. . . . Let no one underestimate how extraordinary this naming is. . . . After wrestling with God all night at the river Jabbok, Jacob names the spot, Peniel, or “The face of God” (Gen 32:30). After coming so close to sacrificing Isaac . . . Abraham names the place, “The Lord Sees” (22:14). Abraham’s name is very close to the one Hagar gives God. Yet, like Jacob, Abraham names the *place* of encounter. . . . Elsewhere Abraham calls *upon* the name of God (12:8; 13:4; 21:33), but that is a very different exercise. Moreover, Hagar does not name her God as an aside, or declare his identity to herself after he has left the stage. She names him to his face: “You are the God who Sees Me.” The phrase the narrator uses for the naming is the usual one in Hebrew narrative. It is the same as the one used, for example, when the man in the Garden named his wife Eve, or Eve herself named her third son Seth. Soon it will be used for the naming of Ishmael, and again for the naming of Isaac.⁵¹

Hagar is one of only three women to engage in dialogue with God in Genesis—and she a rejected slave woman.

Rebekah. This matriarch⁵² exhibits the same force of character as Sarah:

... rather than minimizing Rebekah’s contribution to the Israelite people, the [Genesis] narratives that introduce and develop the portrait of the second of the matriarchs are striking in the way she is depicted. Although she is described as being a beautiful wife for Isaac, she is not appreciated solely for her appearance. Like Abraham, her independence and trust are demonstrated by her willingness to leave her family and travel to a strange land.⁵³

When Abraham commissions Eleazer to find a wife for Isaac, he makes a significant allusion to woman’s status during the patriarchal era. “But if the

⁵¹Ibid., 71.

⁵²Keturah, Abraham’s wife after Sarah’s death, receives scant mention, without any of the impressive detail that Sarah’s narratives exhibit.

⁵³Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 53. “Even genealogical designation must not be overlooked. The genealogy in Gen 22:20-24 ‘presents the names of the children born to Abraham’s brother Nahor and his sister-in-law Milcah. Nahor and Milcah’s eight sons are listed, but the offspring of these eight sons, the third generation, are mentioned only in two cases. The offspring of Kemuel and Bethuel alone are deemed significant. The name of Kemuel’s son, Aram, is given only in a parenthetical phrase. In contrast Bethuel’s offspring is given greater attention. A separate phrase announces, ‘Bethuel begat Rebekah’ (22:23). Moreover, her name is arresting in this context because she is the first offspring who is mentioned.’ Even the placement of this genealogy after the account of the testing of Abraham with his son Isaac (22:1-19) emphasizes the importance of Rebekah, Jeansonne argues (54–55).

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woman is not willing to come with you, then you will be free from this oath of mine” (Gen 24:8, NRSV). “Abraham assumes the woman will have the final say in the matter.”⁵⁴ And indeed, ultimately it is Rebekah herself who chooses to go with Eleazar. In fact, in the lengthy narrative of Genesis 24, her determination to travel with Eleazar is spoken directly by her in the dialogue and not merely reported by the narrator (24:58).⁵⁵

Rebekah herself arranges for the hospitality of Eleazar when he arrives. Her father says hardly a word throughout. Eleazar asks for a place in her “father’s house,” but Rebekah offers welcome in her “mother’s house” (v. 28 NKJV).⁵⁶

There is an interesting correspondence of key terms between the Rebekah narratives and Abraham’s. They both leave behind “their country,” “their kindred,” and their “father’s house.” Both will be “blessed” and “become great.” James Williams underscores this by suggesting “With this blessing the narrator quietly moves Rebecca into the cycle of God’s promises to the patriarchs.”⁵⁷

After Rebekah marries Isaac and becomes pregnant, in apparent misery she is anxious enough “to inquire of the LORD,” and she does this herself (Gen 25:22):

The critical issue of this story comes into play as Rebekah suffers through her pregnancy. The children struggle within her and, pre-

⁵⁴Ibid., 57.

⁵⁵“But her brother and her mother said, ‘Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten, after that she may go.’ And he said to them, ‘Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master.’ So they said, ‘We will call the young woman and ask her personally.’ Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go’” (Gen 24:55-58). In Narrative Analysis, direct speech implies the importance of the person.

⁵⁶[Eleazar speaking] “Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your father’s house for us to lodge?” . . . So the young woman ran and told those of her mother’s house these things” (Gen 24:23, 28, emphasis added). Her father Bethuel is still alive for he speaks later (in v. 50).

⁵⁷James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel*, Bible and Literature Series, vol. 6 (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 44. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn concur: “It is she [Rebecca], not Isaac, who follows in Abraham’s footsteps, leaving the familiar for the unknown. It is she, not Isaac, who receives the blessing given to Abraham (22:17), ‘May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies!’ (24:60).” *Gender, Power, & Promise: the Subject of the Bible’s First Story*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 73.

Mary Donovan Turner writes: “It is Rebekah who, like Abraham before and Jacob after, leaves her home. She travels to the foreign land guided by the blessing for descendants who will “possess the gate of those who hate them.” The reader of Genesis first encounters this promise for possession (*yah-rash*) in 15:3 where Yahweh seals a covenant with Abraham promising him descendants as numerous as the stars and possession of a land in which they would dwell. . . . It is important to note that although Abraham is guaranteed a son to carry God’s promise to his descendants, it is *not* Isaac who next receives the blessing for *possession* of the enemy. It is Rebekah who receives the blessing similar to Abraham as she leaves her family for the foreign land (24:60). The blessing for possession is given one other time, and that is to Jacob as he leaves for Paddan-aram (28:4). Abraham, Rebekah, and Jacob are the ancestors of this promise.” Mary Donovan Turner, “Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 20/2 (April, 1985): 43-44.

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sumably on the basis of her discomfort, Rebekah 'inquires (*darash*) of the Lord.' This phrase is of great importance in the Old Testament. Only the great prophets like Moses and Elisha and the greatest kings of Israel inquire of the Lord. . . . Rebekah inquires and, as a result, receives the oracle from Yahweh which destines her younger son to rule the older.⁵⁸

Note the formula used to announce Rebekah's delivery: "And her days were fulfilled that she should give birth" (Gen 25:24). Mary Donovan Turner notices that this formula is used of only three biblical women: Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament and Rebekah of the Old Testament.⁵⁹

Later, when her son Esau marries two Hittite women, the text informs us that this was a "grief of mind to Isaac *and Rebekah*." (26:35, emphasis added). Turner also suggests that this inclusion of Rebekah's distress regarding Esau's marriage reveals that she was just as concerned about the covenant promise as was Isaac.⁶⁰

The characterization of Rebekah yields a deeper understanding of her significance. . . . All of these actions are given without a polemical context, and the narrator does nothing to indicate that these were unusual activities for a woman to take. . . . The presentation of Rebekah shows that women in Israel were viewed as persons who could make crucial decisions about their futures, whose prayers were acknowledged . . ."⁶¹

The Genesis matriarchs are not passive "wall flowers"! It would be unfair to the biblical portraits of these women to argue that within patriarchy women bowed in submission to all men. Rather, though respectful and devoted to their husbands, they are intelligent, willful, and directive.⁶²

The Women of the Exodus

A notable roster and concentration of women appear at the opening of the book of Exodus.

Jochebed. The Exodus narratives record the unusual means this mother devised to spare the life of Moses in spite of Pharaoh's grim decree. Her husband, after the brief Exodus 2:1 inclusion, is never referred to again except in genealogical notation. The reader's attention is focused on his wife.

Egyptian princess. Divine providence ironically enlists strategic protection for Israel's future deliverer from the very Egyptian monarchy which issued a

⁵⁸Mary Donovan Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 20/2 (April 1985): 44-45.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 47.

⁶¹Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 69.

⁶²Janice Nunnally-Cox concurs: "Far from conforming to a traditional servitude, these women grace the pages of Genesis with their laughter, their sorrows, their strength, and their power." *Fore-Mothers: Women of the Bible* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 20.

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death decree against Israel's male newborn! Ellen White says that angels directed the daughter of the Pharaoh to the basket wherein the baby Moses lay.⁶³

Furthermore:

. . . the actions of this non-Israelite are presented in direct parallel to those of the God of Israel: "She 'comes down,' 'sees' the child, 'hears' its cry, takes pity on him, draws him out of the water, and provides for his daily needs" (cf. 3:7-8). What she does for Moses, God is soon to do for Israel."⁶⁴

Shiphrah and Puah. These two midwives bravely disobeyed Pharaoh's command to murder newborn Hebrew baby boys. That these two courageous women are named (while even the monarch himself is only spoken of by his title) is highly significant in Hebrew narrative. Also noteworthy is the fact that these midwives have two separate audiences and conversations with Pharaoh, further emphasizing their status:

Analysis of Exodus 1 usually concentrates on the fact of the Hebrews in Egypt, their ever-growing numbers, the passage of time, the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, and the Hebrews' persecution. . . . Rarely do traditional commentaries point to the midwives. . . . Few celebrate the courage of their decision . . .⁶⁵

Trevor Dennis rightly concludes:

Of all the initiatives taken by human beings in Ex 1-14, it is those of the women, however, that display the greatest courage, invite our keenest admiration, and have the most powerful influence on events. . . . Shiphrah and Puah and the women of 2.1-10 together succeed in defeating the policy of genocide, and save Moses from drowning.⁶⁶

⁶³"The mother's earnest prayers had committed her child to the care of God; and angels, unseen, hovered over his lowly resting place. Angels directed Pharaoh's daughter thither" (PP 243).

⁶⁴Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 93.

⁶⁵Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 48.

⁶⁶Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 114. John Welch argues further: "When chiasm is used with conspicuous refinement, it becomes one of the few means by which an author of Biblical narrative is able to accentuate a certain tale and draw the reader's attention to its elements of special importance. A further case in point is Ex. 2:1-22. The principle figure in all but the first book of the Pentateuch is of course Moses, but details of his life and character are extremely scanty. . . . Of the first forty years the Torah chooses to tell the reader no more than a few incidents, chiasmically paired with the most decisive in the middle:

- A Marriage of Moses' parents and his birth (2:1-4)
- B Moses taken by a king's daughter to her home (2:5-10) by water (Nile)
- C Moses rescues his Israelite brother (2:11-12)
- D Moses betrayed by his brethren
- C' Moses rescues non-Israelite maidens (2:15-17)
- B' Moses taken by a priest's daughter to her home (2:18-20) by water (well)
- A' Moses' marriage and birth of his son (2:21-22) . . .

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Miriam. We first meet this daughter of Jochabed watching her baby brother floating in a basket near the river's edge. Her courage and diplomacy in addressing the Egyptian princess saved Moses' life. She apparently never married. The Old Testament includes no record of a husband or names of any children for her as it does for the brothers Moses and Aaron. Once the Exodus from Egypt commences, attention usually centers on the lives of her two brothers. Any mention granted Miriam generally concentrates on her errors.

However, Scripture includes an indicative genealogical mention of her (Num 26:59). Miriam is also listed as one of the "sons" of Amram (a term in the plural which at times simply means "children"—see Gen 3:16) in 1 Chronicles 6:3. The fact that Miriam is mentioned amongst Amram's children in a lengthy chapter of fathers and their male offspring surely confirms her prominence. Perhaps this single woman's position during the Exodus has been underestimated.

In the book of Exodus, Miriam is presented as a prophet, only the second person in the Pentateuch so designated thus far (the other is Abraham in Gen 20:7).⁶⁷ At the crossing of the Red Sea one finds her in a dual role as prophetess and musician at the side of her two brothers. God Himself declares through the prophet Micah:

"For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
I redeemed you from the house of bondage;
And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (6:4, emphasis added).

The biblical narratives also recount her death:

. . . the fact that Miriam's death and burial were recorded at all is striking. Whereas other figures in the wilderness community (Hur, Eldad and Medad, Moses' wife and father-in-law, etc.) disappeared without mention, the notice of Numbers 20:1b seems to be at least an implicit witness that Miriam was a figure of some significance.

. . . .
It is noteworthy that Miriam is the only member of the wilderness community whose death is recorded without being explicitly connected with divine punishment [as were, for example, Aaron and Moses] (cf. Nm 20:2-13, 22ff; Dt 32:48-52).⁶⁸

"It is no accident that the Torah selects from among all that must have happened to Moses in the course of forty years just these five scenes. These, more than any other events, left their impression upon him and shaped his character" (John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity* [Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981], 95, 96).

⁶⁷Ex 15:20, "Miriam the prophetess . . ."

⁶⁸Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses?: A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam*. SBL DSS Series 84, ed. J.J.M. Roberts and Charles Talbert (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 120.

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Women during the time of the Judges

Ruth. This young, childless widow abandoned the security of her national ethnic identity, culture, and religious beliefs to accompany her widowed mother-in-law to Palestine.

Phyllis Tribble argues that Ruth's choice to serve the God of Heaven was just as radical a decision of faith as Abraham's leaving Ur. We must not minimize Abraham's exceptional act of trust as he followed God's call and left his homeland. Yet compare how he traveled with his spouse, much wealth, and many household servants. God sustained him by a direct call from heaven and a promise to guide his steps of faith.⁶⁹ In this light, Ruth's radical decision to serve the God of heaven marks an extraordinary venture. "By the grace of God, she had chosen to join the chosen people. Indeed, she had joined at ebb tide, when fortunes were darkest."⁷⁰

Ruth and Naomi's initiatives have been noted by many commentators. The men in this narrative never assume major roles, except for Boaz; yet the narrator exhibits no surprise at such female enterprise. This lack of surprise suggests that such initiative in women may have been less uncommon than we might expect.

Naomi's name itself (meaning "my delight" or "my pleasantness"), given to her when sons were often more welcome than daughters (Ruth 4:15), suggests that her parents were filled with joy at her birth.⁷¹ The book of Ruth ends with a genealogy that links this Moabite woman to the royal Davidic line, and thus to the Messiah Himself. Ruth becomes a key link in God's salvation lineage.⁷²

⁶⁹Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Denise Lardner Carmody also reflects on Ruth: "[Ruth's] pledge itself is religiously remarkable, because in it Ruth completely throws in her lot with Naomi's faith. A Moabite, Ruth presumably had her own gods and religious ways. . . . So her dedication to Naomi is extremely radical." *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts*. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 33-34.

⁷⁰Carmody, 33-34.

⁷¹Louise Pettibone Smith, "Introduction to Ruth," *The Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1992, 829-32.

⁷²LaCocque is observant regarding Ruth's lineage. He recounts this "faithfulness displayed by a Moabite, and how providential it is that she was accepted and even honored by her contemporary Israelites. . . .

"It is for this reason and no other that the author belabors the point of Ruth's foreignness (Ruth 1:4, 22; 2:2, 6, 10-13, 21; 4:5, 10). . . . the adjective 'Moabite' appears at last twice in connection with Ruth where the plot does not demand the title (2:2, 21). This issue is crucial to the purpose of the tale. Ruth is not any foreigner in general. She belongs to a nation that, for Israel, represents perversion and destruction. Number 22ff (see especially 25:1ff) explains the origin of the hostility between the two peoples. Moabite females attempted to corrupt the Israelites coming from Egypt on their way to Canaan. Since then, the numerous references to Moab in Scripture are unanimously pejorative. Zephaniah 2:9 (seventh century B.C.E.) exclaims, 'Surely Moab shall be as Sodom!' Deuteronomy 23:2-6 prohibits Ammonites and Moabites from ever entering the community of Israel. Even the Edomites are treated more kindly (Deut. 23:7-8)." *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 85-86.

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Deborah. The book of Judges includes the second Old Testament prophetess (and the third prophet), Deborah,⁷³ portrayed not only as wife and musician, but also as judge:

Deborah is the only judge described as a prophet and, in the tradition of the other biblical prophets, she spoke the word of Yahweh. Her summons to Barak is couched in the ‘ command of Yahweh, . . .⁷⁴

She is depicted as a great military leader with the same authority as male generals, and a judge to whom male Israelites turn for legal counsel and to settle court cases (Judges 4:5). She is observed as an esteemed political leader and one through whom God initiates a war. The text indicates that she arbitrated disputes, assembled people to combat, and was regarded as an oracle of the divine will.⁷⁵

There seems to be no shock or negative reaction to this woman appearing at this time, no hint that it should be regarded as unusual. She is merely introduced in the customary Old Testament manner. No excuses or explanations are necessary that a woman should be in this prominent position:

Nothing in the narrative suggests that Deborah’s gender improved or detracted from her status as judge/deliver, nor is there indication that Yahweh had any reservations about her functioning in this role.⁷⁶

Moreover, others have seen Deborah’s narrative as the single positive episode in the otherwise dreary history of the other (male) justices in the book of Judges:

With few (but significant) exceptions, the development of each major judge narrative leads to a decline . . . even during the judge’s lifetime. Typically, after becoming a leader of the people and eliminating the source of oppression, the judge leads the people away from Yahweh. . . . The exception . . . is Deborah.⁷⁷

⁷³The first being Rebekah’s nursemaid, Gen. 35:8. See note 35.

⁷⁴Charme E. Robarts, “Deborah--Judge, Prophetess, Military Leader, and Mother in Israel,” *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol. 2, Carroll D. Osburn, ed. (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995), 74.

⁷⁵Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn rightly remind us: “Deborah is introduced by the epithet *eshet lappidot*. On first reading we might assume that this is a familial identification. Deborah, wife of Lappidoth. We might expect her importance to the story to lie in her role as wife. Yet we soon discover that wifehood reveals little about Deborah. It is not her relationship to her husband that will prove significant, but her relationship to Israel and to her appointed commander” (*Gender, Power & Promise*, 122). The reader is reminded that Deborah’s oracles concerned her entire people, and thus one finds that a prophetess could be, and in fact was, divinely authorized to articulate matters of national concerns.

⁷⁶Vancil, “Sarah,” 80.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 76.

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Hannah. In the pivotal shift from the Judges to the Monarchy, the key transitional person is Hannah, the mother of Samuel. The Samuel narratives commence with an extended account of her:

The Books of Samuel are primarily concerned with . . . David, for Samuel comes to prepare the way for him, while the account of the reign of Saul very soon becomes the story of David's own rise to power. . . . Hannah . . . appears right at the start of it all, when David is but a twinkle in the narrator's eye. Her story provides the beginning of this great chapter in Israel's story, just as . . . Shiphrah and Puah and the women of Exodus 2 presided over the accounts of Israel's beginnings as a people in Egypt. . . . The women of the beginning of Exodus, helped set up a series of events which would eventually take Israel out of Egypt, to their encounter with God at Sinai, and then on into the Promised Land. Hannah will begin a tale which will lead Israel into the . . . monarchy . . .⁷⁸

Hannah's vow is her first recorded speech (1 Sam 1:10-11). After this she speaks more than anyone else. In her initial prayer, she vows to dedicate her asked-for son as a lifelong Nazirite. Israelites normally took this pledge for themselves (Num 6:1-25). When Samson's birth was announced, God declared he would be a Nazirite (Judges 13:4-5). However, on this occasion, Hannah takes the initiative.⁷⁹

Moreover, Hannah—

does not need Elkanah to pray for her. *She* prays, and in doing so becomes the first woman, indeed the *only* woman, in the entire Bible to utter a formal, spoken prayer, and have her prayer quoted in the text for us to read. Eve, Sarah, and Hagar converse with God, and Rebekah (Gen 25:22) 'enquires' of him; Miriam, Deborah, and Mary the mother of Jesus all sing songs to God (Hannah herself will have her own song to sing to him in 1 Sam 2). . . . in the narratives of the Old and New Testaments Hannah's prayer is unique—and no other woman pays God such a vow as hers, either.⁸⁰

Only when Samuel is weaned do we learn of Hannah's earlier pledge regarding him. As the text suggests, "Hannah has not asked Elkanah to confirm her vow. . . . She presents her plan to dedicate Samuel as something already decided upon (1 Sm 1:22)."⁸¹ Hannah does not ask Elkanah for his permission. He is

⁷⁸Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 115-116.

⁷⁹"What God commands in Judges 13, she herself vows at Shiloh." *ibid.*, 123.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 124.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 130.

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depicted as simply giving his blessing.⁸² After this, Elkanah will have one brief final appearance (with Hannah, 2:20) in the narrative:

from now on he will have nothing to say, and nothing to do (he does not take any action in 2.20). Except for a few words of blessing from Eli in 2.20, all speech in the rest of Hannah's story will be put in her mouth, all the initiatives taken will be hers, all that is done . . . will be done by her.⁸³

When Hannah brings Samuel to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow to God, Ellen White informs us that she travels with her husband (PP 571). However, the text records that all the initiatives are taken by Hannah.⁸⁴ This is significant, especially since Elkanah was a Levite (1 Chr 6:33-38), and Hannah's duties are generally thought to belong to the male. However, Hannah went to Shiloh:

expressly to perform her own vow. It is she who has come with such fine offerings for sacrifice, and, remarkably, with her own child to dedicate to the service of God. . . .

It is hard to respond adequately to such an act as Hannah's and Eli does not try. This time he does not answer her. Only Hannah herself can speak to what she has done. After noting that she left Samuel with Eli, the narrator takes us straight into her song. For the second time she pours out her soul to God.⁸⁵

Hannah's exultant anthem is striking. One does not hear a gentle lullaby as usually expected of mothers. Rather,

It is a vigorous shout of triumph, . . . There is nothing ladylike about it! . . . At one point it uses the imagery of war. It speaks of the shattering enemies, and closes with a prayer for the king. That final reference is significant, of course. In Hannah's day there was no monarchy. . . . [Yet] Hannah sings *a king's song!*⁸⁶

Many commentators see Mary's glorious New Testament "Magnificat" as an echo of Hannah's triumphant hymn!

Women during the Monarchy

Huldah. This woman comes into focus as a chief religious authority during the time of an intense religious revival (2 Kgs 22:14f). Yet the text ex-

⁸² "“And Elkanah her husband said to her, ‘Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him. Only let the LORD establish His word.’” So the woman stayed and nursed her son until she had weaned him.” 1 Sam 1:23.

⁸³Dennis, *ibid*, p. 130.

⁸⁴“Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh.” 1 Sam 1:24 (emphasis added).

⁸⁵Dennis continues, “When Mary presents Jesus to God in the temple in Jerusalem, she takes him home with her after the ceremony. Hannah will return to Ramah without Samuel. . . . Hannah's offering of Samuel is without parallel in biblical literature.” Dennis, *ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁶*Ibid*, 133.

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presses no surprise that the King of Judah dispatches Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan the scribe, and several other prominent officials to her. “The biblical text does not suggest that seeking divine revelation from a woman was in any way unusual.”⁸⁷ Both Huldah’s use of the prophetic formula “thus says the Lord” and the king’s directive, “Go, inquire of the Lord,” indicates that her judgment was authoritative.

The scroll of Deuteronomy had been found as the Temple was being repaired and refurbished. This particular book of the Pentateuch deals with significant moral and political issues. Thus the authority that the King recognizes in Huldah is profound. Ellen White so argues:

At that time . . . Huldah was living in Jerusalem, near the temple. *The mind of the king, filled with anxious foreboding, reverted to her, and he determined to inquire of the Lord through this chosen messenger, to learn, if possible, whether by any means within his power he might save erring Judah, now on the verge of ruin.* *The gravity of the situation, and the respect in which he held the prophetess, led him to choose as his messengers to her the first men of the kingdom.*⁸⁸

Some commentators have suggested that Huldah may have been consulted because no male prophet was available at the time. However, no less a prophet than Jeremiah was already well established in his prophetic office. Others have thought Huldah might have been a man. However, the biblical text specifically states that Huldah was a wife (2 Kgs 22:14)!

Other Old Testament women could be considered, such as Abigail, who embarked on a mission of “solo diplomacy” during a volatile situation, only later notifying her husband. There is also the “wise woman of Tekoa,” who was enlisted to advise King David. Moreover, there are subtle textual indicators of women sprinkled throughout the Old Testament, such as Ps 68:11: “The Lord gave the word; great was the host of those who proclaimed it.” This “host” is a *female* company in Hebrew, but only a very few translations acknowledge this.⁸⁹

⁸⁷John T. Willis, “Huldah and Other Biblical Prophetesses,” *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol. 2, ed. Carroll F. Osburn (Joplin: College Press Publishing, 1995), 112.

⁸⁸PK 398, emphasis added. Duane Christensen also carefully analyzes the inclusion of the story of Huldah in 2 Kings. He argues that the narratives of Deborah in Judges 4 and Huldah in 2 Kings 22 frame the Deuteronomic history of life in the promised land (from Judges up to and including Kings) on both sides, forming an inclusio:

A Deborah: a “Prophetess” of YHWH alongside Barak (Israel)

B Jezebel: A royal advocate of Baal in Israel

B’ Athaliah: a royal advocate of Baal in Judah

A’ Huldah” a Prophetess of YHWH alongside Josiah (Judah)

D. L. Christensen, “Huldah and the Men of Anathoth: Women in Leadership in the Deuteronomic History,” *SBL 1984 Seminar Papers* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), 399-403.

⁸⁹*The Clear Word Bible* catches this nuance: “You, our Lord, spoke and victories were won. The women spread the news and everyone knew.” Jack J. Blanco, *The Clear Word Bible: A*

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This and other texts hint at a wider involvement of women in Israelite religion than is sometimes recognized. For example, Alice Laffey comments on Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1-10:

Buried in this text . . . is the directive: circumcise your hearts. The author here transfers a physical act, possible only for males, to a symbolic one, possible for all human beings. The author thus transforms an essential sign of covenant partnership (cf. Gen 17:10-14; Ex 4:24-26) from one which can include only males to one which can include both men and women. . . . Verse 6 [of Dt. 30] transforms the phrase of Dt 10:16, 'circumcise your hearts.' It is now not they, the Israelites, who are to do it (an imperative), but rather the Lord who will do it for them. . . . making circumcised hearts rather than circumcised bodies the appropriate sign of the covenant relationship with Yahweh . . . directly available to women.⁹⁰

The Song of Songs represents full female/male equality in the marriage relationship. If anything,

. . . the primary orientation lies with the female of the pair. . . . There is no trace of subordination of female to male, and there is a presence of power images for the female and not the male."⁹¹

Women in the New Testament

Women in the Gospels

Anna. Luke refers to the widow and prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36-38). He includes her in the narration of the infant Jesus' presentation at the Temple because she was the second witness testifying to Jesus' divinity. At that time the injunction "in the mouth of two or three witnesses the thing is established" (Matt 18:16, cf. Deut 17:6) was taken very seriously. Luke is thus assigning a vital position to this woman. Ellen White's passing comment seems to suggest this:

Anna, also a prophetess, came in *and confirmed Simeon's testimony concerning Christ*. As Simeon spoke, her face lighted up

Paraphrase to Nurture Faith and Growth (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 675.

⁹⁰Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 64-66.

In the NT, the Apostle Paul also expresses the same lack of differentiation between male and female, for spiritual circumcision, representing entrance into the line of Abraham and the body of Christ:

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, . . ." (Col 2:9-11).

⁹¹Carol Meyers continues ". . . The Song of Songs . . . reveals a situation of gender mutuality. There is no trace of subordination of female to male, and there is a presence of power images for the female and not the male." Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 180.

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with the glory of God, and she poured out her heartfelt thanks that she had been permitted to behold Christ the Lord.⁹²

Luke describes Anna going forth from the Temple to proclaim the Incarnation to the crowds in the courtyard. The Greek verb translated “speak” (in the imperfect tense) indicates continual action. This suggests that Anna preached the Incarnation on more than one occasion.⁹³ Some have noticed a biblical pattern of God commissioning prophets to announce both the beginning and ending of the major timed prophecies in Scripture. If so, here at the climax of the 490-year prophecy predicting the Messiah’s birth (Dan 9:24–27), God enlists a female prophet to draw attention to this pivotal event in the capital city of Jerusalem!

In fact, three women prophets appear during this dramatic time. Anna is actually designated a “prophetess” by Luke. However, Elizabeth and Mary also “prophesied.”⁹⁴ Previously, the Old Testament referred to three women as prophetesses: Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. At this climactic moment in Salvation History, three additional women appear in prophetic roles.

The Samaritan Woman. All four gospels record impressive portraits of Christ’s dealing with women during His adult ministry. The narrative in John 4 of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well is a profound case in point. The conversation between them is the longest recorded discussion Jesus had with anyone—and she a Gentile woman. Ellen White also informs us that it is the “most important discourse that Inspiration has given us . . .”⁹⁵ The Samaritan woman is the first person recorded in Christ’s public ministry who brought a group of people into a believing relationship with the Messiah.⁹⁶ Ellen White comments, “She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples.”⁹⁷

This narrative’s position, immediately following that of Nicodemus (John 3,) may not be coincidental. Is the apostle seeking to contrast the weak faith of a prominent male Jewish religious leader with that of a Gentile woman?⁹⁸ She at

⁹²DA 55, emphasis added.

⁹³Lk 2:38: “And coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

⁹⁴Elizabeth--Lk 1:41-45; Mary--Lk 1:46-55.

⁹⁵3T 217. In fact, two of the longest recorded conversations of Christ in the Gospels are with women, both Gentiles: this woman at Samaria’s well (John 4) and the Syrophenician mother (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30).

⁹⁶“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ . . . And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’” (John 4:39, 41-42).

⁹⁷DA 194-195.

⁹⁸The juxtaposition of narratives in the larger structure of biblical books is increasingly seen as significant .

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once hastens to spread her conviction of the Messiah, whereas Nicodemus does not publicly align himself with Christ until after Christ's death.

Martha and Mary. The narratives of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus also contain rich insights regarding Christ's attitude toward women. Lazarus is miraculously raised from the dead, the greatest and last of the "signs" John records leading up to Christ's Passion.⁹⁹ However, Lazarus is never recorded with direct speech in the narrative. Rather, it is Martha who

. . . makes one of the premiere confessions of faith in the New Testament, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' . . . The confession by Martha in John 11 may be compared to the confession by Peter in the Synoptic Gospels at Caesarea Philippi. Martha's statement is very close to Matthew's account, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt 16:16). . . . Martha's statement may also be compared to the confession of Thomas in John 20. . . . Actually, Martha's confession is more powerful than Thomas's for she had not yet seen Jesus' or even Lazarus' resurrection."¹⁰⁰

On another occasion Jesus coaxes Martha to accept her sister's priorities of opting to study rather than assisting in the kitchen. Nevertheless, Martha apparently had also been an avid student of the Messiah herself to express such a penetrating statement of faith at the death of her brother (John 11:23-27).

Her sister Mary has always been perceived as an earnest student of the Messiah. Yet,

Mary's choice was not a conventional one for Jewish women. She sat at the feet of Jesus and was listening to "his word." Both the posture and the reference to Jesus' "word" seem to imply teaching, religious instruction. Jewish women were not permitted to touch the Scripture; and they were not taught the Torah itself . . . A rabbi did not instruct a woman in the Torah. Not only did Mary choose the good part, but Jesus related to her in a teacher-disciple relationship. He admitted her into the "study" and commended her for the choice. A Torah-oriented role for women was not unprecedented in Israel . . . but the drift had been away from it.¹⁰¹

Mary is the first to see the resurrected Jesus, and Christ commissions her to proclaim His resurrection to the disciples. She is the first person to herald the resurrection!¹⁰² In fact,

⁹⁹Frank Wheeler also notes that "The location of this story in the Gospel of John is significant. Just as the first sign was initiated by a woman, Jesus' mother, the last sign is initiated by women, Martha and Mary." Frank Wheeler, "Women in the Gospel of John," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol 2. (Joplin: College Press Publishing, 1995), 215.

¹⁰⁰Wheeler, *ibid.*, 216, 217.

¹⁰¹Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 118.

¹⁰²One can almost detect that the two disciples traveling to Emmaus are disparaging the fact that the "women" have been the only ones to proclaim the resurrection: "But we were hoping that

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Mary's prominence among witnesses to the resurrected Jesus is significant for John's readers. Of the six resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels, five of them include Mary.¹⁰³

Jesus and Women. Biblical scholars have been slow to discern the role of women in the early New Testament Church:

While the focus in John is not to argue for greater recognition of women in terms of discipleship and ministry, that certainly would have been one of the results within the early Christian community. The focus, rather, appears to be on discipleship and giving testimony to Jesus as Messiah. In the fourth Gospel, women are shown to be capable of fulfilling that role as well as men. . . . this Gospel does make it clear that the faith, testimony, and discipleship of women is equal to that of men and is equally as important to the Christian community. The value of women's discipleship and influence has been tremendously overlooked."¹⁰⁴

There is no Scriptural evidence that the Messiah ever treated women as inferior to men or urged all women to be in submission to all men. At this time, though the status of women in Judaism is very complex, the position of the female is generally conceded to have been restricted, at least according to rabbinical rules. For example, as mentioned above, women normally were not allowed to study Torah. One first century rabbi, Eliezer, writes, "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness."¹⁰⁵ Women did not

it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and *certain women of our company*, who arrived at the tomb early, *astonished us*. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. *And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see*" (Lk 24:21-24, emphasis added).

¹⁰³Wheeler, 219.

¹⁰⁴Wheeler, 223. He continues, "The Fourth Gospel may not have as much to say directly about the public or official roles of women in the church as one might like. Nevertheless, this Gospel does make it clear that the faith, testimony, and discipleship of women is equal to that of men and is equally as important to the Christian community" (224).

¹⁰⁵"Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. . . . Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness." (Eliezer, 1st c. rabbi). Rabbinic quotes concerning women are pointed:

"Happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females.

". . . The Talmud says: 'Let a curse come upon the man whose wife or children say grace for him.' Furthermore, included in daily prayers was this thanksgiving:

Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man.

". . . The gospel accounts themselves present no negative attitudes toward women, an astounding and telling fact. Leonard Swidler, in his paper, 'Jesus Was a Feminist,' comments:

For whatever Jesus said or did comes to us only through the lens of the first Christians. . . . The fact that the overwhelmingly negative attitude toward women in Palestine did not come through the primitive Christian communal lens by itself underscores the clearly great religious

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count in determining a *minyan* in worship (the number needed to organize public Jewish worship, according to the Mishnah). They could not bear witness. Jesus, however, repeatedly rejected these customs.

We must bear in mind, of course, that the Mishnah was not written down in Jesus' day, and many of its remarks against women are almost certainly from after that period. What is more, even if these rules were in place in then, this does not mean that all or even many Jews followed them. Mary the mother of Jesus certainly knew the Bible, as she alludes to it in a sophisticated way in her prophetic song. Josephus estimates that there were only about six thousand Pharisees, and we actually only know of the Sadducees from the gospels and the writings of Pharisees. So we should not assume that all women in Israel were treated the same way Pharisees and rabbis thought they should be treated.

Jesus also refused to limit a woman's horizon to nurturing her family and, as we saw, to cooking. When a woman once called to Jesus from a crowd, "blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked," Jesus sought to widen this feminine perspective by responding, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27-28 RSV). Yet Christ never belittled the role of mother. Indeed, He likened Himself to a mother hen seeking to gather her baby chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37).

In one trilogy of parables (Luke 15), all of which revealed attributes of God, the Messiah placed in the center a woman seeking a lost coin. Some feminists have not been blind to all this and have openly appreciated Christ's attitude toward women.

As seen above, much feminist material boils with rage against Scripture. Thus it is arresting to notice how many feminists, though vehement against the canon, refrain from denouncing the Messiah. Often, in fact, they uphold Him as an example of a "revolutionary man" (even though He is male, and God). Radical feminist Mary Daly is one such example:

In the New Testament it is significant that the statements which reflect the antifeminism of the times are never those of Christ. There is no recorded speech of Jesus concerning women "as such." What is very striking is his behavior toward them. In the passages describing the relationship of Jesus with various women, one characteristic stands out starkly: they emerge as persons, for they are treated as persons, often in such contrast with prevailing custom as to astonish onlookers. . . . What stands out is the fact that these, his friends, he saw as persons, to whom he gave the supreme yet simple gift of his brotherhood.¹⁰⁶

importance Jesus attached to his positive attitude . . . toward women. [Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 3].

Nunnally-Cox, *Fore-Mothers*, 99, 100, 101.

¹⁰⁶She continues: "The behavior of Jesus toward the Samaritan woman puzzled even his disciples, who were surprised that he would speak to her in public (John 4:27f). . . . In the Gospel narratives the close friendship of Jesus with certain women is manifested in the context of the

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Women in the Epistles of Paul

Paul, of all the New Testament men, receives the greatest scorn from feminists, especially for his supposedly extreme chauvinistic statements in 1 Timothy. Because of what they consider as Paul's sexist language, feminists often jettison all of Paul's teachings and many times the entire New Testament itself. Denise Carmody so fumes regarding the Timothy passage:

But the prejudicial, if not outrightly vicious, interpretation of Yahwist mythology we find in this text triggers my bile. How arrogant and self-serving! What a dangerous precedent, as generations of patriarchal Christian leadership have proved! Pseudo-Paul has on his head guilt for a significant amount of the violence and humiliation women have suffered throughout the Christian era. Among the biblical wrongdoers, he stands out as a paramount oppressor.¹⁰⁷

Radical feminists, however, neglect to compare Paul's counsel to Timothy who was ministering in Ephesus with numerous other Pauline passages portraying Paul's attitudes and actions toward women elsewhere, along with his strong insistence that his teachings were normative, and that his example be followed.¹⁰⁸ These varied details must be taken into account when interpreting Paul,

crucifixion and resurrection." Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex: With a New Feminist Post-Christian Introduction by the Author* (NY: Harper/Colophon Books, 1975), pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁷Denise Lardner Carmody, *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

¹⁰⁸1 Ths 1:6 "... you became imitators of us and of the Lord . . ." "We often think about the imitation of Christ (Eph 5:1-2; 1 Jn 2:6; 3:3), but probably do not pay sufficient attention to Paul's repeated exhortation to the churches to imitate him ('I urge you to imitate me,' 1 Cor 4:16; cf. 2 Ths 3:7; Gal 4:12; Phil 3:17; 4:9), as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1)." John Stott comments:

"We are familiar with the claims of the Old Testament prophets that they were bearers of the word of God, for they introduced their oracles with formulas like 'the word of the Lord came to me,' 'listen to the word of the Lord,' and 'thus says the Lord.' But here in 1 Ths 2:13 is a comparable claim by a New Testament apostle. Paul does not rebuke the Thessalonians for regarding his message too highly. On the contrary, he commends them for having recognized it as what is truly is (God's word) and for having accepted it as such. More than that, he actually thanks God constantly that they have done so, and adds that the gospel authenticates its divine origin by its transforming power in their lives. This is a clear indication of Paul's self-conscious apostolic authority. He knew who he was (an apostle of Christ) and he knew what his message was (the word of God). And the Thessalonians knew these things as well."

