The Religious Left and the Religious Right at End-Times

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The Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation

A militant movement has arisen in conservative Christianity that is seeking to take over the world before Christ’s second coming.

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It is commonly understood that Seventh-day Adventist theology expects the enactment of a Sunday law in homage to Papal authority in the United States and other nations preceding the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, despite its inevitability according to prophecy, prior to such enactment, we are obligated to do what is reasonably possible to delay it by uplifting the importance of religious liberty.

Contemporary Adventist Perspectives on Religious Liberty and Sunday Laws

Numerous Adventists, and others, have commented upon Sunday laws and the groups that have promoted them over the past centuries both in the United States and elsewhere. These vary from more polemical arguments to detailed and well-reasoned historical treatises tracing the history of Sunday laws back to pagan Rome.

Responses by outsiders have been, overall, decidedly mixed in comparison with the Adventist perspective. The issues have become far more complicated since Ellen White’s death in 1915 than they were during the early period of American and Adventist history. Though Sunday laws in earlier periods of history were typically both motivated and sustained exclusively on religious grounds, this is no longer necessarily the case. A variety of complex socio-economic factors are now at play, affecting both the positive and negative sides of the debate concerning the usefulness and validity of any Sunday legislation. Additionally, during the past, there were several times when actual Sunday legislation was being actively discussed at various national or local governments in the United States. Since World War II, however, such discussions have been absent altogether or effecting insignificant attention among government officials in the United States. This makes the traditional Adventist presentation of the future in the United States more challenging for outsiders to accept in the 21st century.

This article, however, will focus on attitudes of prominent conservative Adventist perspectives from the past 15 to 20 years in relation to their non-Adventist peers. Some have been employed by official or influential Adventist institutions of ministry or education. This by no means is meant to imply that their views—or anyone else’s—are to be understood as “official” positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Rather, the intention is to sample the perspectives of prominent and respected contributors to contemporary mainstream Adventist thinking that are or have been
connected with various official branches of the church at one level or another, and who have contributed noteworthy scholarly contributions to the issues of religious liberty and Sunday law legislation in the United States in light of 21st-century events.

Several Adventists have written articles or books that address the possibilities of Sunday legislation in a late 20th- and early 21st-century context. Norman Gulley, Marvin Moore, and John V. Stevens, adequately represent professional scholars, pastors, and popular authors who have dedicated significant study to religious liberty in America and in particular Sunday legislation. Collectively and individually, their credentials are solid. Each of them has written a book-length treatment on end-times, noting both the biblical and historical evidence, which includes an examination of the identification of groups that would encourage Sunday legislation in the U.S.

**Norman Gulley on the End Game in the End-Time**

Gulley’s views on end-times are extensive, covering both the relevant biblical passages and writings from Ellen G. White. His perspectives in these areas are in overall harmony with traditional understandings from Adventist leaders, including hers. Gulley as such saw, in the 1990s, the Sunday/Sabbath crisis as the final religious question confronting the world at the end of time. Concerning the origin of Sunday veneration in the Christian Church, he viewed it as a Catholic invention, evidencing the Catholic view concerning the authority of the early church apart from scriptural teachings. Gulley described the purpose for Sunday veneration as simply Satan’s hatred for Christ and God’s Law: Satan “hates the law, because he hates Christ.”

These positions match the historic positions of Adventist teachings that have been held since near the beginning of the sabbatarian movement that developed into Seventh-day Adventism. Gulley’s studies on end-times include an extensive overview of the issues that are confronting our postmodern age. These issues include the state of the dead, New Age spiritualism, relativism, evolution, and many others, including different understandings of millennialism.

“In America,” Gulley wrote, “bastion of religious liberty, forces are at work to tear down the wall of separation between church and state.” He continued, “There is a relentless attack against the first amendment of the Constitution, and leading the fight is the Christian Coalition.”

This leads to a question: What were the policies of the Christian Coalition at that time? Founded in 1989 following religious broadcaster and political commentator Pat Robertson’s failed Presidential bid in 1988 in the Republican Party, the Christian Coalition sought to “Christianize America” through political activism. This much is certain: Robertson provided some of the sharpest statements in recent decades advocating a closer relationship between religion and government. Gulley noted several books and articles by Robertson and his allies that expressed their desire to tear down the wall of separation between church and state that Gulley saw in the First Amendment of the Constitution. The evidence is clear enough that the Christian Coalition of that time was not an ally in Adventist efforts to preserve religious liberty. "The New Christian Right is out to Christianize America," wrote Gulley.
Gulley was direct in addressing the political alliances that the Christian Coalition sought to create. He noted that the organization had “considerable influence in the Republican party and hope[d] to get the Republican President of their choice elected in the year 2000.” He also sided with the liberal or progressive Supreme Court justices against conservatives like the late William Rehnquist and still-active Antonin Scalia. He asserted that the Christian Coalition was misguided in its perception of persecution against Christians in America, leading them to greatly exaggerate the difficulties Christians face. In other words, he said that they were deceptively playing a “victim card” to attract attention and strengthen their base supporters.

The goal of the Christian Coalition was clear to Gulley: They wanted to legislate morality. And this sounds like events described in Revelation 13. He noted that Robertson helped organize a meeting in which he tried to rally his coalition behind a single individual in the Republican Party to run for president in 2000, all the while trying to keep his organization tax exempt, a violation of U.S. law.

He noted with irony the enigma that the Christian Coalition’s effort to “take-over..the Republican party” defied the party’s traditional stance “against big government” and its concern “with individual freedom.” Nevertheless, Gulley observed Robertson’s call for “his Coalition to get behind one Republican candidate for President,” revealing “the partisan nature of their scheme,” which they no doubt recognized as necessary to obtain power; they knew they needed to control a prominent political party first.

Gulley did note that there were Christian dissenters against Robertson’s Christian Coalition, like the Presbyterian minister Robert H. Meneilly, who dubbed the New Right as “a present danger greater than ‘the old threat of Communism’” and Edward G. Dobson, who wrote an article in Christianity Today entitled “Taking Politics Out of the Sanctuary.”

In his personal account after attending the 1995 “Road to Victory” Convention organized by the Christian Coalition, Gulley observed that in 1990, the convention had 250 delegates, but in 1995, that number had swollen to 4,260, with 143 speakers and seven of nine Republican Presidential candidates speaking. Gulley reported “thunderous applause” after shouts of “Take the nation back for God!” and “Out with the liberals.” It was clear to him that the Christian Coalition wanted to join the state and religion. He also noted that of the 1.7 million Coalition members in 1995, 250,000 of them were Catholics.

Gulley acknowledged his agreement that the moral condition of America is wanting. However, although “the Christian Coalition was appalled at the moral disarray in the country,” they winked at the “doctrinal disarray in the church.” Thus “they shout out against moral degradation, but don’t even whimper about doctrines on the trash heap. This uniting for a moral cause is a moral disaster,” he asserted. He recognized that the real issue was “the danger of moralists attempting to legislate their moral values on minorities. This,” he said, was “the danger of the Christian Coalition agenda, and that of Dominion theology.”

Gulley concluded his analysis of the Christian Coalition by citing how their efforts were
compatible with Ellen G. White’s picture of the end-times presented in *The Great Controversy* and elsewhere: “As we watch the Christian Coalition out to force through its social revolution, we remember that ‘Protestant churches shall seek the aid of the civil power for the enforcement of their dogmas.’”

Indeed, he noted that “during the 1990s there have been unprecedented natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes.” He continued, “The Christian Coalition and the New Right consider these natural disasters as judgment acts of God for moral degradation. And this fires them up in their push to place secular leaders in power to push their religious agenda.”

Gulley framed several quotations from Ellen G. White that would have seemingly fit the Christian Coalition perfectly. He cited her by sharing, “‘This very class put forth the claim that the fast-spreading corruption is largely attributable to the desecration of the so-called ‘Christian sabbath,’ and that the enforcement of Sunday observance would greatly improve the morals of society.’” It is this breaking down of the separation of church and state that Gulley described as the “end-game.”

To summarize his analysis of Sunday movements of that time, it is clear that Gulley anticipated them as most likely to come from the people like those behind the Christian Coalition, which is similarly part of the New Christian Right, the Religious Right, and perhaps recognized more publicly as the Republican worldview.

The central lynchpin of Gulley’s broader critique, however, was not leveled against the Christian Coalition per se. His perspective centered on the idea that there is a definable wall of separation between church and state in the U.S. Constitution, which philosophically presumes such a separation is in fact possible. This is a decidedly complex subject, as differing opinions abound on the nature and intent of the founding fathers in their creation of the Constitution and the philosophical possibility of truly separating religion from the state.

Gulley, however, concluded that the Founders intended, through the first amendment, to preserve a wall of separation. This means that “the government must stay out of the sphere of religion, which also means that religion should not force government to legislate in matters of faith and conscience.” And it decidedly enters Gulley into the debate over the intent of the founders and the philosophical issues related to any true separation of church and state. He sided with the liberals, who view the United States as a secular nation. He insisted that the founders never wanted an openly Christian nation and that the Constitution is a “secular” document.