[P. 130 regarding, 1 Ths 5:27:] "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren." "... he certainly used extremely strong terms in order to ensure that everybody without exception would have the change to hear it. 'I put you on oath,' he wrote, and solemnly added a reference to the presence and/or authority of *the Lord*, to have this letter read to all the brothers. He was later to make the same charge to the Colossians, with the supplementary requirement that they and the Laodiceans (referring perhaps to *Ephesians*) exchange their letters. It is quite extraordinary instruction. Already the Old Testament was read in the Christian assemblies, for the custom had been taken over from the synagogues. But now the apostles' letters were also to be read aloud during the worship service . . . The clear implication is that these apostolic docu-

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for it is the position of this paper that Paul as apostle cannot be contradicting himself. He will not be saying one thing in Ephesus and acting contrary elsewhere, though this is often the accusation suggested by feminists.¹⁰⁹

ments were to be regarded as being on a level with the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul saw nothing incongruous in this.

“Further, he gave the Thessalonians no command to test his teaching, as they were to test the words of the prophets [v. 19-20], in order to sift the wheat from the chaff, the good from the evil, the genuine from the spurious. They were to weigh prophetic utterances, because not all of them were from God, but they were to listen to everything the apostle wrote, and were expected to believe and obey it all. Thus Paul unequivocally put his authority as an apostle above that of the prophets. Just so today, granted that a subsidiary prophetic gift exists, Scripture has supreme authority in the church.”

“Paul has clarified the three distinct media which he has used in instructing the Thessalonians. First, he had taught them the apostolic *tradition* (*paradosis*), verbally, and they had received it from him (2 Ths 3:6, 10: 2:15). Secondly, he had set them an *example*, which they were to imitate (7-9; 1 Ths 1:6; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; Phil 3:17). Thirdly, he confirmed and elaborated his teaching by *letters* (14; cf. 1 Ths 4:16), which he autographed personally (17) in order to distinguish them from forgeries (2:2). ...

“. . . five times Paul resorts to the language of ‘command’ and ‘obedience.’ . . . It is truly astonishing that he says he is trusting the Lord Jesus to ensure that the Thessalonians will obey him. By these ‘blunt commands . . . he appears to canonize his own doctrine and writings” [fn: Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (Anchor Bible; Doubleday, 1974), 362.]

Now these are not the wild ravings of a demagogue. They are not the petulant reaction of a tinpot leader whose authority is being challenged and who over-compensates by reasserting it. Paul betrays no personal pique or anger, and no petty arrogance. On the contrary, he keeps his cool, continues to call them his ‘brothers’ (6, 13, 15), and does not require of them an obedience which he is unwilling to give himself (6-10). Yet he makes the explicit claim that his commands are the Lord’s commands . . . another clear example of his self-conscious authority as an apostle of Christ. In an earlier letter he has commended the Galatians for welcoming him as if he ‘were Christ Jesus himself’ (4:14), and in a later letter he will refer to his insistence that Christ was ‘speaking through’ him (2 Cor 13:3).

“Nobody in the church today has this kind of authority or dares speak to us this kind of language” [John Stott, *The Gospel & the End of Time: The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 36, 54, 130-131, 195].

¹⁰⁹Ellen White addresses this issue many times: “The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands . . . Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony” (*Great Controversy*, v, vi).

“There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures. The miracles of Christ are not given in exact order, but are given just as the circumstances occurred, which called for this divine revealing of the power of Christ. The truths of the Bible are as pearls hidden. They must be searched, dug out by painstaking effort. Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures. But those whose hearts are in harmony with truth and duty will search the Scriptures with a heart prepared to receive divine impressions” (1 SM, p. 20).

“In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will” (GC, vii).

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Consider Paul's acknowledgment that women in Corinth publically praying and prophesying during the service of worship. Moreover, a spate of studies on the Philippian church suggest that "Philippi is perhaps the classic NT case study on the roles of women in the founding and developing of a local congregation."¹¹⁰

Moreover, in Romans 16 Paul sends greetings to twenty-six people in the church at Rome:

Reflecting on the names and circumstances of the people Paul greets, . . . the most interesting and instructive aspect of church diversity in Rome is that of gender. Nine out of the twenty-six persons greeted are women: Priscilla (3), Mary (6), probably Junia (7), Tryphena and Tryphosa, who may have been twin sisters, and Persis (12), Rufus' mother (13), Julia and Nereus' sister (15). Paul evidently thinks highly of them all. He singles out four (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis) as having "worked hard." The verb *kopiaō* implies strong exertion, is used of all four of them, and is not applied to anybody else on the list. . . . the prominent place occupied by women in Paul's entourage shows that he was not at all the male chauvinist of popular fantasy.¹¹¹

Two names in this roster call for special attention: 1) *Phoebe*: who may have carried on this occasion Paul's letter, just as Titus and Timothy were deputed to do at times. Her designation as "servant" or "deacon" (the Greek word *diakonos* used here is usually translated "servant" but is also transliterated "deacon") does not imply the "deaconess" we know today, but may, rather, refer to the position ordained by the apostles in Acts 6:1-6, including that of Stephen (though "servant of the church" in Rom 16:1 may not refer to a church "office"

¹¹⁰A. Boyd Luter, "Partnership in the Gospel: The Role of Women in the Church at Philippi," *JETS* 39/3 (September 1996): 411. See also: W.D. Thomas, "The Place of Women in the Church at Philippi," *ExpTim* 83 (1972): 117-120; F.X. Malinowski, "The Brave Women of Philippi," *BTB* 15 (1985): 60-64; L. Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Received by First-century Women* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wikgren, 1988). Significant attention to the circumstances in Philippi is also found in such broader studies of NT women as E.M. Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1980); B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988).

Moreover, the Phillipian church was highly regarded by Paul:

" . . . of all his converts, the Philippians seem to have been the most free from fault, and the most attached to himself. In the Epistle which he wrote to them, we find no censure, and much praise; and so zealous was their love for St. Paul, that they alone (of all the Churches which he founded) forced him from the very beginning to accept their contributions for his support. Twice, while he was at Thessalonica, immediately after their own conversion, they had sent relief to him. Again they did the same while he was at Corinth, working for his daily bread in the manufactory of Aquila. And we shall find them afterwards cheering his Roman prison, by similar proofs of their loving remembrance." W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 436.

¹¹¹John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 394-396.

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at all, but to a woman who is devoted to Christian service, irrespective of any formal commissioning).¹¹²

2) *Priscilla*. In verse 3 (and in three other New Testament passages), Priscilla is named first before her husband.¹¹³ Whatever the reason behind this ordering, Paul recognizes her service to the church.¹¹⁴

Paul's positive inclusion of women is also implicit throughout his writings. For instance, in chapter 12:1-2, he entreats the believers in Rome to

“offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (1b). Paul uses five more or less technical terms. He represents us as *a priestly people*, who, in responsive gratitude for God's mercy *offer* or present our bodies as living sacrifices. These are described as both *holy* and *pleasing to God*, which seem to be the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a *fragrant aroma* [cf. Lv 1:3, 9].¹¹⁵

This passage echoes OT sacrificial language, and allows no differentiation of men and women. All the believers are functioning in this NT “priestly” role.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, it is Paul's letter to Timothy in Ephesus that modern feminists (and the early Church Fathers) cite most often. And because of this passage feminists in droves have abandoned Scriptural authority. But perhaps they have not given careful consideration to the initial situation that Paul was addressing in Ephesus. For just as biblical patriarchy needs to be fairly interpreted in the light of its original context, so with Paul's materials. Leon Morris so argues:

It is a great pity that Paul's letters were ever called *epistles*. They are in the most literal sense *letters* [(Barclay, *The Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: The Daily Study Bible, 1988), xiv)]. . . . what Paul wrote was a series of genuine letters addressing specific situations in which he and his converts found themselves. . . . Each of these missives was clearly written in the light of what was needed

¹¹²“Phoebe, the deacon acclaimed by St. Paul, is a woman of high favor. Although we know little else about her, the description in Romans is complimentary: she is sister, she is saint, she is helper of many, and helper of St. Paul as well” (Nunnally-Cox, *Fore-Mothers*, 134).

¹¹³Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tm 4:19.

¹¹⁴Luke (Acts 18:24-26) pointedly describes *both* Aquila and Priscilla instructing Apollos and explaining “to him the way of God more accurately.”

¹¹⁵John Stott, *Romans*, 321, emphasis Stott's.

¹¹⁶“There is no doubt, in the early community, as to the full membership of women. [fn: Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 785.] Women and men now meet together, pray together, learn together, and serve a common people. The book of Acts, called the Acts of the Apostle, and several early letters of Paul make mention of a number of women. Jesus' positive, life-giving response to women begins to take root, and we see a blossoming in the community of early times.” Nunnally-Cox, *Fore-Mothers*, 121-122.

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in a given situation. . . . They all focus on the situation confronting Paul at the time he wrote them.¹¹⁷

Radical feminists need to recall that Ephesus was a major center for Goddess worship (a hint of this is found in Acts 19 with the great “Diana of the Ephesians”). Some of its major tenets were that a female goddess gave birth to the world, that the first woman was created before the first man, and that to achieve highest exaltation wives must claim independence from their husbands, and especially from child-bearing.

Sharon Gritz’s extensive research suggests that a situation of a radical religious pluralism existed in Ephesus, and that various false teachings were endangering the faith of the new Christian converts there. Thus, Paul was instructing Timothy how to deal with such a stark departure from the Christian faith.¹¹⁸ Instead of exhibiting a negative attitude toward women, Paul is seeking to preserve the exalted position of the Christian wife:

Paul’s concern in 1 Tim 2:8-15, according to Gritz, is not that women might have authority over men in the church, but that certain assertive women

¹¹⁷Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 13. Gunther Bornkamm concurs:

“The distinctiveness of the Pauline letters lies in their being close to the living voice of the gospel, that is to say, the gospel proclaimed by word of mouth and aimed at gaining both a hearing and an obedience in faith. They do not move in the realm of abstract theoretical reflection, but always include the hearers’ own situation as a determining factor. . . . [In addition] Paul’s letters differ from countless other church treatises and pastoral epistles both early and late in that their author’s person and work are an indissoluble unity. The modern reader will often feel their strangeness, nor should he try to gloss over it. But he should also be conscious that here the power of the spirit is united with the power of the heart and finds expression in language which is often quite amazing in its mastery. Very often it is difficult, impenetrable and overloaded; it shifts and changes, being wooing, and gracious, but abrupt and harsh as well. *In every case, however, it is dictated by the apostle’s work and gospel.* It is a tool used by a man who is himself a tool in the hand of his master” [*Paul* (London, 1971), xxiv-xxv].

Conybeare and Howson also:

“It is in these letters then that we must study the true life of St. Paul, from its inmost depths and springs of action, which were ‘hidden with Christ in God,’ In them we learn (to use the language of Gregory Nazianzene) ‘what is told of Paul by Paul himself.’ Their most sacred contents indeed rise above all that is peculiar to the individual writer; for they are the communications of God to man, concerning the faith and life of Christians; which St. Paul declared (as he often asserts) by the immediate revelation of Christ Himself. But his manner of teaching these eternal truths is coloured by his human character, and peculiar to himself. And such individual features are naturally impressed much more upon epistles than upon any other kind of composition. For here we have not treatises, or sermons, which may dwell in the general and abstract, but genuine letters, written to meet the actual wants of living men; giving immediate answers to real questions, and warnings against pressing dangers; full of the interest of the passing hour” [*The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), xv-xvi].

¹¹⁸Sharon Hodgin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991).

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in the church who had been influenced by false teachers would teach error. For this reason, he charges them to 'be silent.'¹¹⁹

It appears significant that Paul wrote this singular counsel to Timothy in Ephesus. When Paul counseled the churches in Philippi or Galatia,¹²⁰ for exam-

¹¹⁹Thomas C. Geer Jr., "Admonitions to Women in 1 Tim 2:8-15," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. C.D. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1993): 1:281-302.

Angel Rodriguez also reaches a similar conclusion through a NT word study of the terms Paul is using. He concludes: "Having examined the New Testament evidence, we can now take a closer look at 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. There is no doubt that Paul is concerned about controversies in the church. In verse 8 he exhorts men to pray 'without anger or disputing.' In the case of the women, the apostle is also concerned about behavior and attitudes that could be disruptive. . . . Why did Paul single out women? Possibly because some of them had become the target of false teachers and their instructions (2 Tim. 3:6). As a result, they were bringing controversies into the church. Paul forbids this type of controversial and divisive speech when he says that 'a woman . . . must be silent'" ("Women's Words." *Adventist Review*, Nov. 14, 1996, 27).

¹²⁰Gal 3:27-29 "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Leon Morris comments on this passage:

"There are many distinctions in human society, and in the first century the Jews despised the Gentiles (even proselytes were often not fully accepted), the Greeks looked down on uncultured people outside their race, the Romans felt themselves superior to those they had conquered, and so on. Probably people of every nation look down on outsiders. But in Christ all such distinctions are meaningless. . . . *There is neither Jew nor Greek*. This means that the great divide between Jew and Gentile that meant so much to the Jews in general is meaningless. If Christ has saved a person, that person is a Christian and whether he or she is a Jew or Greek is irrelevant. Baptism unites people across all national boundaries. Nationality was important for both Jews and Greeks. Jews divided the whole human race into Jews and Gentiles and they saw only themselves as making up the people of God. . . .

The apostle moves on to the great social division of antiquity when he affirms that in Christ slavery makes no difference. Throughout the Roman world the division between slave and free was of the greatest importance. Slaves had no rights, and the lowliest free person was infinitely more important than any slave, however gifted. To recognize that a believing slave was just as important in God's sight as the highest among the nobility was to point to a radical abolition of a distinction that was taken for granted throughout Paul's world. These words mark a revolution.

It was hardly less so with *no male and female*. While occasionally women might attain importance or notoriety, it was almost universally true that the female of the species was allocated a very minor role. Women were not educated; often it was regarded as a sin to teach a woman. This meant that women had a very limited sphere in life. . . . to affirm that *male and female* was an irrelevant distinction, indeed that there was no such distinction, was to make another revolutionary statement. Osiek sees a reference to Genesis 1:27 and speaks of 'an expression of the deep unity of humanity as it comes forth from the creating hand of God.' . . .

For introduces the reason for the world-shattering statements the apostle has made. . . His *all* is important. *All* believers are one in Christ Jesus and the unity is the important thing." [fn: Bruce comments, 'No more restriction is implied in Paul's equalizing of the status of male and female in Christ than in his equalizing of the status of Jew and Gentile, or of slave and free person. If in ordinary life existence in Christ is manifested openly in church fellowship, then, if a Gentile may exercise spiritual leadership in church as freely as a Jew, or a slave as freely as a citizen, why not a woman as freely as a man?'] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 121- 123.

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ple, a different situation existed, and other issues were addressed. Carroll Osburn argues similarly:

Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text [1 Cor 14:34-35] anything regarding patriarchy or female subjection. The real issue is not the *extent* to which a woman may participate in the work and worship of the church, but the *manner*. Paul's corrective does not ban women from speaking in public, but stops the disruptive verbal misconduct of certain wives who are giving free rein to 'irresistible impulses' to 'pipe up' at will with questions in the assembly.¹²¹

One wonders what might have resulted if the much-berated Timothy passage had been more carefully evaluated in the light of its original context by modern feminists (and the early Church Fathers) in determining Paul's intentions. Most feminists see it as the critical text behind the oppression of women. This is a crucial point. Such interpretations as offered by Gritz and many others enables all aspects of Paul's personal ministry, along with his counsel in his letters and epistles, to be held together without contradiction. Paul can even be seen demonstrating the attitudes of Christ Himself, who treated men and women with equality in the Church, along with carefully preserving the marriage union. This view moreover, dovetails with the constructive re-evaluation of biblical patriarchy, as seen above.

Conclusion

Women in Scripture are observed functioning in many different spheres. Contra radical feminism, biblical evidence does not reveal stifling patriarchy.

¹²¹Carroll D. Osburn, "The Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. C.D. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1993) 1:242. See also Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Tim 2:8-15," *JETS* 35/3 (September 1992), 341-360.

Also regarding the church at Corinth, John Willis writes that it "is instructive that Paul teaches here [1 Cor 11:4-5] that a woman can lead prayer or prophecy (proclaim God's message) in the public assembly of the church *and at the same time* honor and be in subjection to her husband." John T. Willis, "Huldah and Other Biblical Prophetesses," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, vol II, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., 1995), 2:120-121, emphasis Willis'. He continues by citing William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter: "There is no question that women were engaging in prayer and prophecy in public worship in Corinth. . . . The specific problem that elicits the theological analysis of the relationship between men and women has to do with how women should be attired and particularly how they should wear their hair when taking part in worship leadership. . . . Probably her veiling is an indication of her married state, which reflects her relationship to her husband; and this ought not to be put aside for any reason . . . because it would be a reflection upon her husband. . . . A woman who participates in Corinthian worship leadership *ought* to exercise her freedom responsibly. . . . The wife ought to lead in public worship in such a way (with such traditional decorum) that she will not bring disgrace or dishonor to her husband. Presumably the principle would apply to unmarried women, *mutatis mutandis* [William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter, *1 Corinthians* (AB 32; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976); 263-64.

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However, feminists have been right to force attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the Church. Their pain is *real*. Their anger is *deep*. Nevertheless, they have been wrong in their castigating of biblical patriarchy and the Apostle Paul. Upon a closer reading of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the entire canon can be seen to affirm women, whether in the home or in public ministry, or both.

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Responding to Relativism, Humanism, and Religious Pluralism in the Secular University

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The ideologies of relativism, humanism, and religious pluralism are basic to the intellectual mindset of both teachers and students on the secular university campus, even though many are unfamiliar with the words. The ideology of humanism goes back to the late 15th century, with the dawning of the Italian Renaissance, but many of its ideas, of course, are derived from the Greek philosophers. Relativism and religious pluralism have their roots in the work of Descartes, Hume, Locke, and Mill, but they did not achieve the level of social paradigm, one might argue, until this generation, making them particularly “last day” delusions.

It is tempting to trace relativism, humanism, and religious pluralism back to the temptations in the Garden of Eden. “Thou shalt not surely die” offered Eve the “free” choice peculiar to relativism—a range of choices, any of which might be right for the one who proclaims, “I have to do what’s *right* for *me*.” “You shall be as gods” is the very heart of humanism, which proudly asserts that “*Man* is the measure of *all* things.”¹ By offering Eve the option of disobedience disguised as her own wisdom—as an acceptable and even preferable route to eternal bliss—the serpent introduced a key tenet of religious pluralism. “You shall be as gods, knowing good from evil,” is as well the same half-truth whispered by the Gnostics and by the various manifestations of New Age and nouveau-mystical gurudom.

Of course, while there may be elite campuses, even among state universities, where large numbers of students are conversant in the philosophy of these ideas—and certainly they are pervasive among the professoriate—in most public institutions few students are even familiar with the words relativism, humanism,

¹ Protagoras, in Diogenes Laertius’s *Protagoras*, IX.li, emphasis added.

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and religious pluralism. Nevertheless, the basic assumptions of these ideologies have permeated student thinking because they have permeated the culture and the educational system, and nearly all students are essentially products of their culture. Their ideas are nearly all derivative and unexamined, yet held with as much passion as they can possibly muster for the philosophical dictum, “Whatever.”

The Logic of Relativism

I have a student in one of my Developmental Writing classes named Bud. Bud is a genuinely nice guy, courteous and sensitive and hardworking. His adopted parents run a dairy farm in New Jersey, and in high school Bud would come home from football practice to face hours of chores. This contributed to the lack of writing skills which landed him in my class, but despite this lack he is always eager to contribute to the class discussion.

Recently the class members were discussing an article they were to think and write about, an article about a theoretical geophysicist at Los Alamos who has developed a very complex simulation program for the supercomputer there, a simulation program which allows him to specify a variety of geological conditions throughout the earth, then observe the effect through simulated time. This scientist, a Christian, found that a worldwide flood induced by a massive under-sea magma swell 6,000 years ago was the best explanation for Earth’s present surface features.²

Bud raised his hand. “I believe absolutely in evolution,” he said, “and I think this scientist guy is nuts.”

“On what authority do you believe absolutely in evolution?” I asked.

“Well,” he said when he’d finally deciphered the question, “my teachers in high school said so.”

“And are high school science teachers with only a dozen college science classes under their belts more authoritative in your eyes than this man, who has two Ph.D.s from top universities and is the acknowledged world leader in his field?”

“But he’s a Christian,” Bud said.

“So am I,” I responded. “Is that a problem? Does that make him a liar? Isn’t his thesis based on valid use of the scientific method?”

“Well, I believe in God, too,” Bud said, backpedaling. “I just don’t think He interferes with us. And I believe that there’s some kind of afterlife, that our souls live on forever, but I don’t believe God punishes us.”

“On what authority do you believe in God?” I asked. “Have you ever seen Him, touched Him, heard Him?”

“Well, my grandmother told me,” Bud admitted, “except that she believed God has power over us.”

² Chandler Burr, “The Geophysics of God,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 June 1997, 55-58.

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“Good for her,” I said, “but was your grandmother an adequate authority? Did she ever see or touch or hear Him? And if she did, on what authority did you decide that part of what she told you was right and part wrong?”

“Well,” he said, “it’s just that some of what she said made sense, and part of it didn’t.”

I was unable, in this Socratic dialogue of sorts, to elicit from Bud any recognition that belief should be grounded on authority, that some authorities might be more believable than others, that some beliefs might be more fairly believable than others.

“I believe in God,” I told the class, “including the creation in seven days and the worldwide flood and Noah’s ark, because the Bible says they happened. I’ve accepted the Bible as an unerring authority on these things because it has proven to be authoritative in areas closer to our day where we have corroborative evidence from other sources. I believe it to be correct because time after time, when historians or archaeologists say it is wrong, more evidence turns up that proves that the Bible is right and they are wrong. I believe it is an authoritative source of truth because when I do what it says, I get the effect it says I’ll get. Isn’t that good science? You do the experiment the way the book says, and it works, so it must be true.

“I don’t think I myself could honestly believe something simply because I wanted to believe it was true. I want to believe only what I have carefully examined and found to be accurate and authoritative.”

“Well, you’re entitled to believe what you want,” Bud said, claiming the last word, “but I think I’m entitled to believe what I want, and I think my beliefs are as good as yours.”

“Folk Relativism” and Wishful Thinking

I do not mean to suggest that the Bible is true and authoritative *because* archaeology and history prove it to be true. Rather, it is the Bible that proves them to be true. I also do not mean to suggest that the Bible is true and authoritative *because* it has a desirable effect on my emotions, actions, or physical needs. It is what it is and what it claims to be. However, the evidence for the Bible’s accuracy and emotional utility can be a powerful incentive to belief. To say to college students, “There is absolutely no evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be, but I choose to accept it as the absolute truth,” would be to state in bald terms what many already believe about their own unexamined ruminations on the cosmic realm, and would be to rank the Bible with the mystical mutterings of New Age spirit channelers.

Bud’s assertion was what we might call “folk relativism.” It reminds us of the state of affairs among the Israelites during the time of the judges, when “every man did what was right *in his own eyes*” (Judg 17:3). This sort of fuzzy, unexamined, illogical thinking is rampant on the secular university campus. Professors, especially in such fields as education, sociology, psychology, and Eng-

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lish, present the ideology of relativism as the sure foundation for tolerance and peace in our society—and the freedom to do whatever feels good to the professor. Students who are otherwise intelligent and well read will spout this nonsense as Gospel truth. (And of course to them it *is* gospel. It's the good news of *Peter Pan*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice in Wonderland*, the good news that what is *right* is equivalent to what one *wishes* to be right. The illogicality and impossibility of relativism is breathtaking. No two beliefs are mutually exclusive or contradictory. If you believe God is hiding down the storm drain and I believe God is in my thumb, we're both believing what is right—for us. Each man is an island. There is an interesting relationship between relativism and solipsism—we are not only self-existent but the sole source of our own wisdom and knowledge.

However, even though a vast number of college students have swallowed the ideology of relativism without examining it, it hasn't necessarily atrophied their brain cells. I find they will often respond very well to the sort of appeal to the intellect I used on Bud. My own comments to Bud, given above, verged perhaps on the insulting. I find that most students hate the Socratic dialogue and resent having it used on them. What works much better, I've found, is the personal confession of faith. When I tell the class about the idiotic things I used to believe, they can grin and soak it up and take notes without having to publicly admit they believe the same thing. I find students are desperately eager to learn, to believe what is true, what makes sense. If I can support my arguments to their satisfaction, I needn't make an altar call. They will change their beliefs without telling me, then I'll discover months later that they've accepted what I've said and can now share it with others. This is one reason why the calm, honest voice of belief in the authoritative Word of God and the God it reveals is so powerful. The Word of God is the pole star drifting students need to find their way home.

Here's an example. In my 8 a.m. Developmental Writing class, the entire class, including Bud, seemed outraged by the article we were discussing. They refused to believe their teachers had misled them. They refused to believe scientists would deliberately exclude certain possibilities because they couldn't measure them. They had never heard any good arguments for creation or Noah's flood. In the 9 a.m. class the attitude was just the opposite. They loved the article and were happy to have a scientific reason to believe in the flood, and they testified to their faith.

What made the difference? It may have been that Bud began the 8 a.m. class with a statement of disbelief, whereas Michelle began the 9 a.m. class with a statement of belief. The 8 a.m. students may have been afraid to admit their faith. The 9 a.m. students may have been afraid to say anything against the Christian reading of Genesis. However, in both classes I presented the case for creation and the flood and testified to my own strong belief in them and how it had developed.

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When I graded the students' papers I was shocked. The students from both classes were equally likely to claim to be Christians who believed in creation and the flood, even though I'd made it very clear that what they believed made no difference at all in the grade they would get. In both classes some students stuck to evolution and had no need for God, and some claimed to hold views which are mutually exclusive. However, many students wrote that they used to believe in evolution because that was all they had ever heard, but the article and my comments had convinced them to believe what the Bible said.

For many students, relativism is a superficial belief. Many are hungry for a reason to believe the Bible, and they readily understand that it is illogical to believe that one can accurately judge which parts of the Bible are true and which false. Christian professors who profess the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but will find an appreciative audience in the secular university.

The Problem with "Clear and Distinct Ideas"

As I said in my introduction, one might trace both relativism and religious pluralism back to René Descartes' 17th century attempts to reach beyond his doubts and prove logically that God exists. Inventing a rationale for relativism and religious pluralism was not, of course, his intention, but merely a byproduct of his logic, which led him to believe that his own reason was a trustworthy guide, apart from any external authority.

Descartes' studies in philosophy led him to an extreme skepticism, even though he was longing for faith. But could he doubt everything? No. He decided he could certainly *not* doubt he was *doubting*. This led him to several more logical deductions. First, whatever it was that was *doubting* must *exist*. That meant him! "*Cogito ergo sum*," he cried with relief: "I *think*, therefore I *am*!" Second came a logical leap which reminds us of the logical problems of relativism and religious pluralism: since he now had a clear, distinct conception of his own existence, he deduced that all other ideas that were "clear and distinct" must therefore also be true. Third, eager to prove God's existence, he deduced that because he had a clear and distinct idea of something greater than anything else, that something, which he chose to call God, must also exist. (Thus we move from "I think, therefore I am," to "I think, therefore *God* is!" Finally, Descartes deduced that it was God who devised this world in which clear and distinct ideas exist, and God is a *puissance incompréhensible*, an "incomprehensible power" above all other powers, and because such a being must be entirely true and perfect, therefore clear and distinct ideas must also be *always* true and inerrant.³

In 1521 Martin Luther turned medieval theology on its head with these ringing words:

³ I am following closely after David Laird Dungan in *A History of the Synoptic Problem*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 159-61.

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Unless I am convinced of error by the *testimony of Scripture* or *clear reason*, I remain convinced by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Popes or councils because they have often erred and contradicted themselves. *My conscience is taken captive by God's Word*. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to *act against our conscience* is neither safe nor open to us.⁴

We generally think of these words as meaning that Luther refused to trust the traditions and doctrines of the medieval church and instead proclaimed that the Bible is the only source of doctrine, *sola scriptura*. This was a noble aim.

David Dungan points out, though, that Luther was saying that it was by his “reason” and his “conscience” that he would interpret the Word, even though he believed that his conscience had been “taken captive by God’s Word.”⁵ That conscience, in fact, led him away from the Word in several important ways, because he *felt* that his interpretation was adequate. It led him, for example, to doubt the authority of the books of James, Hebrews, and II Peter, and to assent to the persecution of Anabaptists, despite their clear scriptural teaching, and to reject the gospel call to service in favor of his understanding of “the freedom which is in Christ Jesus,” which seemed to free us from obedient service. By this, Luther also freed Protestants to be their own Bible interpreters, and while this has led to wonderful new light, it has also led to the splintering of the church’s temporal unity.

From Luther’s “scripture interpreted by reason and conscience” to Descartes’s “truth recognized by the clearness and distinctness of our idea of it” was a great leap, but predictable. The chasm between them was and still is easily bridged by the idea so well expressed in the title to Morris Venden’s book, *God Says . . . But I Think*. (I sometimes think this phrase is the motto of many Sabbath School classes.)

Descartes’s “discovery” that all “clear and distinct ideas” must be true and must be from God has led predictably to a society in which anyone’s ideas, no matter how unclear or indistinct, are claimed to be as good as anyone else’s, and in which all religions can be proclaimed true routes to God, despite the contradictions between them.

Relativism is Fun!

My own sense is that while many college students are drawn by relativism’s powerful call for tolerance of ethnic and social differences, what most strongly entices them is the idea of tolerance of their own sins. Few students are unaware that violence, drunkenness, sexual immorality of any sort, lying, or stealing are wrong, yet a large percentage are obsessed with at least one of these. Relativism

⁴ Dungan, 157.

⁵ Dungan, 157.

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tells them “You have to do what’s right for you.” It leads them to say, “I won’t say anything against what you are doing if you won’t say anything against what I am doing.” It absolves them from guilt, or seems to for a while. It lets them continue in their ways without censoring them. It stills the conscience. To some extent it is the cousin of existentialism and situation ethics.

Despite the seeming benefits of relativism, many students, even those with no religious background, sense the nagging of their consciences as the Holy Spirit tries to get through to them. Some of them also hear the voices of their parents, of course.

I have found that while many students are hostile to personal testimonies of God’s leading and to the clear teaching of Scripture, some of these students can be brought, if not to God, at least toward God. It is important to not call them fools, but it is also important to stick closely to the Word and present it in a clear and logical way as a valid source of authority, rather than agreeing with their ideas. Go as far as you can with them, agree strongly on the importance of ethnic and cultural tolerance, but show them a better and more consistent and less contradictory way.

Other students may be living a wild life, yet have been raised in a Christian home, and these often respond with rejoicing to the clear call of the Gospel. I do not hesitate to present Paul’s list, in Galatians 5:19–21, of those who “will not inherit the Kingdom of God,” even though it is a hard teaching indeed for students told by pastors that once they are born again, nothing they do can cost them eternal life. However, I soften the blow by telling them the ages at which I gave up the various sins they struggle with—ages far beyond their own few years. I tell them that some are ready now for this teaching, while others aren’t, but in the name of faithfulness I have to present the clear teaching of the Word.

Relativism is inimical to faithfully following Christ. Share this word and students will respond.

Humanism: Man the Measure of All Things

Humanism is at the heart of higher education. The primary purpose of the secular scholarly enterprise is to study the works of man or do the work of man in research and discovery, and this is humanism. The “nominalist” philosophers rejected Plato’s ideas of the good, the eternal, of the spiritual “Platonic forms,” saying they were not actual things but only names (*nomen*). Instead, they said the only real things were physical things. Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) wrote, “Human nature includes everything within itself and attains all things by the power of its sense, intellect, and will. *The human person is a god*, yet not absolutely, because he is human; *a human god*, then.”⁶ Thomas More, in his book *Utopia* (1516), claimed that humans could use reason to achieve happiness for all. A century later, Francis Bacon taught that through a rational study of science

⁶ Dungan, 154–55.

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and mathematics, through examining actual objects rather than blindly accepting the teachings of ancient philosophy or the Bible, humans could control their world and achieve happiness.

Some Christians argue that we should recognize a distinction between “Christian humanism” and “secular humanism.” They say that Christian humanism admits that all things are under God, yet sees man as the measure of all things because none can measure God or use Him as a measure. Secular humanism, on the other hand, in deliberately excluding God from all equations, sets up mankind as the image worthy of worship.

However, while this may serve to distinguish between the personal feelings of Christian and secular scholars, it is generally more difficult to distinguish between their work. It is sometimes possible to read, say, a work of history or literary criticism and think, “I can tell by this author’s sensitivity to and sympathy for the things of Christ that he or she must be a Christian.” More often, though, Christian scholars hide their allegiance. They may claim to be Christians, but neither their students nor their readers can perceive this. They are hiding their lights under bushels in the name of objectivity or science and in order to gain tenure or promotion or the respect of the world, and Jesus warns against this.

Thus, there is an inherent tension between even Christian humanism and the things of God. The secular humanist admits to no God in heaven and therefore worships man. The Christian humanist worships God but has man as an additional object worthy of worship, a metaphorical “graven image.”

The great majority of theologians have accepted the presuppositions of the historical-critical method of scholarship, whether or not they accept these presuppositions in their own beliefs. These presuppositions include the rejection of supernatural intervention in our affairs, the rejection of the miraculous, the rejection of creation and the flood and the resurrection of Christ in the flesh, and the rejection of the idea of God as the ultimate author of Scripture, which allows *sola scriptura* biblical study through comparing verse with verse throughout the Bible. At the heart of the historical-critical method is the hermeneutic of *doubt and suspicion*. Everything is doubted; everything is “interrogated,” to use the current buzz word, drawn from the vocabulary of totalitarian torture.

Students who study the Bible in the secular university, whether in a philosophy of religion class or a Bible as literature class or a religious studies class, will find that the historical-critical approach is pervasive. There are a few teachers who reject it, such as myself. However, most students who study the Bible in the university classroom will be taught to doubt it. Students are supposed to be mature enough to weigh options and make up their minds, but in fact the arguments of an articulate expert can be very persuasive, even if those arguments are wrong.

The tension between biblical Christianity and humanism of any type is profound. Galatians 5:22 tells us, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, pa-

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tience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”⁷ While we sometimes find these exhibited by professors, they are rarely taught and rarely objects of scholarly inquiry. In Philippians 4:8 Paul writes, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” One might argue that the honorable is often studied in history class, that what is right is often studied in philosophy or sociology, that what is lovely is the general subject of art history, that what is pure is the subject of mathematics, and that the excellent and praiseworthy is studied in the literature classroom, and perhaps there is merit in this argument. However, what are students to make of those things which do not fit into these categories?

Humanists focus primarily on the things of humanity. They praise and elevate the human. They also devote most of their waking hours to studying that which is human, leaving little time for the things of God. Students who do not learn their subjects will not succeed. Students who reject the subject matter in their fields will not become the next generation of academics. Would we be right to urge students in the secular university to distance themselves from the study of mankind? Probably not.

However, in responding to humanism, we must continually give students options. We must be role models as people of high intellectual attainment who nevertheless place God first. Christian students should be constantly questioning themselves, asking themselves how what they are studying fits the categories of what is biblically acceptable. They should be helped to realize that this world is not their home, nor will their worldly career be their heavenly career. They should be helped to recognize the presuppositions of the humanistic ideal. They should be trained to see their education as a prelude to a life of service.

Relativism and religious pluralism are not intrinsic to the idea of the university, but humanism is. They may pass, but humanism won't. Furthermore, it is difficult to reject it and still attain a university education worth having. However, we can help students avoid the seductions of humanism. We can help them learn to be in the world, yet not of it.

Religious Pluralism: Are There Many Paths to God?

Only in the past generation has religious pluralism become a hot topic in theological circles, and the influence on students seems to be even more recent. Within academe, one comes across the ideology of religious pluralism especially in philosophy of religion, religious studies, and anthropology classes, wherever professors present non-Christian religious beliefs. It has a corollary in New Age circles, going back perhaps to the hippy movement of the late 60s and early 70s, and is now a commonplace in books on “spirituality.” Students influenced by

⁷ All quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted, and all emphasis has been added.

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this ideology are perhaps more likely to have learned it from the latter source than the former, though both are influential.

We should perhaps trace the psychological need for the development of religious pluralism back to the influence of Plato and neoplatonic ideas of the immortal soul on Christian belief, which in turn led to belief in the eternal punishment of the wicked. If one person has turned away from God, saying, "I can't believe in a God who would let a person burn in Hell for trillions of years because the person sinned during one short lifetime," a million have, and can we blame them? It would be inexplicably cruel of God to decree such a thing, and Christians who teach the horrors of eternal torment may find that they themselves may receive their heavenly reward, "yet so as through fire," as 1 Corinthians 3:15 says, by the skin of their teeth.

In essence, religious pluralism teaches that *all* religions are true, *all* religions are from the true God, whoever or whatever that might be, and *all* religions lead to salvation for those who believe in them. Logically, of course, this is utter nonsense. If Christians, Jews, and Muslims teach death, judgment, and paradise or destruction, while Hindus and Buddhists teach reincarnation, how can such contradictory ideas both be true? If Christians, Jews, and Muslims teach monotheism, and Hindus and Buddhists teach polytheism, can all be right? Of course not. And if Jews say Jesus was only a man and an imposter, Muslims say Jesus was only a prophet, and Christians say Jesus was God Incarnate, can they all offer paths to salvation? Only if our ideas of what is true, right, and salvific are completely subjective wish fulfillments with no objective correlative in actual historical events and truths. If that is not the case, then one of these is more true than the others, and if salvation is in any sense open to all through the beliefs they were raised in, it is because the true God respects faithfulness wherever He finds it.

But the Dalai Lama Says. Last year I had a student named Adam in my Old Testament Literature class who was much influenced by religious pluralism. He was an intelligent, gentle, searching young man who found the Bible's claim to exclusivity hard to stomach. During the last week of the course he drove several hours to hear a lecture by the Dalai Lama. He returned for the final class period enthralled by the experience. He eagerly shared the Dalai Lama's message that all religions are equally true and that we should give up our differences and work as one for humanity while seeking God in whatever way seems meaningful to us.

Unfortunately, the day's topic was Daniel 7–12, and the students had been thinking about the time of trouble and the little horn. One student suggested that perhaps the Dalai Lama was the Antichrist, or at least had similar tendencies, and several others, noting the Dalai Lama's weak logic behind his stirring words, chimed in.

Adam responded in his final paper with fury and bitterness, utterly rejecting Christianity. In turn, I wrote him a long letter, apologizing and explaining the

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Christian position. Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. Adam stopped by my office a few weeks later and thanked me for my letter. What's more, he signed up for my apocalyptic fiction class, and during the next semester, as he read books about the second coming, he gave his heart to Christ and was transformed, becoming a staunch advocate of the Bible as the sole spiritual authority. A gentle sharing of biblical truth wins souls and changes hearts.

Wicca Means Witchcraft. A couple months ago, as I was reading the survey sheets filled out by students in my Bible as Story class, I discovered that one student, Lindsay, identified herself as a believer in Wicca. This is a form of witchcraft which adherents see as a benign worship of nature and the Mother Goddess, using spellcasting not for evil but for such good causes as influencing the weather or crop fertility. She was the second witch I'd had in a Bible class, actually. The first one wore, on chains around his neck, a pentangle with a goat's head in the middle and a cross with a naked woman hanging from it and asked for Halloween off as a religious holiday (I gave it to him, in the name of religious freedom).

I sent Lindsay an e-mail message, welcoming her to the class, warning her that a lot of what I would say would offend her, but promising that her beliefs would have no bearing on her grade, so long as she passed the exams.

A few weeks ago I received an e-mail from Lindsay's mother. Checking up on her daughter's computer contacts, as perhaps a good mother should, she had found my e-mail on her computer in Lindsay's saved mail file and had read it, and she felt she needed to respond. "Lindsay is *not* a witch, whatever she might tell you," she wrote. "She's a Christian. She was baptized as a Lutheran, and she attended confirmation classes. She does read books about witchcraft, but I've always let her do that. That's just Lindsay."

I suspect that this woman, despite attending a Lutheran church on occasion, was completely unaware of what the Bible says about the toleration of witches and witchcraft and why God decreed that witches must be killed. Certainly she was ignorant of the difference between infant baptism and being a true Christian. When religious pluralism is accepted by Christians, it is generally either because they don't know what the Bible says, or they don't accept the Bible as authoritative. So much of what we believe and how we respond depends on whether or not we believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

For example, the major proponent of religious pluralism is the English philosopher John Hick. At the beginning of his career, Hick was a conservative though neo-orthodox theologian. However, as his ideas of religious pluralism developed, he came to judge Scripture by them, rather than judging them by Scripture. In order to maintain these ideas, of which he was proud, he eventually came to deny that Jesus had ever thought or taught that He was God the Son. The logical corollary to this, of course, is that the New Testament writers were

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either wrong or deceptive, though probably the former. After all, many have died for mistaken beliefs, but few to maintain their own lies.⁸

It is not really necessary here to delve deeper into religious pluralism. Clearly it is inimical to belief in biblical Christianity. Furthermore, few teachers have heard of it, and few students know the philosophy behind it. It is better to expose the contradictions and present a better alternative. Those who want to know more would do well to read Ronald H. Nash's book *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*

Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism

Beyond doubt, even non-Christian students are sincere in their concern for the salvation of those who have never had the opportunity to hear and respond to the call of Christ, even though for most that concern does not extend to the point of becoming full time evangelists. Some embrace religious pluralism because they dislike Christianity, or because they have seized upon an alternate religion and want it too to lead to salvation. However, many accept religious pluralism because they consider themselves Christians, but can't believe God would condemn those who have never heard.

If these students are to accept the Gospel and become Gospel workers, then we must respond satisfactorily to their concerns. There are two general approaches: exclusivism and inclusivism.

Exclusivism has been the usual Christian explanation, and it is the most clearly and strictly biblical. In Acts 4:12 Peter says to the Sanhedrin, about Christ, "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (NIV). Paul and Silas tell the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31, NIV). In Romans 10:9 Paul writes that this is his message: "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (NIV). Jesus says, in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father *except through me*" (NIV). Of course all of these witnesses have other things to say about the path to salvation, as well, but these four texts seem to be *sine qua non*, whatever the rest of the New Testament may say.⁹

However, exclusivism is also the belief that has led so many to reject Christianity as unworthy of the character of God, and if that is all we have to share with our students, many will turn away in disgust, turn toward some other faith which, though in conflict with the Bible, offers salvation to all, even if not

⁸ Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 72-73. Nash's book is a major response to John Hick's pluralism and Clark Pinnock's inclusivism, but it is important to bear in mind that he writes as a Calvinist, and this informs his response throughout, even though it is revealed only near the end.

⁹ See Nash for his support of exclusivism over inclusivism and his analyses of these and other texts.

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all accept it. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus gave His followers the assignment of sharing the Gospel with the entire world. Must the unreached world be damned because we have failed? John writes, “Anyone who does what is good is from God” (3 John 1:11). Admittedly, John is writing about Christians, but if a pagan does what is good, is it not also from God? And if by God’s grace a pagan does what is good, can God not also see fit to offer that faithful pagan salvation?

What, too, of the judgment scene of Matthew 25:31–46? There those who “inherit the kingdom” are those who feed, clothe, house, and visit those in need. There is no mention of belief in Christ. I have had many students who proudly proclaim they are “saved” and cannot be lost, even though they do nothing for those in need. These verses cause them intense discomfort. Perhaps from the context of the entire New Testament, we should assume that both the sheep and the goats in this story are believers in Christ. However, in the story itself it is “the nations” who are divided, not believers, and into only two groups: those who help and those who don’t, not those who believe in Christ and those who don’t.¹⁰ We might recall, as well, that “the nations” in the Bible refers generally to those who are not Abraham’s seed, to the Gentiles.

How Wide Is God’s Mercy?

The most influential and controversial work on inclusivism is Clark Pinnock’s 1992 book *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*.¹¹ The book has taken the theological world by storm and led to many contentious sessions at Evangelical Theological Society conferences. Rather than deal with the strengths and weaknesses of Pinnock’s arguments (Nash has pointed out all the weaknesses and various strengths which he considers weaknesses), I’d like to use some of his ideas in suggesting some of the biblical hints that God’s mercy is less narrow than exclusivists claim. If there is indeed breadth to it, then this breadth of mercy can be used in guiding back to Christ students who have turned to religious pluralism.

Inclusivists agree, with Acts 4:12, that “there is no other name under heaven given to men [but Christ’s] by which we must be saved.” They agree with Jesus when he says, in John 14:6, “No one comes to the Father except

¹⁰ I’m continually astonished by theologians who carefully distinguish between good works done in grateful response to salvation and good works done to achieve salvation, as if God were going to exclude all Catholics from heaven because their motives for faithfulness were skewed. I agree that good works don’t earn us salvation, but in this passage Jesus says nothing about motive. He speaks only of action. I fear those who carefully avoid a life of service lest God accuse them of “works righteousness” will be among the goats, not the sheep. On the other hand (the right hand, where one finds the sheep), those who devote themselves to loving service to those in need reveal that they are among the sheep, and I believe and hope that when the Shepherd calls in the Resurrection, they will hear His voice and recognize the Shepherd they have followed without ever having heard His name or seen His face (John 10:14–16).

¹¹ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

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through me.” They say these verses do not exclude the possibility of salvation for those who have never had the opportunity to accept Christ, but only confirm that if such people are saved, it will be through Christ’s blood, shed for them.

How could such people appropriate Christ’s blood without ever hearing of Him? Inclusivists point to the “roster of faith” in Hebrews 11, men and women who had no distinct, specific knowledge of Jesus Christ, Son of God Incarnate and Savior, yet *by faith* were *faithful* to God, as best they understood His call (and despite episodes of unfaithfulness), and because of their faith, revealed by their faithfulness, were accounted righteous (Gal 3:6). Dispensationalists may argue that before Christ people were saved by obedience, but now they are saved by faith alone, but this controverts Acts 4:12. If the faithful following of God by those in the Old Testament who never had the opportunity to accept Christ led to their salvation, is it possible that the same holds true today? It is not certain, but there are grounds for hope in God’s mercy and providence.¹²

Paul tells us, in Romans 1:18–21,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because *that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them*. For since the creation of the world *His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made*, so that they are without excuse. For even though *they knew God*, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Nash is right to point out that this passage, like most of the chapter, is given to explain why God is just in punishing wicked unbelievers, not to map out alternate routes to salvation.¹³ Nevertheless, does it hint that there might be some who have acted upon the evidence available to them because “they knew God,” some who have walked in as much light as they have had, some who have been

¹² A. H. Strong writes, in his *Systematic Theology*, “The patriarchs, though they had no knowledge of a personal Christ, were saved by believing in God as far as God had revealed himself to them; and whoever among the heathen are saved, must in like manner be saved by casting themselves upon God’s plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence. But such faith, even among the patriarchs and heathen, is implicitly a faith in Christ, and would become explicit and conscious trust and submission, whenever Christ were made known to them . . . Since Christ is the Word of God and the Truth of God, he may be received even by those who have not heard of his manifestation in the flesh. . . . We have, therefore, the hope that even among the heathen there may be some, like Socrates, who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit working through the truth of nature and conscience, have found the way of life and salvation.” (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1907), 842–843.

¹³ Nash, 119-120.

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led by the Holy Spirit to care for those in need without hearing Christ's name? Can we hope, based on this, that such people might be saved by Christ's blood because the righteous King knows that when they see Him face to face they will recognize Him, much as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12, even of himself, "then I will know *fully* just as I also have been fully known"?

Paul also writes, in Romans 2:14–16,

For when Gentiles who *do not* have the Law do *instinctively* the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that *they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness* and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Nash is right again to note that this text does not say that such people will be saved.¹⁴ However, having the Law written upon the heart is the great promise God makes to His people in Jeremiah 31:33, repeated in Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16. God's promise to those who have His law written upon their hearts is this: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." While this promise is made to the "house of Israel," one could argue that any who have God's Laws written on their hearts *are* of the "house of Israel," even if they are Gentiles, according to Romans 9:6–8 and 30–31.

Jesus says, in John 6:45, "It is written in the prophets, "And they shall *all* be taught *by God*." Therefore *everyone* who has *heard* and *learned* from the *Father* comes to *Me*." The context of both Christ's own words and His quote from Isaiah 54 are eschatological, but Christ is also explaining why most Jews who hear His words do not become disciples. Only those drawn by the Father accept Him. Only those willing to hear and learn when drawn. But all who *do* hear and learn *will* come to Christ. But when? Jesus says several times in the chapter, "and I will raise him up *in the last days*." Can we hope, on the basis of this text, that "the God of the whole earth" (Isa 54:5) will have taught those willing to hear and learn among "the nations," even if they have not heard of Christ, and that they will "come" to Christ when He, the Shepherd who knows His sheep, calls them after He has raised them up "in the last days"? Yes, we can hope, and we can give hope. In giving this hope, we will persuade many doubters that God *can* be trusted.

Another text which seems to support inclusivism is Acts 10:34–35. Speaking to the God-fearing centurion Cornelius, Peter says, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but *in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him*." There is no

¹⁴ Nash, 121–122.

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mention here of faith in Christ as a requirement, as such faith might not be an option for some of these “righteous pagans.” While in this case Cornelius has learned about the true God from the Jews and has heard of Jesus (v. 38), he has not become a Jew or accepted Christ, but has only feared God and done what is right (v. 2). This is his condition when God uses miraculous means to bring to him the Gospel which the apostles have not yet seen fit to share with Gentiles. Also, Peter says, referring to his vision, “God has shown me that I should not call *any man unholy or unclean*” (v. 28).

He is speaking here specifically of Gentiles who have not accepted Christ yet but have come, with the Holy Spirit’s leading, to fear God and do what is right. He says these people, even though they have not yet accepted Christ and been baptized, are *not unholy or unclean*. If they are not unholy or unclean, then they are clean and holy. Those are the only options. Clean and holy was also the position of faithful and forgiven Israelites, according to the Law. What is more, it is before Cornelius has accepted Christ and received the Holy Spirit and been baptized that “an angel of God” comes to him in vision and says, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God” (v. 4). Dare we hope from this that, say, the “prayers and alms” of the devout Muslim who has not yet met Christ also ascend “as a memorial before God”? Of course, a clean and holy Gentile such as Cornelius recognizes and accepts his Savior when the Gospel is clearly presented, and our call is always to present that Gospel and lift people to Christ, not to tell people they’re okay where they are. But what if such people never hear?

There are many more texts that hint at how God might save those who have never heard of Christ.¹⁵ However, the verses above give us sufficient grounds to hope.

It is important to bear in mind that the Bible is given to offer one route to salvation, not alternate routes. It is given to bring all sinners to the true God and Savior by way of His true revelation of Himself in His Word, not to give us permission to seek God in our own way (or in our own likeness) or in other supposedly sacred writings, even though there might be some truth in them here and there. Furthermore, the Gospel Commission is for us to *make disciples of Christ*, not to explain alternate ways by which the world might be saved through Christ. Accordingly, we should not expect a clear Bible statement about the possibility of salvation for those who have never heard of Christ. Thus, the argument from silence is not really persuasive, whether it is used by exclusivists or inclusivists.

¹⁵ See, for example, I Tim 2:3–6, 4:10; Col 1:16–17; John 1:9, 3:16; I John 4:9, 14; I Cor 5:19; II Pet 3:9; Rom 11:32; Gen 3:15, 9:9–17, 12:3, 14:17–24, 20:1–18; Ps 47:8–9, 82:8, 87:4, 99:2, 102:15, 22; Acts 14:16–17; Exod 18:1–12, 19:5–6; Isa 19:6, 25, 25:6–8; I Pet 2:9; James 1:18, 5:11; Matt 2:1–12, 8:11, 11:21–24, 12:41–42; Amos 9:7; Mal 1:11; Jer 18:7–8; Luke 14:13, 15:11–32, 18:9–14.

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What I tell my students is that the Bible reveals the sure route to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and our call is to share that Gospel with the world. Only those who are born again as children of God and remain in Christ can have the *assurance* of salvation. However, I tell them, I know there are people around the world who have never heard of Jesus, yet reflect Him in their faces and their acts, and this leads me to believe they are living by faith, as revealed by their faithfulness.¹⁶ The Bible does not give me permission to speak with assurance of their salvation, but it gives me reason to hope and pray for their salvation. Meanwhile, again, our duty is to offer Christ to everyone possible.

After hearing this explanation in the context of my Bible classes—each of which is equivalent to about a hundred hours of Bible studies, what with the homework—many agnostic students influenced by religious pluralism have accepted Christ, and many more devout or nominal Christians have been led to surrender and rebirth and devotion to sharing the Good News with those around them. Even for students I don't know who God brings to my office with questions about this topic, this answer often satisfies them and opens their hearts to God's working.

A Call to Arms

Despite the influence of relativism, humanism, and religious pluralism, students on the secular university campus who tire of false freedom and empty lives and seek an answer in Christ are drawn by faith, not by doubt; by salvation, not by suspicion. If we, in a misguided attempt to face liberal Christianity without embarrassment, subscribe to a theology of indeterminacy and ethical relativity, we will be doing the work of the accuser, not of our Advocate. We will be driving people from Christ, not drawing them.

We don't have to compromise to reach students in the secular university, whatever their religious background; we have to stop compromising. We have to stop compromising in what we ask of others. Much more important, for the sake of the Gospel, we have to stop compromising in what we ask of ourselves. People in their teens and twenties are seldom drawn by platitudes, by pretended piety, by phoniness. They want to believe in something that matters, in something with meaning, however challenging.

¹⁶ "Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God's Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. The "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God." Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, [1900] 1941), 385. A popular book filled with examples of this is Don Richardson, *Eternity In Their Hearts*, rev. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981).

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Christ has proven that the most powerful of calls is not the call to a modified, relative, relatively painless and pointless faith, but the call to complete, all out, total, radical commitment, radical surrender, radical integrity, radical love, radical joy, radical transformation, radical holiness, radical discipleship. All for Christ; all through Christ; all by Christ; all in Christ.

When this describes us, it won't matter if we wear the right clothes, know the right slang, or sing the right songs in church. When the army of youth who are going to change this world and bring it to Christ sees this in us and hears us ask for it in them, they will come.

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Generation Angst and the Ethical Paradox of Postmodernity

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Welcome to Postmodernity

In his book *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*, Walter Truett Anderson tells of standing one day on a cliff overlooking the Pacific ocean. He was looking down at a sea otter that bobbed in the surf far below. The otter floated happily and busily on its back in the water, holding an abalone in its forepaws and cracking the abalone's shell with a rock. The waves were coming in, and the otter was rocking about gently on the surface. The little animal was constantly moved this way and that way by the water, but seemed to pay no attention to this movement as it concentrated on its task. Then Anderson says, "I thought, how different from mine its experience of life must be, living in a medium in such flux and so unlike the hard ground on which I stood. But as I thought about it further, I realized that the medium in which I live is far more turbulent than anything the sea otter could ever conceive of—because as a human being, I bob about in a sea of symbols, an ocean of words."¹

What Anderson has in mind is the collapse of belief taking place in our postmodern society because of the overabundance of words and the competing moral vision they articulate. Words communicate ideas. They shape perceptions of reality. An ocean of words in our postmodern world is creating a smorgasbord of diverse values and beliefs where the permanent rightness of certain beliefs and values is no longer accepted, where the idea of objective or absolute or ultimate truth is fast becoming an archaism in our pluralistic American society.

¹Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (HarperSan-Francisco, 1990), ix.

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Like waves coming in and going out, our postmodern world brings constant flux and change. Five fundamental changes characterize the postmodern world view—ways of looking at reality/unreality that are evident in actions people are taking in relation to politics, religion, ethics, and culture. These changes include:

1. *Changes in thinking about thinking.* There is a growing awareness of the multidimensional, relativistic quality of human experience and the mind's ability to see itself and to see itself seeing itself and to step outside of reality constructs to examine them. This opens the way toward the idea that all explanations of reality are themselves constructions—human, useful, but not perfect.

2. *Changes in identity and boundaries.* Postmodernism is the age of fading boundaries, the twilight of a mind-set that structured reality with sharp lines. The boundaries between nations, races, classes, cultures, religions, moral systems, have all become less distinct. With it comes the loss of one-dimensional social identities. Multiple identity has become a common feature of postmodern life.

3. *Changes in learning and the purpose of learning.* The kind of learning that becomes necessary for survival in the postmodern age is the discovery kind of learning that includes an ongoing process of reality-construction.

4. *Changes in morals, ethics, and values.* Postmodernism accepts morality and moral discourse as a living and central element in human existence. Morality is not merely handed down, but learned and created and re-created out of experience and in dialogue with others. The morals of today are not the morals of yesterday, and they will not be the morals of tomorrow.

5. *Changes in relationship to traditions, customs, and institutions.*² Obviously these changes are interrelated. Changes in thinking and about thinking affect ethics and values. And changes in identity and boundaries affect relationships to traditions, customs, and institutions, etc. But ethics and values are the ultimate bottom line of how all these changes really touch human life. Because of this, ethics and values are, in fact, the driving force behind all other changes. People are pursuing certain values and desire an ethic that facilitates those values.

I want to take a few moments to outline morality as it is expressed in the postmodern perspective, then follow with a reality check on the emergent fiction postmodernism creates with respect to ethics.³ Finally, I want to share some pastoral perspectives for an Adventist ethos in the postmodern context.

²Anderson 254.

³According to Grenz, "*Postmodernism* refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set. *Postmodernity*, in turn, refers to an emerging epoch, the era in which we are living, the time when the postmodern outlook increasingly shapes our society. Postmodernity is the era in which postmodern ideas, attitudes, and values reign—when postmodernism molds culture. It is the era of the postmodern society." Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

Morality in Postmodern Perspective

Anyone tuned into the contemporary dialogue on postmodernism knows that when it comes to the question of the postmodern approach to morality, it is all too often associated with the celebration of the supposed “emancipation” from moral standards and the disavowal of moral responsibility.⁴ We are witnessing, some assert, the “demise of the ethical” and the transition to a new “post-deontic” era where we are placed beyond moral duty. Morality is seen as having reached the end of the line. Such fashionable pronouncements cascade from the scientific and academic community, the arts, as well as the entertainment and news media, saturating our society’s view of ethics and morality so that the average GenXer believes there are no rules, no right, no wrong, no meaning, and no absolute truth.⁵

I particularly single out Generation X because it is the first generation to see the world through postmodern eyes. This generation truly thinks differently, perceives differently, believes differently, and processes truth differently from any previous generation.⁶ It is the generation leading the way towards relativism. According to Barna, adults in this generation reject absolute truth by a staggering 78 percent.⁷ The significance here lies in what Eugene Peterson refers to as “unwell in a new way.” He notes that there was a time when ideas and living styles were initiated in the adult world and filtered down to youth. Now the movement has been reversed: lifestyles are generated at the youth level and pushed upward. Dress fashions, hair styles, music, and morals adopted by youth are evangelically pushed on an adult world, which in turn seems eager to be converted.⁸

But the collapse of belief taking place in postmodern society does not, it turns out, really result in a collapse of morality: quite the opposite. According to Anderson:

“The early postmodern years are bringing, instead of collapse of morality, a renaissance of searching for principles of life that we variously call morals, eth-

⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 2-4.

⁵Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 114, 115, 117; Anderson, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be*; Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to the Theories of the Contemporary* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Thomas Docherty, *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993); Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1993).

⁶Ford, 113.

⁷As cited by William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), 27.

⁸Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 128-129. (To be fair, it is true that many who have studied medieval and renaissance social history and literature would assert that those in their teens and twenties have nearly always formed the styles of their eras.)

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ics, values. And this is not merely a single shift of values but a continual dynamic process of moral discourse and discovery.⁹

For the eminent sociologist and postmodern theorist Zygmunt Bauman, the great issues of ethics have not lost their importance at all: they simply need to be seen and dealt with in a wholly new way.¹⁰ He sees our postmodern era as presenting the dawning, rather than a twilight, for ethics. The reality is not that postmodernism brings an end to morality or ethics, but that it brings an end to morality or ethics as modernism has framed it.¹¹ Postmodernism brings a radically new understanding of morality and ethics over against the many paths previously followed by ethical theories which began looking more like blind alleys.¹² I would suggest that as a sociologist, Bauman helps us understand the IS of postmodern ethics. I will only broadly outline his main thesis.

First, “The distinctly postmodern ethical problematic arises primarily from two crucial features of the postmodern condition: *pluralism* of authority, and the centrality of *choice* in the self-constitution of postmodern agents.”¹³

According to Bauman, pluralism of authority simply means the apparent absence of any universalizing authority. This rules out, then, the setting of binding norms which moral agents must obey. In effect it places moral responsibility wholly upon the moral agent. In other words, moral agents face now point-blank the consequences of their actions. This increased moral autonomy naturally leads to the question of ethical choice as a defining trait of postmodern agents. “Self-monitoring, self-reflection and self-evaluation become principle activities of the agents, indeed the mechanism synonymical with their self-constitution.”¹⁴

In the postmodern context, moral agents are constantly faced with moral issues and obliged to choose between equally well founded (or equally unfounded) ethical precepts. The choice always means the assumption of responsibility, and for this reason bears the character of a moral act.¹⁵ “It requires us not only to make moral choices, but also to add to our life-making responsibilities the task of creating and re-creating our ideas of what morality is.”¹⁶ Bauman terms this situation the “ethical paradox of postmodernity”:

The ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restored to agents the fulness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised. Ethical tasks of individuals grow while the socially produced resources to fulfill them

⁹Anderson, 259.

¹⁰Bauman, 4.

¹¹Ibid., 2.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 201.

¹⁴Ibid., 201-203.

¹⁵Ibid., 203.

¹⁶Anderson, 156.

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shrink. Moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice. . . . In a cacophony of moral voices, none which is likely to silence the others, the individuals are thrown back on their own subjectivity as the only ultimate ethical authority. At the same time, however, they are told repeatedly about the irreparable relativism of any moral code.¹⁷

I want to note Bauman's reference to "the loneliness of moral choice" and the angst that this ethical paradox obviously suggests. The postmodern mindset is in sharp contrast to the optimistic cultural forecasts modernism gave promise of in terms of inevitable human progress through human reason, values, and abilities. Modernism emerged out of the deep human desire for structure in a world where human order appeared vulnerable and devoid of reliable foundations. Modernism was the attempt to bring structure and order to human existence, to order society in a way where certainty, orderliness, and homogeneity became the order of the day. Because modernism appears to have failed to deliver, postmodernity brings with it an existential insecurity—a pessimism where people are left alone with their fears not only about their own survival, but the world's survival.¹⁸

According to Bauman postmodernity has simply *privatized* our fears. This privatization of fears means privatization of escape routes and escape vehicles. It means DIY (Do It Yourself) escape. The only thing society can be expected to offer is a set of "self-assembly kits for DIY work." The social world becomes for the individual merely a pool of choices.¹⁹

Adding to this angst is a very practical dilemma: our consciences naturally yearn to have our moral choices affirmed. That requires some objective truth principle outside our own thinking, something postmodernism says doesn't exist.²⁰ According to Bauman, "the moral self is a self without a foundation."²¹ A person can never be entirely sure that he or she has acted in the right manner. "The moral self is a self always haunted by the fact that it is not moral

¹⁷Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, *Ibid.*, xxii.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, xxiv, xvii-xviii. "The postmodern consciousness has abandoned the Enlightenment belief in inevitable progress. Postmoderns have not sustained the optimism that characterized previous generations. To the contrary, they evidence a gnawing pessimism. . . . The postmodern generation is also convinced that life on earth is fragile" (Grenz, 13). See also, Ford, 113-118. (Some might say they have merely internalized and taken to heart the ecological agenda, political cynicism, and counter-cultural longings of their parents and so reaped the whirlwind.)

¹⁹*Ibid.*, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, xviii.

²⁰"Behind the postmodern ethical paradox hides a genuine practical dilemma: acting on one's moral convictions is naturally pregnant with a desire to win for such convictions an evermore universal acceptance; but every attempt to do just that smacks of the already discredited bid for domination" (Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, xxiii); "In so many situations in which the choice of what to do is ours and apparently ours alone, we look in vain for the firm and trusty rules which may reassure us that once we followed them, we could be sure to be in the right" (*idem. Postmodern Ethics*, 20).

²¹Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 62.

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enough.”²² It is moral, nonetheless, when it has set itself standards it cannot reach or placated itself with self-assurances that the standard has been reached.²³

Second, Bauman draws a contrast between moral responsibility and ethical theories or rules. Ethics provides the tools for moral life—the code of moral behavior, the assembly of the rules of thumb we follow. It answers the ever burning human question, “Why should I be moral?” In the postmodern perspective, however, previously followed ethical theories have not done a very good job of either answering the question, “Why should I be moral?” or outlining appropriate moral life. In other words, it is the ethical theories and the ethical rules that modernism has finally proved to be lacking.²⁴ It is the ethical theories, not the moral concerns of modern times, that have come to look like so many blind alleys.²⁵ According to Bauman, then, the postmodern perspective shows the relativity of ethical theories and the moral practices which ethical theories recommend or support, but not the relativity of morality itself.²⁶

In addition, Bauman suggests that the plethora of ethical theories have each in some way robbed the individual moral agent of his or her moral responsibility. Ethical theories and rules have depersonalized morality.²⁷ The artificially constructed ethical theories and rules of various sociological groups have dissolved the moral selves into an all-embracing “we” where personal moral impulse, moral responsibility, and moral intimacy is lost.²⁸ The failure of modernism’s ethical theory enables postmodernism to focus again on “the mystery of morality inside me” rather than morality being something outside of me. Hence, postmodernism becomes morality without external ethical code.²⁹ The notion of no universal standards does not release us from moral responsibility: it only increases it. It brings moral responsibility home to where it should be, inside the moral agent. Rules can be universalized, but morality can’t. Moral duties make humans alike; responsibility is what makes them into individuals.³⁰

Finally, Bauman speaks of postmodernism as bringing the “re-enchantment of the world”³¹ The postmodern mindset represents an abandonment of the rationalist belief system. The postmodern framework allows for the existence of realities that science cannot measure—the supernatural, the transrational, the spiritual, the paradoxical, the numinous, and mystery.³² Postmodernism thus

²²Ibid., 80.

²³Ibid., 81.

²⁴Ibid., 14.

²⁵Ibid., 2.

²⁶Ibid., 14.

²⁷Ibid., 16-36.

²⁸Ibid., 47.

²⁹Ibid., 31-36.

³⁰Ibid., 53, 54.

³¹Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, vii-xi.

³²See Anderson, 187-227; Ford, 123. As Anderson notes, in a chapter he calls “The Magic Bazaar,” “we seem to be in a world with more religion than there has ever been before. However, the

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opens up the ability to deal with aspects of morality that modernism often struggled against. We learn again to accept contingency and respect ambiguity, to feel regard for human emotions, to appreciate actions without purpose and calculable rewards. Not all actions need to justify and explain themselves to be worthy of esteem. There is the ability to live with events and acts that are not only not-yet-explained, but inexplicable.³³ It opens the way to re-personalize morality, to get in touch with the “mystery of morality inside me.”

Postmodernism elevates feeling to a level on par with, or superior to, rational thought. The postmodern worldview has intuition and emotion as its center, not intellect. The first question asked by a postmodernist is not “What do you think?” but “How do you feel?”³⁴ Subjective experience supercedes logic and objective facts.³⁵ Postmodernism creates a generation which is accustomed to paradoxes and processes truth relationally rather than propositionally.³⁶ Moral reflection and action follows accordingly. Such moral reflection and action is ambiguous, paradoxical, and often processed relationally.

According to Bauman, “the postmodern re-enchantment of the world carries a chance of facing human moral capacity point-blank.”³⁷ Postmodernity, one may say, is *modernism without illusions*.³⁸ As such it opens the way to morality without the illusions—moral choices are indeed choices, and moral dilemmas are indeed dilemmas. There is a certain amount of messiness to human existence and moral reality. Moral conflicts do occur.

In summary, postmodern ethics includes the following: pluralism of authority, centrality of choice, existential angst, re-personalizing morality, ethical systems discredited while morality is affirmed, and the re-enchantment of the world.

Reality Check—the Emergent Fiction

During the CBS evening news with Dan Rather, there is frequently a feature called “Reality Check.” During this news segment a report is made of some claim or statement by a government official, politician, etc., and then bam, a big rubber stamp comes across the screen that says, “Reality Check.” The news commentator then goes on to tell the other side (or the real side) of the issue in order to set the facts straight. As a sociologist, Bauman has persuasively defined morality from the postmodern perspective. He presents the IS of postmodern

situation is not really one to warm the heart of a true believer; the growth seems to have been quantitative rather than qualitative—more things to believe in, but not necessarily more of what we used to call belief” (Anderson, 187).

³³Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 33-34.

³⁴Ford, 128.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

³⁶Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 51, 46.

³⁷Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 34.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 32.

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ethics. One may take issue with Bauman's own position on the issues he outlines, but his description of morality from a postmodern perspective is rather fair. He is correct in asserting basically that moral responsibility touches the heart of who I am as a person. He is correct, too, in noting that "we are not moral thanks to society (we are only ethical or law-abiding thanks to it), we *are* society, thanks to being moral. At the heart of sociality is the loneliness of the moral person."³⁹ Our question is whether or not postmodern ethics as he has described it fits moral reality, whether or not it fits what *ought to be* in terms of human moral theory and practice.

First, the postmodern ethics Bauman describes shares some of the same assumptions about human nature and the contingency of moral/social order that modernism has projected. I tend to agree with Scott H. Moore's assessment. He describes "postmodernity as a 'turn' rather than as an epoch or an era. Postmodernity is a modern problem and a modern phenomenon."⁴⁰ "Postmodernity is not what comes after modernity falls away, but it is that turn in which modernity's assumptions have been problematized and the continuity of our confidence has been called into question."⁴¹ Bauman would probably agree, as he himself states that postmodernity is *modernity without illusions*.

There are some fundamental shared presuppositions, then, between modernism and postmodernism when it comes to ethics, human nature, and human ability. Modernism celebrated human reason, human values, and the ability of human beings to bring social/moral structure to personal life as well as to the world. At bottom, postmodernism does the very same in that it celebrates the human moral capacity and human nature's ability to rise to challenging moral exigencies of contemporary society. It, along with modernism, is essentially humanistic.

Second, while postmodern ethics correctly critiques previously followed ethical systems for their apparent failure to deliver, and in doing so, asserts that it is the ethical theories and ethical rules, not morality itself, that are being called into question, it (postmodern ethics) nevertheless throws the baby out with the bath water. It overlooks the fact that the real problem is not with ethical theories per se, but with ethical systems that don't deliver. It denies the possibility that there might be an adequate moral theory out there, yet to be grasped and articulated for human moral formation and reflection. It also assumes an unnatural dichotomy between moral responsibility and ethical theory where the moral agent is said to be robbed of his/her autonomy or personal moral responsibility if the demands of some external ethical theory becomes universal and binding.

In principle, ethical theories and moral responsibility are not mutually exclusive. The universalizing of moral principles does not necessitate the dimin-

³⁹Ibid., 61.

⁴⁰Scott H. Moore, "Era and Epoch, Epoch and Era: Christian Intellectuals in the Postmodern Turn," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26/2 (Winter 1996): 133.

⁴¹Ibid., 137.

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ishing of the moral self. What is needed is an ethical theory that affirms moral responsibility in all of its necessary features and at the same time gives the moral agent the motivation and guidance it needs towards right moral choice.

A valid critique of modernity's ethical systems does not necessarily mean there are no valid systems at all. The apparent plurality of equally well founded (or equally unfounded) moral authorities does not negate this either. In fact it increases moral responsibility or choice, because the moral agent must become informed enough on the issues to be morally discriminating if he or she is to make the right moral choice.

In addition, the reality of human nature and the age-long phenomenon of enduring human problems points to the existence of moral structure corresponding to human nature. When the noted educator and prolific writer Mortimer Adler was once asked by a television interviewer, "How do you know there is a real, tangible world outside our minds?" Adler slowly turned his head toward the interviewer, and without cracking a smile, said, "It's no mystery. The world outside my mind never lets me forget it is there. When I run into a wall, reality abruptly stops me. When I throw cold water on my face, reality wakes me up. If I stub my toe or burn myself, reality brings me a taste of pain. If I ever think the external world is not there, reality finds a way to slap some sense into me. The external world is there. I have the bruises to prove it."⁴²

How could our postmodern society know for sure that there is moral structure to human nature and human relationships? The real moral world outside all this great sounding postmodern idea of the relativity of ethical theories and rules never lets us forget it. People on their own are stubbing their moral toes. People on their own are getting beat up and hurt. And so with societies. The question of ethics can never be pluralistic because the moral issues our world faces are very much human and transcend time and culture.⁴³ Bauman admits of this when he states,

Not all ethical issues found in a postmodern habitat are new. Most importantly, the possibly extemporal issues of the orthodox ethics—the rules binding short-distance, face-to-face intercourse between moral agents under conditions of physical and moral proximity—remain presently as much alive and poignant as ever before. In no way are they postmodern; as a matter of fact, they are not modern either.⁴⁴

Human beings need an external moral compass (ethical theory) in order to be morally responsible. When I visited the famed and very beautiful Cliffs of

⁴²As told by William D. Watkins, 225.