Though Gulley’s theology and view of end-times are in harmony with those described by Ellen G. White, it is necessary here to point out that the Christian Coalition is, for all practical intents and purposes, defunct. From a highpoint of $26.5 million revenue in 1996, their financial wherewithal had dropped to a scant $1.3 million by 2004, by which time they had also lost their battle with the IRS over their tax-exempt status, setting a precedent for other similar religious organizations intent on engaging in politics. And Pat Robertson, who left the Christian Coalition 13 years ago has been discredited by other faith leaders and the media for a range of ill-conceived public pronouncements.
Marvin Moore: Could It Really Happen?

Moore took a similar approach to Gulley. Outlining Adventism’s traditional perspectives on the historical significance of the Papacy and the United States in prophecy, particularly its understanding of Revelation 13, Moore guided his readers through the historical context that set up the contemporary picture. Moore set up his 2007 book, *Could It Really Happen? Revelation 13 in the Light of History and Current Events,* by referring to a union of church and state in the United States, followed by a Sunday law, thus making an image to the beast of Papal Rome.

Clearly it could happen. The question is: Who does Moore identify as most likely to make such a union of church and state? And in what manner does he see it developing historically?

Moore notes that the land-beast of Revelation 13:11-18 is lamb-like. As the symbol of the lamb usually represents Christ, this means the United States will become a “professedly Christian nation.” However strong secularism, atheism, or other religions may become in America, Moore asserts that they will never obtain a dominance. America, while founded on the separation of church and state, is nevertheless and will remain predominantly a Protestant Christian nation. This Protestant nation will, however, eventually pay homage to the Papacy through the enactment of Sunday legislation. So far, again, these interpretations and predictions in and of themselves are in harmony with longstanding Adventist interpretations.

When Moore traces the rise of religious influences and powers in America, however, things become more interesting. Like Gulley, Moore rests his case largely on the assumed true separation of church and state established in the Constitution, all the while acknowledging that the founders of America recognized the importance of religion. From this point onward, however, Moore foresees only one path as bringing a union of church and state, and it is the rise of the conservative movement in America and its associated religious arm, the Religious Right, which includes the former Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority. He has have given little attention to liberal theology or mainline Protestantism.

Conversely, the “Religious Right” as a phrase occurs 58 times in Moore’s book. The dichotomy of emphasis is noteworthy. Moore’s work clearly reveals his thoughts here; in that, although the intellectual elites, including those more involved with politics, were more likely to be liberal theologically, their influence and numbers amongst the population declined during the mid- and late 20th century.

Moore details the work of Jerry Falwell, Ronald Reagan, and Pat Robertson as key players in the rise of conservatism. Falwell and Robertson undeniably desired to create a Christian political powerhouse to govern society. Moore also traces with special interest the rise of the Christian Coalition in the early 1990s following the relative demise of the Moral Majority. And, although the conservative presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush represented successes for the Religious Right, Moore acknowledges that they weren’t as conservative as many Religious Right leaders hoped.

He then makes a particularly revealing statement and analysis about the presidency of Bill Clinton, a noted Democrat liberal. Moore observes that religious conservatives were able to see a
silver lining, in that they had a “face” to war against in Bill Clinton. This paid off to some degree in Moore’s thinking as following Clinton, Republican President George W. Bush was elected, whom Moore considers a genuine religious conservative who catered to the Religious Right. This commitment to conservatism was seen through his appointment of John Roberts and Samuel Alito—both Catholics—to the Supreme Court, granting decided victories, in Moore’s view, for the Religious Right.

Moore essentially sees the avenue toward the Sunday law to be along the lines of the conservative, Republican, religious push of the 1980s and 1990s. He also cites R. J. Rushdoony (1916-2001), an influential force in Christian Reconstructionism and Dominionism, who emphasized creating a kingdom of heaven here on earth. Without question, Adventists are opposed to these views as antithetical to religious liberty. Moore sees these ideas as the influential drive of the Religious Right and the path that the Sunday law will likely follow. In other words, it is a conservative version of Christianity that has its roots in the Religious Right and its political connections that will create the Sunday law.

Individuals like Pat Robertson and the now-deceased Jerry Falwell, however, are not influential figures today. And though it is true that President George W. Bush had two influential and historically significant terms of office, he also left the presidency with the highest disapproval rating in U.S. history—71 percent. The chances of seeing another Bush-like figure win the Presidency are low for the foreseeable future. As the 21st century gets well underway, America isn’t interested in following the ultra-conservative path. This is seen clearly in the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and again in 2012, to the Presidency, one of the most liberal politicians in history, who has a very progressive agenda.

Even more important than either of the above observations, however, is one of the most amazing trends in American Christianity during the late 1990s and 2000s: the rise of the Religious Left. According to a poll in 2009, American Christians are split almost 54/46, Right versus Left, and the trend is moving toward a 50/50 split. There is little difference between the Catholic and Protestant numbers; these two branches of Christendom are split in their overall socio-political identification. Pollsters noted that their report “puts to rest the question of whether there is a ‘God gap’ between Republicans and Democrats: ‘Clearly, from this data, it’s not only closing. It’s closed.’”

Moore also fails to mention the significance of the cultural/geographical gap, or the “Red/Blue” divide in America, separating the liberal coastal cities from the conservative heartland, and the impact this could have on the implementation of Sunday laws. This cultural divide became prominent only after 1992. The population centers in America, where much power exists, are overwhelmingly liberal. Interestingly, Ellen G. White seemed to indicate that persecution of Sabbath-keepers will be most severe in cities. If this is so, it would be ironic, as cities are not conservative or Republican. Having conservative, rural Christians invade the cities to enforce a Sunday law on secular people and liberal Christians seems unlikely.
John V. Stevens: Abortion and the Sunday Law

Stevens, a longtime specialist and activist on matters of religious liberty, follows a similar line of thinking to that of Gulley and Moore, and outlined clearly the Adventist position on Revelation 13 that places the United States squarely into the center of prophecy.

Stevens sees the United States as a nation founded on secular principles respecting the freedom of religion. In this, he echoes the views of Gulley and Moore that it was the separation of church and state that granted the U.S. its lamblike characteristics.

Stevens specifies in his 2008 book how the U.S. was able to achieve this, and how such a system must look graphically. He describes a specific separation of the two tables of the Ten Commandments into vertical and horizontal planes, wherein a secular government can legislate only the horizontal plane. This led him, however, to articulate yet another reason for criticizing the Religious Right, and that is the issue of abortion.

Stevens believes fervently that conservative religious powers are trying to restrict or oppose abortion in violation of the separation of church and state principle upon which the United States is founded. Stevens sees abortion as acceptable because he believes human life begins only at birth, not at conception, claiming that “God’s Word defines the time of the beginning of life for a person as birth and the end of life as death.” And for Stevens, interpreting the commandment proscribing murder to include abortion is not biblical. Therefore, legislating the issue in favor of a pro-life commitment violates the separation of church and state.

For Stevens, “the most powerful religio-political coalition in the nation is seeking control of the presidency, the Congress, and the judiciary, and for all practical purposes has achieved it, and the same is true on the state level.” He continues, “The Fundamentalist New Right, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, Mormons, and others, is effectively using the abortion issue in recent years in order to become our moral and legal guardians.”

The powers he referred to reside, in his mind, in the conservative political party of the Republicans, the party well known for its support of anti-abortion (or pro-life) positions. Stevens has been highly critical of both President George W. Bush and James Dobson, of Focus on the Family, a conservative organization dedicated in part to opposing abortion and gay marriage. It should be noted here that Stevens’ book, written in 2008, went to press prior to President Obama’s election, which casts a distinctly different light on current events.

Nevertheless, Stevens believes that it is through the issue of abortion as the catalyst, that “the Catholic-Evangelical alliance wants to unite religion with government” and that “it is this change on the part of some American Protestants that is changing them into the likeness of the beast, like the papacy.” This, Stevens asserts, will eventually lead to a resurgence of focus on Sunday observance. Abortion and Sunday legislation are thus inseparably connected for Stevens, with their common origin in the conservative Religious Right, which dominates the Republican Party in America.

Two major issues affect the acceptance of Stevens’ assessment:
First, abortion must be interpreted in harmony with his view that life begins only at birth, which dismisses the personhood of the fetus. Many Adventists are not comfortable with this interpretation. In fact, were one to take the opposite view from Stevens, that voluntary abortion is murder, one could argue that it is precisely society’s willingness to violate one of the horizontal commandments that will prepare them to violate a vertical commandment.

Second, some of Stevens’ facts have dissipated since the writing of his book. Influential figures that he cited, such as Dobson, are fading off the scene without obvious replacements. There has been a strong rise of liberal Christianity in recent times. Even when Obama provoked American Catholic leaders over the issue of contraceptives in February 2012, drawing pointed criticism, the average Catholic seemed unconcerned, and this had little impact on Obama’s approval ratings, right in line with the rest of the country at the time, including many other Christians. Overall, Obama maintained a near 50-percent approval rating during the public dialogue on this issue, consistent with the very split nature of the U.S. overall, a split that has deepened of late as part of a broad “culture war.”

Summarizing These Three Views

Among these three prominent mainstream Seventh-day Adventists, a theologian, a well-published pastor, and a religious-liberty expert, concerning the issue of potential Sunday legislation, a clear pattern emerges. These and many others among the disciplines that they represent have advanced the idea that Sunday legislation is most likely to come from conservative religious Protestant groups uniting with fellow conservative Catholic groups to “moralize” society. In the everyday world, this amounts to a criticism of the Republican Party in American politics during the 1980s through the early 2000s.