⁴³"They have accepted a reality that isn't real, that doesn't square with either the physical world or the moral order that is really there. They keep trying to live in the worlds of their own creation, but they keep running up against the real world, and they become bruised and broken in the collision. . . . they are bucking reality and are getting beat up in the process" (Watkins, 226).

⁴⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 201.

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More in Western Ireland, I learned something about rules and the centrality of human choice. These impressive cliffs rise 700 or so feet from the Atlantic ocean. Large open meadows roll right up to the edge where paths wind their way along the precipices. Obviously people come to see and look down. And some have fallen down. Over the years they have built miles of stone wall with warning signs along the way. I was intrigued with the way some of those signs read—they don't say, "People have fallen." Rather, they read, "People are falling." Despite warnings and barriers and slippery slopes and loose rocks, people keep falling. Why? Because they don't take the warning signs seriously. They don't need signs or fences. They think they know enough on their own. They get close and look down because they are confident of their ability to judge the situation. Yet people keep falling and dying.

Ethical theory works within three interrelated levels—theological and philosophical bases, universal principles, and rules for action in specific areas of life. When it is asserted that the moral agent needs no moral framework to work within, we are basically assuming too much of our fallen human nature and are overlooking how very much we need guidance in making moral choices. After all, as Bauman notes, our inner being cries out for such universal objective structure in order, not only to guide us through moral dilemmas, but to also assure our conscience that we have done well.

I'm intrigued with William D. Watkins' assessment of the our postmodern moral perspective in his recent book, *The New Absolutes*. Commenting on whether or not relativism really rules the American conscience—Do we really live as if right and wrong, truth and error, are up for grabs? Are we really operating without any sense of objective values?—he states, "the answers lie not so much in stated belief as in actual behavior. That difference makes all the difference in the world."⁴⁵ He asserts that:

We Americans are absolutists, despite any rhetoric to the contrary. Over the years, we have certainly changed what we believe and how we live, but we have not embraced relativism. . . . The American people may say they accept the notion that a truth claim or moral claim is relative, but they do not behave as if this is true. Their behavior exposes what they really accept—that what they believe is true or right for them should be (and actually is) true or right for everyone else.⁴⁶

Watkins' bottom line is that since we are a nation of absolutists at odds with one another, our differences must be over different understandings of what we believe is absolutely true.⁴⁷In other words, no one ever truly functions without a world-view or system of absolutes. The postmodern metanarrative is simply that there are no metanarratives except one's own.

⁴⁵Watkins, 34.

⁴⁶Ibid., 44.

⁴⁷Ibid.

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This brings me to Ecclesiastes and what I think Solomon has to say about postmodern ethics and about postmodernity's ocean of words with their competing visions of moral and spiritual reality. "For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness" (Eccl 5:7). "The fool multiplies words and no man knows what will happen" (Eccl 10:14). Solomon's point is that there are a lot of words being spoken, some of which are just plain empty, and they all can cause a lot of moral and spiritual confusion. Words are very powerful. They shape our perception of reality. They create reality for others as well as ourselves.

There's an old joke about three umpires that takes us to the heart of what Solomon has in mind. They were sitting around having a beer after a baseball game. One says, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way they are." Another responds, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way I see 'em." The third umpire says, "There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't *nothin'* until I call 'em."⁴⁸ That third umpire is clearly postmodern.

Solomon is talking about our tendency to create our own reality through words or describe reality as we see it or want it to be seen. Words express what we think, what we want to see happen. Words for Solomon are very important. God creates reality by what He says (Ecclesiastes, I suggest, was written with Genesis in hand, as evidenced by its themes). God spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. His word is truth. In a lesser way, we create reality by what we say, whether verbally or in our minds.

In fact, Solomon himself did a little reality-creating. Referring to his writing of Ecclesiastes, he says, "*the Preacher sought to find delightful words*" (Eccl 12:10). Solomon was a master preacher. An orator who knew the power of words to create reality. A writer who understood what words can do. So he chose beautiful words. Creative words. Words that would catch attention, convince, persuade.

Besides, Solomon says, "*But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body*" (Eccl 12:12). He understood the existential angst and soul wearing pain that comes with the challenge of wading through all possible roads one could travel to find the meaning and purpose of life, or to know how he or she should live morally. The existential angst and soul wearing pain that comes with creating one's own reality, one's own morality. Solomon tried it all, everything under the sun—the hedonist's solution of partying harder, the philosopher's solution of thinking deeper, the intellectual's solution of studying further, the materialist's solution of acquiring more, and the religionist's solution of doing church.⁴⁹ His "been there, done that, now what" experience makes him very postmodern, and with all the existential angst and soul wearing pain that goes with it. "*I set my mind to seek and explore . . . it is a grievous task which God has given to the*

⁴⁸Anderson, 75.

⁴⁹See Ed Young, *Been There. Done That. Now What?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

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sons of men to be afflicted with,” he says (Eccl 1:13). “*In much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain,*” he adds (Eccl 1:18).

It is astonishing that Solomon would write this when books were rare. In much simpler times. In a pre-modern era. His thoughts apply to our postmodern time as if the book were written only yesterday and suggest to me that the post-modern condition is not all that different than any other age, except that it might be more sophisticated, radical, and all-encompassing in terms of its influence and grip on contemporary culture.

Ecclesiastes outlines the whole aspect of our postmodern world and its perspective on morality—the bobbing like an otter in an ocean of beliefs and values and ideas. It includes the plurality of authority where we are pressed with the centrality of personal choice and feel the angst and uncertainty and fear that go along with it. For sure, there is the philosophical and practical emptiness of all the explored ethical theories— a “Been there. Done that. Now What? So What! They don’t deliver. I’m empty and confused, and alone.”

We find, too, Solomon’s rational attempt to dis-enchant his world by leaving God out of the equation. A Danish philosopher tells the story of a spider who dropped a single strand down from the top rafter of an old barn and began to weave his web. Days, weeks, and months went by, and the web grew. It regularly provided the spider food as flies, mosquitoes, and other small insects were caught in its elaborate maze. The spider built his web larger and larger until it became the envy of all the other spiders. One day this productive spider was traveling across his beautifully woven web and noticed a single strand going up into the darkness of the rafters. *I wonder why this is here?* he thought. *It doesn't serve to catch me any dinner.* And saying that, the spider climbed as high as he could and severed the single strand that was his sustenance. When he did, the entire web slowly began to tumble to the floor of the barn, taking the spider with it. That's what happened to Solomon. As Ed Young writes,

Somewhere along the way . . . Solomon clipped the strand that united him with God *above the sun* and decided to find meaning and satisfaction in a life lived strictly *under the sun*. In other words, he chose a life lived on his own terms, in a natural dimension with no reference to the divine.⁵⁰

Reading Ecclesiastes we can sense how Solomon would systematically critique the ethical systems of his day and conclude in the process that personal moral responsibility could never ever be gotten away from no matter how many ethical systems didn’t work.

In the end, Solomon calls for a “Reality Check.” Like postmoderns, he accepts the need to re-personalize morality. He re-enchants his world and goes the

⁵⁰Ibid., 15, 16.

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next step to accept the reality that God has something to say, that in this ocean of words there is a word from the Lord, that there are right and truthful words.

Notice how he ends Ecclesiastes: “*The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly*” (Eccl 12:10). He wanted to find creative, captivating words. Convincing words. Persuasive words. But he wanted to write words of truth. And he wanted to put these true words together correctly. The NIV says it this way, “*what he wrote was upright and true*” (Eccl 12:10).

In effect, Solomon is pitting God’s word against the ocean of words in his world. He is pitting God’s word against our words. He affirms an ultimate reality. An ultimate authority. There are some “well-driven nails” of certainty, as he goes on to say—“*the words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails*” (Eccl 12:11). There are nails of certainty to hang our perceptions of moral reality on.

It all comes down to this: “*The conclusion, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgement, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil*” (Eccl 12:13, 14). Human ethical systems discredited while morality is still affirmed? Yes! Centrality of choice? Yes! Re-personalized morality? Yes! Re-enchantment of the world? Yes! Plurality of authorities? NO! Existential angst? Only if you don’t fear God or accept His pattern for moral life.

Like the otter, we can survive in a world of flux and movement because of some very fundamental moral/spiritual principles that exist for all human beings, no matter how much movement of ideas there may be around him or her.

Adventist Ethos in a Postmodern Context

In conclusion I want to touch on the question of what shape a Seventh-day Adventist approach to ethics should include. I am not, here, outlining a comprehensive moral theory. I am merely reacting to postmodern ethics as I have just described it—plurality of authority, centrality of choice, re-personalizing morality, re-enchantment of the world, existential angst and insecurity, the discrediting of prevailing ethical theories without relativizing moral responsibility.

Stanely J. Grenz ends his *Primer on Postmodernism* with a chapter on “The Gospel and the Postmodern Context.”⁵¹ Here he asserts that as Christians we must both stand our ground and share ground in a postmodern world. I will interpret him in the narrower context of ethics rather than the wider context of the gospel which he has in view. On the one hand, we will reject postmodernism’s abandonment of the belief in universal truth and it’s corollary for ethics—there are no rules, no right, no wrong, no meaning. If truth is relative, then morality is relative. We can accept the plurality of authority as a sociological fact, but not

⁵¹Grenz, 161-174.

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an ideological one. As Alister McGrath notes, there is a difference between pluralism as a fact of life and pluralism as an ideology. We can accept the former, but not the latter.⁵²

When it comes to the question of authority we will assume that God knows what He is talking about and that He is the ultimate authority for ethics. We will continue to affirm, as well, that Scripture is an ideal and primary moral textbook that communicates morality through story, principles, concrete commands, and divine example. The moral address of Scripture is from a personal God to us as persons. The moral address of Scripture is internal—dealing with being and doing—not legalistic, abstract, or external. It speaks to the heart and examines our intentions. It is sensitive to human beings in a sinful deprived condition, in need of grace, forgiveness, moral vision, and power. And it is metacultural.

On the other hand, we will take advantage of postmodernism's critique of modernism's assumptions and supposed accomplishments with its elevation of human reason and its utopian social ethical systems for structuring human society.⁵³ Morality at bottom is not purely rational. Solomon said it succinctly: "*What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted*" (Eccl 1:15). In other words, no amount of knowledge or rationalism will make an immoral person moral, or a selfish person generous, an impure mind turn from pornography. Nor does knowledge or rationalism make something of nothing. It can't create something that is not there. If a void exists in a person's life, rational knowledge will not fill it. According to Ecclesiastes, human reason on its own opens the way toward much grief.

Postmodernity's re-enchantment of the world has opened up a tremendous opportunity for Christian ethics. As Kevin Ford writes:

The postmodern mind set represents an abandonment of the rationalist belief system. The postmodern framework allows for the existence of realities that science cannot measure—the supernatural, the trans-rational, the spiritual, the eternal, the ineffable, the numinous. These are all realities that are central to the biblical story . . . The collapse of the modern worldview has given the Christian worldview a beachhead in the postmodern mind.⁵⁴

Win Manning asserts, "It opens up the ability to deal with spiritual and metaphysical issues on a level that was not possible twenty years ago."⁵⁵ Grenz

⁵²Alister E. McGrath, "The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Christian Church," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/3 (September 1992): 361-363.

⁵³Inasmuch as postmodernity represents a perspective that calls into question the world of facts, particularly the world of facts as the non-Christian, secular world understands it, then Christians have a vested interest in denying this world of facts. Thus, Christians have every reason to be excited about the opportunities that are opened up by postmodernity, not because we deny the existence of just any collection of facts but because we deny the existence of a particular set of facts" (Moore, 134).

⁵⁴Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation*, 123.

⁵⁵Win Manning of the George Gallup Institute as quoted by Ford, 124.

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suggests that the contours of a postmodern gospel would be post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noetic.⁵⁶ I believe the same would be true for ethics. Postmodern Christian ethics would undoubtedly be post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, post-poetic, and post-individualistic. Ethics would touch the whole person. Ethics would take people beyond mere knowledge of right and wrong toward being and doing. Ethics would lead past human agency toward objective truths and a personal God Who both commands and empowers.

I find Grenz's notion of a post-individualistic gospel (and thus Christian ethic) very intriguing and useful for Christian ethics in a postmodern context. One of the phenomena of postmodernity is the shift from the raw individualism of modernity toward community and significant relationships. Truth in the postmodern context is processed more relationally than it is rationally or propositionally.⁵⁷ Feelings and relationships supersede logic and reason. The same is true for morality, ethics, and values. The postmodern mind does not respond well to intellectual arguments. Logic is looser, but relationships are more powerful. There is a social dynamic to moral thinking and decision making. A Generation Xer who mirrors postmodernism will say, "*Let me see it in your life before you tell it to me with your words.*"

This says volumes about the power of morally mature Christians to influence and mold people's lives, to model the beauty of biblical moral life in such a way that one has the right to explain the reasons afterward. It is very biblical: "*Follow me as I follow Christ,*" Paul says. Here lies the potential power behind our unique message for this world filled with competing voices. Our power to engage people with truth, whether theological or moral, will be in proportion to the power that those truths have had in our individual and community moral experience.

This brings me to my final thought—the enduring existential angst and insecurity that weighs so heavily upon our postmodern generation because of moral failure, moral dilemma, and perceived (no matter how much postmodernism will deny it) moral duty. The sense of helplessness, of hopelessness, of gnawing loneliness, is real, driving many towards cynicism and ambivalence in terms of any solution. Ours is the challenge of bridging to postmodern yearnings and postmodern thirst. To assure them we are not out there on our own. That there is *someone* we can trust. That there is *something* we can trust. But they must see the difference in our lives. They must be able to "read between the lines" of our everyday lives and the moral choices we make only sweet peace and security. They must read in our Adventist ethos something other than the confusion and angst that they find in our world.

⁵⁶Grenz, 167.

⁵⁷Celek and Dieter, 51.

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Alister McGrath suggests the most powerful solution is to orient ourselves toward an event, not an idea, per se.⁵⁸ That event is the story of Jesus. For our media-saturated, story hungry postmodern generation, Leighton Ford suggests “The Power of Story”⁵⁹—where telling the story of Jesus and the story of how Jesus has touched our own personal life creates vision which transforms character and yields compelling evangelistic influence and power to change people’s lives for Christ. It gives people a point of connection in their everyday lives, enabling them to see how Jesus *the Truth* and the truth of Jesus can interact with their own moral lives.

In conclusion I would have us note the words of Scott Moore:

the rules in postmodernity come down to this: the *regulae fide*. It is the rule of faith . . . some of these rules are going to look very much like premodern forms of discourse. Some of the rules are going to be new and innovative and exciting. Some of them are going to be very sensible and reasonable. They are going to be very modern because postmodernity is not what comes after modernity falls away, but it is that turn in which modernity’s assumptions have been problematized and the continuity of our confidence has been called into question.⁶⁰

As Seventh-day Adventists we have the privilege of seizing the opportunities postmodernism brings us in a way that enables us to present a biblical alternative that genuinely fills the moral spiritual angst of a generation caught in ethical paradox.

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⁵⁸Alister E. McGrath, “The Christian Church’s Response to Pluralism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/4 (December 1992): 497-499.

⁵⁹Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1994).

⁶⁰Moore, 137.

Some Basic Hermeneutic Principles Established By Christ for the Exegetes of All Centuries

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Modern hermeneutics is in a crisis. It is confused, disoriented, and in a state of revolution. Each exegete interprets as he thinks best and moreover wants his particular perspective to form one of the basic norms in the hermeneutic world, or at least each exegete wants his particular interpretation to be kept in the forefront of the academic world.¹ As Larkin has precisely noted, the pluralism of the postmodern hermeneutic enterprise is one of chaotic diversity that generates in its participants a cynical or apathetic lack of commitment.² Third world biblical hermeneutics can roughly be divided into two categories, a liberation focus and a culturally sensitive approach.³ Over the past years, western theological circles have mainly been exposed to the theology of the Latin American liberation movement with its strict liberation agenda. The feminist movement, which has been felt in all cultural contexts, has also left its mark on the field of hermeneutics,⁴ with various feminist interpretations emerging in recent years. This ex-

¹Barton emphasizes that this situation is not so much an issue regarding the interpretation of any particular book, but is more acute in regards to the methods that should be employed in studying them all. John Barton, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 1; hereafter *Biblical Interpretation*. Uríbarri in turn mentions that the plurality of current exegetical methods have notably divorced the exegesis from the theology. Gabino Uríbarri, "Interlocutores de la teología de la segunda etapa postconciliar," *Estudios Eclesiásticos*, 73 (1998), 172.

²William J. Larkin, "Culture, Scripture's Meaning, and Biblical Authority: Critical Hermeneutics for the 90s," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992), 172.

³R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Vernacular Resurrections: An Introduction," in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1999), 11.

⁴For a synthesis of the liberation theologies see, T. Schmeller, "Liberation Theologies," John Hayes, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 2:66-74, hereafter *DBI*. For a description of the method of feminist interpretation see, V. C. Phillips, "Feminist Inter-

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treme diversity of exegetical proposals⁵ could well be explained as “symptoms of the decomposition of interpretation and hermeneutics” at the current time.⁶

Now—as the modern world collapses into postmodernism,⁷ fearing some unknown apocalyptic cataclysm on the threshold of a new millennium, or when the idea of a stable home is becoming more of an elusive concept even as we extol the global village dream or when a reevaluation of the ancestral and native is looked upon to be the element *sine qua non* of the exegetical task—now, more than ever, we need to look for orientation in the Scriptures, always bearing in mind the interpretive principles instituted by the Lord of the Scriptures Himself. We believe that in His Word, God Himself has already given us guiding principles for any hermeneutic task.

1. Ignorance of what God has revealed can only produce an ignorant and mistaken hermeneutic.

“*You do err, ignoring the Scriptures.*” Matt 22:29

“*You err a lot.*” Mark 12:24, 27

In these verses Jesus uses two verbs that are so clear that there is no room for supposition. To err⁸ and to ignore⁹ are serious faults in any attempt at exegesis. It is impossible to rightly interpret divine revelation while at the same time ignoring it.¹⁰ In these two passages Jesus not only speaks of what happens

pretation,” *DBI*, 1:338-398. For a perspective on this interpretation, see Ann Loades, “Feminist Interpretation,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 50-56.

⁵For a detailed discussion of modern hermeneutic theories, see John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, especially Anthony Thiselton, “Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics,” 25-113. For a review of the hermeneutical trends regarding Old Testament studies, see L. Alonso-Scholke, “Trends: Plurality of Methods, Priority of Issues,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 285-292.

⁶Joseph Ratzinger, *La interpretación bíblica en crisis. Problemas del fundamento y la orientación de la exégesis hoy* (Lima: Vida y Espiritualidad, 1955), 11.

⁷Larkin, “Culture, Scripture’s Meaning, and Biblical Authority,” 175.

⁸*Planao* is “to err, be led astray.” The passive form *planasthe* is “to be deceived, led astray.” The Greek term is equivalent to “wander astray, to be lost, out of the way, wrong.” (Herbert Braun, s.v., “*planao*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 6:229-231, hereafter *TDNT*). The term implies to be entirely out of reality, or the truth, or to be totally clueless, wrong, and deceived.

⁹*Eidotes*, is the act. ptc. m. pl. of *oida* that means “to learn, know how, be familiar with, know, acknowledge, understand.” The participle is really explicatory of *touto* (e.g., *dia touto planasthe, me eidotes* . . . , “this is why you are in error, you ignore [do not know] . . .”). A. T. Robertson, *The Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 700. The ptc. preceded by *me* just means “do not know, do not understand, do not recognize, ignore.”

¹⁰Jesus mentions two crucial things of which the Pharisees were ignorant: “the Scriptures and the power of God”—*tas grafas, mede ten dunamin tou theou*. The Scriptures are a direct reference to the set of the sacred books that contain the divine revelation. In fact Jesus is referring to the Old Testament canon that was at that time respected as inspired by God. The actual Christian consensus understands that the Scriptures are the canonical books of both Old and New Testaments.

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when the given revelation is ignored, but goes on to predict the degree of error at which one arrives by utilizing this ignorance: “You err a lot.” That is to say, one arrives at a gross error.

A central feature of this ignorance as it is seen today is the refusal to accept the Scriptures as God’s revelation of truth. This mindset limits God’s power to the human finite. God has thousands of ways of working, and we know those ways He has revealed to us. Even these we only vaguely understand through a veil of ignorance. Paul in his writings demonstrates the corrupt situation in which the Greek-Roman world of his day was submerged due to the ignorance (voluntary or involuntarily) of what God has revealed, with all its disastrous consequences (Rom 1:19-25).

2. A hermeneutic consensus of the theology in vogue is not a sure guide to the correct understanding of what Scripture reveals.

“Should I forgive him up to seven times?” Matt 18:21-22

“Why then say the scribes . . . ?” Matt 17:10

“Who do men say the Son of Man is?” Matt 16:13-14

“Are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” Acts 1:6

These four biblical examples demonstrate that the theology in vogue, as determined by the hermeneutic consent of the scholarly world, is not a sure guide to understanding what the Scriptures declare concerning any matter revealed in them. The popular hermeneutic consensus misled the people of God when the Savior was born, because they did not even know the “fulfillment of the time.” The true nature of the Kingdom of God as well as of its King had also been completely distorted. And this same misguided consent blinded the theologians, leaders, and ruling class of Jesus’ days to the point that they rejected Him. It also confused the disciples when Jesus was crucified. Their messianic interpretations collapsed when they saw the One they thought would redeem Israel sentenced, killed, and crucified (cf. Luke 24:20-21). For them the death and the resurrection of the Master didn’t fit in the puzzle of the current hermeneutic consensus. They didn’t understand it; neither did they accept it. And even afterwards, accepting the current consensus confused the disciples and filled them with false hopes when they saw Jesus resuscitated (cf. Acts 1:6).

The preceding centuries have proved the disappointing nature of biblical interpretation based on the premise of hermeneutic consensus. In 1844 the hermeneutic agreement among serious Bible students led to overwhelming disappointment. Hermeneutic consensus has not led to a clear understanding of the message of Jesus’ intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as revealed in Daniel 8:14. And now in end times it should not be surprising that the same forms of hermeneutic consensus will make a come-back to universalize and impose its premises and deceive if possible even the elect.

We would do well to remember that the hypotheses and paradigms that have guided interpretation are neither invariable nor irreplaceable. Scholarly

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interpretive proposals are continually being revised and replaced. The hermeneutic field has always been a changing landscape, and this will continue.¹¹

3. The hermeneutic of the text based on tradition—"you heard that it was said"—is not enough. The exegete must submit himself to the divine authority of the "but I tell you."

"You have heard¹² that it was said . . . but I tell you." Matt 5:17-48

Today as never before modern exegetes have an incredible variety of useful tools at their disposal. The biblical text has been examined¹³ from grammatical, philological, archaeological, political, philosophical, sociological, psychological, and theological points of view. The majority of these focuses and conclusions are useful and illustrative. All form a part of the "you have heard that it was said" which the exegete should know, for it is a valuable and undeniable help. However, the biblical exegete needs to hear, above all, the One who is the supreme authority in hermeneutics. Only His "but I tell you" gives the correct theological perspective so peculiar to the Word of God. And it is precisely this peculiar biblical theological perspective with its God-oriented message that is so necessary today.

Matthew 5:17-48 shows explicitly the hermeneutic importance of the "but I tell you" opposing, enlarging, or clarifying the accepted positions of "that it was said." Here the dimensions of the five cases presented surpass the repetitive treatment the text is given in the then current legalistic form. The "but I tell you" adds the true theological dimension to the interpretation so the attentive exegete can find the perfect meaning as (cf. 5:48) taught by the Lord of perfection.

4. In the biblical message there is always something that is beyond the limits of human exegetic-hermeneutic.

"That which is been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is been born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:5-6

In this verse two hermeneutic schools stand in contrast. One school is tradi-

¹¹James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards, eds., *Old Testament Interpretation. Past, Present and Future. Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 7.

¹²*Ekousate* (aor. ind. act. *akouo*, "to hear"). In the light of rabbinical parallelisms, here this verb could be translated as "you have understood," and it refers to the interpretations the rabbis usually gave to the Old Testament passages. Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 10.

¹³It is well known in the current hermeneutical atmosphere that many a renowned writer in the field of Biblical studies first proclaims as a 'new paradigm' "his reading of the text—giving it a slanting from its political-historical interest and the historical meaning of the Bible to a socio-historical style of lecture, sociological literary or postmodern." Then, in a parallel manner, these very interpreters usually fight, arguing that their "new paradigm in no way is new, but the restoration of an older method that in some way was dimmed by the historical-critical method." Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, 1-2.

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tional, cautious, doubtful, calculating, limited, cold, and human. The other school is creative, sure, limitless, dynamic, based on Scripture, and of heavenly origin. While the traditional school sought only to know, the other sought to share and to teach. And in this dynamic hermeneutic school, Jesus took each step with certain security, founded on the Scriptures and His own divine authority. Clearly, Christ's approach showed rabbinical exegesis with purely human resources to be limited, indeed useless. Earthly things cannot be seen by the human exegete in their real dimension, for celestial realities are far beyond purely human understanding (cf. John 3:10-12). Even Christ Himself is seen as simply another rabbi and nothing else. He is not perceived as the Lamb of God who should be understood and exalted in His true redemptive dimension.

Due to the inherent character of the Holy Scripture, that is, its divine origin, the conviction that the exegete has in regard to its origin will largely predict his hermeneutic approach. Alonso affirms:

A fundamental characteristic that we find in the Bible is that the sacred writers proffer a communication claiming to be a word, a message from God. Jews and Christians believe that these authors were inspired or assisted in a special way for a divine gift, since the message that they transmit belongs, in the first place, to the sphere of God, who wants to communicate with us. The hermeneutical orientation one takes with regard to the Bible will depend a great deal on what one understands by "inspiration"; in the same way, one's concept of the inspiration concept will substantially mark one's hermeneutical orientation.¹⁴

Exegetes who consider the Bible simply an outstanding book are limited to a very narrow framework of biblical understanding. They should understand and accept that the Bible is in fact inspired by God. Otherwise, from the start, the direction of their exegesis will be uncertain and their hermeneutic will be essentially erroneous.

5. Without the illumination of the divine Paraclete there can be no true exegetical understanding of the Scripture.

"The Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:13-15

Mechanical exegesis is one thing, but the correct understanding achieved through the procedure of exegetical extraction of the text's content is quite another. Certainly, the steps of the exegetical procedure are very useful and necessary in examining the book, chapter, or text that the exegete chooses to study. But it must be remembered that the passage is part of a writing that has come to us via inspiration (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Its authorship transcends the human pen. The one who seeks to study the Bible should look for the illumination of the One who breathed it. In each of the mentioned verses Jesus emphasizes the fact that

¹⁴Luis Alonso-Schokel, *A Manual of Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1998), 22.

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the divine Paraclete is the only true source of eschatological knowledge. The triple “he will make you know,”¹⁵ expresses the constant activity carried out by the celestial Paraclete in the task of guiding and leading¹⁶ all who want to know what is revealed in the prophecies or the message of the Word of God. Jesus emphasizes that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is vital to the completion of the exegetical task. Without the Holy Spirit’s help exegesis becomes a mere conjectural, theoretical, textual analysis lacking the essential element of the truth that we all desperately need to know and understand.

6. A hermeneutic based on mere human tradition doesn’t honor the Word of God but rather invalidates it.

“Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” Matt 15:1-3

Traditions are collections of experiences lived in a certain environment or society together with the diverse beliefs adopted along with these past experiences. They could be summarized as the way in which a certain society has tried to solve its difficulties and enigmas by means of pure human intellect. They are the customs or ideas that have become fixed as norm and belief for all by force of repetition. Jesus was prepared to confront and even call for the eradication of tradition on several occasions.¹⁷ Jesus mentioned that no matter how refined or fixed a tradition is, it does not form a valid criteria in the hermeneutics of the Word of God. It doesn’t matter how old, ingrained, in fashion, or respectable these traditions are. They should not be the interpretive norm of the Word of God, because “all the traditions are human and fallible.”¹⁸ The Scriptures transcend any human tradition, but no human tradition can transcend the Word of God. The Holy Scriptures did not emanate from the traditional heap of human knowledge; they originated in the Arcanum of the Eternal one.

7. The diligent exegete always finds delight and new treasures in the Word of God.

“Every learned scribe in the Kingdom of heaven . . . brings out of his treasure things new and old.” Matt 13:51-52

¹⁵The repetition of *anaggelei* underlines the emphasis on this specific aspect of the Holy Spirit’s Work. Rogers, Jr. & Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 220.

¹⁶ISEDET, *Clave Lingüística del Nuevo Testamento Griego* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Aurora, 1960), 218.

¹⁷The tradition of the elders was the oral tradition that formed the Talmud. This body of traditions accumulated during the centuries, represented the rabbinical interpretation of the Torah, and was considered mandatory for all aspects of Jewish life. The Pharisees gave the oral tradition a value similar to that of the written law, arguing that Moses received the oral law at Sinai, then it was transmitted orally to the prophets and in the same way to the members of the Great Synagogue. Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969), 8:165-166.

¹⁸Robert Morgan, “The Bible and Christian Theology,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 123.

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Throughout the centuries the Bible has been an inexhaustible source of investigation. During the last century, the work of the biblical scholars has been refined and increasingly specialized as different methodological proposals have unfolded.¹⁹ Biblical interpretation continues as a vital and central part of biblical studies, and the continuous development of new methods has only served to reflect the serious and central nature of this interest.²⁰ In fact, the biblical field has not shrunk as an area of investigation, but grown.²¹

Biblical exegesis is always an adventure. Besides being exciting, it is loaded with expectation and is well-rewarded. The possibilities of true knowledge by means of biblical exegesis are infinite. Each text contains mysteries and truths that are revealed in a real and gradual way. Each word of the Word of God is part of the tapestry of knowledge that God has given to man. In saying “every scribe,” Jesus includes all who perform or want to undertake the exegetical task. But their exegesis should lead them to be “learned in the Kingdom of heaven.” That is to say, it should transform exegetes into experts in the revealed eternal realities of God as revealed in His Word, now opened by means of the exegetical task. For exegetes the task is pleasant and full of recompense, for they constantly discover in the treasure of the revelation new truths without neglecting the old truths that are always a basic part of new knowledge. This exegetical approach is closely linked to the reality of progressive knowledge, the continued “knowing of YHWH” (cf. Hosea 6:3) in that dimension where God Himself wants us to “fully be able to understand.” He wants us to understand “Christ’s love that exceeds all knowledge,” so that we may be filled with the “fullness of God” (cf. Eph 3:17-19).

8. An incorrect hermeneutic always causes ruin.

“If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” Matt 15:12-14

It should not be surprising that the Pharisees were very offended when their hermeneutical premises were shown to be false due to their incorrect exegesis. They believed themselves to be bearers of light to the blind pagans, but the only thing they offered was a different blindness.²² Jesus noted that not only the interpretation of a passage suffers if it is incorrectly exegeted. The resulting falsehood causes double damage in that it deceives the interpreter and misleads the one taught by it. Jesus calls both blind men by the same Greek term.²³ They are

¹⁹Gina Hens-Piazza, *Of Methods, Monarchs, and Meanings. A Soteriological Approach to Exegesis* (Macon: Mercer UP, 1996), 1.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 155.

²¹Alonso-Schokel, *Manual of Hermeneutics*, 156.

²²Jesus condemns them in such a way because their blindness was the direct result of their hardening and insensibility toward the things of God. F. Graber, s.v., “blind,” *TDNT* 1:220.

²³*Tuflos* is not only used in the total sense of the incapability to see with the eyes. It was also commonly used in the sphere of the capability of knowledge and understanding. (Wolfgang Schrage, s.v., “*tuflos, tufloo*,” *TDNT* 8:276). In this way, to call someone blind implied that that person was not only totally incapable of knowing but also was incapable understanding that this knowledge was

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unable to see the reality of, or understand the truth of, their common destination—namely perdition. Countless interpretations nowadays are no more than an exegesis of theories imposed on the Writings in a vain attempt at forcing these theories to reveal themselves to be true. These interpretations are then also products of the blindness that produces a double blindness about celestial things.

9. Many exegetes are moved by deceit.

“Do not be deceived,, for many will come in my name.” Luke 21:8

Since mankind was first deceived by the master deceiver there has not been a moment in human existence where the human race has not been besieged. Our first parents believed in the hermeneutics of the deceiver concerning the truthfulness and kindness of the Creator, and they followed the exegesis of the father of lies, rejecting the authority of the Word of God. The false hermeneutics of the tempter led them to believe the lie of immortality, and as a result we live with the terrible reality of sin, suffering, and death. There is no area of human activity that has not been affected by satanic cunning. Unhappily, hermeneutics is no exception. There are methods and concepts that have flooded the hermeneutic discussion whose authors have had the sole purpose of undermining the Word of God. Jesus has warned us of the multiplicity of these methods and concepts, of their purposes, and also of the uselessness of paying attention to these methods and concepts.

10. The Scriptures are always the real source of all true biblical hermeneutic criteria.

“How do you read?” Luke 10:26

“Have not you read?” Matt 12:1-8; 19:4; 22:31

“Did you never read?” Matt 21:16, 42

Time after time, Jesus reminded his listeners and disciples that teachings and doctrinal beliefs should have their real source in the Scriptures. In current academic circles a lot of discussion revolves around the correct “reading” of the Bible.²⁴ Although each of the current methods can make a contribution towards the understanding of some aspect of the Bible from a new and different perspective, the philosophical and often theological bases of such methods are often far from the purpose for which the Scriptures were given. Under the umbrella of these methodologies²⁵ new readings are often imposed on the biblical text which

necessary.

²⁴E. V. McKnight, “Reader-Response Criticism,” *DBI*, 2:370-373; see also, David Jasper, “Literary Readings of the Bible.” *Biblical Interpretation*, 21-34.

²⁵These readers declare that in reading in postmodern ways, they represent modernity having achieved its maturity; and besides, they themselves believe that in this way they have rescued the Bible from its “ecclesiastical and academic casuistries expressed in hermeneutical ways that have grown into an ecclesiastical grade during centuries.” Robert P. Carroll, “Poststructuralist Approaches. New Historicism and Postmodernism,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 51.

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carry worrisome presuppositions.

With reason Fokkelman states that hermeneutics is the art of explanation, and that the Biblical text is so complex, so rich in meanings and sense, that explanations can only come from the Bible itself by means of a conscientious hermeneutics.²⁶

Jesus warns us repeatedly that the Scriptures are always the real source of all true biblical hermeneutic approaches. He repeatedly pointed out to His contenders the fact that they read the Biblical text in a fickle manner. There is an incorrect and inappropriate way of “reading” the Scriptures as well as a correct way of reading them. The correct way stems from an acceptance of the basic literalness of what the Bible means or the reality of what it reveals. Its message, no matter how cryptic it may appear, can only be correctly read in the light of the divine revelation. Often the doctrinal or textual difficulties in the ecclesiastical or theological environment have been derived from a wrong reading of the biblical text.

11. The true biblical hermeneutics should always be “Christ-centered.”

“Search the Scriptures . . . they are they which testify²⁷ of me, and you don’t want to come to me that you might have life . . . for had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me.” John 5:39-40, 46

“And he declared to them what the prophets said of Him in all the Scriptures.” Luke 24:26-27, 44-46

“This is life eternal . . . that they might know . . . Jesus Christ.” John 17:3

The true purpose and goal of all Christian hermeneutics is to know what the Scriptures say of Christ and all that has been revealed of Him in them. From the first Mosaic pages until the last letter of John, there is a conspicuous link—impossible to ignore—that unites the total revelation with the center of the Scriptures—Jesus Christ. There is no book in Scripture that does not present this unequalled Center in some way or another, and attentive exegetes, even while they investigate other biblical topics, will notice how their study is intrinsically linked to the Center.

12. Biblical hermeneutics should be an edifying and giving enterprise.

“ . . . freely you have received, freely give.” Matt 10:8

The hermeneutical mission is searching, edifying, and serving. As the exegete comes into contact with the source of infinite wisdom, he begins a process

²⁶J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis. Vol. I: Ex. 15, Deut. 32, and Job 3*—*Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998), 23.

²⁷Here the use of *marturousai* (act. ptc. pres. *martureo*) emphasizes the always relevant and contemporary nature of the biblical testimony. That is to say, the Scriptures are still witnessing Christ’s assertions. If any passage is mentioned explicitly, this constitutes an important hermeneutical key. Rogers, Jr. and Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 195.

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of unimaginable learning. At the same time, as he delves into the Word, he discovers new horizons and perspectives that enlarge his knowledge and understanding of the revealed Word, because scripture always “enlightens the understanding” (Psalm 119:130). This edifying task should however rebound in a double benefit, because this should be poured out for the edification of others, so the dynamics of grace and service, of giving and sacrifice, can be known. Or, as Jesus Himself puts it, “*freely you have received, freely give.*” True hermeneutics will always be both receptive and sharing. Otherwise it would be denying the very essence of the examined Word, since the Word never stops acting. The author of the inspired Word assures us that His Word will never “return empty” (Isa 55:11). Within the dynamics of the biblical hermeneutics, exegetes are privileged in a double way—as apprentices discovering the mysteries of the divine revelation and as teachers of what they have learned. Even exegetes are included within the maxim of, “it is more blessed to give than to receive . . .” (Acts 20:35).

13. The parameter of all correct biblical hermeneutics was, is, and will be the Word of God.

“ . . . *it is written* . . . ” Matt 4:1-10

Any method that deprives the Bible of the absolute right of being its own interpreter should be revised if not rejected. The presuppositions of postmodern, progressive, and liberal scholars have in one way or another manifested the common goal of imposing their own approaches on the Scriptures. In Matthew 4 the audacity with which the deceiver seeks to impose his deceptive hermeneutics on Jesus is astounding. The encouraging aspect of the passage is the way Jesus makes the Word of God the parameter of His flawless hermeneutics. For Jesus, what the Scriptures say, God said.²⁸

In the same way, when Jesus confronted the exegetes of his time who were confused by the sophisms of the eternally deceitful “you will not surely die” theory, He invited them to accept in all seriousness what “Moses and the prophets” had already written on the matter. All the Hellenistic philosophical arguments and the fables already accepted by the hermeneutics of the Pharisees and Sadducees with respect to the immortality of the soul were to be discarded by the clear revelation that Moses and the prophets had given on the problem. This hermeneutic solution, besides being clear, is simple and comprehensible, biblical and Christ-centered. Were it not, it would not be a true hermeneutic solution. The parameter for a correct hermeneutic is the Word of God.

²⁸Undoubtedly Jesus not only believed the veracity of the Old Testament history, but He also utilized it as the ultimate authority in questions of faith and conduct and took the Scriptures as inspired. “To Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To him the God of the Old Testament was the living God, and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To him, what Scripture said, God said.” John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, 30, 44.

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With reason Hiebert affirms that “it is the divine revelation in the Scriptures that finally defines the questions, that provides the categories, and sketches the methods that help us to see the reality. It is this world well-known by God, not the worlds that we create, that is the real world. All the other systems, including that of the sciences, should arise from this biblical realism.”²⁹

As the end of this century approaches and we embark on the third millennium it would be well to remember that the hermeneutical approaches established by Christ did not diminish the force of Scripture. Rather, they changed the direction of the rabbinical interpretation and became a forceful Christian hermeneutic which completely changed biblical studies from then on. This same dynamic is now needed so the Word of God can complete its individual or collective purpose of teaching, of edification, of giving, of service, of convincing, of orientation, of justice, and even perfection in all good work (cf. 2 Tim 3:16).³⁰

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²⁹Paul Hiebert, “Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism,” *Misiology* 19 (1991), 275.

³⁰ Speaking of good work, I would like to thank my exegetical colleagues Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil of Peruvian Union University for translating this paper for me.

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A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844–2000)

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Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists form a modern eschatological movement born out of the study of the Holy Scriptures, with the specific mission of proclaiming the Word of God “to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6, RSV). In many places around the world Seventh-day Adventists have actually been known as the “people of the Book.” As a people Adventists have always held—and presently hold—high respect for the authority of the Bible. However, at times in the denomination’s history different views on the nature of the Bible’s inspiration have been discussed within its ranks.

The present study provides a general chronological overview of those major trends and challenges that have impacted on the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of inspiration between 1844 and 2000. An “annotated bibliography” type of approach is followed to provide an overall idea of the subject and to facilitate further investigations of a more thematic nature.

The Adventist understanding of inspiration as related to both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White is considered for two evident reasons: (1) While their basic function differs, Adventists have generally assumed that both sets of writings were produced by the same *modus operandi* of inspiration, and (2) there is an organic overlapping of the views on each in the development of an understanding of the Bible’s inspiration.

Terminology employed in discussing the nature of biblical inspiration is often confusing. Such technical expressions as *mechanical* inspiration, *verbal* inspiration, *plenary* inspiration, and *thought* inspiration have at times carried

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different meanings. Because of the various shades of meaning, it is important to be aware of the basic understanding of those terms.

Thus, *mechanical* inspiration is usually associated with the theory that all the words of Scripture, even down to the Hebrew vowel points, were actually dictated by the Holy Spirit. This theory virtually negates the human element of Scripture.

Verbal inspiration normally is understood by its advocates to mean the Holy Spirit guided the writers not only in receiving a divine message but also in communicating it, without completely eliminating the personality and the style of the writers. The emphasis, however, is on the end-product of the whole inspiration process, namely, on the words of Scripture.

The term *plenary* inspiration points out that Scripture in its entirety is inspired, making no distinction between alleged inspired and non-inspired words. Some authors prefer this term in order to distinguish their position from any mechanical understanding of inspiration, which may at times be associated with the term verbal inspiration.

Lastly, *thought* inspiration is proposed by others to indicate that it is the writer who is inspired, the Holy Spirit thereby transmitting God's thoughts to the writer, who then chooses the proper words to express those thoughts under the continued guidance of the Spirit.

It will become obvious from the following discussion that there are instances where some authors use terms without clearly defining them, taking for granted that their meaning is common knowledge. This, however, can lead to different interpretations.

The Millerite Legacy

Seventh-day Adventists inherited their early views of Scripture from their former denominations and the Millerites. William Miller,¹ the founder and main leader of Millerism, had accepted the views of Deism as a young man in his twenties. Miller at that time actually gave up his faith in "the Scriptures as a revelation from God to man" because of "some inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible" which he was "unable to harmonize."² Thus, his questioning of the Bible's inspiration was occasioned by alleged discrepancies in the Bible.

After twelve years (1803-1816) in deistic circles, Miller had a conversion experience, after which he began a two-year period (1816-1818) of intensive study of Scripture. His basic assumption was that "if the Bible was the word of God, every thing contained therein might be understood, and all its parts be

¹For a more detailed study of Miller's view of Scriptures, see Steen R. Rasmussen, "Roots of the Prophetic Hermeneutic of William Miller" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University extension course at Newbold College, England, 1983), 16-36.

²William Miller, *Apology and Defence* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1845), 2-3. Cf. J. V. H[imes], "Memoir of William Miller," *Midnight Cry*, Nov. 17, 1842, [1].

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made to harmonize.”³ Miller stated that at the end of his intensive Bible study “all the contradictions and inconsistencies” he “had before found in the Word were gone,” and he “felt a delight in studying the Scriptures which” he “had not before supposed could be derived from its teachings.”⁴

In his 1822 Statement of Faith, Miller expressed his conviction that “the Bible is given by God to man” as “a revelation of God to man.”⁵ In 1836 Miller asserted that “there never was a book written that has a better connection and harmony than the Bible,” which has “a general connection through the whole.”⁶

While dealing with some difficulties in the Bible, Miller even preferred to blame its translators rather than to admit obscurities and inconsistencies in the original text.⁷ In other words, Miller came to accept the full authority and inspiration of the Bible because he became convinced that there was harmony and unity in its content. For him, inspiration affected the actual text of Scripture and not just the general ideas.

According to Steen Rasmussen, “Miller’s basic attitude towards the Bible—that in order to be the word of God it must be wholly clear, consistent, and without contradictions—never changed from his childhood till his death.”⁸ When he finally concluded that Scripture was clear and consistent, he accepted its ultimate authority.

Early Seventh-day Adventist View (1844-1883)

Sabbatarian Adventists kept William Miller’s high view of Scripture. James White, for instance, stated in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847) that “the [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation” and “our only rule of faith and practice.”⁹ The third article of the 1872 statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs composed by Uriah Smith asserted similarly that “the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”¹⁰

³Miller, *Apology and Defence*, 5-6.

⁴Ibid., 12. Cf. [Josiah Litch], “Rise and Progress of Adventism,” *Advent Shield and Review*, May 1844, 49-50.

⁵William Miller, [“Statement of Faith”], Sept. 5, 1822, ASC; Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 77.

⁶William Miller, *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, about the Year 1843* (Troy, [NY]: Kemble & Hooper, 1836), 5.

⁷See e.g., Miller’s lecture on Ezekiel 39:1, 11, in [William Miller], *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology*, ed. Joshua V. Himes (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 67.

⁸Rasmussen, “Roots of the Prophetic Hermeneutic,” 20.

⁹[James White], in idem, ed., *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* (Brunswick, ME: [James White], 1847), 13.

¹⁰[Uriah Smith], *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872), 5, art. III. See also “Fundamental Principles,” *Signs of the Times* (hereafter *ST*), June 4, 1874, 3; *Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*, Words of Truth Series, no. 5

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Apart from such concise statements about the authority of Scripture, not much was penned by Seventh-day Adventists on the nature of its inspiration up to the early 1880s. The major Seventh-day Adventist concern on the subject of the Bible during this early period was to defend its divine origin from infidel (deist) attacks.¹¹ Such defenses of the Bible provide, however, insightful evidences of the early Adventist views on the infallibility and trustworthiness of Scripture.

Moses Hull, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, made the first significant Seventh-day Adventist response to infidel attacks on Scripture in his 1863 book, *The Bible from Heaven*.¹² Hull advocated the authenticity, integrity, and credibility of the Bible,¹³ insisting that nothing in the Bible contradicts any of the sciences of “physiology, anatomy, hygiene, materia medica, chemistry, astronomy, or geology.”¹⁴

In 1867 the *Review* came out with a series of twenty-two responses to the so-called “self contradictions” of the Bible raised by infidels against the Christian religion.¹⁵ Those responses dealt, for example, with such issues as whether one woman or two went to Christ’s sepulcher (John 20:1; Matt 28:1);¹⁶ whether Christ ascended from Mount Olivet or from Bethany (Acts 1:9, 12; Luke 24:50, 51);¹⁷ and whether 24,000 or 23,000 Israelites died by the plague in Shittim (Num 25:9; 1 Cor 10:8).¹⁸

Another significant defense of the Bible was penned by A. T. Jones, a Seventh-day Adventist minister working in Oregon (who would become one of the major protagonists of the 1888 General Conference session), through a series,

(Battle Creek, MI: [Review and Herald], 1897), 3-4; Uriah Smith, “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (hereafter *RH*), Aug. 22, 1912, 4; F. M. W[ilcox], “A Conference on Christian Fundamentalism,” *RH*, June 19, 1919, 6.

¹¹One of the most influential deistic books of that time was still Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason. Being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology* (Boston: Thomas Hall, 1794).

¹²Moses Hull, *The Bible from Heaven: Or A Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1863). This book was later on revised, expanded, and republished (in 1878) under the authorship of D. M. Canright. See D. M. Canright, *The Bible from Heaven: A Summary of Plain Arguments for the Bible and Christianity* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1878).

¹³Hull, *Bible from Heaven*, 79.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 168-69.

¹⁵Editorial, W. C. G[rainger], and J. M. A[ldrich]. “The Infidel’s Objection to the Bible, Answered,” 22-part series in *RH*, June 18, 1867, 4; June 25, 1867, 20; July 2, 1867, 36; July 9, 1867, 52; July 23, 1867, 84; July 30, 1867, 100; Aug. 6, 1867, 116; Aug. 13, 1867, 132; Aug. 20, 1867, 148; Aug. 27, 1867, 164; Sept. 3, 1867, 180; Sept. 10, 1867, 196; Sept. 17, 1867, 212; Sept. 24, 1867, 228; Oct. 1, 1867, 244; Oct. 8, 1867, 260; Oct. 15, 1867, 276; Oct. 29, 1867, 300; Nov. 12, 1867, 332; Nov. 26, 1867, 372.

¹⁶Editorial, “Infidel Objections to the Bible Answered. No. 7,” *RH*, Aug. 6, 1867, 116.

¹⁷Editorial, “Infidel Objections to the Bible Answered. No. 15,” *RH*, Sept. 24, 1867, 228.

¹⁸J. M. A[ldrich], “Infidel Objections to the Bible Answered. No. 22,” *RH*, Nov. 26, 1867, 372.

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“A Review of Paine’s ‘Age of Reason,’” which appeared in the *Review* in 1880.¹⁹

That early Seventh-day Adventists regarded the Scriptures as infallible and inerrant is evident from the uncritical reprint in the *Review* of several portions from non-Adventist authors that fostered such a view. In 1859, for example, the *Review* reprinted a large paragraph from Louis Gaussen’s *Theopneustia*,²⁰ stating that not “one single error” could ever be found in the more than 31,000 verses of the Bible.²¹ Some paragraphs of John H. Pratt’s *Scripture and Science Not at Variance*²² came out in the *Review* in 1880, declaring that the Holy Spirit preserved the writers of the Holy Scriptures “from errors of every kind in the records they made.”²³ An entire lecture of H. L. Hastings on inspiration appeared in the *Review* in 1883,²⁴ referring to the Scriptures as “the transcript of the Divine Mind.”²⁵

Sparse statements on inspiration can be found also in the articles and books penned during that period (1844-1883) about the prophetic gift of Ellen White.²⁶ Those statements, however, were more concerned about proving the inspiration of her writings than in discussing the actual nature of inspiration.

Up to the early 1800s no clear discussion of the doctrine of inspiration is found in Seventh-day Adventist literature. While responding to “infidel” attacks against the trustworthiness of the Bible, Seventh-day Adventists demonstrated their commitment to a view of Scripture similar to Miller’s. Such responses to infidelity clearly show that early Seventh-day Adventists were convinced that the process of inspiration preserved the actual text of the Scriptures from factual errors and contradictions.

¹⁹A. T. Jones, “A Review of Paine’s ‘Age of Reason,’” 4-part series in *RH*, March 25, 1880, 195-96; April 1, 1880, 211-12; April 8, 1880, 226-27; April 15, 1880, 244-45.

²⁰[Louis] Gaussen, *Theopneustia. The Bible: Its Divine Origin and Inspiration, Deduced from Internal Evidence, and the Testimonies of Nature, History and Science*, new and rev. ed. (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, n.d.), 257-59.

²¹[Louis] Gaus[s]en, “Perfection of the Bible,” *RH*, Sept. 15, 1859, 134.

²²John H. Pratt, *Scripture and Science Not at Variance; With Remarks on the Historical Character, Plenary Inspiration, and Surpassing Importance, of the Earlier Chapters of Genesis*, 7th ed., rev. and corr. (London: Hatchards, Piccadilly, 1872), 286-88, 302.

²³[John H.] Pratt, “Inspiration,” *RH*, Feb. 26, 1880, 139.

²⁴H. L. Hastings, “The Inspiration of the Bible,” 2-part series in *RH*, Nov. 13, 1883, 714-16; Nov. 27, 1883, 746-48.

²⁵H. L. Hastings, “Inspiration of the Bible,” *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 748.

²⁶See *Witness of the Pioneers concerning the Spirit of Prophecy: A Facsimile Reprint of Periodical and Pamphlet Articles Written by the Contemporaries of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1961); [Uriah Smith], *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White, A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts according to the Scriptures* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868).

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Focus on the Nature of Inspiration (1883-1915)

By 1883, Seventh-day Adventists had for about four decades been mainly concerned with defending the divine inspiration of the Bible from *outside* infidel challenges. However, some *internal* crises regarding the nature and authority of Ellen White's writings pushed Seventh-day Adventists in the 1800s into a more thoughtful discussion of the doctrine. During that period two major questions were raised: (1) Are there *degrees* of inspiration? and (2) did the Holy Spirit dictate the actual *words* of the inspired writings?

Are There Degrees of Inspiration? Administrative problems and conflicts of personality at Battle Creek College led Ellen White to send a few testimonies to Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review* and president of the college board, reproving him for some unwise decisions.²⁷ Resentment against such reproofs was one factor that led Smith to the assumption that not all Ellen White writings were equally inspired. By the Spring of 1883 Smith was convinced that while Mrs. White's "visions" were truly inspired, her "testimonies" were not.²⁸

It seems that to harmonize such quarrels about the trustworthiness of Ellen White's testimonies, George I. Butler, General Conference president, wrote for the *Review* a series of ten articles on "Inspiration,"²⁹ in which he sought to provide a biblical rationale for the theory of "degrees of inspiration."³⁰ According to E. K. Vande Vere, if Butler "could show that the Bible contained human elements, then by implication, the Testimonies contained many more human elements" and could not be regarded as absolutely perfect.³¹

Assuming that inspiration varies according to the various forms of revelation, Butler argued that the Scriptures "are inspired just in the degree that the person is inspired who writes them."³² Since Scripture resulted from different forms of revelation,³³ according to Butler, there likewise had to be distinct degrees of inspiration, of authority, and of imperfection. For him the Scriptures "are authoritative in proportion to the degrees of inspiration,"³⁴ and are perfect

²⁷For a more detailed discussion of the subject, see Eugene F. Durand, *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 229-246; Allan G. Lindsay, "Goodloe Harper Bell: Pioneer Seventh-day Adventist Christian Educator" (Ed.D. diss., Andrews University, 1982), 192-231.

²⁸U[riah] Smith to [D. M.] Canright, March 22, 1883, ASC.

²⁹G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration," 10-part series in the *RH*, Jan. 8, 1884, 24; Jan. 15, 1884, 41; Jan. 22, 1884, 57-58; Jan. 29, 1884, 73-74; Feb. 5, 1884, 89-90; Apr. 15, 1884, 249-50; Apr. 22, 1884, 265-67; May 6, 1884, 296-97; May 27, 1884, 344-46; June 3, 1884, 361-62.

³⁰For a more detailed discussion of the subject, see Peter M. van Bemmelen, "The Mystery of Inspiration: (An Historical Study About the Development of the Doctrine of Inspiration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with Special Emphasis on the Decade 1884-1893)" (Term paper, Andrews University, 1971).

³¹Emmett K. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart: The Story of George I. Butler* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 66.

³²G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration[.—No. 1]," *RH*, Jan. 8, 1884, 24.

³³See G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration[.—No. 2]," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1884, 41.

³⁴G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration[.—No. 1]," *RH*, Jan. 8, 1884, 24.

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only as they are necessary for achieving the purpose for which they were given—"to make us wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15).³⁵

Such a theory of inspiration led Butler to suggest a hierarchy within the biblical canon, in which "the books of Moses and the words of Christ" appeared in the first and highest level; "the writings of the prophets and apostles and a portion, at least, of the Psalms" in the second level; "the historical books" in the third level; and "the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and the book of Job" in the last and lowest level.³⁶ Beyond those levels, Butler pointed out some specific passages (Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 1:16; 4:19; 7:7-40; 16:5-9; 2 Cor 11:21; Phil 2:19, 23; 2 Tim 4:9ff) which he "could hardly call inspired."³⁷

Thus, under the assumption that different forms of revelation implied distinct degrees of inspiration, Butler ended with a hierarchy within the biblical canon, and in fact even rejected some texts as uninspired.

Although the theory of degrees of inspiration was advocated outside Adventist circles,³⁸ this was the first time such theory was advanced in an official Seventh-day Adventist publication. There are indications that it was so influential that some people were prompted to almost completely disregard Ellen White's testimony at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis.³⁹

By the late 1880s the theory of degrees of inspiration continued to be fostered in some Seventh-day Adventist circles.⁴⁰ In response to this, Ellen White penned in a letter to R. A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference, that it was shown to her that "the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review*." Since "to criticize the Word of God" is to "venture on sacred, holy ground," no human being should ever "pronounce judgment" on God's Word, "selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired." She explained also that "the testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this."⁴¹

In a similar manner, the Senior Sabbath School lesson for January 7, 1893, also denied the possibility of "different degrees of inspiration," for the reason

³⁵G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration.—No. 9," *RH*, May 27, 1884, 344.

³⁶G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration.—No. 7," *RH*, April 22, 1884, 265-66.

³⁷G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration.—No. 10," *RH*, June 3, 1884, 361.

³⁸See e.g., Daniel Wilson, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 5th ed. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1845), 1:278-89; Samuel Davidson, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, Critical, Exegetical, and Theological* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868), ix-x; Thomas H. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846), 1:474ff.; [F. W.] Farrar et al., *Inspiration: A Clerical Symposium on "In What Sense, and Within What Limits, Is the Bible the Word of God?"* 2d ed. (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1885), 137-54, 202-42.

³⁹See George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle over Righteousness by Faith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1989), 85-91.

⁴⁰See e.g., M. H. Brown's motion in "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 25, 1884, 745; Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, EGWRC-AU.

⁴¹E. G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, EGWRC-AU.

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that “such a view destroys the authority of God’s word and gives to each one a Bible made by himself.”⁴²

Did the Holy Spirit Dictate the Actual Words? Another discussion that engaged Seventh-day Adventists during the period under consideration (1883-1915) concerned whether the Holy Spirit dictated the actual words of inspired writings.

A partial response to this issue came from the 1883 General Conference Session, which suggested a grammatical revision of Ellen White’s *Testimonies for the Church*.⁴³ At that time the General Conference appointed a committee of five individuals—W. C. White (chair), Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, and George I. Butler—to supervise that revision. The rationale for such a revision was stated as follows:

Whereas, Many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection of the writings, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected; and—

Whereas, We believe the light given by God to his servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed; therefore—

Resolved, That in the republication of these volumes such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought.⁴⁴

While opposing the theory of mechanical inspiration, the motion did not mention any factual error in the content of the *Testimonies*. Only grammatical “imperfections” should be corrected, without changing the thought “in any measure.”

George W. Morse likewise opposed the theory of mechanical inspiration when he stated in the *Review* of March 7, 1888, that “by the inspiration of the Scriptures is not meant the inspiration of the words and phrases, but the general purpose and use of the same.”⁴⁵

Uriah Smith, who had been a member of the committee for revising the *Testimonies*, proposed, however, a week later (March 13), a *via-media* solution to the tensions between the theories of mechanical inspiration and thought inspiration. In an article in the *Review* he suggested that if the words were “spoken directly by the Lord,” then “the words are inspired.” If the words did not come directly from the Lord, then “the words may not be inspired,” but only “the

⁴²*Sabbath School Lessons for Senior Classes*, no. 98 (1st quarter, 1893), 9.

⁴³For further study of the revision of Ellen White’s *Testimonies*, see Jerry Allen Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship between the Prophet and Her Son*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, Vol. 19 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1993), 122-29.

⁴⁴“General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 741-42.

⁴⁵G. W. Morse, “Scripture Questions,” *RH*, March 6, 1888, 155.

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ideas, the facts, the truth, which those words convey.”⁴⁶ I have not been able to locate any specific reaction to this article.

Leaning evidently towards a more mechanical view of inspiration, D. M. Canright, ex-Seventh-day Adventist minister and writer, began to attack the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings after he left the Seventh-day Adventists in early 1887. Already in the 1888 edition of his book, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*,⁴⁷ Canright stated that Ellen White was “not inspired” because, among other things, (1) she herself changed the wording of previous drafts of her own writings; (2) she incorporated suggestions from her husband and secretaries in the process of correcting the grammar and improving the style of her writings; and (3) she often copied “without credit or sign of quotation” from other non-inspired authors.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, several Seventh-day Adventist authors stressed that the process of inspiration had actually exercised a controlling influence on the whole writing of Scripture. In 1890, for instance, it was stated in the *Signs of the Times* that

the New Testament does not speak of inspiration as being given to men, or of men being inspired. It was the writings which were inspired, or, literally, “God-breathed.” The New Testament declares this repeatedly of the Old Testament. See 2 Tim 3:15, 16; Acts 1:16; Heb 3:7; 1 Peter 1:11. Peter classes Paul’s writings with the Scriptures, and Paul declares that his words were given by the Spirit of God. 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Cor 2:13.⁴⁹

In 1905 *The Beacon Light*, by Robert Hare, a Seventh-day Adventist minister and writer working in Melbourne, Australia, came off the press with a quotation from James Hamilton,⁵⁰ stating that “in theopneustic Scripture we have a book, every sentence of which is truly human, and yet every sentence of which is truly divine.”⁵¹

While denying the “verbal inspiration of translations,” the *Signs of the Times* in 1909 emphasized the verbal inspiration of the words of Scripture in the original Hebrew, Chaldaic [Aramaic], and Greek languages. “These words,” it was stated, “were the words inspired by the Spirit of God.”⁵²

⁴⁶[Uriah Smith], “Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?,” *RH*, March 13, 1888, 168-69.

⁴⁷D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of that Faith* (Kalamazoo, [MI]: Kalamazoo Publishing Co., 1888). Some historians, unaware of this edition, mention 1889 as the year when this book was first published.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁴⁹Editorial, “Questions on Inspiration,” *ST*, Oct. 27, 1890, 531.

⁵⁰James Hamilton, *The Lamp and the Lantern: or, Light for the Tent and the Traveller* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1866), 85.

⁵¹Robert Hare, *The Beacon Light[,] or Book of the Ages* (Melbourne, Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 1905), 19.

⁵²Editorial, “2976.—Versions and Verbal Inspiration,” Question Corner, *ST*, Nov. 17, 1909, 2 (italics in the original).

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A more mechanical view of inspiration was stressed by Dr. David Paulson, founding-president of Hinsdale Sanitarium, in a letter to Ellen White (1906). Paulson stated in that letter: “I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that *every* word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under *any* and *all* circumstances, was as inspired as the ten commandments.”⁵³

That Ellen White did not endorse such a mechanical view of inspiration is evident from her response to Paulson on June 14, 1906. In that response she clearly stated that neither she nor the other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers “ever made such claims.”⁵⁴

Further evidence that Ellen White did not endorse such a view of inspiration was provided in the revisions of her book *The Great Controversy* for its 1911 edition.⁵⁵ While grammatical revisions of her manuscripts had been previously done, in 1910 she asked the help of W. W. Prescott in checking the historical sections of this book. As an advocate of Gaussen’s views of verbal inspiration,⁵⁶ Prescott felt very uneasy about having to suggest revisions to the writings of an inspired prophet.⁵⁷

This experience certainly became a decisive factor in leading Prescott to the assumption that the Scriptures were *verbally* inspired but not Ellen White’s writings.⁵⁸ Also in the same context, W. C. White stated in 1911 that his mother (Ellen White) “never claimed to be authority on history” and “never laid claim to verbal inspiration.”⁵⁹

By contrast, in the same year (1911) Milton C. Wilcox, editor of the *Signs of the Times*, gave evidence of his agreement with Prescott on a verbal concept of inspiration. In his book, *Questions and Answers*, Wilcox stated that “the

⁵³Quoted in Ellen G. White to David Paulson, June 14, 1906, EGWRC-AU. (The words “every,” “any,” and “all” are underlined in the original.) This letter was published in idem, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:24-31.

⁵⁴E. G. White to David Paulson, June 14, 1906, EGWRC-AU.

⁵⁵Compare Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1911) with idem, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan during the Christian Dispensation*, rev. and enl. ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1888).

⁵⁶W. C. White letter to L. E. Froom, January 8, 1928,” in Appendix C of E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3:454.

⁵⁷See Appendixes A-C of E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3:433-65; Arthur L. White, “W. W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of Great Controversy” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1981); idem, “The Prescott Letter to W. C. White, April 6, 1915” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, n.d.); idem, *Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 6:302-37.

⁵⁸W. W. Prescott, in “The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” 29-30, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, July 30, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU; idem, in “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” 21-28, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU. Cf. Gilbert M. Valentine, “William Warren Prescott: Seventh-day Adventist Educator” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1982), 515, fn. 2.

⁵⁹Appendix A, in E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3:437. For a more detailed discussion on W. C. White’s statement on Ellen White’s historical authority, see Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White*, 427-36.

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original words” “by which prophet and apostle spoke” were inspired. “It was not the person,” according to Wilcox, “who was inspired; it was the God-breathed Word.”⁶⁰

Ellen G. White’s View of Inspiration. It was also during the period under consideration (1883-1915) that Ellen White penned some of her more significant statements on inspiration.⁶¹

For Ellen White the inspiration of Scripture is a mystery that parallels the incarnation of Christ. She declares that as Christ was at the same time divine and human (John 1:14), so “the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human.”⁶² So organically merged are the two elements throughout Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) that “the utterances of the man are the word of God,”⁶³ and no one should ever attempt to tell “what is inspired and what is not”⁶⁴ or to point out “degrees of inspiration.”⁶⁵

In opposition to the theory of *mechanical* inspiration, Ellen White asserted in 1886 that “the writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.” She explained it further by saying the following:

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind.⁶⁶

In opposition to the theory of *seminal thought* inspiration, i.e. that only general thoughts were inspired, Ellen White explained that “the scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work

⁶⁰Milton C. Wilcox, *Questions and Answers Gathered from the Question Corner Department of the Signs of the Times* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 12.

⁶¹See e.g., E. G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), a-h; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:15-76; 3:28-124. For further study of Ellen White’s doctrine of inspiration, see also Leslie Hardinge, “An Exploration of the Philosophy of Inspiration in the Writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White” (Unpubl. ms., n.d.), AHC; Raoul Dederen, “Ellen White’s Doctrine of Scripture,” supplement to *Ministry* (hereafter *Min*), July 1977, 24F-24J; Steven G. Daily, “*How Readest Thou*: The Higher Criticism Debate in Protestant America and Its Relationship to Seventh-day Adventism and the Writings of Ellen White, 1885-1925” (M.A. thesis, Loma Linda University, 1982), 122-39; Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 140-84; James H. Burry, “An Investigation to Determine Ellen White’s Concepts of Revelation, Inspiration, ‘The Spirit of Prophecy,’ and Her Claims about the Origin, Production and Authority of Her Writings” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1991); Gerard Damsteegt, “The Inspiration of Scripture in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (hereafter *JATS*) 5 (Spring 1994): 155-79.

⁶²E. G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), vi.

⁶³Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” Ms. 24, 1886, EGWRC-AU.

⁶⁴E. G. White, “The Guide Book,” Ms. 16, 1888, EGWRC-AU.

⁶⁵E. G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, EGWRC-AU.

⁶⁶E. G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” Ms. 24, 1886, EGWRC-AU.

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themselves,”⁶⁷ and that she herself was “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision.”⁶⁸

The tension between those statements is harmonized in the following quotation from Ellen White:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.⁶⁹

Although Ellen White recognized the existence of *transmission errors* and *difficulties* in Scripture,⁷⁰ I have been unable to find any instance in which she mentioned specific factual errors in Scripture. As silent as the writers of the New Testament had been in pointing out factual errors in the Old Testament, so was Ellen White in regard to the total canon of Scripture.

The difficulties of Scripture were regarded by her not as “an argument against the Bible” but as “a strong evidence of its divine inspiration.” While “the way of salvation” is discernable even to “the humble and uncultured,” there are in Scripture mysteries that challenge “the most highly cultivated minds.”⁷¹ Speaking about such mysteries Ellen White warned that

men of ability have devoted a lifetime of study and prayer to the searching of the Scriptures, and yet there are many portions of the Bible that have not been fully explored. Some passages of Scripture will never be perfectly comprehended until in the future life Christ shall explain them. There are mysteries to be unraveled, statements that human minds cannot harmonize. And the enemy will seek to arouse argument upon these points, which might better remain undiscussed.⁷²

While admitting that the human language of Scripture is “imperfect,” she still held that God’s Word “is infallible” and should be accepted “as it reads.”⁷³ She stated, for instance, that in Scripture the history of Israel was traced by “the

⁶⁷E[llen] G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 26 (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1876), 5. Cf. idem, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854), 8.

⁶⁸Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts [vol. 2]: My Christian Experience, Views and Labors* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1860), 293.

⁶⁹Ellen G. White, “Questions and Answers,” *RH*, Oct. 8, 1867, 260. See also idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:37.

⁷⁰See e.g., Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts [vol. 1]: The Great Controversy, between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1858), 117 (reprinted in idem, *Early Writings of Mrs. White* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1906], 220-21); idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:16-17.

⁷¹Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892), 126.

⁷²E[llen] G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 312.

⁷³E. G. White, “The Tasmanian Camp-meeting,” *RH*, Feb. 11, 1896, 81.

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unerring pen of inspiration” “with exact fidelity.”⁷⁴ She regarded the Bible also as the “unerring standard” by which “men’s ideas of science” should be tested.”⁷⁵ Therefore, “the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted,” according to Ellen White, “as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will.”⁷⁶

The fact that “the finite mind is inadequate to grasp the infinite” should in no way discourage human beings from a thoughtful, reverent study of Scripture.⁷⁷ She even pointed out that

as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clear insight, discerns the underlying harmony.⁷⁸

Noteworthy also is the fact that Ellen White made use of different versions of the Bible in her writings.⁷⁹ The use of different versions was also supported by other contemporary Seventh-day Adventists.⁸⁰ This is a significant point because later on the issue of the reliability of certain English translations of the Bible would be raised in Seventh-day Adventist circles.⁸¹

⁷⁴Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church*, no. 28 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1879), 171.

⁷⁵E. G. White, “Science and Revelation,” *ST*, March 13, 1884, 161; idem, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1904), 8:325.

⁷⁶E. G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), d; ibid. (1911), vii.

⁷⁷E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 123-35.

⁷⁸E. G. White to David Paulson, June 14, 1906, EGWRC-AU; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:25.

⁷⁹For a more detailed study of Ellen G. White’s use of Bible versions, see “Instances of the Use of Various Versions in the Spirit of Prophecy Writings,” DF 391-b, EGWRC-AU; Arthur L. White, “Mrs. Ellen G. White and the Revised Version of 1881-1885 and 1901” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1953); Arlyn D. Stewart, “An Analysis of Ellen Gould White’s Use of the English Versions in the Light of the Greek New Testament” (M.A. thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1954); D[on] F. N[eufeld], “Bible Translation Methods Examined—5: Ellen G. White’s Use of Various Versions,” *RH*, Dec. 21, 1967, 12-13; William Larry Richards, “Ellen G. White and Her Use of Versions” (Term paper, Andrews University, 1968); Frank W. Hardy, “Ellen White’s Use of Bible Versions Other than King James,” supplement to *Historicism*, no. 23 (July 1990); Arthur L. White, “The E. G. White Counsel on Versions of the Bible” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1953, rev. 1991).

⁸⁰See e.g., Editorial, “The Revised Version,” *ST*, July 21, 1881, 318-19; W. H. Littlejohn, “Scripture Questions: 82.—The New Version vs. the Old,” *RH*, March 20, 1883, 186.

⁸¹See e.g., Benjamin G. Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Washington, DC: n.p., 1930); “A Review of ‘Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,’ by B. G. Wilkinson” (N.p., [1931]), AHC; Benjamin G. Wilkinson, “A Reply to the ‘Review’ of My Book, ‘Our Authorized Bible Vindicated’” (N.p., n.d.), AHC; Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, *Problems in Bible Translation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954); D. F. N[eufeld], “Bible Translation Methods Examined,” 5-part series in *RH*, Nov. 16, 1967, 13; Nov. 30, 1967, 11-12; Dec. 7, 1967, 13-14; Dec. 14, 1967, 13; Dec. 21, 1967, 12-13; Ranulfo L. Raposo, “History of Preservation of the New Testament Manuscripts, the Development of Corrupted Texts and Its Impact Today upon the Sabbath” (Term paper, Andrews University, 1994).

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That by the late 19th and early 20th centuries Seventh-day Adventists still regarded the Scriptures as the infallible and trustworthy Word of God is evident from their responses to higher criticism.⁸² For example, Charles M. Snow, editor of *Liberty* magazine and associate editor of the *Review*, stated in 1912 that the assumption that

the Word of God is “inspired, but not infallible,” is the reiteration on earth of Satan’s challenge to God in heaven. When man sets himself up as a judge of the words and works of God, the rebellion in heaven is reproduced in the earth.⁸³

As previously seen, it was during the period under consideration (1883-1915) that Seventh-day Adventists began to face an internal crisis on the nature of inspiration. Significantly, it was during that period that Ellen White penned some of her most deliberate statements on the subject. These would be studied again and again by Seventh-day Adventists as they continued the study of the biblical teaching of inspiration after her passing on July 16, 1915.

Seventh-day Adventists and the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy (1915-1950)

Since its very inception in 1844 Seventh-day Adventism had developed under the stabilizing influence of Ellen White. From 1915 on, however, her influence was largely confined to the legacy of her writings. This transition contributed to the development of an identity crisis about the nature and authority of those writings that had been obviously nourished by the revision of the *Testimonies* in the mid-1880s and of the *Great Controversy* in the early 1910s. That crisis reached its climactic expression in the Summer of 1919 in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy that challenged a large number of North American denominations. While Modernists, under the influence of Darwinian evolutionism, challenged the historicity of the biblical accounts of creation and of other supernatural divine interventions, Fundamentalists were de-

⁸²See e.g., L. A. S[mith], “The True Basis for a Genuine Revival,” *RH*, Jan. 5, 1905, 5-6; idem, “Modern Criticism of the Decalogue,” *RH*, Jan. 26, 1905, 6; C. M. S[now], “The Higher Critic and God’s Word,” *RH*, Nov. 28, 1907, 4-5; idem, “The New Salvation,” *RH*, Nov. 28, 1907, 5; R. “The Age of Apostasy,” *ST*, Oct. 6, 1909, 9-10; Editorial, “The Drift in Christendom,” *ST*, Feb. 8, 1910, 10; Earle Albert Rowell, “Higher Criticism,” 16-part series in *ST*, May 10, 1910, 6-7; May 17, 1910, 6-7; May 24, 1910, 6-7; May 31, 1910, 6; June 7, 1910, 3-4; June 14, 1910, 6-7; June 21, 1910, 6-7; June 28, 1910, 5, 9; July 5, 1910, 4-5; July 12, 1910, 6-7; July 19, 1910, 5-6; July 26, 1910, 5-6; Aug. 9, 1910, 7-8; Aug. 16, 1910, 7-8; Aug. 30, 1910, 5, 8; Sept. 6, 1910, 7-8; C. H. Edwards, “Facing the Crisis,” *RH*, May 18, 1911, 3-5; Earle Albert Rowell, “Higher Criticism the Enemy of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, Nov. 9, 1911, 7.