Instead, America has become evenly divided between conservative and liberal Christians, and the fragmentation appears to be growing. It is uncertain who will win—conservatives or liberals. And, interestingly, Adventist interpretation of prophecy is compatible with either side winning in a general sense, as both have strong motives compatible with Catholic teachings that could combine the church and the state, and the various understandings of the old and new covenants advanced by Protestant believers.

As noted earlier, Ellen G. White encouraged effort to delay Sunday legislation. Assuming this, and the party identification that the Religious Right has obtained, it would appear that every good Adventist should always vote for the Democrat or liberal politician. The unfortunate implication is that the Adventist is encouraged to embrace every liberal cause, idea, or practice. This greatly damages our reputation with many non-militant conservatives, both religious and secular, who are not seeking union of church and state.

Are Most Christians Politically Conservative?

As the liberal Democrat-leaning Catholic Steven H. Shiffrin observed in 2009, “Although the
mass media tend to ignore it, there is a strong religious Left in the United States.”

His observation is merely the echo of one made by Michael Cromartie in 2000, when he shared that a visiting liberal theologian, Harvey Cox, was surprised to find that the students at Pat Robertson’s Regent University were “not monolithic in their political views.” Indeed, Cromartie notes that evangelicalism “includes not only a diversity of denominations but also Christians from the political right, left, and center.”

Even more importantly, from his vista in 2000, he already had noted that “although they have largely maintained an alliance with political conservatism, they do have a moderate, liberal, and left-wing contingent that has had an important influence.” When this fact is combined with the knowledge that even decades ago, “many evangelical college students were turned off by the confrontational tactics of Jerry Falwell’s followers” and were not fans of Robertson either during the peak of the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition, the evangelical world was and remains ripe for unpredictable changes.

The question is, What kind of changes, and have they already begun to happen? The answer is a resounding Yes. “The Religious Right and the Religious Left are almost exactly the same size. The former has had a much greater impact for the past 25 years largely because of superior organization and drive.” Yet that dominance might change, as the latest data from 2013 suggest. It seems that “if current trends persist, religious progressives will soon outnumber religious conservatives, a group that is shrinking with each successive generation.” As such, the “forgotten” Evangelical Left may yet rise again in unforeseeable forms. And the socio-political groundwork for such a major movement has already been laid for some years in what is called liberation theology, which depends on a union of church and state.

The Origin and Development of the Religious Left

A history of the origin of the contemporary Religious Left in America necessarily begins with liberation theology, a movement popular in South American Catholicism in the 1960s and 1970s, though its social and political visions come from even earlier times. In its essence, “liberation theology grew out of the faith, struggles, sufferings and hopes of the poor.” As such, “it is . . . a theology that starts out in a particular political context and set of social conditions.”

This political dimension is crucial. Indeed, “because liberation theology originated—and remains—at the intersection of contested political and religious goals, “no matter how one wishes to define its theological” dimension, at heart it remains interested in “socio-economic systems” that have a decidedly Marxist and redistributive flavor taking, forcibly if necessary, from the rich and gives to the poor to advance equality. “Liberation theology” has “its focus on the poor, the construction of God’s reign and liberation.” It seeks the “radical political transformation of the present order” as “a central component of the living out of Christian faith.” For most Adventists, it is noteworthy that Ellen G. White took a decidedly neutral position on socio-economic activism.

There is a direct connection between liberation theology and the popular concept of “cheap grace,” a problem infecting the Religious Right, whose vision has become obsessed with political
goals at the cost of personal piety. To define it, as Eldin Villafañe puts it, “cheap grace’ is a phrase, and a concept, that has great theological meaning. In its practical sense, which I want to underline, it speaks to us of an ‘easy’ Christianity.” He continues, “An easy Christianity is a Christianity that doesn’t cost much, that pays no price. It thinks and says, in fact, ‘Please don’t ask too much of me’; ‘Don’t place any demands on me.’ ‘Cheap grace’ portrays those persons who want to live in a secured comfort zone, those who think and say, ‘Do not disturb!’ Ultimately, ‘cheap grace’ characterizes that mode of thinking or mind-set that rejects obedience, commitment, and discipleship, and the cross! #44

Although the criticism of cheap grace can be fully given and accepted as a personal critique and call to discipleship, and thus an internal criticism of conservatives to themselves, it can also become a corporate and external one, as it is used by liberal theologians against conservatives. The prominent liberal-leaning Christian, Ronald Sider, connects the Religious Right’s apparent cheap grace message to a lack of emphasis by Christians on social justice. He aims his critique of cheap grace at traditional evangelical conservatives, the Religious Right. He credits liberal “Mainline Protestants [and] Roman Catholics” for an understanding of “distributive justice,” which includes universal access to healthcare #45 and a rejection of cheap grace.

The liberation movement, a call to abandon cheap grace, took on an American face in the 1970s through the work of Jim Wallis (particularly when he rebranded his earlier magazine into Sojourners in 1976), Ron Sider, and Tony Campolo.

In the words of Wallis himself, who was not even here advocating Marxism, though his pragmatic ideas would lean more and more that way: “As more Christians become influenced by liberation theology, finding themselves increasingly rejecting the values and institutions of capitalism, they will also be drawn to the Marxist analysis and praxis that is so central to the movement. That more Christians will come to view the world through Marxist eyes is therefore predictable. It will even be predictable among the so-called ‘young evangelicals’ who, for the most part, have a zeal for social change that is not yet matched by a developed socio-economic analysis that will cause them to see the impossibility of making capitalism work for justice and peace.” #46

Wallis’ words were prophetic. Note his reference to young evangelicals, also sometimes called elsewhere the “new evangelicals.” Such individuals would later contribute to the rise of the Emergent and/or Emerging Church, which is essentially a postmodernized Christianity, an amorphous liberal Christianity that “speaks hip” fluently and constitutes a group of millions throughout the Western and South American world. Although their exact numbers are difficult to ascertain in part because they avoid traditional churches but still identify with Christianity, it is clear that they have split American Evangelicalism in two. They are an “ideology” that runs house-to-house, college campus-to-campus. Though often relegated by some as merely a youth movement, many aspects of the Emerging ideology have made their way into the mainstream. The Occupy Wall Street movement in America represents this liberation of the poor from the rich in a secular context, and has been specifically embraced by the Religious Left’s Wallis. It’s no accident that Wallis is a special advisor on religious
matters to President Obama. It is similarly no surprise that Obama’s longtime pastor, Jeremiah Wright, has connections with liberation theology.

All these movements and individuals are religious, political, and lean to the far left politically. Furthermore, Wallis is also a close ally with Brian McLaren, a prominent leader of the Emerging church movement. And those with sympathies to these movements represent a significant number of the American populace. And they don’t like the Religious Right or Republicans. Emergent or Emerging Christians are overwhelmingly Democrats.

Emerging Christians frequently espouse a “kingdom on earth” mentality, often considered a revealing sign of the Religious Right. Scot McKnight, an Emerging Church leader, once said, “I tell my friends that I have voted Democrat for years for all the wrong reasons. I don’t think the Democratic Party is worth a hoot, but its historic commitment to the poor and to centralizing government for social justice is what I think government should do.” Combined with what Brian McLaren believes, namely that “Jesus came ‘to proclaim the Kingdom of God, which is God’s will being done on Earth,’” whether one likes this or not, this kind of thinking leads to the explicit ideological union of church and state that the liberal social gospel seeks to temporally fulfill here on earth. Some may see support of this in the saying of Jesus: “‘Seek first the kingdom of God’” includes “social salvation and the salvation of the earth.” It was surely not accidental that President Obama, a Democrat, echoed their sentiments that he wanted to create “a kingdom right here on earth” in his desire to reach out to what he perceived to be his liberal Christian base.

Little has been said by Seventh-day Adventists about the Emerging Church. This suggests an unawareness of what is happening religiously in America. And, although it may seem inconceivable that such liberal Christians would want to create a Sunday law, this is not so farfetched as one might think, because of the close relationship that liberal Catholics have with the Religious Left, and the relationship that the Religious Left’s interests have in the government to advance their causes.

**The Ground Motive of the Secular and Religious Left**

Although arguments rage on regarding the Republican and Democratic visions of society and the amount of power or control the federal government should have over its citizens, it does appear to be a basic reality that, at least in theory, the Republicans favor big business “trickle down” economics and the Democrats prefer helping the poor through social programs as the best way to improve society and the economy. Although it is a highly divisive topic, the basic fact is that the liberal/socialist/progressivist/ Marxist philosophies admittedly require larger, more comprehensive governmental oversight, whereas a conservative capitalism emphasizes less government and more localized control.

It is important to emphasize, however, that societal change oriented toward emphasizing equality and fairness is the ground motive of the Religious Left, and is something it shares with the secular Left. They want things to be fair, even if it means forcefully. (In South America, sometimes violence was used; in the U.S., usually just higher taxation of the rich.) Both are willing to use the
government to achieve their socio-economic-religious aims.