For a more detailed study of Ellen White’s rebuttal to higher criticism, see also Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, “The Authenticity and Christo-centricity of the Pentateuch according to the Writings of Ellen G. White” (Term paper, Andrews University, 1978); Daily, “How Readest Thou.”

⁸³C. M. S[now], “An Attack upon God,” *RH*, Oct. 24, 1912, 11.

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fending the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture in response to those challenges.⁸⁴

Three significant events took place in mid-1919 in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of inspiration. Firstly, Francis M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review*, published in the June 19 issue of that periodical a large report on the “Christian Fundamentals” Conference, which he had attended in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in late May.⁸⁵ Secondly, a Bible Conference for denominational editors, college teachers of Bible and history, and members of the General Conference Committee was held in Washington, DC, from July 1 to 21, 1919. Thirdly, D. M. Canright’s *Life of Mrs. E. G. White*⁸⁶ came off the press also in July 1919,⁸⁷ as the author’s final criticism of Ellen White.

Of special significance were the sections of July 30 and August 1 of the Bible and History Teachers’ Council that followed immediately after the 1919 Bible Conference.⁸⁸ Dealing respectively with “The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History”⁸⁹ and “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,”⁹⁰ those sessions were generally question-answer discussions chaired by Arthur G. Daniells, president of

⁸⁴For a representative exposition of the early Fundamentalist view of Scriptures, see *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 12 vols. (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing Company, [1910-15]). Cf. J. Schoneberg Setzer, “A Critique of the Fundamentalist Doctrine of the Inerrancy of the Biblical Autographs in Historical, Philosophical, Exegetical and Hermeneutical Perspective” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1964); Michael H. Blanco, “The Hermeneutic of *The Fundamentals*” (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1990).

An insightful study of the broader early twentieth-century controversy between Fundamentalism and Modernism has been provided by George M. Marsden in his *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980).

⁸⁵F. M. W[ilcox], “A Conference on Christian Fundamentals,” *RH*, June 19, 1919, 2, 5-8. See also Calvin Bollman, “Christian Fundamentals,” *RH*, July 3, 1919, 5-7.

⁸⁶D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati, [OH]: The Standard Publishing Company, 1919).

⁸⁷Carrie Johnson, *I Was Canright’s Secretary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 165.

⁸⁸For further study of the 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers’ Council, see Mollerus Couperus, “The Bible Conference of 1919,” *Sp* 10 (May 1979): 24-57; Robert W. Olson, “The 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers’ Council” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1979); Bert Haloviak, “In the Shadow of the ‘Daily’: Background and Aftermath of the 1919 Bible and History Teachers’ Conference” (A paper presented at the meeting of Seventh-day Adventist Bible Scholars in New York City, November 14, 1979); Bert Haloviak and Gary Land, “Ellen White & Doctrinal Conflict: Context of the 1919 Bible Conference,” *Sp* 12 (June 1982): 19-34; Valentine, “William Warren Prescott,” 504-19.

⁸⁹“The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, July 30, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

⁹⁰“Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

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the General Conference. The focal points of these discussions were the issues of “verbal inspiration” and “infallibility” of prophetic writings.⁹¹

Regarding the subject of verbal inspiration⁹² of Ellen White’s testimonies, A. G. Daniells stated that neither Ellen White, nor James White, nor W. C. White, nor anyone of “the persons who helped to prepare those Testimonies” ever claimed it.⁹³ Reactions to this position can be found in F. M. Wilcox’s question to W. W. Prescott, “Do you believe that a man who doesn’t believe in verbal inspiration of the Bible believes the Bible?”⁹⁴ Clifton L. Taylor, head of the Bible Department of Canadian Junior College, remarked:

With regard to the verbal inspiration of the Testimonies, I would say that I have heard more about it here in one day than ever before in my life. I think we have made a great big mountain of difficulty to go out and fight against. I do not believe that our people generally believe in the verbal inspiration of the Testimonies. I think that the general idea of our people is that the Testimonies are the writings of a sister who received light from God. As to verbal inspiration, I think they have a very ill-defined idea. I think they believe that in some way God gave her light, and she wrote it down, and they do not know what verbal inspiration means.⁹⁵

As far as infallibility is concerned, A. G. Daniells stated that it is not right to regard the Spirit of Prophecy as “the only safe interpreter of the Bible.”⁹⁶ He argued also that Ellen White “never claimed to be an authority on history” or “a dogmatic teacher on theology”⁹⁷ and that she never regarded her “historical quotations” as infallible.⁹⁸ C. L. Benson, professor of History at Union College, reacted to this position, inquiring:

If there are such uncertainties with reference to our historical position, and if the Testimonies are not to be relied on to throw a great deal of light upon our historical positions, and if the same is true with reference to our theological interpretation of texts, then how can we consistently place implicit confidence in the direction that is given with reference to our educational problems, and our medical school, and even our denominational organization? If there is a definite spiritual leadership in these things, then how can we consistently lay

⁹¹A. G. Daniells, in *ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹²For a more detailed study of the 1919 Seventh-day Adventist discussion on “verbal inspiration,” see Valentine, “William Warren Prescott,” 515, fn. 2.

⁹³A. G. Daniells, in “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” 17, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

⁹⁴F. M. Wilcox, in “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” 30, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, July 30, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

⁹⁵C. L. Taylor, in “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” 6, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

⁹⁶A. G. Daniells, in “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” 9, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, July 30, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 26.

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aside the Testimonies or particularly lay them aside when it comes to the prophetic and historic side of the message? and place these things on the basis of research work?⁹⁹

The same issue was also raised by C. L. Taylor in the following words:

If we must lay aside what Sister White has said interpreting history, or what we might call the philosophy of history, as unreliable, and also lay aside as unreliable expositions of [S]cripture, the only natural conclusion for me, and probably for a great many others, would be that the same authorship is unreliable regarding organization, regarding pantheism, and every other subject that she ever treated on;—that she may have told the truth, but we had better get all the historical data we can to see whether she told the truth or not.¹⁰⁰

That the church leadership at large did not follow Daniells' views of inspiration is evident not only from the fact that the records of the 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers' Council were not brought to public attention during the years that followed that conference,¹⁰¹ but also from the fact that his views were not reflected in the content of the several books and pamphlets¹⁰² and of the Sabbath School quarterly¹⁰³ published during the 1920s and 1930s in defense of the Bible as the Word of God.

During the 1920s and 1930s Seventh-day Adventists supported Fundamentalism in uplifting the trustworthiness of the Bible in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. That Seventh-day Adventists had historically held to a view of Scripture that had much in common with Fundamentalism is evident from their former responses to "infidels" and to higher criticism.¹⁰⁴ Thus, William G. Wirth clearly stated that there could be "no neutral ground" in

⁹⁹C. L. Benson, in "Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible," 4-5, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

¹⁰⁰C. L. Taylor, in *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰¹The records of the 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers' Council were misplaced until December 1974, when F. Donald Yost found them. M. Couperus, "The Bible Conference of 1919," *Sp* 10 (May 1979): 26.

¹⁰²See e.g., H. L. Hastings, *Will the Old Book Stand? A Compilation from the Anti-Infidel Library and Other Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, [1923]); Carlyle B. Haynes, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1924); William G. Wirth, *The Battle of the Churches: Modernism or Fundamentalism, Which?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1924); Milton C. Wilcox, *The Surety of the Bible[.] God's Multiplied Witness* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1925); Frederick C. Gilbert, *The Bible[.] a Twentieth-Century Book* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1927); Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Bible: Is It a True Book? An Inquiry into the Origin, Authenticity, History, and Character of the Sacred Writings of Christianity* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1927); Fannie D. Chase, *The Bible—Book Divine* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1933); Carlyle B. Haynes, *God's Book* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1935).

¹⁰³*Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, no. 152 (2nd quarter, 1933).

¹⁰⁴For a comparative study between Seventh-day Adventism and Fundamentalism, see Carl Walter Daggy, "A Comparative Study of Certain Aspects of Fundamentalism with Seventh-day Adventism" (M.A. thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1955).

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the battle between Modernism and Fundamentalism.¹⁰⁵ And F. M. Wilcox added that “Seventh-day Adventists, with their historical belief in the Divine Word, should count themselves the chief of Fundamentalists today.”¹⁰⁶

On July 15, 1920, the *Review* published a report on the second Conference of Christian Fundamentals, held in Chicago, Illinois. Leon A. Smith, literary editor of the Press Bureau of the General Conference, reported that “the conference affirmed its belief in the verbal inspiration of the Old and New Testaments as first penned by the Bible writers.” For Smith, “all this was good.”¹⁰⁷

In 1919 S. N. Haskell, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist and administrator, had already defined inspiration as “God’s breath, using the vocal organs of the prophet” (cf. Dan 10:17, 19).¹⁰⁸

In 1926 Benjamin L. House, professor of Bible and Homiletics at Pacific Union College, devoted a special section of his *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges* to the topic of “The Inspiration of the Bible.”¹⁰⁹ One of the first paragraphs of that section was a quotation from the non-Adventist author William Evans,¹¹⁰ stating that since inspiration is “*God speaking through men,*” the Old Testament is “*just as much the Word of God as though God spake every single word of it with His own lips.*”¹¹¹

Later on in the book, House defined more clearly his own concept of inspiration. He distinguished inspiration from revelation by postulating that while revelation is the “act of God by which He directly communicates truth to man,” inspiration “refers to the divine superintendence which has been given in speaking or writing all of the records found in the Bible.” Therefore, “all ‘revelation’ is ‘inspired,’ but all that is ‘inspired’ did not come by ‘revelation.’”¹¹²

Holding the view of “Verbal or Plenary Inspiration,” House rejected the theories (1) of *partial* inspiration, for implying that “the Bible contains much that is not inspired”; (2) of *concept* or *thought* inspiration, for leaving the Bible writers “absolutely to themselves in the choice of words they should use”; (3) of *mechanical* or *dynamic* inspiration, for not accounting for “the different style of the various writers” and for “the material secured from historical records”; (4) of

¹⁰⁵Wirth, *Battle of the Churches*, 7.

¹⁰⁶F. M. Wilcox, “Forsaking the Foundations of Faith,” *RH*, Nov. 28, 1929, 14. See also George McCready Price, “The Significance of Fundamentalism,” *RH*, May 12, 1927, 13-14.

¹⁰⁷Leon A. Smith, “The Chicago Conference of Christian Fundamentals,” *RH*, July 15, 1920, 20.

¹⁰⁸S. N. Haskell, *Bible Handbook* (South Lancaster, MA: Bible Training School, 1919), 9.

¹⁰⁹Benjamin L. House, *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges: A Course in Biblical Theology*, tentative ed. ([Washington, DC]: General Conference Department of Education, 1926), 60-69.

¹¹⁰William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1912), 194-45.

¹¹¹House, *Analytical Studies*, 60 (italics supplied in replacement to the original emphasis). This quotation was still preserved in the 1928 edition of House’s book.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 62.

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natural inspiration, for denying “the supernatural and the mysterious in the Bible”; and (5) of *illumination* or *universal Christian* inspiration, for holding that “the Christians of every age have been inspired just the same as the Bible writers.”¹¹³

According to House, the theory of “Verbal or Plenary Inspiration” holds that

all Scripture is inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, that the selection of the very words of Scripture in the original languages was overruled by the Holy Spirit in some [way] . . . , and that the writers did experience the guiding and controlling influence of the divine Spirit in the choice of material. He guided the writer even in the choice of what imperial decrees, genealogies, official letters, state papers, or historical matters he might find necessary for recording the divine message of salvation.¹¹⁴

Also in 1926, F. M. Wilcox penned that since it was “the Spirit of Christ in the prophets” who “testified through them” (cf. 1 Pet 1:10, 11),

it was not David who spoke, not Isaiah, not Daniel, but Christ speaking through them. *Nor was it the instrument through whom the message came that was inspired; it was the message itself.* Indeed, the prophets oftentimes failed to understand their own prophecies, and with others had to search what God had revealed through them, to find that salvation of which they prophesied.¹¹⁵

In 1927 Carlyle B. Haynes, president of the South American Division, penned an insightful chapter on “The Inspiration of the Book” in his *The Bible: Is It a True Book?* Haynes stated in this chapter that

the Bible is a divine *revelation* embodied in an *inspired* Book. By revelation God makes known to man that which he could never know or discover for himself. By inspiration God so guides and controls man that his writing even of things not revealed is precise and accurate.¹¹⁶

According to Haynes, “the Bible declares that God *did* inspire its writers and writings.” Since “it does not tell us *how* He did this,” “we have nothing to do with the *method* of inspiration,” but “we have everything to do with the *fact* of inspiration.”¹¹⁷ Haynes declared that although “the words of the Bible were not dictated to the inspired writers as a man would dictate to a stenographer,”

¹¹³Ibid., 66-68.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁵Francis M. Wilcox, *What the Bible Teaches: A Synopsis of Leading Bible Doctrines Setting Forth the Everlasting Gospel as Revealed in Jesus Christ Our Divine Lord and Only Saviour* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1926), 8 (italics supplied).

¹¹⁶Haynes, *The Bible: Is It a True Book?*, 67 (italics in the original).

¹¹⁷Ibid. 70 (italics in the original).

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the Holy Spirit mysteriously controlled the whole process by which the Holy Scriptures were produced. Haynes explained that

when God inspired men to write, the personality of the writer was not effaced, his style was not set aside. The Spirit of God infallibly guided in the communication of divine truth from the writer's own vocabulary, and in his own particular style. Inspiration means that the Spirit, by a mysterious control beyond our comprehension, but in which we may and should believe, acted in such a way upon chosen men while they were writing the books of the Bible, that they were supernaturally guided in communicating the will of God. Their individual human personalities, their peculiar mental traits, and even their forms and styles of literary expression were apparently given full sway and liberty, and were used by the Spirit, and yet the product was so controlled that it became "the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." 1 Peter 1:23.¹¹⁸

Although Ellen White and other Seventh-day Adventist authors had endorsed the use of different English versions of the Bible, in 1930 Benjamin G. Wilkinson, dean of the School of Theology and professor of Biblical Exegesis at Washington Missionary College, published his *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, advocating the reliability of the King James Version and blaming other modern versions for being distorted by Modernist influence.¹¹⁹ Such blames were responded to by a committee from the General Conference,¹²⁰ to which Wilkinson, in turn, replied.¹²¹

In June 1931 the *Ministry* reprinted several paragraphs from the non-Adventist E. Kretzmann's article "Modern Views about Inspiration."¹²² This reprint stated, under the title "Valuable Quotations from Reliable Sources," that "all the thoughts" and "all the words of Scriptures" were inspired by the Holy Spirit. "Not only is every word of doctrine true, but there is also no mistake in the historical data offered, nor in any other point of divine or human knowledge." Since "the Holy Scripture consists of words," "if we do not accept verbal inspiration, then it is senseless, nonsensical, to speak of an inspiration of the Bible."¹²³

The contemporary emphasis on the trustworthiness of the Bible was also reflected in the wording of the 1931 "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists." Instead of speaking of the Holy Scriptures as "the only *infallible* rule of faith and practice," as both the 1872¹²⁴ and 1889¹²⁵ statements of beliefs did,

¹¹⁸Ibid., 76-77.

¹¹⁹Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*.

¹²⁰"A Review of 'Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,' by B. G. Wilkinson" (N.p., [1931]), AHC.

¹²¹Wilkinson, "Reply to the 'Review' of My Book, 'Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,'" AHC.

¹²²P. E. Kretzmann, "Modern Views about Inspiration—and the Truth of Scriptures," *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (April 1929): 227-44.

¹²³"Valuable Quotations from Reliable Sources," *Min*, June 1931, 20-21.

¹²⁴[U. Smith], *Declaration of the Fundamental Principles*, 5, art. III (italics supplied).

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the 1931 statement came out referring to Scripture as “the only *unerring* rule of faith and practice.”¹²⁶ The Sabbath School lesson for April 8, 1933, referred to Numbers 22:38 and Ezekiel 1:3; 2:7 in support of the idea that “inspiration does not leave a man to speak his own words.”¹²⁷

Also in 1933, an eighteen-part series by F. M. Wilcox came out in the *Review*, under the general title “Testimony of Jesus,”¹²⁸ which appeared the next year (1934) in book form.¹²⁹ In this series Wilcox moved perceptibly away from his previous understanding of verbal inspiration. He argued that inspired writers did not claim infallibility for themselves,¹³⁰ and that Ellen White was not “verbally inspired” in the sense that she received “the exact words in which her thoughts” were expressed.¹³¹

In 1935 C. B. Haynes, then president of the Michigan Conference, came out with his 222-page book, *God’s Book*,¹³² expanding considerably the author’s previous arguments on inspiration.¹³³ In this new book Haynes spoke of revelation as “the *informing* process” and inspiration as “the *imparting* process.” He argued that as the information recorded by inspired writers not always comes from supernatural revelation, so individuals who sometimes receive divine revelations do not necessarily become inspired prophets (cf. Exod 19ff).¹³⁴

Haynes stated that in Scripture “there is no mechanical dictation, but *inspiration*,” which “means more than an *uninspired* account of *inspired* thoughts.” For him, inspiration was *plenary*, by which he suggested that “God’s inspiration includes the form as well as the substance,” and that it “extends to the words as well as the thoughts.” Haynes justified his position saying that “we cannot know God’s thoughts unless we know His words.”¹³⁵

¹²⁵*Seventh-Day Adventist Year Book of Statistics for 1889* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1889), 148, art. III (italics supplied).

¹²⁶*1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, [1931]), 377, art. 1 (italics supplied).

¹²⁷*Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, no. 152 (2nd quarter 1933), 7.

¹²⁸[Francis M. Wilcox], “The Testimony of Jesus,” 18-part series in *RH*, July 6, 1933, 6-7; July 13, 1933, 9-10; July 20, 1933, 8-9; July 27, 1933, 8, 20; Aug. 3, 1933, 5-6; Aug. 10, 1933, 5-6; Aug. 17, 1933, 5-6; Aug. 31, 1933, 10-11; Sept. 7, 1933, 5-6; Oct. 5, 1933, 8-10; Oct. 12, 1933, 9-10; Oct. 19, 1933, 6-7; Oct. 26, 1933, 8-9; Nov. 2, 1933, 7-9; Nov. 16, 1933, 2, 7; Nov. 23, 1933, 4-5, 11; Nov. 30, 1933, 10-11; Dec. 7, 1933, 5-7, 17.

¹²⁹Francis M. Wilcox, *The Testimony of Jesus* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1934).

¹³⁰F. M. Wilcox, “Testimony of Jesus,” *RH*, Oct. 5, 1933, 8-10.

¹³¹F. M. Wilcox, “Testimony of Jesus,” *RH*, Oct. 19, 1933, 6-7.

¹³²Haynes, *God’s Book*. In 1950 a 420-page revised and enlarged edition of this book was published under the title *The Books of All Nations*. No revisions were made in the main chapter on inspiration (chapter 18), except to the addition of some new paragraphs, which only expanded the author’s previous views of inspiration. See Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Book of All Nations*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1950), 232, 250-54.

¹³³See Haynes, *The Bible: Is It a True Book?*, 67-77.

¹³⁴Haynes, *God’s Book*, 136 (italics in the original).

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 138 (italics in the original).

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Haynes argued also that the Bible writers “required *inspiration*” to produce a record “infallibly preserved” from “all error and mistake.”¹³⁶ He regarded the Bible as infallibly accurate and precise not only in its historical accounts but also in its “predictions of the future.”¹³⁷ For him “the *facts* of science and the teachings of the Bible are in complete agreement.”¹³⁸

In 1940 Haynes even stated that Seventh-day Adventists “are Fundamentalists in their understanding and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.”¹³⁹ In 1944 Walter E. Straw argued that “no authenticated scientific fact has been revealed that was contrary to the teaching of the Bible” and that “no archeological discovery has revealed truths contrary to the Bible.”¹⁴⁰

Also in 1944, a new edition of F. M. Wilcox’s *Testimony of Jesus*, with an additional chapter on “The Inspiration of the Bible Writers,” came off the press.¹⁴¹ It was in this chapter that probably for the first time Ellen White’s Manuscript 16, 1888 (“The Inspiration of the Word of God”)¹⁴² and Manuscript 24, 1886 (“Objections to the Bible”) appeared in print.¹⁴³ The second of these manuscripts would be quoted frequently in later discussions of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching of biblical inspiration.

Noteworthy, it was also during the period under consideration (1915-1950) that some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist studies in geology, biblical archeology, and biblical chronology appeared in support of the trustworthiness of the Bible. George M. Price,¹⁴⁴ for instance, penned several books in which he used geological data to support the biblical accounts of creation and the flood.¹⁴⁵ W. W. Prescott,¹⁴⁶ Lynn H. Wood,¹⁴⁷ and several others¹⁴⁸ used

¹³⁶Ibid., 136-37 (italics in the original).

¹³⁷Ibid., 92.

¹³⁸Ibid., 150 (italics in the original).

¹³⁹Carlyle B. Haynes, *Seventh-day Adventists—Their Work and Teachings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1940), 9.

¹⁴⁰W. E. Straw, *Bible Doctrines for College Students* (Berrien Springs, MI: Emmanuel Missionary College, 1944), 43.

¹⁴¹Francis M. Wilcox, *The Testimony of Jesus: A Review of the Work and Teachings of Mrs. Ellen Gould White*, [enl. ed.] (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1944), 11-18.

¹⁴²In Ms. 16, 1888, Ellen White criticized the attempts to solve “the supposed difficulties of Scripture” by distinguishing between “that which is inspired and that which is not inspired.”

¹⁴³In Ms. 24, 1886, appear Ellen White’s often quoted statements that “the Bible is written by inspired men” and that “it is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired.”

¹⁴⁴Harold W. Clark, *Crusader for Creation: The Life and Writings of George McCready Price* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1966); Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 72-101.

¹⁴⁵See e.g., George McCready Price, *The Fundamentals of Geology and Their Bearing on the Doctrine of a Literal Creation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913); idem, *The New Geology* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923); idem, *Evolutionary Geology and the New Catastrophism* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1926); idem, *A History of Some Scientific Blunders* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930); idem, *The Geological-Ages Hoax: A Plea for Logic in Theoretical Geology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1931); idem, *Modern Discoveries which Help Us to Believe*

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archeology in furthering the historicity of Bible accounts. Edwin R. Thiele demonstrated in his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (1943),¹⁴⁹ that many of the so-called historical discrepancies of the Bible could actually be synchronized.¹⁵⁰

Despite the seeds of disbelief in Ellen White's prophetic ministry that Ludwig R. Conradi sowed in Europe during the 1930s,¹⁵¹ several new books came of the press in both the United States and Europe (between 1915 and 1950) advocating the genuineness of her prophetic gift.¹⁵² Those books, however, were more concerned with proving the prophetic gift of Ellen White than in discussing the actual nature of her inspiration.

Up to the 1950s Seventh-day Adventists were much concerned about defending the trustworthiness of Scripture from Modernist attacks. The inspiration of the Scriptures was largely defined during that period in terms of infallibility and verbal inspiration. However, from the 1950s Seventh-day Adventists would

(New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1934); idem, *The Modern Flood Theory of Geology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1935); idem, *Genesis Vindicated* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941); idem, *Common-Sense Geology* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1946).

¹⁴⁶W. W. Prescott, *The Spade and the Bible: Archeological Discoveries Support the Old Book* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1933).

¹⁴⁷See e.g., Lynn H. Wood, "Archeology's Contribution to Faith," 2-part series in *Min*, Jan. 1938, 18-19, 46; Feb. 1938, 13-14, 41-42; idem, "The Bible and Archeology," 3-part series in *Min*, April 1940, 23-26; May 1940, 16-18, 46; June 1940, 8-10; idem, "Archeology and the Bible," 5-part series in *RH*, Sept. 3, 1942, 3-4; Sept. 10, 1942, 5-7; Sept. 17, 1942, 5-7; Sept. 24, 1942, 4-6; Oct. 1, 1942, 3-5.

¹⁴⁸For a more detailed study of Seventh-day Adventist interest in biblical archeology, see Lloyd A. Willis, *Archaeology in Adventist Literature, 1937-1980*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1982).

¹⁴⁹Edwin R. Thiele, "The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1943). See also Edwin R. Thiele, "The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3 (July 1944): 137-86; idem, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: A Reconstruction of the Chronology of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951).

¹⁵⁰See Siegfried H. Horn, "From Bishop Ussher to Edwin R. Thiele," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (hereafter *AUSS*) 18 (Spring 1980): 37-49; Edwin R. Thiele, "The Chronology of the Hebrew Kings," *Adventist Review* (hereafter *AtR*), May 17, 1984, 3-5.

¹⁵¹See Johann H. Gerhardt, "L. R. Conradi, the Development of a Tragedy" (Term paper, Andrews University, 1970); Daniel Heinz, *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987), 107-13.

¹⁵²See e.g., F. C. Gilbert, comp., *Divine Predictions of Mrs. Ellen G. White Fulfilled* (South Lancaster, MA: Good Tidings Press, 1922); W. Mueller, *Die geistlichen Gaben unter Berücksichtigung der Schriften von E. G. White* (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, n.d.); Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1931); Arthur G. Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1936); William A. Spicer, *The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1937); Lewis H. Christian, *The Fruitage of Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947); George K. Abbott, *The Witness of Science to the Testimony of the Spirit of Prophecy*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948).

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see the rise of new trends that would multiply during the 1970s and early 1980s. Among those trends would be an increasing tendency to define inspiration from factual studies on the person and writings of Ellen White.

The Emergence of New Trends (1950-1970)

A significant number of publications came out during the 1950s uplifting the reliability of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Of the books dealing with Ellen White,¹⁵³ Francis D. Nichol's *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (1951)¹⁵⁴ was the most outstanding one. In this 702-page volume, Nichol responded to almost all charges raised against Ellen White since the days of Can-right.

It was also during the 1950s that a group of Seventh-day Adventist scholars combined their efforts to produce a *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953-1957).¹⁵⁵ With the help of such groups as the Committee on Bible Chronology¹⁵⁶ and the Committee on Problems in Bible Translations,¹⁵⁷ the commentary integrated in a single project the views of its different contributors. It was stated that while rejecting the position that "the writers of Scripture wrote under verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit," the commentary was carried out under the assumption that the writers of Scripture "spoke and wrote according to their own individualities and characteristics, as is indicated by the varied styles of writing that they display, but free of the errors found in other writings."¹⁵⁸

In the mid-1950s Carl W. Daggy completed his M.A. thesis, "A Comparative Study of Certain Aspects of Fundamentalism with Seventh-day Adventism" (1955), in which he explicitly suggested that Seventh-day Adventists were not in

¹⁵³See e.g., Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951); W. E. Read, *The Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the Church* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1952); Arthur W. Spalding, *There Shines a Light: The Life and Work of Ellen G. White* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1953); Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Publications, 1954); T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1955); Denton E. Rebok, *Believe His Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1956).

¹⁵⁴Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*.

¹⁵⁵Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57). Cf. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Untold Story of the Bible Conference," *Sp* 16 (Aug. 1985): 35-51.

¹⁵⁶See "Committee on Bible Chronology" minutes, GCA; Siegfried H. Horn to Alberto R. Timm, Sept. 2, 1992.

¹⁵⁷See Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, *Problems in Bible Translation: A Study of Certain Principles of Bible Translation and Interpretation, together with an Examination of Several Bible texts in the Light of these Principles* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954).

¹⁵⁸[Siegfried H. Horn and Earle Hilgert], "'Lower' and 'Higher' Biblical Criticism," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:177.

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full agreement with the Fundamentalist view of inspiration.¹⁵⁹ According to Daggy,

Fundamentalists and Seventh-day Adventists are in agreement that the Bible is the Christian's sole unerring rule of faith and practice. They sharply disagree, however, on the question of verbal inspiration. The Fundamentalists generally take the position that the words of Scriptures, as such, were inspired by God. Seventh-day Adventists, on the other hand, believe that inspiration functioned in the minds of the Bible writers, but that their choice of words was their own. At the same time, they insist that this choice was guarded so that the writers did not express error.¹⁶⁰

Also in 1955, Roy F. Cottrell (not to be confused with Raymond F. Cottrell), a Seventh-day Adventist minister working in Escondido, California, argued that while "inspiration did not impart a precise identity of expression or memory," "careful study reveals no discord in the records."¹⁶¹

In 1957 the book *Questions on Doctrine* came out affirming that Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Bible "not merely *contains* the word of God, but *is* the word of God."¹⁶²

In the following year (1958) Ellen White's *Selected Messages*, book 1, came off the press with an insightful section compiled from the author's writings on inspiration.¹⁶³

Although Seventh-day Adventists had traditionally held the *propositional* view of revelation, a perceivable move towards the *encounter* view of revelation was taken by Frederick E. J. Harder in his 506-page Ph.D. dissertation, "Revelation, a Source of Knowledge as Conceived by Ellen G. White," defended in 1960 at New York University.¹⁶⁴ In this dissertation Harder studied Ellen G. White's concept of revelation in the light of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Augustus Strong, and Emil Brunner.

In interpreting Ellen White's concept of revelation, Harder suggested that

White agreed with Brunner's emphasis on the personal content of revelation—that it consists in an "I-Thou" relationship in which God communicates Himself to man. She did not share Brunner's hesitancy to accept the revelation of specific truths, for these, she believed, contribute to the ultimate reconciliation between man and God.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹Daggy, "Comparative Study of Certain Aspects of Fundamentalism with Seventh-day Adventism."

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶¹Roy F. Cottrell, "How the Bible Came to Us—1: God's Chosen Penmen," *RH*, March 3, 1955, 5.

¹⁶²*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 27 (italics in the original).

¹⁶³E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:13-76.

¹⁶⁴Frederick E. J. Harder, "Revelation, a Source of Knowledge, as Conceived by Ellen G. White" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960).

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 485.

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While acknowledging that Ellen White recognized the communication of specific truths in the process of revelation, Harder did not emphasize her understanding of that communication as an actual impartation of propositional truths. Although “the line between the natural and the supernatural is almost nonexistent so far as the attainment of knowledge is concerned,” there is still a need for the Word of God because that Word was “communicated by methods less subject to the distortions of sin” than in natural revelation.¹⁶⁶

In regard to the inspiration of Scripture, Harder stated that for Ellen White “inspiration reveals thought, but it does not set the mold for its form of expression.”¹⁶⁷ Harder recognizes, however, that for Ellen White the Bible is “a correct record” of biography and history because (1) “the scribes wrote under direction of the Holy Spirit,” and (2) “this influence counteracted the human biases which cause biographers to gloss over many derogatory facts about their heroes and thus present only a partial truth.”¹⁶⁸ “Inasmuch as both science and the Bible have the same author, there can be no conflict between them when they are rightly understood.”¹⁶⁹ Varieties of “styles and subject matters” are seen by Ellen White as “a strength rather than weakness,” because they provide “varying emphases” to the many aspects of truth “which would not be presented in a toughly uniform work.”¹⁷⁰

Also in 1960, H. W. Lowe, general field secretary of the General Conference, responded to some of Walter Martin’s (a non-Adventist) charges against Ellen White,¹⁷¹ saying that “a God-chosen instrument may be inspired in writing, teaching, preaching, exhorting, but humanly fallible in the exercise of private judgment.”¹⁷²

Another slight move towards *encounter* revelation was taken by Jack W. Provonsha, professor of Christian Ethics at Loma Linda University, in his article “Revelation and Inspiration,” published in 1964 in the *Andrews University Seminary Studies*.¹⁷³ In this article, Provonsha spoke of encounter revelation in a much friendlier way than traditional Seventh-day Adventists used to speak. The overall tenor of the article seemed even to suggest a certain *via-media* position

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 3 (of the abstract), 486.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 235. Cf. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:21-22.

¹⁶⁸Harder, “Revelation, a Source of Knowledge,” 150-51. Cf. E. G. White, “Bible Biographies,” *RH*, Jan. 22, 1880, 49; idem, *Steps to Christ*, 89.

¹⁶⁹Harder, “Revelation, a Source of Knowledge,” 405. Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 462; idem, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 130.

¹⁷⁰Harder, “Revelation, a Source of Knowledge,” 234-35. Cf. E. G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), vi-vii.

¹⁷¹See Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 90-114.

¹⁷²H. W. Lowe, “Alleged Outside Influence on Ellen G. White,” *Min*, Oct. 1960, 16.

¹⁷³Jack W. Provonsha, “Revelation and History,” *AUSS* 2 (1964): 109-19.

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between the propositional concept of revelation and the encounter revelation theory.

The first edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1966) came off the press with a specific entry on the “Inspiration of Scripture.”¹⁷⁴ After quoting the statement on the “Holy Scriptures” of the Fundamental Beliefs that was officially accepted since 1931,¹⁷⁵ the entry stated that Seventh-day Adventists “do not believe in verbal inspiration, according to the usual meaning of the term, but in what may properly be called thought inspiration.”¹⁷⁶ This statement was followed by some quotations from Ellen White’s writings.¹⁷⁷

Also in 1966, Arthur L. White, secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate and grandson of Ellen White, presented a lecture at Andrews University under the title “Toward a Factual Concept of Inspiration” (published in 1973).¹⁷⁸ In that lecture A. L. White actually stated that

Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely fortunate in approaching the question of the inspiration of the prophets. We are not left to find our way, drawing all our conclusions from writings of two thousand years or more ago that have come down to us through varied transcriptions and translations. With us it is an almost contemporary matter, for we have had a prophet in our midst. It is generally granted by the careful student of her works that the experience of Ellen G. White was not different from that of the prophets of old.¹⁷⁹

The same author mentioned that “Ellen G. White’s statements concerning the Bible and her work indicate that the concept of verbal inspiration is without support in either the Bible writers’ or her own word.”¹⁸⁰ He declared also that while “the Scriptures provide an infallible revelation,” “the language used in imparting it to mankind is not infallible.”¹⁸¹ Following the non-Adventist Henry Alford,¹⁸² A. L. White admitted the existence of factual discrepancies in “details of minor consequence.”¹⁸³

The Sabbath School Lesson for October 11, 1969, stated, however, that not only “the actual impartation of the divine revelation of truth came to the prophet

¹⁷⁴See Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), 585-86.

¹⁷⁵See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* ([Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists], 1963), 29.

¹⁷⁶Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 585.

¹⁷⁷E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:21; idem, *Great Controversy* (1911), vi.

¹⁷⁸Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 13-48. See also idem, “Toward a Factual Concept of Inspiration II” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1978).

¹⁷⁹A. L. White, *Ellen G. White Writings*, 15.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸²Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (London: Rivingtons, 1863), vol. 1, pt. I, chap. I, 20-27.

¹⁸³A. L. White, *Ellen G. White Writings*, 26-48.

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under the Spirit's guidance and control" (cf. Num 12:6; Hos 12:10; Rev 1:10), but also that "the communication to the people of the light received by the prophet, was also directed by the Holy Spirit" (cf. 2 Pet 1:21; Rev 1:2, 11).¹⁸⁴

George Burnside, Ministerial Association secretary of the Australasian Division, suggested in the *Ministry* magazine for January 1970 (1) that "the very nature of our God demands an infallible Bible" (Titus 1:2); (2) that "the Bible claims infallibility" (Prov 30:5); and (3) that "Jesus, heaven's glorious Commander, accepted the Scriptures as unerring" (John 8:12; 17:17; 10:35; Matt 24:35).¹⁸⁵

Aware of the new critical trends that were slowly leading Seventh-day Adventism into a crisis on inspiration, Edward Heppenstall, professor of Systematic Theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, pointed out in *Ministry* magazine for July 1970 that Seventh-day Adventists had simply aligned themselves "with the evangelical or traditional position," without having a "clearly defined and developed doctrine of revelation and inspiration."¹⁸⁶

After blaming the encounter theory of revelation for confusing revelation "with regeneration,"¹⁸⁷ Heppenstall affirmed that "God's communication is addressed to the mind of man in rational concepts and verbal propositions." "By inspiration," according to Heppenstall, "God kept the Bible writers within the conceptual truths of His revelation," so that "both the writers and the message were God directed" (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). Heppenstall affirmed also that Scripture is "without error in what it teaches, in the historical facts basic to the truths they are intended to unfold," but not necessarily in "the accuracy of words per se."¹⁸⁸

Thus, the two decades under consideration (1950-1970) saw the emergence of some moves toward encounter revelation and a thought view of inspiration that was largely informed by a particular understanding of Ellen White's phenomena. Not until the 1970s and early 1980s, however, did these trends reach their climactic expression.

Challenges of the Historicization of Inspired Writings (1970-1991)

While conflicting views of inspiration had been previously nurtured within Seventh-day Adventism, it was in the early 1970s that Seventh-day Adventist scholars became more controversially divided on this particular doctrine. The main forums to foster those discussions were the Association of Adventist Fo-

¹⁸⁴*Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, Senior Division, no. 298 (4th quarter 1969), 9.

¹⁸⁵G[eorge] Burnside, "Our Infallible Bible," *Min*, Jan. 1970, 6.

¹⁸⁶Edward Heppenstall, "Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration—Part 1," *Min*, July 1970, 16. See also idem, "The Nature of Revelation" (Unpubl. ms., n.d.), AHC.

¹⁸⁷E. Heppenstall, "Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration—Part 1," *Min*, July 1970, 17.

¹⁸⁸H. Heppenstall, "Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration"—Part 2, *Min*, Aug. 1970, 28-29.