What truly separates the Left from the Religious Right, which seeks to reform society morally (e.g., taking a stance against abortion and same-sex marriage), is simply a shift in focus. The Left is willing to work through the government just as much as the extreme Right leaders were. In the Left, however, the idea that everyone should have an equal or “fair” amount of wealth and prosperity is the primary concern, and even becomes the moral justification for their actions. The issue is this: Does reforming society through the government, even without purportedly traditional moral concerns, truly leave the state out of the church or individual’s life in an excessive way? The answer appears to be No.

Any law, such as the universal healthcare plan that the Obama administration has championed, which requires an “individual mandate,” represents this reality, and is almost unanimously supported by Leftist religious leaders, though not by most on the Right. Even more apropos would be the debate concerning the Obama administration on the issue of government-mandated contraception availability in church-controlled hospitals. Although most Catholic leaders denounced Obama’s plan to provide contraception through religious organizations, including Catholic hospitals that oppose the practice, the vast majority of Catholics do in fact accept or approve of contraception.

Were Adventists to focus solely on the vigorous voice of the conservative Catholic leadership’s opposition, they would be preaching from a denial of reality of what most religious people actually believe. Religious people are as likely to be “progressive” as they are to be “conservative” on different issues. In this instance, the liberals are rather stoking the fire by provoking conservatives over an irrelevant issue through a desire for greater forced secularism, as free or inexpensive contraceptives were already available at many health clinics for people from lower economic brackets. Liberals were here inserting themselves into socio-religious issues unnecessarily, even when it interfered with the operation of churches.

Interestingly, the disagreement between conservative Catholics and the Secular Left over contraception ignores the fact that Catholics strongly favored the universal healthcare plan in the first place, setting up the future disagreement. One cannot deny the Religious Left’s desire to gain a public and political influence that rivals that of the Religious Right, and it’s hard to argue they aren’t beginning to achieve some success.

The Religious Left’s Catholic Roots and Desire for Political Control

It is no accident that a number of individuals in the Emerging Church and Religious Left see the close relationship between the Religious Left and liberal Catholicism. Noteworthy is that those in the new Evangelical “Center” (which is really more Left than Right, given which issues they emphasize, like global warming) are far more open to Catholic teachings, especially concerning mystical spirituality.

The Evangelical Left’s ethicist David Gushee remarks, “We believe that while the Catholic tradition’s emphasis on learning from tradition and other sources of insight can be embraced, the
equating of the authority of Scripture and of tradition must be rejected on the basis of Jesus’ example.”

Gushee favors more nuanced positions, like the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, in which Scripture is combined with tradition, reason, and experience. “All have a role to play in the formation of Christian faith and ethics, though Scripture occupies the central place,” he claims. His discussion needs to be taken seriously by Adventist thought leaders to detect the slide into Catholicism that Religious Left leaders are encouraging. There is surely a reason that Emergent, liberal, Leftist ideas are so friendly to Catholic understandings of spirituality and social concern, even when the political scene is brought into the picture.

Many of today’s liberal or progressive ideas, religious or otherwise, have intellectual roots or parallels in totalitarian fascism. The evidence is overwhelming. Those on the Left are often as totalitarian in their thinking as those on the Right. It seems, then, that many prominent Adventist thinkers have clearly neglected studies of recent history as they paint possible eschatological pictures, which are always filtered through classical or contemporary conservatism and the Religious Right of the 1980s to 1990s. Such critiques, however, are not absent from the rest of the Christian world.

In his *Freedom and Capitalism: Essays on Christian Politics and Economics*, alongside his earlier work, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church*, the libertarian conservative John W. Robbins sharply rebukes the liberal-progressive tendencies of Catholic social teachings as an integral part of the Catholic Church’s plan to regain complete authority over society. Robbins states plainly that “the Roman church-state devised much of the theory on which secular twentieth-century totalitarian regimes have been based, as well as acting as a model for them.” Robbins argues that “for centuries the Roman church-state had resisted the advance of the Reformation and its economic system, capitalism.” As capitalism began to win the day, new approaches were needed to combat capitalism. That new ally was socialism and all its variants.

Robbins demonstrates what to him seems clear. “In the United States, the influence of Roman Catholic economic thought has resulted in the creation of a redistributive state, in which the government intervenes in the economy and society in order to protect the ‘common good’ and establish ‘social justice.’” Robbins believes that “Mainline Protestant churches, which like the Roman Catholic Church . . . were promoting what came to be called the Social Gospel, whose political expressions were the Progressive movement and later the New Deal,” represent the heart of the Catholic church-state’s vision.

Presently, in 2014, this can be seen in the progressive vision of a variety of programs and ideas, including universal healthcare. As Robbins explains, “what the papacy has realized is that by constantly enlarging the Rights of Man, to use the Vatican’s own phrase, it can offer ever new moral arguments for enlarging the size, scope, and power of government.” With healthcare, the principle at stake is the universal destination of goods. “The rights advocated by the Roman church-state require the enslavement of some people for the benefit of others.” It appears “the church-state
seems to realize that this is the case, and advocates these rights for that reason."

Just imagine a time when a “day of rest” could become a “right” before it becomes a “requirement,” like a required participation in universal healthcare. A time when we are no longer requested to aid our brothers and sisters willingly, but our wellbeing is bound up with theirs, in every way, forcibly. The parallels are closer than one might wish. The precedent has been set—and supported by Catholic U.S. Supreme Court Justices from both ideological perspectives.

The most important point to draw from Robbins is the fact that the re-empowerment of the Roman church-state is most likely to come from their socio-economic teachings, which authorize greater governmental oversight over all of society for the “greater good.” Robbins notes that “the Vatican itself traces the origin of liberation theology to the Roman church-state, specifically to Vatican II (1962-1965) and the 1968 conference of Roman Bishops in Medellín, Colombia.” Indeed, “the only disagreements the Vatican has had with some aspects of liberation theology are its secular elements, the insufficient obsequiousness of some liberation theologians to the pope, and their sometime advocacy of a systematic use of violence to achieve goals that the Roman church-state has always approved: social justice, the common good, and the universal destination of goods.” Robbins again plainly states that the Roman “church-state has never criticized the economic views of the liberation theologians.”

If it were true that the Roman church-state were using Leftist liberal social concerns to prepare the groundwork for a total takeover of American society, then where are the critiques of the relationship of Leftist economic thought and church-state relations by Adventists focusing on end-times? Just as in healthcare, could a day of rest on Sunday also become, first a right, before a requirement? Why is there no engagement with conservative but moderate theologians like Ronald Nash, who has written extensive criticisms of liberation theology and its attendant economic theory in relation to church-state issues? Why is there no closer attention to Max Weber’s thesis in 1905, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” that capitalism, however imperfect in a sinful world, leads to greater freedom and better economic outcomes than alternative systems?

Considering that Robbins agrees with the writings in the 1990s of Adventist representatives Moore, Stevens, and Gulley on significant issues, and shares with Adventists an opposition to Christian Reconstructionism, it is unfortunate that there is no genuine dialogue with his and similar thinkers who are concerned about the growing power of both the secular and Religious Left alongside their strong disagreements with aspects of the Religious Right. Robbins expresses a robust independence from any history of eschatological predictions and guesswork, letting his epistemology speak for itself as it analyzes the present, and he sees the church and state uniting on both the Left and the Right with equal force.

**Ellen G. White’s Views on the Sabbath/Sunday Crisis**

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White reiterates the importance of understanding the historical origin of the Sabbath and how this establishes its true meaning. “Because He had rested upon the
Sabbath, 'God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,'—set it apart to a holy use. He gave it to Adam as a day of rest. It was a memorial of the work of creation, and thus a sign of God’s power and His love.”

Again, she describes in detail the true purpose of the Sabbath: “The Sabbath calls our thoughts to nature, and brings us into communion with the Creator. In the song of the bird, the sighing of the trees, and the music of the sea, we still may hear His voice who talked with Adam in Eden in the cool of the day.”

The Sabbath, as a time set apart, is a sign of the nature of the God who created us, one who is personal and relational. It was made for us, but can, as originating with Him, only be chosen by Him. Some other day won’t do. Although it was made for us, it is not of our choosing, but God’s; in this respect, it is no different from any relationship. It has two parties. And in this instance, one is the Creator, the other the created. We can’t choose a Sabbath for God, but rest in our acknowledgment of God’s choice of a Sabbath with and for us. God wants to rest with us. He wants to spend His quality time, so to speak, with us.

An important point to note is also that Sabbath observance is not merely an external form that we can meet through some series of actions, as a mere ritual. “in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ.” Our hearts must be in conformity to God’s work and designs for us actually to rest in Him, fulfilling a true rest. Furthermore, and highlighting the universal scope of the Sabbath, Ellen G. White states that “The Sabbath was embodied in the law given from Sinai; but it was not then first made known as a day of rest. The people of Israel had a knowledge of it before they came to Sinai. On the way thither the Sabbath was kept.” And, “The Sabbath was not for Israel merely, but for the world. It had been made known to man in Eden, and, like the other precepts of the Decalogue, it is of imperishable obligation.”

In many ways, and in complete contrast to many other religions, God’s “idol” is His time, the Sabbath. Other religions worship shapes and forms, but the biblical God commanded us to do no such thing. Rather, instead of a concrete idol, He hallowed the Sabbath time. We are both commanded and invited to join Him during this time.

Ellen White also beautifully describes that the Sabbath is not intended to be a yoke upon us, but that it is designed to be a joy. The Jews had turned the Sabbath into a rule book, rather than allowing it to be a positive focus of their week. It is perfectly within the purpose and intent of the Sabbath to bring joy and help to our friends and neighbors. The Sabbath itself serves as a sign of God’s redemptive power for us. We are invited to rest in His work for us, both in creation and in salvation. As explains, “the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.” As such, we are to “Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with
thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise,’ Psalm 100:2-4." It is not a burden imposed for the sake of earning our salvation.

Two of the most important chapters of Ellen White’s writings are surely found in “God’s Law Immutable” and “A Work of Reform” in The Great Controversy. These present the difficulties that Sabbath keepers have had and will have in explaining the Sabbath and its original purpose, not because of any intrinsic fault with the Sabbath, but because of the insidious nature of the arch-deceiver’s work. As White wrote, “In the absence of Bible testimony in their favor, many with unwearying persistence urged—forgetting how the same reasoning had been employed against Christ and His apostles: ‘Why do not our great men understand this Sabbath question? But few believe as you do. It cannot be that you are right and that all the men of learning in the world are wrong.’"

It is not so much that it will come down, in the final period of earth’s history, to two groups of people “properly” living the Christian life, with one group worshiping on Sunday and the other on the seventh-day Sabbath. The final crisis will come when one group attempts coerce all to worship on Sunday. In this critical sense, it will be rejecting the entire plan of salvation that Christ has offered, attempting to save themselves, and others, by their own works—an old covenant experience of law, not grace! This is why grasping this truth, in its wholistic socio-political context, is important as events unfold. One cannot properly keep Sunday as the Sabbath at the appointed time. This is the sign that true Sabbath keepers may rest in as they attempt to share the ultimate cost of their choice to rest in God’s salvation, rather than to present to God their own means of salvation.

As such, despite the fact that “the great obstacle both to the acceptance and to the promulgation of truth is the fact that it involves inconvenience and reproach,” we may share that it is not merely an inconvenience, but a choice to truly accept salvation by faith that empowers rather than empty works. No true Sabbath keeper would wish to go out and persecute his or her Sunday-worshiping friends. But that the Sabbath message is sometimes (and by and large will be) rejected is a sign of its truth. God’s law cannot be changed to save humanity, and this is a good thing.

That the Sabbath also functions as the ultimate sign at the end, separating those who choose God’s authority rather than human authority, makes it ironic that Sabbath keepers are accused of salvation by works, when the very opposite is true. All of the “requirements” that Adventists accept—the health message, the Sabbath, etc.—are really preparatory, as with Daniel in Babylon, to make them ready to choose to accept God’s salvation and to rest their repentant hearts in Him, as the completion of character development here on earth. (Ellen White compares the final Sabbath test to Eden’s Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—a simple yet profound test.)

This is a beautiful reality, not a legalistic one. Obedience to God is not salvation by works, but acceptance of His work on our behalf. And the hatred of Satan will cement that this seeming paradox (obedience to accept grace and redemptive growth in God) is the true reality, as Sunday keepers will ultimately persecute Sabbath keepers for their rest in God’s work. Seventh-day Sabbath keepers, the ones accused of legalism over the Sabbath, will finally be the only ones who are proven not to be legalists, the only ones living a new covenant experience of grace and faith that works.
Adventism in Today’s World

Many sincere Christians in the “conservative heartland” of America are, for a variety of reasons, more sympathetic to the Religious Right. This is not necessarily because they wish to see Christians take over and enact religious laws, but rather because they believe a biblical view of economics and individual liberty aligns with more conservative or libertarian positions.

These Evangelicals have sufficient facts and evidence to sustain their differing worldview, whether it is ultimately closer to the truth or not. Many have no desire to create Sunday legislation that would harm dissenters. They are baffled by our insistence that they will.

Conversely, however, when reaching out to people who share Ronald Nash’s and John Robbin’s views, it makes perfect sense to them that Catholics are trying to assert political power through Leftist liberal social ideas that will ultimately impinge upon their understanding of the separation of church and state. Allowing the possibility of this perspective in Adventist circles may open more doors to such people concerning the nature of the final eschatological conflict, including the role of the Sabbath as a social, as well as a moral, commandment. Both views, those of Robbin’s and of such Adventist authors as Gulley, Moore, and Stevens, remain possible. What should remain speculative are the views that Adventists advocate with any air of certitude.

Second, there is an internal ideological barrier among Adventists, including some of our young people. It is confusing to them that Adventists spend most the most effort engaging, in a positive way, with liberal, mainline churches and secular intellectuals who are often theistic evolutionists or atheists, simply because they purportedly agree with Adventist thinking on religious liberty issues. How privileged is one set of issues over another?

Why do Adventists not also engage more positively with the Religious Right on issues we have in common, such as recent creationism? Should we be so selective with whom we engage in scholarly dialogue? Spending time positively dialoging with people such as Robbins and Nash—and winsomely critiquing any weaknesses we think they may have—while also enlisting their sympathies in ideas that we may share, seems the more productive route. Simply dismissing their eschatological views on the particulars of the Roman church-state because they differ from our traditional emphasis on the Religious Right, while they are more wary of the Religious Left, is inadequate.

Third, in their efforts to fully secularize the country with a supposed complete separation of church and state, it must be recognized that some believe the secular and religious Left literally create the Religious Right. Do Adventists even know what a truly secularized nation—in which church and state are totally separated—would look like? Could it not be a totalitarian state just as easily? If secular liberals would not interfere in conservative Christianity, then things would remain more status quo; there would be no flag around which to rally the Religious Right. Thus, it would be wiser to support moderate political positions to delay any awakening of the “beast” of Revelation. So if Adventists wish to delay a Sunday Law, they should not appear to so openly support the political philosophy of progressivist secular liberals in their opposition to the Religious Right.
Supporting humanistic morality is a growing trend among the general populace, and is surprisingly compatible with the Left and Catholic social teachings. It is no accident that Pope Francis recently shared that atheists and agnostics can be saved, when he wrote that “the issue for those who do not believe in God is to obey their conscience.”

The point is not whether or not Scripture supports the salvation of the unevangelized or those who have received an incorrect view of God and thus doubted His existence, but that the Pope, of all people, would contextualize this so openly and point toward the conscience as guide. God does not offer a “pass” for those who merely follow their own conscience.

Yet, this example, as well as many others—including the possible reconsideration of priests and marriage and de-emphasis on abortion and homosexuality—shows that the Catholic Church is now willing to connect with liberal progressive humanists and their views of morality. If the Left continues to redefine morality’s relationship to socio-political realities alongside an Emergent vision, it is impossible to predict how things may play out. What is clear is that a government that is proactive in social agendas is needed in such a worldview, which plays as much into predictions for the Roman church-state as a creation of Leftist ideas, as to one that is created by the Religious Right.

A more neutral approach would be to ally more closely with those who truly do share general Christian beliefs, allowing opportunity to reach out to them the message of “justification by faith,” a message that Martin Luther accepted and for which Ellen White specifically endorsed Luther. We would then be better positioned to be received as true heirs of the Reformation. Then we will be in more influential positions to introduce the Sabbath and sanctuary doctrines as the true new covenant experience, outside the restrictive stereotypes of any political-ideological identification.

It would serve Adventism well to articulate a less partisan and narrow vision of how end-time events will play out, and focus more on the philosophical aspects of the debate as they interrelate with theological issues. It serves our evangelistic purposes more effectively to explore different possibilities with a more open mind, keeping our distinctive issues at the forefront, but not letting our view of end-times replace a solid epistemology that analyzes the present honestly and without bias. This will allow us to form our response from what is really happening in an ever evolving world, not on what “could” or “will” happen—outside of what prophecy specifically makes clear. In this way, Adventists will be better prepared when things don’t turn out precisely the way we have predicted, and our message will be more open to acceptance by individuals of varying religious and political backgrounds and perspectives, which may open scholarly and evangelistic doors of opportunity never before anticipated.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Norman Gulley, longtime professor at Southern Adventist University and past president of the Adventist Theological Society, well represents a centrist Adventist perspective. He has written numerous articles and books that have been...
well-received during his academic career on a wide variety of theological and historical issues.

2. Marvin Moore, for many years the editor of the Signs of the Times, a mainstream magazine originally founded by James White, a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is well acquainted with the contemporary issues Adventism is facing. He has also written numerous articles and books on a wide variety of religious and biblical topics, and has also served in pastoral ministry.

3. John V. Stevens has more than 40 years of experience working directly as an advisor with government officials from several countries on matters of religious liberty. Stevens served for 20 years at the Pacific Union Conference as the public affairs and religious liberty director. He has also authored several articles, including a number for Liberty, that promote religious freedom, and written a book focusing on prophecy and religious liberty in the United States.


5. Ibid., p. 81.


7. Ibid., p. 122.

8. Ibid., p. 121.

9. Ibid., p. 127.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 128.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 129.


15. Ibid., p. 133.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. (italics supplied.)


21. Ibid., p. 121.


23. Ibid., p. 98.

24. Ibid., p. 134.


27. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 505.
30. Ibid., p. 456.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
51. Fernando Canale has authored an ongoing series of articles in *Perspective Digest*, of which the following article is an introduction: http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/121/archives/19-1/a-closer-look-at-the-emerging-church.
53. Ibid., p. 87.