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rums (officially established in the Fall of 1967)¹⁸⁹ and its *Spectrum* magazine (first issued in the Winter of 1969).¹⁹⁰

As a non-official church publication, *Spectrum* assumed a revisionist-critical stand, which would eventually be rebuked by Neal C. Wilson, General Conference president, at the 1984 Annual Council of the General Conference.¹⁹¹ Several articles advocating encounter revelation and the use of the historical-critical method came out in *Spectrum*, setting the agenda for many discussions on inspiration during the period under consideration (1970-1991).

Encounter Revelation. The theory of encounter revelation¹⁹² was a neo-orthodox reaction to the traditional concept of propositional revelation. It perceives revelation as a subjective personal divine-human encounter rather than as an objective communication of propositional truth. The Bible is, therefore, reduced to a mere human testimony of that encounter.

The Autumn-1970 issue of *Spectrum* came out with several articles dealing with Ellen White. Among those articles was one by F. E. J. Harder,¹⁹³ dean of the School of Graduate Studies of Andrews University, in which he further elaborated some basic concepts of his Ph.D. dissertation (1960).¹⁹⁴ Seventh-day Adventists were challenged by Harder's article to move beyond the nineteenth century Protestant view of special revelation "as propositionally embedded within an ancient book." For Harder, special revelation was a "continuing conversation and communion between God and living people" in personal and communal bases.¹⁹⁵

In 1975 Herold Weiss, chairman of the Department of Religious Studies of St. Mary's College, Indiana, and former assistant professor of New Testament at

¹⁸⁹See Alvin L. Kwiram, "Introduction," *Sp* 1 (Winter 1969): 4-5.

¹⁹⁰D. R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration," *Sp* 10 (March 1980): 27-41. See also Richard C. Osborn, "The Establishment of The Adventist Forum," *Sp* 10 (March 1980): 42-58.

¹⁹¹See "Association of Adventist Forums and *Spectrum*—Neal C. Wilson Statement," in *1984 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee: General Actions* (Washington, DC: [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists], 1984), 27-31; Myron K. Widmer, "1984 Annual Council—Part III," *ATR*, Nov. 15, 1984, 4-5; "Annual Council—1984," *Min*, Dec. 1984, 23-24.

A response to Neal Wilson's statement was published by the Association of Adventist Forum Board in *Sp* 15 (Dec. 1984): 28-30.

¹⁹²Classical expositions of the encounter revelation theory are found in Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946); and idem, *Truth as Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

For non-Seventh-day Adventist critical responses to encounter revelation, see e.g., Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958); Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1971); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word, 1976-83).

¹⁹³Frederick E. J. Harder, "Divine Revelation: A Review of Some of Ellen White's Concepts," *Sp* 2 (Autumn 1970): 35-56. Cf. W. Paul Bradley, "Ellen G. White and Her Writings," *Sp* 3 (Spring 1971): 51-52.

¹⁹⁴See Harder, "Revelation, a Source of Knowledge."

¹⁹⁵F. E. J. Harder, "Divine Revelation: A Review of Some of Ellen White's Concepts," *Sp* 2 (Autumn 1970): 53-54.

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Andrews University, moved even more explicitly toward the encounter theology of neo-orthodoxy in his *Spectrum* article entitled “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration.”¹⁹⁶ Under the assumption that “both revelation and inspiration take place outside and prior to the Bible,” Weiss argued that

to equate God’s Word with a book is the work of a corrupted faith that sets up for itself an idol. The words of the book are the words of the prophets which only tangentially reflect the Word of God. Nothing on earth is the ultimate expression of God. To make the Bible such is bibliolatry, just another form of idolatry.¹⁹⁷

Weiss rejected the “verbal inspiration” idea that “the Bible has one Author” because “historical, grammatical and literary” studies have shown that “it is impossible to lump all the books of the Bible under one author.” Based on such an assumption Weiss argued that “the Bible as a book can and must be studied as any other book.”¹⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the most significant Seventh-day Adventist critical responses to the encounter revelation theory were penned by Raoul Dederen during the 1970s. In a paper entitled “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” which came out in the *Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1974),¹⁹⁹ Dederen qualified the idea of setting “revelation-encounter over against revelation-doctrine” as a false dichotomy. While admitting that revelation is indeed “an event, an encounter,” Dederen also explained that

one’s encounter with Christ is effected only through hearing the prophetic and apostolic proclamation consigned to Scriptures. These fragile words of Scripture passed down to us from the OT and the NT writers are intrinsic to the revelational process. They are as true as the Christ event they explicate, and they share in the “once-for-all” character of the divine revelation.²⁰⁰

After describing how “the age of enlightenment” questioned the Christian traditional view of Scripture as “a divine communication to man cast in written form under the express inflow of the Holy Spirit,” Dederen qualified any attempt to reject “the testimony of Scripture regarding itself” as “unscientific.”²⁰¹

Also in 1974, Dederen read a paper entitled “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration” at the 1974 Bible Conference. In this paper Dederen again pointed out that revelation “is more than a mere meet-

¹⁹⁶Herold Weiss, “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration,” *Sp* 7, no. 3 (1975): 49-54. Cf. Frederick E. J. Harder, “A Reply to Dr. Weiss,” *Sp* 7, no. 3 (1975): 54-57.

¹⁹⁷H. Weiss, “Revelation and the Bible,” *Sp* 7, no. 3 (1975): 53.

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁹⁹Raoul Dederen, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” in Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* ([Washington, DC]: Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 1-15.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*, 8-11.

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ing or encounter, it is also a knowing, it implies a knowledge of the Lord and of His will.”²⁰²

The Historical-Critical Method. The historical-critical method²⁰³ is a method of literary analysis used to study documents from the perspective of their indebtedness to the particular socio-cultural milieu in which they were produced. The method grew out of the Enlightenment assumption (or basic presupposition) that history can be understood without taking into consideration supernatural intervention.

The question whether the method is adequate for the study of “inspired” writings divided Seventh-day Adventist scholars eventually into three major groups: (1) Those who accept the method with its basic presupposition; (2) those who believe that a modified version of the method can be used apart from its basic presupposition; and (3) those who hold that the method is unacceptable because it cannot be isolated from its basic presupposition.

The existence of so-called “modified” versions of the classical historical-critical method would require a much more detailed study to identify particular understandings of the method by different Seventh-day Adventist scholars. However, no classification of such variant understandings are provided in the present article beyond the endeavor of pointing out a few Seventh-day Adventist studies that attempt to foster the use of the method and criticisms of those attempts.

Historical-critical studies of Ellen White’s writings were encouraged by the Autumn-1970 *Spectrum* article “Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship,” written by Roy Branson, then assistant professor of Christian Ethics at Andrews University, and Herold D. Weiss, then assistant professor of New Testament at the same university. In that article Branson and Weiss challenged Seventh-day Adventist scholars to study Ellen White’s writings with a four-step historical-critical hermeneutics, intended (1) “to discover the nature of Mrs. White’s relationship to other authors,” (2) “to recover the social and intellectual milieu in which she lived and wrote,” (3) “to give close attention to the development of Ellen White’s writings within her own lifetime, and also to the devel-

²⁰²Raoul Dederen, “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration,” 8, in *North American Bible Conference, 1974* ([Washington, DC: Bible Research Committee], 1974).

²⁰³Classical expositions of the historical-critical method are found in Johann S. Semler, *Treatise on the Free Investigation of the Canon*, 4 vols. (Halle: n.p., 1771-75); Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1994); Ernst Troeltsch, “Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie,” in idem, *Gesammelten Schriften* (Aalen: Scientia, 1962), 2:729-53; Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

For non-Seventh-day Adventist criticisms to the historical-critical method, see e.g., Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis, [MO]: Concordia, 1977); idem, *Biblical Hermeneutics*; Vern S. Poythress, *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernit . . . What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

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opment of the church,” and (4) “to apply in our day the words she spoke in her day.”²⁰⁴

Such hermeneutics set the trend for several historical-critical studies that came out during this period (1970-1991)²⁰⁵ charging Ellen White of historical errors,²⁰⁶ plagiarism,²⁰⁷ psychological trances,²⁰⁸ and theological pitfalls.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴Roy Branson and Herold D. Weiss, “Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship,” *Sp* 2 (Autumn 1970): 30-33. Cf. W. Bradley, “Ellen G. White and Her Writings,” *Sp* 3 (Spring 1971): 43-51.

²⁰⁵For further study on the development of such revisionist studies, see e.g., Benjamin McArthur, “Where Are Historians Taking the Church?” *Sp* 10 (Nov. 1979): 9-14; D. R. McAdams, “Shifting Views of Inspiration,” *Sp* 10 (March 1980): 27-41; Gary Land, “From Apologetics to History: The Professionalization of Adventist Historians,” *Sp* 10 (March 1980): 89-100; Jonathan M. Butler, “Introduction: The Historian as Heretic,” in Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform*, rev. and enl. ed. (Knoxville, [TN]: U of Tennessee P, 1992), xxv-lxviii.

²⁰⁶See e.g., William S. Peterson, “A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen G. White’s Account of the French Revolution,” *Sp* 2 (Autumn 1970): 57-69; idem, “An Imaginary Conversation on Ellen G. White: A One-Act Play for Seventh-day Adventists,” *Sp* 3 (Summer 1971): 84-91; idem, “Ellen White’s Literary Indebtedness,” *Sp* 3 (Autumn 1971): 73-84; Ingemar Lindén, *Biblicism, apokalyptik, utopi. Adventismens historiska utforming: USA samt dess svenska utveckling till o. 1939* (Uppsala: [U of Uppsala], 1971), 154-64; Carl G. Tuland, “Six Thousand Years?,” *Sp* 6, nos. 3/4 (1974): 65-70; Donald R. McAdams, “Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians: The Evidence from an Unpublished Manuscript on John Huss” (Unpubl. ms., Andrews University, 1974), EGWRC-AU; idem, “Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians: A Study of the Treatment of John Huss in *Great Controversy*, Chapter Six ‘Huss and Jerome,’” rev. (Unpubl. ms., Southwestern Adventist College, 1977), EGWRC-AU; Ingemar Lindén, *The Last Trump: An Historico-Genetical Study of Some Important Chapters in the Making and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), 211-39; Eric Anderson, “Ellen White and Reformation Historians,” *Sp* 9 (July 1979): 23-26; Donald Casebolt, “Ellen White, the Waldenses, and Historical Interpretation,” *Sp* 11 (Feb. 1981): 37-43; Frank A. Knittel, “The Great Billboard Controversy,” *Sp* 23 (May 1993): 56.

Responses to the charges of historical errors in Ellen White’s writings are found, for instance, in W. Bradley, “Ellen G. White and Her Writings,” *Sp* 3 (Spring 1971): 52-60; John W. Wood, “The Bible and the French Revolution: An Answer,” *Sp* 3 (Autumn 1971): 55-72; Ronald Graybill, “How Did Ellen White Choose and Use Historical Sources? The French Revolution Chapter of *The Great Controversy*,” *Sp* 4 (Summer 1972): 49-53; idem, *Analysis of E. G. White’s Luther Manuscript* ([Washington, DC]: Review and Herald, [1977]); Jean Rouillard, “Connaissance du catharisme,” 6-part series in *Revue adventiste*, April 1977, 8-9; May 1977, 8-9; June 1977, 8-9; Sept. 1977, 6-7; Oct. 1977, 7-8, 13; Nov. 1977, 6-7; Dec. 1977, 7-8; Gerhard F. Hasel, “A Review of the White Estate Paper ‘The Role of Visions and the Use of Historical Sources in the Writing of the Great Controversy,’ Third Draft, Revised Oct. 24, 1977” (Unpubl. ms., Andrews University, [1977]), EGWRC-AU; White Estate Staff, “The Role of Visions and the Use of Historical Sources in the E. G. White Writings,” 5th draft (Unpubl. ms., Ellen G. White Estate, 1978), EGWRC-AU; Eric Anderson, “Ellen White and Reformation Historians,” *Sp* 9 (July 1979): 23-26; Arthur L. White, “The E. G. White Historical Writings,” 7-part series in *AtR*, July 12, 1979, 4-7; July 19, 1979, 7-9; July 26, 1979, 5-10; Aug. 2, 1979, 7-11; Aug. 9, 1979, 7-10; Aug. 16, 1979, 6-9; Aug. 23, 1979, 6-9; Jean Zurcher, “Ellen G. White, the Waldenses and the Albingenses” (1982), DF 2200-a, EGWRC-AU; Milan Hlouch, “John Huss in the Writings of Ellen G. White” (Unpubl. ms., Prague, 1982), EGWRC-AU; Warren H. Johns, “Ellen G. White and Chronology” (Unpubl. ms., [1983]), AHC;

idem, "Ellen G. White and Biblical Chronology," *Min*, April 1984, 20-23; Jean Zurcher, "A Vindication of Ellen White as Historian," *Sp* 16 (Aug. 1985): 21-31.

²⁰⁷See e.g., [Walter T. Rea], "A Comparison of the Writings of Mrs. E. G. White and John Harris - 1842, Daniel March - 1867, William Hanna - 1863, Alfred Edersheim - 1886" (N.p.: n.p., [1979]); idem, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982); idem, "Sketches from the Life of Paul: Forerunner of Acts of the Apostles" (Unpubl. ms., 1982), AHC; idem, "The Great Controversy" (Unpubl. ms., 1983), AHC; idem, "Desire of Ages" (Unpubl. ms., 1983), AHC; idem, "The Pirates of Privilege" (Unpubl. ms., 1984), AHC; idem, "The Makings of a Prophet" (Unpubl. ms., 1986), AHC; idem, "Did the Prophet See Kings?" (Unpubl. ms., 1988), AHC.

Responses to charges of plagiarism in Ellen White's writings are found, for example, in Ellen G. White Estate, "*The Desire of Ages*" (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1979); Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Literary Relationship between *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White and *The Life of Christ*, by William Hanna" (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1979); Walter F. Specht, "The Literary Relationship between *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White and *The Life of Christ*, by William Hanna—Part II" (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, n.d.); Robert W. Olson, "Ellen G. White's Use of Uninspired Sources" (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1980); Neal C. Wilson, "This I Believe About Ellen G. White," *AtR*, March 20, 1980, 8-10; Keith S. Parmenter, "The Ellen G. White 'Borrowings'—What Are the Facts?," *Australasian Record*, July 28, 1980, 4; Shirley Burton, "Applications of Inspiration: What the Media Overlooked," *Pacific Union Recorder*, Nov. 10, 1980, 2, 4; Arthur L. White, "Ellen G. White and Her Writings," *AtR*, Nov. 27, 1980, 7-9; W[illiam] G. J[onhsson], "Reflections on Ellen White's Inspiration," *ibid.*, 12-13; Robert W. Olson, *One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 64-111; John J. Robertson, *The White Truth* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1981); Ron Graybill, "Did Mrs. White 'Borrow' in Reporting a Vision?," *AtR*, April 2, 1981, 7; Vincent L. Ramik, "Memorandum of Law Literary Property Rights, 1790-1915" (Washington, DC, Diller, Ramik & Wight, Ltd., Aug. 14, 1981); Editorial, "Ellen White's Use of Sources," *AtR*, Sept. 17, 1981, 3; Editorial, "'There Simply Is No Case'" (interview with Vincent L. Ramik), *ibid.*, 4-6; Editorial, "The Story Behind This Research" (interview with Warren L. Johns), *ibid.*, 7; Ron Graybill, "E. G. White's Literary Work: An Update" (An edited and annotated transcript of a tape recording of presentations made in the morning worship services at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Nov. 15-19, 1981); Warren H. Johns, "Ellen White Prophet of Plagiarist?," *Min*, June 1982, 5-19; Ellen G. White Estate, "The Truth About *The White Lie*," supplement to *Min*, Aug. 1982; George Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1983); Fred Veltman, "Full Report of the Life of Christ Research Project," 4 vols. ([Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate], 1988); idem, "The *Desire of Ages* Project," 2-part series in *Min*, Oct. 1990, 4-7; Dec. 1990, 11-15; "Olson Discusses the Veltman Study" (David C. Jarnes's interview with Robert W. Olson), *Min*, Dec. 1990, 16-18.

²⁰⁸See e.g., Lindén, *Biblicism, apokaliptik, utopi*, 103; Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Lindén, *Last Trump*, 148; Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., John Hopkins University, 1983); Bernadine L. Irwin, "A Psychohistory of the Young Ellen White: A Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (Ph.D. diss., United States International University, 1984); Molleurus Couperus, "The Significance of Ellen White's Head Injury," *Adventist Currents*, June 1985, 16-33; Dennis E. Waite, "A Psychoanalytic and Archetypal Examination of Two Seminal Dreams and Visions of Ellen G. White" (Ed.D. diss., Western Michigan University, 1993).

Responses to charges of psychological trances in Ellen White's writings are found, for instance, in Ron Graybill, "Prophetess of Health: A Review" (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1976); Ellen G. White Estate, *A Discussion and Review of Prophetess of Health* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1976); idem, *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health* (Washington, DC:

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In the Fall of 1979, Benjamin McArthur, professor of American History at Southern Missionary College, pointed out in his *Spectrum* article, “Where Are Historians Taking the Church?” that Seventh-day Adventism was “witnessing the first great age of Adventist historical revisionism.” McArthur explained that the new generation of Seventh-day Adventist revisionists worked under the common presupposition that “the cultural milieu in which Ellen White lived and worked to a large degree shaped her writings on history, prophecy, health and, by implication, every other topic she discussed.” As a result, “the nature of her inspiration” and “her authority in the church” were at issue.²¹⁰

McArthur explained that since “orthodox belief and critical historical judgment are incompatible,” “the problem is not that the Adventist historian lacks faith in God’s providential leading, but that there is no way for them to include it in historical explanation.”²¹¹ Thus, the use of the historical-critical method led

Ellen G. White Estate, 1976); R[obert] W. Olson, “Physicians Say Ellen White’s Visions Not Result of Epilepsy,” *ATR*, Aug. 16, 1984, 4; Donald I. Peterson, *Visions or Seizures: Was Ellen White the Victim of Epilepsy?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988).

²⁰⁹See e.g., Lindén, *Biblicism, apokalyptik, utopi*, 68-84; idem, *Last Trump*, 92-105; Rolf J. Poehler, “... and the Door Was Shut’: Seventh-day Adventists and the Shut-Door Doctrine in the Decade after the Great Disappointment” (Term paper, Andrews University, 1978); Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980), 333-425, A170-A245, A256-A261; Ingemar Lindén, *1844 and the Shut Door Problem* (Uppsala: Distributed by Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982); Ingemar Lindén, *Adventismen vid Skiljevägen* ([Sweden]: n.p., 1983), 59; Thomas R. Steininger, *Konfession und Sozialisation: Adventistische Identität zwischen Fundamentalismus und Postmoderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), passim.

Some of the charges of theological pitfalls in Ellen White’s writings are responded to in Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), passim; Robert W. Olson, “The ‘Shut Door’ Documents” (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1982); Arthur L. White, “Ellen G. White and the Shut Door Question: A Review of the *The Experience of Early Seventh-day Adventists Believers in Its Historical Context*,” rev. ed. (Ellen G. White Estate shelf document, 1982); idem, *Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 1:256-70; “Christ and His High Priestly Ministry,” special issue of *Min*, Oct. 1980; Olson, *One Hundred and One Questions*, 8-31; Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington, DC: [Biblical Research Institute], 1981); William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 1 ([Washington, MD: Biblical Research Institute], 1982); Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Daniel*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); idem, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); idem, ed., *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989); idem, ed., *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 5 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989); idem, ed., *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992); idem, ed., *Symposium on Revelation—Book 2*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992).

²¹⁰B. McArthur, “Where Are Historians Taking the Church?” *Sp* 10 (Nov. 1979): 9.

²¹¹*Ibid.*, 11.

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Seventh-day Adventist revisionists not only to deal with Ellen White's writings as "historically conditioned"²¹² but also to a large extent to give up the great controversy theme as a philosophy of history.²¹³

In March 1980 Donald McAdams, president of Southwestern Adventist College, published an article in *Spectrum* under the explanatory title "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s." In that article McAdams explained how critical studies of Ellen White during the 1970s tried to show that Ellen White's works were "not entirely original" (because she "copied from other sources") and were "not infallible" (because she "made statements that were not correct").²¹⁴

The use of the historical-critical method was also encouraged in regard to the study of Scripture. Of special significance was the section entitled "Ways to Read the Bible" of the December 1982 issue of *Spectrum* magazine.²¹⁵ There John C. Brunt, professor of New Testament at Walla Walla College, argued that the use of the historical-critical method does not necessarily lead to "liberal conclusions." Brunt further suggested that

virtually all Adventist exegetes [*sic*] of Scripture do use historical-critical methodology, even if they are not willing to use the term. The historical-critical method deserves a place in the armamentarium of Adventists who are serious about understanding their Bibles.²¹⁶

Larry G. Herr, then professor of Old Testament in the seminary of the Far Eastern Division in the Philippines, argued in the same line that "the 'historical-critical' method of Bible study, used properly, can be a valid and powerful tool for Seventh-day Adventists."²¹⁷

Meanwhile, some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist criticisms of the historical-critical method were penned by E. Edward Zinke and Gerhard F. Hasel. During the 1970s E. E. Zinke, then research assistant and assistant secretary of the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference, came out with several articles on the subject.²¹⁸ Of special significance was his supplement to the *Ministry* of October 1977, entitled "A Conservative Approach to Theology." After surveying different approaches to theology from a historical perspective, Zinke stated that

²¹²Ibid., 12-13.

²¹³For further study of Ellen White's philosophy of history, see Gil G. Fernandez, "Ellen G. White's Philosophy of History" (M.A. thesis, Philippine Union College, 1968); Joseph Battistone, *The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White[s] Writings* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978).

²¹⁴D. R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration," *Sp* 10 (March 1980): 27-41.

²¹⁵See special section "Ways to Read the Bible," *Sp* 13 (Dec. 1982): 30-62.

²¹⁶John C. Brunt, "A Parable of Jesus as a Clue to Biblical Interpretation," *ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁷Larry G. Herr, "Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective," *ibid.*, 51.

²¹⁸See e.g., E. Edward Zinke, "Postreformation Critical Biblical Studies," in Hyde, ed., *Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, 67-87; *idem*, "A Conservative Approach to Theology," supplement to *Min*, Oct. 1977, 24A-24P; *idem*, "Guiding the Ship of Truth," *Min*, Dec. 1978, 14-15.

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method in theology must not be determined by an *a priori* consideration of the nature of man, of the universe, or of any aspect of these two. Rather, method must be determined totally by Scripture itself. The method by which Scripture is studied must not be the same as that applied to human literature. Since God's revelation is distinct from that which takes place within the human sphere, the method applied to its interpretation is not the same as that which is applied to what is produced within the human sphere. Thus the nature of revelation itself must be considered within the context of the method for its interpretation.²¹⁹

In 1980 Gerhard F. Hasel, professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at Andrews University, published his book *Understanding the Living Word of God*, in which he criticized the historical-critical method for its "totally immanent view of history on the horizontal level without any vertical, transcendent dimension."²²⁰ Hasel not only charged that method for undermining the authority of the Scriptures, but also argued in favor of an approach to Scripture that could recognize its divine, supernatural element.

In 1985 the Biblical Research Institute published G. F. Hasel's book, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, in which the author strongly criticized the historical-critical method for "disallowing divine, supernatural intervention in history."²²¹ Under the assumption that "the Bible must remain the master and the method the servant," Hasel argued that in the study of Scripture the "method must always be subject to the judgment of Scripture." Thus "the study of Scripture must follow a method that derives its philosophical conceptuality, its norms and procedures from Scripture itself."²²²

Concerns about the use of the historical-critical method by Seventh-day Adventist scholars also led the 1986 Annual Council of the General Conference, which convened in Rio de Janeiro, to vote a document on "Methods of Bible Study."²²³ In this official document Adventist Bible students were urged "to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method." Under the assumption that "human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it," the document stated that "even a modified use" of the historical-critical method "that retains the principle

²¹⁹E. E. Zinke, "A Conservative Approach to Theology," supplement to *Min*, Oct. 1977, 24A-24P.

²²⁰Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980), 24-25.

²²¹Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today: An Analysis of Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation and Proposals for the Interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God* ([Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute], 1985), 97.

²²²*Ibid.*, 99.

²²³See "Methods of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A)—Report," *AtR*, Jan. 22, 1987, 18-20; "Methods of Bible Study," *Min*, April 1987, 22-24. Cf. Raymond F. Cottrell, "Blame It on Rio: The Annual Council Statement on Methods of Bible Study," *Adventist Currents*, March 1987, 32-33.

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of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.²²⁴

The use of the historical-critical method was also criticized in several articles by Gerhard F. Hasel,²²⁵ Leon I. Mashchak,²²⁶ Richard M. Davidson,²²⁷ and Mario Veloso.²²⁸

Further Developments. A significant variety of definitions of inspiration have been proposed in Seventh-day Adventist circles since 1970. Those definitions oscillated between attempts to accommodate apparent “discrepancies” of inspired writings and concerns of uplifting the infallibility of those writings against the challenges imposed by revisionist studies.

In 1972 Rene Noorbergen’s *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* described the prophetic ministry in strong terms. According to Noorbergen,

true prophet is not a psychic who performs with the aid of a mental or “spiritual” crutch, but is someone who has no degree of freedom either in turning in or controlling the prophetic impulses or prophetic recall. These impulses are superimposed over the prophet’s conscious mind by a supernatural personal being, having absolute knowledge of both past and future, making no allowance for error or human miscalculation.²²⁹

Also in 1972, Hans Heinz’ *Glaubenslehren der Heiligen Schrift* came out with a special chapter on “The Holy Scripture.”²³⁰ After rejecting the theory of verbal inspiration, Heinz defined inspiration as “a positive divine impact on the mind, will, and imagination of the author, who uses his means in order to write as God desires, whereby the author is under the guidance of God, which prevents error.”²³¹

Of special significance was the 1974 Bible Conference, which was summoned “to focus on the Bible as the foundation of Adventist faith and doctrine,

²²⁴“Methods of Bible Study Committee,” *ATR*, Jan. 22, 1987, 18.

²²⁵Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Rise and Wane of Biblical Authority,” *Adventist Perspectives* (hereafter *AP*) 1 (Nov. 1987): 8-16; idem, “The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God,” *JATS* 1 (Spring 1990): 16-38; idem, “The Origin of the Biblical Sabbath and the Historical-Critical Method: A Methodological Test Case,” *JATS* 4 (Spring 1993): 17-46.

²²⁶Leon I. Mashchak, “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Study,” *AP* 1 (Nov. 1987): 32-35; idem, “Canonical Criticism—an Olive Branch or a Trojan Horse?,” *AP* 2 (Summer 1988): 61-67.

²²⁷Richard M. Davidson, “The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage,” *JATS* 1 (Spring 1990): 39-56.

²²⁸Mario Veloso, “Modern Scientific-Critical Method—A Testimony,” *AP* 6, no. 2 (1992): 29-35.

²²⁹Rene Noorbergen, *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* (New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1972), 21 (italics in the original).

²³⁰Hans Heinz, *Glaubenslehren der Heiligen Schrift* (Bern: Europaeisches Institut fuer Fernstudium, 1972), 25-45.

²³¹*Ibid.*, 30. (Translated by Winfried Vogel.) Cf. idem, *Leben aus der Zukunft: Wende der Zeit—Wandlung der Welt* (Hamburg: Saatkorn-Verlag, 1989), 159-60.

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and to study sound principles of hermeneutics.”²³² The doctrine of inspiration was addressed in Raoul Dederen’s two papers, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics”²³³ and “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration.”²³⁴

In the latter Dederen defined inspiration as

the controlling influence that God exerts over the human instrument by whom His revelation is communicated. It has to do with the *reception*, by the prophet, of the divine revelation and the accuracy with which it is *transmitted*, whether in an oral or a written form. At the same time it gives the record of revelation its authority and validity for us.²³⁵

To this he added,

We can hardly believe that God, having performed the mighty acts and revealed their true meaning and import to the minds of prophets and apostles would leave the prophetic and apostolic ministry to take care of itself. The same Holy Spirit, we hold, who called them to share God’s knowledge and plans, also aided their efforts to convey such a revelation to those to whom they ministered.²³⁶

Dederen also pointed out the existence of a tendency in certain circles “to caricature” as “some sort of a dictation theory” the position of those who believed that the Bible was “fully inspired” “in all its parts.” While recognizing that on “some occasions” God actually spoke and man just recorded the words (Gen 22:15-18; Exod 20:1-17), Dederen stated that “in the main” inspiration functioned in such a flexible way as to allow for “human personalities.”²³⁷

After quoting Ellen White’s classic statement, “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired,” Dederen raised the crucial question, “Since the thoughts rather than the words are inspired, shall we conclude that we are at liberty to treat the text of Scripture as being of little importance?” Answering the question, he explained that

some, in fact, do maintain that God suggested the thoughts and the general trend of His revelation, leaving the prophet free to express them in his own language, as he liked. Quite apart from the fact that ideas are not most usually transferred by means other than words, this scheme ignores the fact that if the thought communicated to a prophet is of the essence of a revelation, the form in which it is expressed is

²³²K[enneth] H. W[ood], “The 1974 Bible Conference,” *RH*, Aug. 1, 1974, 2. See also Gordon M. Hyde, “Church Holds Historic Bible Conference,” *RH*, Aug. 15, 1974, 4-6.

²³³Dederen, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” in Hyde, ed., *Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1-15.

²³⁴Dederen, “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration,” in *North American Bible Conference, 1974*.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, 9 (italics supplied).

²³⁶*Ibid.*, 9-10.

²³⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

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of prime significance. The exegetical study of the Scriptures in their original language would lose much of its meaning if God has not guided the prophet in the writing of his message.²³⁸

In regard to Ellen White's position on the matter, Dederen asserted that

Ellen White herself, who so clearly emphasizes that the thoughts rather than the words of a prophet are inspired, stipulates: "While I am writing out important matters, He is beside me helping me . . . and when I am puzzled for a fit word to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind." "I tremble for fear," adds the servant of the Lord, "lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words . . . Who is sufficient for these things?" Everything points to the fact that God who imbued the prophets' minds with thoughts and inspired them in the fulfillment of their task also watched over them in their attempts to express "infinite ideas" and embody them in "finite vehicles" of human language.²³⁹

Such a view of inspiration "does not nullify," according to Dederen, "the significant human authorship of the biblical writings. It simply affirms that the prophetic message as we find it in Scripture is the testimony of God."²⁴⁰

In 1977, Dederen came out with an insert in *Ministry*, under the title "Ellen White's Doctrine of Scripture."²⁴¹ While declaring that Ellen White did not support the views of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the original autographs, Dederen explained that Ellen White's concept of inspiration is that "the whole man is inspired, not just his words."²⁴²

Meanwhile, Arthur White prepared two series of articles for the *Review*, trying to counteract some of the tensions unleashed by revisionist studies of Ellen White. The first series came out in early 1978, under the general title "Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration."²⁴³ In this series Arthur White suggested again that Seventh-day Adventists were in a better position to understand the *modus operandi* of inspiration, because they still had the autographs of a modern prophet (Ellen White), while those of the Bible were no longer available.²⁴⁴

White admitted that while "the revelation of God's will is authoritative and infallible," "the language used in imparting it to mankind is human and hence is imperfect."²⁴⁵ He saw the prophet as under the influence of the Spirit of God not

²³⁸Ibid., 12.

²³⁹Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹R. Dederen, "Ellen White's Doctrine of Scripture," supplement to *Min*, July 1977, 24F-24J.

²⁴²Ibid., 24G-24H.

²⁴³Arthur L. White, "Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration," 4-part series in *AtR*, Jan. 12, 1978, 4-6; Jan. 19, 1978, 7-9; Jan. 26, 1978, 6-8; Feb. 2, 1978, 6-8.

²⁴⁴A. L. White, "Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration—3," *RH*, Jan. 26, 1978, 6. Cf. *idem*, *Ellen G. White Writings*, 15.

²⁴⁵A. L. White, "Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration—3," *RH*, Jan. 26, 1978, 6.

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only in receiving “his message through the visions” but also in bearing testimony. Despite certain occasions in which “the very words to be used are impressed upon his mind by the Spirit of God,” the influence of the Spirit does not lead the prophet to “the point of being mechanically controlled, or of being forced into a mold.”²⁴⁶

Arthur White began his second series, “The E. G. White Historical Writings” (Summer of 1979),²⁴⁷ explaining in a euphemistic way that probably never before, since the death of Ellen White in 1915, had Seventh-day Adventists been so interested in the questions of “inspiration in general and the inspiration of Ellen White in particular,” as well as “Ellen White’s ‘sources’ for the Conflict of the Ages books in general, and *The Great Controversy* and *The Desire of Ages* in particular.” He promised that this series of articles would lead the readers “some distance from the narrow concepts held by some of a mechanical, verbal inspiration according to which Ellen White wrote only what was revealed to her in vision or dictated to her by the Holy Spirit.”²⁴⁸

In recommending this series, Kenneth Wood, editor of the *Review*, suggested the readers to keep in mind “four facts”: (1) “*Inspired writings do not come to us ‘untouched by human hands’*”; (2) “*in communicating with the human family, God inspired persons, not writings*”; (3) “*inspiration involves a variety of methods in communicating truth and God’s will*”; and (4) “*the message of an inspired writer does not depend for its authority on whether it is accompanied by the label, ‘This is God’s Word.’*” Wood also pointed out that “because Satan is today making supreme efforts to undermine confidence in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, we feel convinced that the end of all things is near.”²⁴⁹

Within the context of the contemporary revisionist challenges, Seventh-day Adventists published, in 1980, two major consensus documents in order to confirm their faith in the trustworthiness of the inspired writings. The first one, titled “Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible,” was produced “over a period of several years, involving scientists, theologians, administrators, teachers, and others throughout the world church.” Although “numerous revisions” in its text had been made taking into consideration the suggestions received, the document appeared in the *Adventist Review* of January 17 with a special note asking for additional “comments and suggestions” to be addressed to W. Duncan Eva, a vice-president of the General Conference.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶A. L. White, “Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration—2,” *RH*, Jan. 19, 1978, 8.

²⁴⁷Arthur L. White, “The E. G. White Historical Writings,” 7-part series in *AtR*, July 12, 1979, 4-7; July 19, 1979, 7-9; July 26, 1979, 5-10; Aug. 2, 1979, 7-11; Aug. 9, 1979, 7-10; Aug. 16, 1979, 6-9; Aug. 23, 1979, 6-9.

²⁴⁸A. L. White, “E. G. White Historical Writings—1,” *AtR*, July 12, 1979, 4.

²⁴⁹K[enneth] H. W[ood], “An Important Series about Ellen G. White,” *AtR*, July 12, 1979, 11-12 (italics in the original).

²⁵⁰General Conference Officers, “About These Documents,” *AtR*, Jan. 17, 1980, 8

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The document under consideration recognized that “the writers of the Holy Scripture were inspired by God with ideas and concepts,” but “He did not dictate His message to them word by word, except in certain instances in which God or an angel spoke or voices were heard by the prophet.” In regard to the difficulties of the Bible, the same document warned that

it is well to remember that such difficulties in Scripture may be the result of imperfections of human understanding, or lack of knowledge of the circumstances involved. Some difficulties may be resolved by further research and discovery. Others may not be understood or resolved until the future life. However, we must guard against sitting in judgment on the Scriptures. “No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said.”²⁵¹

The second document (far more influential than the first one) was the new 1980 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, officially accepted by the delegates of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church at the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas. The new statement on the Scriptures (statement 1) of that document reads as follows:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.²⁵²

The new statement on the gift of prophecy (statement 17) affirmed the following:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.²⁵³

²⁵¹“Study Documents on Inspiration and Creation,” *AtR*, Jan. 17, 1980, 9, 10.

²⁵²“Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists—*Church Manual* Revision,” *AtR*, May 1, 1980, 23.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 25-26. The original English wording of this particular statement has been slightly changed in some translations. The expression “as the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth” was translated, for instance, into German (*Adventecho*, June 1, 1981, 8) as “*die Schriften dieser Botin des Herrn sind eine fortwirkende, bevollmächtigte Stimme der Wahrheit*” (the writings of this messenger of the Lord are a continuing, authorized voice of truth) and into French (*Revue adventiste* [France], April 1981, 4) as “*les écrits de cette messagère du Seigneur sont une source constante de vérité qui fait autorité*” (the writings of this messenger of the Lord are a constant source of truth which is authoritative). The word “authoritative” was translated

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Also published in 1980, Gerhard F. Hasel's book *Understanding the Living Word of God* had a whole chapter on the inspiration of Scripture.²⁵⁴ In that chapter Hasel argued that the witnesses of Peter (2 Pet 1:19-21) and Paul (2 Tim 3:16) attest that "all Scripture is inspired by God." "Having received the divine revelation, the human penman was inspired," according to Hasel, "by the Holy Spirit to communicate these divine ideas and thoughts accurately and authoritatively in the language of men." The divine authorship of Scripture was seen as the source for both "the unity of Scripture" and "the supreme authority of Scripture."²⁵⁵

In 1981 William G. Johnsson, associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, stated in his *Ministry* article, "How Does God Speak?," that "defining inspiration is like catching a rainbow. When we have put forth our best efforts, there will remain an elusive factor, an element of mystery."²⁵⁶

Also in 1981, Roger W. Coon, associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, began a three-part series on "Inspiration/Revelation" in the *Journal of Adventist Education*.²⁵⁷ In this series Coon advocated "plenary (thought) inspiration," in exclusion to both "verbal inspiration" and "encounter inspiration."²⁵⁸

In addressing the subject of infallibility, Coon mentioned two theories: (1) The "strait-jacket" theory, in which true prophetic writings are regarded as "prevented from making any type of error," and (2) the "intervention" theory, which holds that

if in his humanity a prophet of God errs, *and* the nature of that error is sufficiently serious to materially affect (a) the direction of God's church, (b) the eternal destiny of one person, or (c) the purity of a doctrine, *then* (and only then) the Holy Spirit immediately moves the prophet to correct the error, so that no permanent damage is done.²⁵⁹

Taking his stand on the side of the "intervention" theory, Coon stated that "in inspired writings, ancient [the Bible] and modern [the writings of Ellen White], there are inconsequential errors of minor, insignificant detail." He then lists a few examples of "errors" in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White.

into both Spanish (*Manual de la Iglesia*, rev. ed. [Montemorelos, Mexico: Asociación Editorial Interamericana, 1984], 38) and Portuguese (*Manual da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia* [Santo André, SP, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1981], 35) as "*autorizada*" (authorized).