58. Ibid., p. 459.

59. Ibid., p. 480.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., p. 486.

62. Ibid., pp. 497, 498.


64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.


67. Ibid., pp. 281, 282.

68. Ibid., p. 283.

69. Ibid.

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71. Ibid., p. 288.

72. Ibid.


74. Ibid., p. 460.


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The Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation

A militant movement has arisen in conservative Christianity that is seeking to take over the world before Christ’s second coming.

Trevor O’Reggio

A new religious movement is emerging on the religious landscape that, if successful, could have major ramifications for the nation and the Adventist view of eschatology. Almost 500 years after the Protestant Reformation, this new religious movement calls itself the “New Apostolic Reformation” and is claiming to usher in the most significant changes in Protestantism since Martin Luther.

The stated goal of this new movement is to eradicate denominations and form a unified church that will be victorious against evil. They have repudiated the “secret rapture” doctrine held by the majority of mainline Protestants. “Instead of escaping the earth (in the Rapture) prior to the turmoil of the end-times, they teach that believers will defeat evil by taking dominion, or control, over all sectors of society and government, resulting in mass conversions to their brand of Charismatic evangelicalism and a Christian utopia or ‘Kingdom’ on earth.”

This new movement believes in the coming of Christ, but that it is long after they have prepared the earth for His coming. This is not a new idea but a new reformulation of Postmillennialism. The major difference between them and traditional Postmillennialism is in their strategy and methodology to achieve their objectives. Their core theology of Dominionism is not new either, but rather, echoes the Reconstructionist view of R. J. Rushdoony and others. Dominion theology teaches that before the second coming of Jesus, believers will take dominion over every area of life in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

Definitions

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a Protestant Christian movement consisting of charismatics and Pentecostals. There is also a movement of charismatic Catholics who identify with their beliefs. The NAR is growing at a rate of nine million per year.

The recognized founder and leader of the NAR is C. Peter Wagner, former professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary of World Mission. He is also founder of Global Harvest Ministries, presiding apostle and founder of the International Coalition of Apostles, and cofounder of World Prayer Center. “There is a hierarchy in the NAR that resembles the Roman Catholic Church. Once world dominion is accomplished, those at the top level will have apostolic authority over other ministries. Are you seeing the danger yet? This could mean literally thousands of ministries with so-called apostles and prophets at the helm! Every person will have an apostle or prophet to whom
they are accountable. According to one source the coalition includes "several hundred apostles across the U.S. and about 40 nations, international training centers and prayer warrior communication networks in all 50 states and worldwide."²

Rick Warren, one of the most influential religious leaders of our time and author of the best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is also associated with this movement. On Sunday, April 17, 2005, speaking before 30,000 at Angel Stadium in Anaheim, California, Warren announced his plan: "The bottom line is that we intend to reinvent mission strategy in the 21st century. As I stated, this will be a new Reformation. The First Reformation returned us to the message of the original church. It was a reformation of doctrine—what the church believes. This Second Reformation will return us to the mission of the original church. It will be a reformation of purpose—what the church does in the world."³

Martha West, writing in the *Conservative Crusader*, calls it a "damnable heresy" that many Christians are not yet aware of, labeled "The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) a.k.a. Dominionism/Kingdom Now/Replacement Theology. . . . The NAR is not new at all. Only the name has been changed—many times—to fool people into thinking there is a 'New Wave' or a 'Paradigm Shift' taking place in Christendom. Over the years they have dubbed themselves Joel's Army, Latter Rain, Manifest Sons of God, and the list goes on. They're ushering in 'a reformation greater in scale than the reformation of the 1500's.'"⁴

What makes the movement so dangerous? It is the divine mandate that they think they possess. One liberal pundit described it by sharing that the NAR has a mission to "take control of communities and nations through large networks of 'prayer warriors' whose spiritual warfare is used to expel and destroy the demons that cause societal ills. Once the territorial demons, witches, and generational curses are removed, the 'born-again' Christians . . . take control of society."⁵

"This is no fringe movement, but a rapidly institutionalizing entity larger than most Protestant denominations. The leadership has forged this movement from several strands of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, often referred to as the Third Wave. Under the Convening Apostle, C. Peter Wagner, they have formed an international entity encompassing thousands of independent, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches worldwide, as well as hundreds of cross-denominational parachurch organizations, their own educational and accreditation systems, conventions, media, and businesses."⁶

**Self-Definitions**

C. Peter Wagner gave the movement its title: New Apostolic Reformation. In 1999, he described it as follows: "the New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century which is to a significant extent changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world."⁷ He further described NAR as a blanket term for churches in the Second Apostolic Age, which he says is in an "adopter phase," meaning that many churches have not yet heard of the movement and those who have heard of it are not yet ready to participate.
John Benefiel, one of the so-called apostles of the movement, describes it not as a fringe movement but a rapidly united prayer reformation network. The movement differs greatly from the traditional Evangelical and Pentecostal movement in its makeup. Rachel Tabachnick describes the movement as “multi-racial and includes women in positions of both apostle and prophet. At first glance many of their organizations might appear as promoting the social gospel but their message is quite the opposite. While they participate in charitable activities, societal transformation is to be a supernatural event which can only take place was the demons are expelled and society is purged of evil influences such as homosexuality, religious pluralism, and the separation of church and state.”

**How Is the Movement Organized?**

There is no central organization with an identifiable name, because the New Apostolic Reformation is a coalition of church groups and churches. Their so-called apostles and prophets head up a series of organizations that provide leadership, direction, strategies, methodologies, and theology for the movement. The recognized and authorized leaders are called apostles and prophets. The apostles are the highest authorities and the ones who provide leadership and direction to the group. Using Ephesians 4 as a biblical justification, they assert their leadership role based on the spiritual gifts identified by Paul, who ranked apostles as the highest gift. Next to the apostles are the prophets, who are God’s spokespersons, setting forth God’s counsel and wisdom to their people. These prophets, however, are to be subjected to the apostles while working alongside to carry out the mission of the movement.

Some apostles, called “market apostles,” are workplace apostles. Their emphasis is evangelism in the workplace and the eventual “Christian dominion over business and finance. Os Hillman, based in Atlanta, heads the International Coalition of Workplace Ministries and Market Leaders. Apostles who are already heavily invested in business are urged to merge ministry with business.

**Proponents**

Who are the recognized leaders in the movement? The leading apostle is C. Peter Wagner (founder of the movement); others among the illustrious group of apostles are Doris Wagner (wife of C. Peter Wagner), Samuel Rodriguez, Ed Silvoso, Jim Ammerman, Cindy Jacobs (top-ranking woman apostle), Os Hillman, Julius Oyet, Pat Francis, Bill Haman, Lou Engle, Harry Jackson, Lance Wallnau, and John Benefiel. Among the leading prophets are Todd Bentley and Rick Warren.

**Organizations**

A number of organizations and ministries have various responsibilities. Some of those organizations are:

1. The *International Coalition of Apostles* (ICA) is a network of several hundred apostles in the United States and about 40 other nations formed by the convening apostle, C. Peter Wagner. Each of these apostles has ministries under him or her.
2. The Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders (ACPE) is an inner circle of about two to three dozen apostles.

3. The International Association of Healing Ministries (IAHR) is part of the Kingdom Health Care System, an international network of healing centers headed by Carl Pierce, an apostle of C. Peter Wagner, a faith healer, and demon exorcist. According to Pierce, "Healing is the undergarment that God’s army will wear to support the armor for battle."

4. The International Society of Deliverance Ministries (ISDM), headed by Bill and Janet Sadduth, exists to expel demons that cause physical and emotional pain.

5. The Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability (ACEA) is an accrediting system, under the apostolic authority of Leo Lawson, which ensures that all the various organizations and ministries adhere to the ideology and goals of the NAR.

6. The Eagle Vision Apostolic Team (EVAT) is a secretive inner-circle group whose membership list is not publicized.

7. The Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI), led by Apostle Carl Pierce, is an international network of faith-healing centers.

8. The Heartland Apostolic Network (HAN), under the directorship of Apostle John Benefiel and based in Oklahoma, is a coordinating center for prayer networks in the United States.

9. The Global Harvest Ministries, the personal para-church ministry of C. Peter and Doris Wagner, is also the legal parent entity of many of the other NAR organizations listed above, including ACEA, ACKW, EVAT, ICA, ISPM, and WLI.

**History of the Movement**

When, where, and why did this movement emerge? Since it sees itself as the second great Protestant Reformation, it traces its beginnings back to that event, but its more immediate antecedent may be found in the Second Great Awakening. During the early 19th century, America experienced what became known as the Second Great Awakening, considered the most profound and pervasive religious revival in the history of the nation. American Evangelicalism was born out of this great revival.

Toward the end of the 19th century, a new wave of revivalism growing out of the Second Great Awakening would sweep the nation, resulting in the birth of Pentecostalism, which is considered the major fountainhead for this new movement. The NAR was founded through the effort of C. Peter Wagner. Since its formation, he has developed an international network of apostles and prophets that has spawned a series of networks and organizations across the globe.

The New Apostolic Reformation sprang primarily from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Hector Torres traces the roots of the NAR to the beginning of the Pentecostal movement under William T. Seymour. A revival movement broke out in Azusa, California, that soon spread worldwide. Speaking in tongues and possessing a Pentecostal spirit that would radically change the structure of the Evangelical church characterized these movements. The movement was, in essence,
the beginning of a process of exchange and restoration that would continue through the rest of the 20th and into the 21st century. First, "various doctrinal changes were restored to the church. Among these were prophetic Presbytery for ordination to the ministry, personal prophesy, the restoration of praise, dance, the arts, drama and different expressions such as laughter, wailing and being slain in the spirit."\textsuperscript{11}

The principles of deliverance and controversy over demon possession of believers were also re-established. In the 1970s, the church experienced restoration of the doctrine of blessing, inheritance, and prosperity of saints through faith. Torres here speaks of the prosperity gospel advocated often by televangelists, some of whom have gone to the extreme and profited financially at the expense of the gospel. In the 1980s and 1990s, the restoration of the personal prophetic word to the church, cities, and nations brought a renewed understanding of the ministry of prophecy and of its role in spiritual warfare for the end-times. Below there is a historical chronology of the movement leading to the NAR as it is traced by Torres who was quoting from Bill Hamon’s book, \textit{Apostles, Prophets and the Coming Moves of God}:

**Chronology of the Movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Major Truth Restored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1517</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8, 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>Water baptism, separation of church and state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
<td>Sanctification, the church set apart from the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Faith healing</td>
<td>Divine healing for the physical body, healing in the atonement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>Holy Spirit baptism with speaking in tongues, gifts of the Holy Spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Latter rain</td>
<td>Prophetic presbytery, singing praises and melodious worship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Deliverance</td>
<td>Evangelistic ministry and mass evangelism, evangelism reactivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>Renewal of all restored truth to all past movement churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Faith confessions, prosperity and victorious attitude and life, teaching ministry re-established as a major fivefold ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Prophetic</td>
<td>Prophetic, activating gifts, warfare praise, prophets to nations. Prophet ministry restored and a company of prophets brought forth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Apostolic</td>
<td>Miraculous signs and wonders, apostolic ministry, and unity, great harvest of souls. Apostolic ministry being restored to bring divine order and structure, finalize restoration of fivefold ministers.</td>
</tr>
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Theology of the NAR: Dominion Theology

The New Apostolic Reformation can now be defined as a distinct movement with a unique ideology. Like many American fundamentalists, the apostles teach that the events of the end-times are imminent, but unlike fundamentalists, the NAR apostles see this as a time of great victory for the church.

In a 2007 letter, founder C. Peter Wagner stated his views in the following way: “Our theological bedrock is what has been known as Dominion Theology. This means that our divine mandate is to do whatever is necessary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to retake the dominion of God’s creation which Adam forfeited to Satan in the Garden of Eden. Our goal, in a word, is transformation. . . . We want to see whole cities and regions and states and nations transformed to support the values of the kingdom of God. This will happen only as kingdom-focused saints become the head and not the tail of each of Lance Wallnau’s seven mountains or molders of culture. Here in America, we have done fairly well in leading the religion mountain, but not the other six.”

The theological basis for this Dominion theology finds support in Deuteronomy 28:13, 14; Genesis 1:28; Psalm 24:1. Dominion theology proposes the view that Christians gain complete authority over the earth before Jesus comes. Charismatic Dominionists are found within the Reconstructionist camps of R. J. Rushdoony. This is the partnership of Dispensationalists and the Dominionists that projected the 17 Christian worldview documents, “The Manifesto of the Christian Church.” Charismatic and non-Charismatic covenant and Dispensational theologians have joined arms in prayer and effort to see revival, renewal, and reformation in the church and American culture. Since 1980, much of Pentecostalism has begun to adopt aspects of Dominion theology.

“Dominion theology is predicated upon three basic beliefs: (1) Satan usurped humanity’s dominion over the earth through the temptation of Adam and Eve; (2) The Church is God’s instrument to take dominion back from Satan; (3) Jesus cannot come or will not return until the Church has taken dominion by gaining control of the earth’s government and societal institutions.”

Dominion eschatology is the examination of future events through the lens of the dominion mandate as interpreted from Genesis 1:28 and Matthew 28:19-29. The church will increase until Jesus returns and contradicts opposing views that see the church waning in influence in the last days. This view does not imply absolute dominion as in a sinless world, but a preparatory dominion as in the earth being prepared for the return of the King.

In understanding Dominion Theology, three key points must be made clear: (1) God’s covenant people take dominion of the earth—this is the main theme of every covenant God has made with humanity, and the covenant with the church is no different; (2) the covenant consists of a twofold process in which humans blessed by God are given a mandate to take dominion of the earth for purpose of blessing it; (3) the first advent of Christ created the blessed seed on the earth, namely, the church. The second coming of Jesus will take place after the blessed seed has completed the dominion process.

The gospel of salvation is achieved by setting up the kingdom of God as a literal and physical
kingdom to be advanced on earth in the present age. Some Dominionists liken the New Testament kingdom of the Old Testament Israel in ways that justify taking up the sword, or other methods of punitive judgment, to war against enemies of their kingdom. They assign to the church duties and rights that belong scripturally only to Jesus Christ. This includes the esoteric idea that believers can incarnate Christ and function as His body on earth to establish His kingdom rule. A great deal of emphasis is placed on human effort, which results in a diminishing of the doctrine of God. A great wealth transfer from the ungodly to the godly facilitates the rapid expansion of the kingdom.

Dominion theology is rooted in Reconstructionist Christianity. Others have traced its roots back to American Puritanism. Peter Leithart says, “Reconstructionist Christianity is more than a resurrection of Puritanism. It is refined Puritanism, tried in the furnace of opposition and hence more consistent to the basic premises of Calvinism than seventeenth century Puritanism.” This writer suggests that there is the possibility of a fusion with old-time Dispensational eschatology, creating a new Fundamentalism. It appears that is precisely what has happened with the rise of the New Apostolic Reformation. There is now a fusion of Dominion Theology with Dispensationalism. This union is not equal, however, for those who embraced the secret rapture are now willing to put that view on pause and embrace a “victorious eschatology,” in which they will not be secretly raptured from the earth but will remain here to transform and rule over it.

Teachings and Roles of Apostles

One of the central teachings of the NAR is the restoration of apostles and prophets to the overcoming end-time church. These leaders will provide direction and counsel to the end-time church. Hector Torres finds support for the restoration of apostles and prophets in Acts 3:19-21, in which God promises to restore all things. He describes the last days as “a moment of refreshing revival as a result of genuine repentance. This is a necessary precursor to Christ’s coming and in order for this to happen there must be a restoration of all things.”

During the Christian era, apostasy infiltrated the church and robbed it of many of its spiritual gifts and brought in false doctrines. Beginning with the 16th-century Reformation, God began a process of restoration. (See chronology.) C. Peter Wagner says: “We are living in the midst of the most epochal changes in the structure of the church.”  He calls this the “Second Apostolic Age.”

The restoration of the apostolic ministry, according to Torres, began in the 1990s “with the purpose of the church entering the new millennium in the fullness of Christ having the five ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. This new movement, called the New Apostolic Reformation by C. Peter Wagner, is described as ‘generating the most radical changes in church government since the 16th century.’” Torres describes these changes as God’s work “to restructure the government of the church and to reveal new strategies. In order to accomplish his objective of establishing the kingdom of heaven here on earth, God is restoring all the truth that had been lost. Those who refuse to accept the movement of the Spirit, with its new and marvelous strategies in the end will cease to produce fruit and disappear.”
Wagner speaks of a paradigm shift in traditional Christianity. What is this paradigm shift? Hamon explained its nature in October 1999 at a meeting of the International Gathering of Apostles and Prophets, where he says that “we are seeing prophets and apostles coming forth for a strategic reason. . . . We are being positioned to lay new foundations for the dawning of a New Kingdom Age. We are in the throws [sic] of birthing a whole new order—dispensation. . . . We are about to move from the dispensation of grace to the dispensation of dominion.”

Noteworthy is that those in NAR claim to hear directly from God, and many claim that Jesus visits them in person. Like the true biblical apostles who established the early church, these so-called restored apostles believe they are called to lay the foundation and government for the new kingdom (one world church). Their goal is complete and utter control of the church and subjugation of the current governance to them. They want power, dominion, and total control.

The NAR believes that the restoration of the apostles has tremendous implications for Christianity and the world, and that it will mark the greatest harvest of souls, for more souls will be saved in the last one hundred years than all the previous years of the church’s existence. The whole world, they believe, will also be affected because the supernatural prophetic and apostolic words of the apostles will signal the rise and fall of many nations and people. They will distinguish the sheep and goat nations so that when Jesus comes, each will receive its due reward.

The Seven Mountains Mandate

This is the mandate for bringing the kingdom of God to earth and taking dominion over seven key spheres of society, including government, arts and entertainment, media, education, forms of religion, and business. The mountain of business is considered key to taking dominion over others. These seven mandates are promoted by market apostles such as Os Hillman and Lance Wallnau, who is the major motivational speaker in Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe.