²⁵⁴Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God*, 66-82.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*

²⁵⁶William G. Johnsson, "How Does God Speak?" *Min*, Oct. 1981, 4.

²⁵⁷Roger W. Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works," 3-part series in *Journal of Adventist Education* (hereafter *JAE*) 44 (Oct.-Nov. 1981): 17-32; (Dec. 1981-Jan. 1982): 17-31; (Feb.-March 1982): 17-33.

²⁵⁸R. W. Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works—Part I," *JAE* 44 (Oct.-Nov. 1981): 24-30.

²⁵⁹R. W. Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works—Part II," *JAE* 44 (Dec. 1981-Jan. 1982): 18-19 (italics in the original).

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Among the “errors” in Scripture are mentioned (1) the allusion to Jeremiah (instead of Zechariah) as the author of the quotation found in Matthew 27:9, 10 (cf. Zech 11:12, 13); and (2) the different wordings of the inscription placed at the top of the cross (cf. Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). The “errors” of Ellen White are seen as including (1) a reference to the Paradise Valley Sanitarium as having forty rooms (instead of thirty-eight); and (2) a mentioning of the apostle Peter (instead of Paul) as the author of the saying, “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor 5:14).²⁶⁰

Rejecting the theory of “degrees of inspiration (or revelation)” and “degrees of authority,” Coon stated that “Ellen G. White is best understood in the role of the literary but noncanonical prophets of the Bible.” Thus, though the writings of Ellen White have the same level of inspiration and authority as the Bible, they are not “an addition to the sacred canon of Scripture.”²⁶¹

In response to the charges of plagiarism raised against Ellen White, George E. Rice, then associate professor of New Testament at Andrews University, in 1983 published his book *Luke, a Plagiarist?* In this book the author suggested that the inspiration of Scripture can only be fully understood from the perspective of two distinctive models of inspiration.

The first of those models was termed “prophetic model,” by which Rice referred to “divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams, visions, thought illumination as seen in the psalms and the wisdom literature, and the recording of these theophanies (divine manifestations) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”²⁶²

While recognizing that Seventh-day Adventists tended to see the prophetic model as “a big umbrella under which we gather all of the books of the Bible,” Rice pointed out that this model “is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait,” as well as the content of “1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and other Old Testament books.” Room was, therefore, left for a second model of inspiration that would function as “the complement to and companion of the prophetic model.”²⁶³

That second model of inspiration is called the “Lucan model” (cf. Luke 1:1-4), which Rice saw as “based on research—reading and oral interviews.”²⁶⁴ Rice explained that

the Bible writer who operated under this model was an author and a theologian in his own right. As an author he shaped and arranged the

²⁶⁰See *ibid.*, 19, 24-26.

²⁶¹R. W. Coon, “Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works—Part III,” *JAE* 44 (Feb.-March 1982): 20-21.

²⁶²G. E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?*, 11-12. George Rice borrowed and redefined the term “prophetic model” from Paul Achtemeier. See Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 30-32.

²⁶³G. E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?*, 11, 19.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 25.

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material he researched so that the end product expressed his interests. As a theologian he worked with the material so that the end product expressed his theological understanding. Yet the Spirit guided throughout the whole process.²⁶⁵

In 1985 Richard Rice, professor of Theology at Loma Linda University, included a whole chapter on “The Doctrine of Revelation” in his book *The Reign of God*.²⁶⁶ Regarding inspiration as “one aspect” of “the larger dynamic of God’s communication to human beings,” the author pointed out that “the doctrine of revelation” should not be reduced “to the phenomenon of inspiration.”²⁶⁷

Richard Rice saw the biblical doctrine of inspiration as containing two important ideas: (1) “The divine authority of Scripture,” and (2) “the divine-human character of Scripture.” “The Bible,” according to Rice, “is not a combination of the words of God *and* the words of men” but rather “the word of God *in* the words of men.”²⁶⁸

The same author regarded the doctrine of inerrancy as “unbiblical” because: (1) “It seems to overlook the human dimension of Scripture”; (2) “it sometimes leads to distorted and unconvincing interpretations of the Bible”; and (3) “it miscasts the fundamental purpose of Scripture.” He then stated that “Seventh-day Adventists have never advocated biblical inerrancy, although they supported the divine authority and complete reliability of the Scriptures.”²⁶⁹

In 1988 the Ministerial Association of the General Conference came out with a representative exposition of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*²⁷⁰ About inspiration of the Scriptures, this book emphasized (1) that “God inspired men—not words”²⁷¹; (2) that “the Bible is the written Word of God”; (3) that “the Bible does not teach partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration”²⁷²; and (4) that the guidance of the Holy Spirit “guarantees the Bible’s trustworthiness.”²⁷³ While the Bible is regarded as “the supreme standard,” the writings of Ellen White are seen as (1) “a guide to the Bible,” (2) “a guide in understanding the Bible,” and (3) “a guide to apply Bible principles.”²⁷⁴

²⁶⁵Ibid., 27.

²⁶⁶Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1985), 20-46. Cf. Norman R. Gulley’s review, *AUSS* 27 (Autumn 1987): 312-14.

²⁶⁷R. Rice, *Reign of God*, 30-31.

²⁶⁸Ibid., 25-26 (italics in the original).

²⁶⁹Ibid., 33.

²⁷⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of SDAs, 1988).

²⁷¹Ibid., 8.

²⁷²Ibid., 11.

²⁷³Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 227-28.

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Noteworthy also are a few theses and dissertations defended at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among them are Peter van Bemmelen's "Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield" (1987),²⁷⁵ Ray C. W. Roennfeldt's "Clark H. Pinnock's Shift in His Doctrine of Biblical Authority and Reliability: An Analysis and Critique" (1990),²⁷⁶ Joseph Karanja's "Inerrancy and Sovereignty: A Case Study on Carl F. H. Henry" (1990),²⁷⁷ James H. Burry's "An Investigation to Determine Ellen White's Concepts of Revelation, Inspiration, 'The Spirit of Prophecy,' and Her Claims about the Origin, Production and Authority of Her Writings" (1991),²⁷⁸ as well as Jerry A. Moon's "William Clarence (W. C.) White: His Relationship to Ellen G. White and Her Work" (1993),²⁷⁹ and Frank M. Hasel's "Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature, and Use" (1994).²⁸⁰

Peter van Bemmelen provided some insights on the relationship between the claims and the phenomena of Scripture in the following paragraph:

Once Scripture is accepted as the only legitimate starting-point and source of reference in our quest, we must face up to the question whether the effort to establish the doctrine of inspiration by letting the Bible speak for itself should proceed primarily from the multifarious phenomena of the content and structure of Scripture or whether it should start from the explicit assertions of the Biblical writers or whether both should receive equal standing. It is evident that the decision we take at this junction is crucial. We suggest in view of considerations presented earlier that the inherent logic of the principle to let Scripture speak for itself requires that the teachings (or assertions, claims, or whatever other terms may be used) should be given priority over the phenomena. We use advisedly the word priority, for the phenomena cannot and should not be ignored. Whatever conclusions may be reached from a thorough study of the assertions must be examined and evaluated in the light of the phenomena, but just as surely, the phenomena must be examined and evaluated in the light of the conclusions derived from the assertions.²⁸¹

²⁷⁵Peter M. Van Bemmelen, "Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield" (Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 1987); idem, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1987).

²⁷⁶Ray C. W. Roennfeldt, "Clark H. Pinnock's Shift in His Doctrine of Biblical Authority and Reliability: An Analysis and Critique" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1990); idem, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 16 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1993).

²⁷⁷Joseph Karanja, "Inerrancy and Sovereignty: A Case Study on Carl F. H. Henry" (M.Th. thesis, Andrews University, 1990).

²⁷⁸Burry, "Investigation to Determine Ellen White's Concepts of Revelation, Inspiration . . ."

²⁷⁹Jerry Allen Moon, "William Clarence (W. C.) White: His Relationship to Ellen G. White and Her Work" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1993); idem, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White*.

²⁸⁰Frank M. Hasel, "Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature, and Use" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1994).

²⁸¹Van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration*, 377-78.

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But all those discussions previously mentioned have proved themselves unable to bring general agreement to the Seventh-day Adventist scholarly circles on the matter of inspiration. Those debates would actually continue through the 1990s.

Conflicting Views of Inspiration (1991-2000)

Influential in bringing the debate on inspiration down from the scholarly realm into the church level was Alden Thompson's *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (1991).²⁸² The author, a professor of Biblical Studies at Walla Walla College, regarded revelation in this book as "some kind of special input from God, a message from Him to His creatures on earth" and as "a visible or audible intervention by God." He defined inspiration as "the Spirit's special urging of a messenger to speak or write" and "a means to indicate that the Holy Spirit has been active in a special way." While acknowledging that "all Scripture is given by inspiration" (cf. 2 Tim 3:16), Thompson suggested that "the most crucial point" of his book was perhaps the idea that "*the Bible does not say that all Scripture was given by revelation.*"²⁸³

Thompson evidently intended to come up with a model of inspiration that could provide enough room for both *difficulties* and *cultural accommodations*. Room for errors, mistakes, and "fatal contradictions" in the Bible (although Thompson tried to avoid such words)²⁸⁴ was provided by the human side of his "incarnational model." Cultural accommodations found special space in his "casebook" (as opposed to "codebook") approach to Scripture.

For Thompson, "the *one* great law of love," the *two* commandments to love God and to love man, and the *ten* commandments "form a pyramid of law that embodies the eternal principles of God's kingdom," which are normative "to all mankind at all times everywhere." "All other biblical laws are applications of those principles in time and place."²⁸⁵

His *casebook* approach to Scripture also provided for a high position for human reason. According to him,

²⁸²Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991). Cf. Fernando Canale's review, *AUSS* 29 (Autumn 1991): 278-79; Peter van Bemmelen's review, *College and University Dialogue* (hereafter *CUD*) 3, no. 3 (1991): 27-28; Gonnell L. O. R. Yorke's review, *Min*, Dec. 1991, 28; Norman R. Gulley's review, *Min*, Dec. 1991, 28-30; Clark H. Pinnock, "Alden Thompson's *Inspiration*: Why Is It a Cause Célèbre?" *Sp* 23 (Jan. 1994): 51-52; Charles Bradford, "Bradford on Thompson's *Inspiration*," *ibid.*, 53-54.

See also Alden Thompson, "Adventists and Inspiration," 4-part series in *ATR*, Sept. 5, 1985, 5-7; Sept. 12, 1985, 13-15; Sept. 19, 1985, 7-9; Sept. 26, 1985, 12-15. Cf. Fannie E. Diller, Bertrand Young, and Myron J. Houghton, in "Adventists and Inspiration," *ATR*, Nov. 7, 1985, 4.

²⁸³Thompson, *Inspiration*, 47-48 (italics in the original).

²⁸⁴Cf. *ibid.*, 144, 249, 263-64.

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 114-15.

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*the casebook approach allows us—indeed, forces us—to recognize that revelation and reason must work together. Revelation always deals with specific cases. Reason, in dialogue with the Spirit, determines which of those cases are most helpful in informing the decisions we make day by day.*²⁸⁶

Thompson's book was controversial from the very beginning. While some endorsed the book,²⁸⁷ others strongly opposed it.²⁸⁸ The most significant response to it was the Adventist Theological Society's *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (1992),²⁸⁹ with articles by Raoul Dederen (two),²⁹⁰ Samuel Koranteng-Pipim,²⁹¹ Norman R. Gulley,²⁹² Richard A. Davidson,²⁹³ Gerhard F. Hasel,²⁹⁴ Randall W. Younker,²⁹⁵ Frank M. Hasel,²⁹⁶ and Miroslav M. Kis.²⁹⁷

The basic consensus of those authors was that Alden Thompson's model of inspiration was based on a partial reading of the Bible and of the writings of Ellen White. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson even pointed out in the *Issues* Preface that Thompson's study illustrated "the fruits of the historical-critical method," which had been regarded by the 1986 Annual Council as "unacceptable" for Adventists.²⁹⁸

While the previous developments of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of inspiration have been largely confined to the phenomena of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, Fernando Canale, professor of Systematic Theology at Andrews University, in the Summer of 1993 began a five-part series in the *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, proposing a "new approach" to the doctrine

²⁸⁶Ibid., 109 (italics in the original).

²⁸⁷See e.g., G. L. O. R. Yorke's review, *Min*, Dec. 1991, 28.

²⁸⁸See e.g., N. R. Gulley's review, *Min*, Dec. 1991, 28-30.

²⁸⁹Frank Holbrook and Leo van Dolson, eds., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

²⁹⁰Raoul Dederen, "The Revelation-Inspiration Phenomenon according to the Bible Writers," in *ibid.*, 9-29; *idem*, "On Inspiration and Biblical Authority," in *ibid.*, 91-103.

²⁹¹Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "An Analysis and Evaluation of Alden Thompson's Casebook/Codebook Approach to the Bible," in *ibid.*, 31-67.

²⁹²Norman R. Gulley, "An Evaluation of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Method in the Light of His View of Scripture and Use of Ellen White," in *ibid.*, 69-90.

²⁹³Richard M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in *ibid.*, 105-35.

²⁹⁴Gerhard F. Hasel, "Reflections on Alden Thompson's 'Law Pyramid' within a Casebook/Codebook Dichotomy," in *ibid.*, 137-71.

²⁹⁵Randall W. Younker, "A Few Thoughts on Alden Thompson's Chapter: Numbers, Genealogies, Dates," in *ibid.*, 173-99.

²⁹⁶Frank M. Hasel, "Reflections on the Authority and Trustworthiness of Scripture," in *ibid.*, 201-20.

²⁹⁷Miroslav M. Kis, "Revelation and Ethics: Question of Distance," in *ibid.*, 221-36.

²⁹⁸Frank B. Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, "Preface," in *ibid.*, 7.

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of revelation and inspiration.²⁹⁹ Canale suggested that “a new theological model about the origin of Scripture” could be developed on the basis of an understanding of God and of human nature derived from Scripture rather than from Greek philosophical concepts.

Canale criticized conventional Roman Catholic and Protestant models of revelation-inspiration for their indebtedness to a *timeless* view of God and to an *immortalist* concept of human soul. He explained, in regard to the concept of God, that

when God is conceived to act within a timeless realm, the theological content of Scripture (which is brought into being by God) will also pertain to the timeless realm. In this case, the historical side of Scripture is considered to belong, not to its divine cause, but rather to the human condition necessary for the expression of its divinely (timelessly) originated content. Thus, the Scriptures are said to be “historically conditioned.” On the contrary, the concept that God is capable of acting genuinely in history (that is, “historically”) leads to a conception of the biblical writings as being “historically constituted.” According to the former view, the historical side of Scripture is external and incidental to its religious and theological contents; according to the latter view, the historical side of Scripture belongs to the very essence of its divinely revealed and inspired contents.³⁰⁰

The development of a new model of revelation-inspiration based on the *sola Scriptura* principle would require, according to Canale, the paradigmatic shift to a “temporal-historical conception of God’s being and actions” that allows Him to act “historically in history.” The multiform “divine revelatory activity” in history was viewed as comprising “theophanic, direct writing, prophetic, historical, and existential” patterns,³⁰¹ supporting the notion that “the whole Bible is revealed and the whole Bible is inspired.”³⁰² For Canale, this change of paradigm would require also “a new exegetical methodology” (different from both the *classic* historical-grammatical method and the *liberal* historical-critical method).³⁰³ But Canale has not yet demonstrated what this new methodology

²⁹⁹Fernando Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration,” 5-part series in *AUSS* “The Ground for a New Approach,” 31/2 (Summer 1993): 91-104; “Method for a New Approach,” 31/3 (Autumn 1993): 171-94; “The Classical Model,” 32/1-2 (Spring/Summer 1994): 7-28; “The Liberal Model,” 32/3 (Autumn 1994): 169-95; “The Historical-Cognitive Model,” 33/3 (Spring 1995): 5-38.

³⁰⁰F. Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach,” *AUSS* 31/2 (Summer 1993): 98.

³⁰¹F. Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: The Historical-Cognitive Model,” *AUSS* 33/1 (Spring 1995): 9, 16.

³⁰²F. Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach,” *AUSS* 31/3 (Autumn 1993): 189. See also idem, “Revelation and Inspiration: The Historical-Cognitive Model,” *AUSS* 33/1 (Spring 1995): 27, 31, 33.

³⁰³F. Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: The Historical-Cognitive Model,” *AUSS* 33/1 (Spring 1995): 34.

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would be or shown how his new “historical-cognitive model” handles the issue of alleged factual errors in Scripture.

Equally noteworthy is the Spring 1994 issue of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, which came out with several papers on inspiration presented at the 1993 Scholars’ Convention of the Adventist Theological Society, which convened in Washington, D.C., on November 18, and Silver Spring, MD, on November 19-20, 1993. Those papers were the following: “By What Authority?” by C. Raymond Holmes;³⁰⁴ “New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” by Richard M. Davidson;³⁰⁵ “Inspiration and the Imprecatory Psalms,” by Angel M. Rodriguez;³⁰⁶ “Divine Inspiration and the Canon of the Bible,” by Gerhard F. Hasel;³⁰⁷ “Revelation/Inspiration, Church, and Culture,” by Jack J. Blanco;³⁰⁸ “Inspiration, the Natural Sciences, and a Window of Opportunity,” by John T. Baldwin;³⁰⁹ “The Inspiration of Scripture in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” by Gerard Damsteegt;³¹⁰ and “History of Inspiration in the Adventist Church (1844-1915),” by Alberto R. Timm.³¹¹ The overall tenor of those papers is the emphasis on the infallibility of Scripture, with specific responses to some charges raised against the trustworthiness of the Bible.

In 1995, Robert S. Folkenberg, then president of the General Conference, stated in the *Adventist Review* that the Adventist historic position on inspiration strengthens the church. According to his own words,

Our unequivocal, historic emphasis upon the divine inspiration and trustworthiness of Scripture has strengthened our church. It has helped us resist the error of treating some parts of Scripture as God’s Word, while ignoring or rejecting other parts. If we accept it as God’s Word, we must accept it all, whether or not we like what it says. To us the Scriptures should be the ultimate revelation of God’s will for our lives.³¹²

Several other publications helped to keep alive the ongoing debate on inspiration during the second half of the 1990s. One of the most influential landmarks in that debate was Samuel Koranteng-Pipim’s conservative-provocative book

³⁰⁴C. Raymond Holmes, “By What Authority?,” *JATS* 5/1 (Spring 1994): 1-13.

³⁰⁵Richard M. Davidson, “New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” *ibid.*, 14-39.

³⁰⁶Angel M. Rodriguez, “Inspiration and the Imprecatory Psalms,” *ibid.*, 40-67.

³⁰⁷Gerhard F. Hasel, “Divine Inspiration and the Canon of the Bible,” *ibid.*, 68-105.

³⁰⁸Jack J. Blanco, “Revelation/Inspiration, Church, and Culture,” *ibid.*, 106-30.

³⁰⁹John T. Baldwin, “Inspiration, the Natural Sciences, and a Window of Opportunity,” *ibid.*, 131-54.

³¹⁰P. Gerard Damsteegt, “The Inspiration of Scripture in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” *ibid.*, 155-79.

³¹¹Alberto R. Timm, “History of Inspiration in the Adventist Church (1844-1915),” *ibid.*, 180-95.

³¹²Robert S. Folkenberg, “Standing on Solid Ground—The Bible,” *Adventist Review*, Aug. 3, 1995, 22.

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Receiving the Word (1996).³¹³ Pipim, from Ghana, West Africa, who was at that time a Ph.D. candidate in Systematic Theology at Andrews University, called the attention of his readers to a significant variety of historical-critical attempts to undermine the authority of the Scriptures within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also tried to uplift the trustworthiness of the Bible by demonstrating that many of its alleged “errors” are either distortions added in the transmission process of its original text, or shortcuts in our present understanding of its true meaning.³¹⁴

That not everybody fully agreed with Pipim’s approach is evident from George R. Knight’s response to it. Knight, a professor of Church History at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University, criticized Pipim (1) for still believing in “inerrancy and verbalism”³¹⁵ and (2) for using the “well-known debater’s technique” in which “at one extreme it sets up the ‘right’ position, which is very, very right, while at the other extreme is the ‘wrong’ position, which is very, very wrong.”³¹⁶ Knight’s own view of inspiration was more clearly exposed in his book *Reading Ellen White* (1997), in which he argued (1) that “inspiration is not infallible, inerrant, or verbal”;³¹⁷ (2) that several factual “mistakes” can be found in the inspired writings;³¹⁸ and (3) that those writings are infallible only “as a guide to salvation.”³¹⁹ The views of Pipim, on one side, and of Knight, on the other, are representative of the two main conflicting poles around which gravitate the contemporary discussions on inspiration.

Meanwhile, the concept of models of inspiration was much further developed in 1996 by Juan Carlos Viera, director of the Ellen G. White Estate, in his *Adventist Review* article entitled “The Dynamics of Inspiration.” While George Rice had spoken only of two models, Viera suggested the following six: (1) the *visionary* model, in which God speaks “through prophetic visions and dreams”; (2) the *witness* model, in which God inspires “the prophet to give his or her own account of things seen and heard”; (3) the *historian* model, in which the message “did not come through visions and dreams, but through research”; (4) the *counselor* model, in which “the prophet acts as an adviser to God’s people”; (5) the

³¹³Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs, MI: Berean Books, 1996). This book was also published in Spanish under the title *Recibiendo la Palabra: Cómo afectan a nuestra fe los nuevos enfoques bíblicos?* trad. David Gullón (Buenos Aires: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamerica, 1997). Cf. George R. Knight’s and George W. Reid’s reviews in *Min*, Dec. 1997, 30-31; Aecio E. Cairus’s review in *Espigas* (Argentina) 1, nos. 1-21, 8-10.

³¹⁴See Pipim, *Receiving the Word*, 279-304.

³¹⁵George R. Knight, “The Case of the Overlooked Postscript: A Footnote on Inspiration,” *Min*, Aug. 1997, 11.

³¹⁶George R. Knight’s review in *Min*, Dec. 1997, 30.

³¹⁷George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 105.

³¹⁸*Ibid.*, 111, 113-18.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*, 110.

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epistolary model, in which “the prophet writes greetings, names, circumstances or even common things that do not require a special revelation; and (6) the *literary* model, in which “the Holy Spirit inspires the prophet to express his or her intimate feelings and emotions through the means of poetry and prose, as in the psalms.” According to Viera, “the prophet can make orthographical or grammatical mistakes, as well as other kinds of language imperfections such as *lappus linguae* (a slip of the tongue) or *lappus memoriae* (a slip of the memory),” but the Holy Spirit “is in control of the inspired message” and “always corrected His messengers in matters important to the church.”³²⁰ Viera’s models reflect more the sources of the inspired content than its actual transmission process.

Two years later (1998), Viera’s book on inspiration, *The Voice of the Spirit*, tried to explain the “relationship between a divine message, perfect and infallible, and a human messenger, imperfect and fallible,” in the process of prophetic inspiration.³²¹ Commenting on Ellen White’s classic statement, “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired . . . ,”³²² Viera suggested that,

taken with all the seriousness that this declaration deserves, it means that expressions such as “the pen of inspiration,” and “the inspired writings” are only symbolic expressions that refer to the message the writings communicate and not to the text itself of the prophetic declarations. Expressions such as these will continue to be used—and there is nothing wrong with that—because we all understand what they mean: that what we may be reading at the moment comes from a mind inspired by the Spirit of God. Therefore, we speak of “inspired paragraphs” or “inspired books” or “inspired letters.” Nevertheless, those expressions, taken literally, would contradict the prophetic thought that tells us that it is not the text, the words, or the language of a declaration that is inspired, but the message these communicate—and that message comes from heaven.³²³

Support for the notion of a non-inspired prophetic text was found in the fact that Ellen White herself allowed C. C. Crisler and H. H. Hall’s chapter on “The Awakening of Spain” to be added to the Spanish version of her book *The Great Controversy*.³²⁴ Under the assumption that this chapter shares the same nature of the book itself, Viera was not afraid of stating that the chapter “ended up being

³²⁰Juan Carlos Viera, “The Dynamics of Inspiration,” *ATR*, special edition, 30 May 1996, 22-28 (italics within quotation marks in the original).

³²¹Juan Carlos Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit: How God Has Led His People Through the Gift of Prophecy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), [7]. This book was also published in Spanish under the title *La Voz del Espíritu: Cómo Dios ha guiado a su pueblo a través del don de profecía* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998). Cf. Alberto R. Timm’s review, *CUD* 11/1 (1999): 33.

³²²See note 66, above.

³²³Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit*, 81-82.

³²⁴See C. C. Crisler and H. H. Hall, “El despertar de España,” in Elena G. de White, *El Conflicto de los Siglos durante la Era Cristiana*, 10th ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 252-77.

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part of the text (not inspired) of a book that contains the message (inspired) of God.”³²⁵ This might be easily seen as a significant move toward the liberal position that the Bible *is not* the Word of God but only *contains* that Word.

Also in 1998 came Herbert E. Douglass’s 586-page textbook titled *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Rejecting “verbal, inerrant inspiration” for implying that the prophet would have to function simply as a “recording machine” or as a “court stenographer,” Douglass argued for “thought inspiration” because “God inspires the prophet, not his or her words.” But the “divinely revealed message, or content,” can still be regarded as “infallible and authoritative.”³²⁶

Of special significance in the late 1990s were Leo R. van Dolson’s Adult Sabbath School Lessons for the first quarter of 1999, dealing specifically with the subjects of “revelation and inspiration,”³²⁷ and its companion book titled *Show and Tell* (1998).³²⁸ Van Dolson, who had been one of the editors of the book *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (1992),³²⁹ defined inspiration in his lessons as “the means by which God safeguarded the production and preservation of the Bible in order for it to become an infallible and sufficient guide to salvation.”³³⁰ But these widespread Bible lessons, as balanced in their content as they could be, were unable to downplay the Adventist academic tensions about inspiration.

Noteworthy also are some articles on inspiration published in *Ministry* magazine between 1999 and 2000. The September 1999 issue of that magazine came out with a slightly edited version of Alberto R. Timm’s paper presented at a plenary session of the First Jerusalem International Bible Conference, in June 1998.³³¹ Timm, director of the Brazilian Ellen G. White Research Center and professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Brazil Adventist University - Campus 2, suggested that further Adventist studies on “the nature and authority of the Bible” should take into consideration (1) “the symphonic nature of inspiration,” avoiding the “classical polarization under the labels of verbal inspiration on one side and thought inspiration on the other”; (2) “the wholistic scope of inspiration,” recognizing that the “overall thematic interrelationship” of the Scriptures “makes it almost impossible for someone to speak of the Bible in

³²⁵Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit*, 94 (parentheses in the original).

³²⁶Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 16.

³²⁷Leo R. Van Dolson, “Studies on Revelation and Inspiration: God Shows and Tells,” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, no. 415 (Jan.-March 1999).

³²⁸Leo R. Van Dolson, *Show and Tell: How God Reveals Truth to Us* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998).

³²⁹See note 289, above.

³³⁰Van Dolson, “Studies on Revelation and Inspiration,” 23 (lesson for January 10).

³³¹Alberto R. Timm, “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of Inspiration” (Paper presented at the First International Jerusalem Bible Conference, Jerusalem, Israel, June 10, 1998), AHC.

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dichotomous terms as being reliable in some topics and not in others”; and (3) “a respectful approach to the inspired writings,” that allows us to emphasize “more the content of the divine messages than their human containers” and “more the core of these messages than their side issues.”³³²

A new appeal for a cultural-conditioned understanding of inspiration was made by Richard W. Coffen in his 2-part series “A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration,” published in *Ministry* magazine of December 1999 and February 2000.³³³ Coffen, vice-president of editorial services at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, was the editor of Alden Thompson’s *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (1991),³³⁴ and showed himself very close to Thompson’s theory of inspiration. Besides pointing out several factual errors in the Scriptures,³³⁵ Coffen also argued for a divine-human dichotomous reading of the Scriptures. He says,

So, contrary to what some suggest, it is not heretical to deal with merely the human aspect of the Bible in isolation from its divine side, or vice versa. That’s not heresy but simple necessity. The heresy occurs when we deny the unity, wholeness, and complementarity principle in relation to inspiration.³³⁶

At the end of the second part of Coffen’s article appeared an editor’s note saying that “a response to Richard Coffen’s two part series,” by Ekkehardt Mueller, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, would appear in the April 2000 issue of *Ministry*.³³⁷ In that response, Mueller explained that “an inductive approach” to Scripture, as used by some scholars,

looks for discrepancies and takes notice of these phenomena. Oftentimes, it does not allow for harmonization even where it seems to be possible and advisable. It is preoccupied with finding differences rather than agreement and unity. And it always has only parts of the entire puzzle.³³⁸

³³²Alberto R. Timm, “Understanding Inspiration: The Symphonic and Wholistic Nature of Scripture,” *Min*, Sept. 1999, 12-15. The basic content of this article was published also in Portuguese as “O Adventismo e a Inspiração” (*Ministério* [Brazil], March-April 1999, 9-12) and in Spanish as “Hacia un entendimiento adventista de la inspiración” (*Logos* [Argentina] 3 [April 1999]: 8-13).

³³³Richard W. Coffen, “A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration,” 2-part series in *Min*, Dec. 1999, 9-14, 29; Feb. 2000, 20-23.

³³⁴See note 282, above.

³³⁵Coffen, “[A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration] - Part 2,” *Min*, Feb. 2000, 20-22.

³³⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

³³⁷“Editor’s note,” in *ibid.*, 23.

³³⁸Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Revelation, Inspiration, and Authority of Scripture,” *Min*, April 2000, 22.

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Thus, instead of an “inductive versus deductive” approach, one should proceed inductively *and* deductively, taking into consideration not only “the phenomena of the biblical texts” but also “the self-testimony of Scripture.”³³⁹

Mueller argued also that

the human and the divine in Scripture are not complementary. They are integrated. Consequently, different sets of tools in order to study the human side and the divine side of the Bible cannot do justice to the unified nature, the truly incarnational character of Scripture.³⁴⁰

Another major appeal for a historically conditioned understanding of inspiration can be found in Raymond F. Cottrell’s paper, “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World.” Presented originally at the revisionist 1985 Conference on Geology and the Biblical Record sponsored by the Association of Adventist Forums (publisher of *Spectrum* magazine), in West Yellowstone, Montana, this paper appeared in print only in 2000, as a chapter of that conference’s symposium, titled *Creation Reconsidered*.³⁴¹ Cottrell, a former editor of the Review and Herald Publishing Association and more recently an editor of *Adventist Today*, tried to solve some of the basic tensions between faith and reason, and between the Bible and natural sciences and secular history, by suggesting a clear distinction between the “inspired message” of the Bible and the “uninspired form in which it comes to us.” Yet “the inspired message on record in the Bible” is viewed by Cottrell as “culturally conditioned” and “historically conditioned.” For him, “historical conditioning permeates the entire Bible. It is not incidental, nor is it exceptional and unusual; it is the invariable rule.”³⁴²

Under the assumption that “in matters of science, the Bible writers were on a level with their contemporaries,” Cottrell could suggest that on these matters our understanding should be informed by the more reliable data provided by modern science. His attempt to harmonize the Bible account of Creation with modern science led him to the conclusion that “at an unspecified time in the remote past, the Creator transmuted a finite portion of his infinite power into the primordial substance of the universe—perhaps in an event such as the Big Bang.”³⁴³

The notion that “the words and forms of expression in the Bible were historically conditioned to their time and perspective” led the same author, elsewhere, to the conclusion that the Genesis Flood did not extend beyond the known “lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea.” He even stated that “only by

³³⁹Ibid., 22, 24.

³⁴⁰Ibid., 24.

³⁴¹ Raymond F. Cottrell, “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World,” in James L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives* (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000) 195–221.

³⁴² Ibid., 195–96, 199, 200, 205, 218.

³⁴³ Ibid., 199, 219.

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reading our modern worldview of ‘all the earth’ [Gen 7:3] back into the Hebrew text can the idea of a world-wide flood be established.”³⁴⁴ This represents, indeed, a major departure from the traditional Adventist understanding of a universal flood, as described in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,³⁴⁵ of which Cottrell himself was an associate editor.

But also published in the year 2000 was the most comprehensive official exposition of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of inspiration. That exposition, titled “Revelation and Inspiration,” was prepared by Peter M. van Bemmelen, professor of Theology at Andrews University, and submitted to the criticisms of the Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM), sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, prior to its publication as a chapter of the major *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (2000).³⁴⁶ The subject of inspiration is addressed in that chapter from the perspective of (1) its biblical interpretation, (2) its main historical expositions throughout the Christian era, and (3) Ellen G. White comments on the topic.

Van Bemmelen defines “inspiration” as the supernatural process by which the prophets were “moved and directed by the Spirit of God, in putting the words of the Lord in written form.” While recognizing that “the locus of inspiration is in the inspired author,” the same author argues that “there is little doubt that thoughts as well as words are involved in this process,” in such a way that those words are “words from God,” “fully human and fully divine.”³⁴⁷ Furthermore, “because all of Scripture is God’s word and every word that comes from God is true, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that all of Scripture is truth.”³⁴⁸

In regard to the so-called “factual errors” of the Bible, van Bemmelen recognizes that “no serious student of the Bible will deny that there are difficulties in Scripture,” but he adds that “these difficulties do not affect the clarity of Scripture.” He warns his readers that the claims and allegations “that there are numerous errors, contradictions, historical inaccuracies, anachronisms, and other flaws in the Scriptures” constitute “a serious indictment against the truthfulness of Holy Scripture.” He also alerts his readers that “through exalting the authority of human reason, tradition, and science, many have come to deny or to limit the

³⁴⁴ Raymond F. Cottrell, “Extent of the Genesis Flood,” in Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered*, 275.

³⁴⁵ Cf. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:257: “This description [of Gen 7] renders utterly foolish and impossible the view set forth by some that the Flood was a local affair in the Mesopotamian valley.”

³⁴⁶ Peter M. van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 22–57.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 38–40.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

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authority of Scripture.” But the Bible itself “warns repeatedly against anything or anybody that would undermine or usurp the authority of the Word of God.”³⁴⁹

Such conflicting views of inspiration as the ones mentioned above demonstrate that Seventh-day Adventist scholars are still divided in their personal understanding of inspiration.

Summary and Conclusion

Different views on the nature of inspiration have been advocated within the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the 150 years of its history.

Sabbatarian Adventists inherited William Miller’s high view of Scripture as the infallible and unerring Word of God. That Seventh-day Adventists kept that view of Scripture during the first four decades of their history (1844-1883) is evident from both their responses to *infidel* challenges against the Bible and their uncritical reprint in the *Review* of several articles by non-Seventh-day Adventist authors who fostered an inerrant view of Scripture.

From the early 1800s up to the time of Ellen White’s death (1915) traditional views of inspiration were challenged by individuals who either had been personally reproved by Ellen White or had been shocked by the idea that an inspired writing could be improved by its author. During that same period Ellen White wrote some of her most significant statements on inspiration. Responses to higher criticism show that Seventh-day Adventists continued to regard the Scriptures as the infallible and trustworthy Word of God.

The first five years after the death of Ellen White saw the development of an identity crisis about the nature of Ellen White’s inspiration. That crisis reached its climax at the 1919 Bible and History Teachers’ Council. The years following that council viewed Seventh-day Adventists on the side of Fundamentalism in uplifting the trustworthiness of the Bible in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. Responses to Modernism demonstrate that Seventh-day Adventists still kept their view of Scripture as the infallible and unerring Word of God.

In the early 1950s new trends began to develop within Seventh-day Adventism that assumed an increasingly radical tone in the early 1970s. Such issues as encounter revelation and the use of the historical-critical method influenced the Seventh-day Adventist discussions about inspiration. The main forum to foster discussions of those issues was *Spectrum* magazine.

Despite the emergence of new trends, no significant changes were made in Seventh-day Adventist official statements on inspiration. One has to avoid, therefore, the generalizing tendency of superimposing individual views or segment trends from the scholarly world upon the whole church.

Noticeably, the last few decades have seen the development of a factual and apologetic doctrine of inspiration largely shaped by revisionist studies of Ellen

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 42-44.

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White. As insightful as such developments can be, the time has come for Seventh-day Adventists to move beyond apologetic concerns into the task of developing a more constructive *theology* of inspiration.

Holding to the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, Seventh-day Adventists should seriously take more into consideration what the Bible and the writings of Ellen White have to say about themselves. As the end-time remnant, Seventh-day Adventists should not give up their identity as a people that lives “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4, RSV).

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