One of the key theological terms is “Social Transformation.” A conference on this subject took place at Harvard featuring leading NAR apostles Lance Wallnau, Bill Hamon, Pat Francis, and Os Hillman. All four travel internationally promoting the “Reclaiming the Seven Mountains” campaign and are considered to be experts on “workplace” or “marketplace apostles.” Transformation is not a generic term to the NAR but a brand used in the title of training videos, books, conferences, and organizations. As seen in the following quotes from leading apostles, promoting social transformation equates with gaining political and societal power or “Christian dominion.” They advertise their charitable activities, but these are secondary to their primary purpose—the mandate to take dominion over society and government, which includes driving out those they believe to be literally under the control of demons.

Lance Wallnau is the motivational guru for the Seven Mountains. Speaking on Patricia King’s Extreme Prophetic Television broadcast, Lance Wallnau says, “The Seven Mountains are—it’s almost like it’s a template for warfare. Because the church so frequently does not have a language for how it goes about taking territory.”
The Seven Mountain mandate is an NAR strategy designed to take control of the power centers of the world. The Ohio Reformation Prayer Network has an abbreviated list of these seven areas on their promotional video:

- **Family:** where generational blessings or curses are passed on to our children
- **Education:** where little truth or lies about God and His creation are taught
- **Government:** where evil is little restrained or endorsed
- **Business:** where people build for the glory of God or the glory of humankind
- **Media:** where events, news, information are interpreted and passed on to people through the lens of good and evil
- **Arts and entertainment:** where values and virtues are little celebrated or distorted
- **Religion:** where people worship God in “spirit and truth” or settle for religious rituals

The New Apostolic Reformation is a movement with well-organized international campaigns. The apostles speaking at Harvard all promoted the “Reclaiming the Seven Mountains” campaign. Bill Hamon, Pat Francis and Lance Wallnau spoke, for instance, at the 2009, “Give Me This Mountain” conference, advertised it with the phrase “‘Possess your promised inheritance in government, family, business, education, arts & entertainment, media and religion.’” The Seven Mountain mandate is the most explicit expression and implementation of Dominion Theology. These seven mountains are considered to be the pillars of society, the battlefield where a culture is won or lost. The NAR intend to train agents who will scale those mountains and conquer them for God.

Apostle Bill Hamon’s 2010 book, *Prophetic Scriptures Yet to Be Fulfilled*, describes the fascinating transformation of the seven mountains of culture and how every nation will become either a sheep or a goat nation. In the end, the restoration of all things spoken of by the apostles and prophets will supposedly release Jesus to return and set up His domain over all the earth. C. Peter Wagner states: “We have now shed our inhibitions over theologizing about taking dominion. Dominion theology is not a flashback to Constantinian triumphalism, but it is a new call to action for a triumphant Church. . . . Satan has polluted the land and cursed it. Satan has deployed high-ranking demonic powers to darken the spiritual atmosphere over society and to block the freedom of heaven flowing to earth. Both of these arenas need to be and can be cleansed spiritually. We have the tools to do it, we have the gifted personnel to do it and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to do it. It will be done!”

“Now that we have social transformation on our evangelical agendas,” Wagner adds, “it is time for action. I regard ‘social transformation’ as the concept term. However, the action term that will best set us on the road toward that goal is ‘taking dominion.’”

Charismatic evangelicals have shifted from a Dispensationalist to a Dominionist theology, from passive theology in which believers are raptured to escape imminent apocalypse horrors, to a politicized theology in which believers must take control of government and society. A new reality has been created in which a more potent movement has emerged like a phoenix from the ashes of Darby’s Dispensationalism. It is the triumph of Dominion theology and the gradual unleashing of a
new breed of spiritual warriors from the restraints of Dispensational theology and the transformation of much of the charismatic Evangelical world. Different from previous white dominant Fundamentalism, this is a more progressive multicultural movement. Women apostles and prophets focus on societal transformation, not a social gospel but a full-blown "Kingdom Now" theology that is sweeping the globe and impacting churches across the spectrum of Christianity.

**Eschatological Implications of the New Apostolic Reformation**

Seventh-day Adventists are Premillennialists, who believe that this world will not get better but worse (2 Tim. 3:1-5). The social, political, economic, and spiritual conditions of the earth will deteriorate more as the end nears. The Christian Church will not be able to do anything to control this deteriorating condition. Only the dramatic intervention of Jesus can save the planet.

The preparation that the church makes is not making the planet a utopian political kingdom for Jesus to return to. The preparation of the church is the sharing of the gospel to the entire world so that everyone will have an opportunity to make a personal choice to become part of Christ’s spiritual kingdom. When Jesus was standing before the temporal rulers of the time, He said: “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). The idea of “spiritual transformation” of the church is fundamentally at odds with the “political dominion agenda” of the NAR.

A columnist for Al Jazeera, Paul Rosenberg, calls the New Apostolic Reformers, “America’s own Taliban” because of the radical nature of their goal and strategy. He describes their ultimate goal as the replacement of secular democracy both in America and the world with a Christian theocracy (Dominionism). He charges that their spiritual aims are strikingly similar to those of the Taliban, but “significantly at odds with more common, long-standing Christian beliefs about the ‘end times,’ as well as the nature and purpose of prayer, and the roles of human and divine power.”

Rosenberg may have overstated the case in comparing the NAR with the Taliban because the differences between the groups are much greater than the similarities. Right now the NAR is not engaged in a violent revolt against any government, using suicide bombers to kill innocent civilians, to publicly execute those who break the religious laws, or to deny women their basic human rights.

Why, then, this comparison? It lies only in the theocratic intent of the NAR and their proposed mission to combine church and state and impose their brand of religion on all. The goal of the NAR—to eliminate denominationalism and to form a unified church that will be politically victorious against evil in the last days—contradicts Adventist ideology of religious freedom and separation of church and state. How will the NAR relate to groups like Adventists that will refuse to join with their religious confederacy and also refuse to submit to their religious authority and doctrine? This movement seems to be a fulfillment of Adventism’s own understanding concerning the confederacy of apostate religious groups in the end-time that will seek to impose their brand of religion on the world.

The NAR vision of the last generation, contrary to that of Adventism, is not of those who are perfecting their characters after the example of Jesus Christ and who are empowered by the Holy
Spirit to proclaim the gospel to a dying world. The NAR’s version of the last generation is of militant young people (Joel’s army) who will take over the world, conquer the Seven Mountains, exorcize demons, doing whatever it takes to accomplish this task.

The NAR version of the last-day triumphant church is not the remnant church being persecuted by the beast powers of Revelation 13 and who nonetheless proclaim the final message to a world that is on the brink of total destruction. Rather, their version is a militant triumphant church on the march, defeating demons, taking territory, and taking the seven major areas of culture. Although there is a grain of truth in the NAR view of the future triumphant church, according to the Bible, God’s true church will not be fully triumphant until Jesus comes and Prince Michael rises to delivers His people from the final persecution of the wicked (Dan. 12:1).

Os Hillman, one of the NAR’s leading prophets, has suggested that, instead of using the word Dominionism, a better choice would be influence, which comes as a result of love and obedience to God. Hillman explains: “Jesus never sought to have dominion; rather, He encouraged others to love and obey God. It is better that we avoid the word dominion in our culture today due to this word’s connotation of control and manipulation of others. It also reminds people of a flawed movement in the body of Christ called dominion theology that caused great harm to many.” Though Hillman may take this position in words, the vast majority of the other leaders take a different and more aggressive stance. They are quite explicit about what dominion means, and they make no apologies about it.

There seems to be little focus on the cross of Christ as central to the Christian gospel. The work of the Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of the individual is not emphasized. There seems to be an obsession with demons, demon possession, and the need to expel demons. The NAR view of the demonic is far too simplistic in explaining human problems. If all the demons were expelled, would the human problems of poverty, crime, violence, war, and sickness be solved? An overemphasis on demonic causation has lost sight of the human culpability in many of the problems that afflict humanity.

One of the most unsettling things about this movement is its militancy and stridency. Much of the language used to describe taking back and having dominion is devoid of the compassionate love of Jesus. A good picture of this forceful call to arms can be seen in the words of one of their prophets: “We are coming into times when passive Christianity and passive Christians will cease to exist. There is a maturity, a discipline, and a divine militancy coming upon the people of God. Those who have succumbed to humanistic and idealistic theologies, may have a hard time with this, but we must understand that God is a military God. The title that He uses 10 times more than any other in Scripture is, ‘The Lord of Hosts’ or ‘Lord of Armies.’ There is a martial aspect to His character that we must understand and embrace for the times and the job to which are now coming.”

This kind of thinking is clearly contrary to the teachings of Jesus. “Christ never intended that His gospel should be propagated by fire and sword or His righteousness wrought by the wrath of man. When the high praise of God is in our mouth with them we will have an olive branch of peace in
our hands. Christ's victories are by the power of His gospel and grace over spiritual enemies, in which all believers are more than conquerors. The Word of God is the two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12), the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).”

Christians are called to be salt and light to the world. Through their loving and obedient lifestyle, believers will seek to persuade others to their loving Savior. This a methodology based solely on love, not power or compulsion. The views of the NAR’s latter-day apostles and so-called prophets are at odds with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faithful believers must sound the alarm and warn the world that in the last days, false prophets and false Christs will arise to deceive many.

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Ellen G. White’s View of Divine Inspiration

The Holy Spirit worked in the revelation-inspiration process in the experience of biblical writers and in that of Ellen White.

Denis Kaiser

A belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible is foundational for the message, the teachings, the mission, and the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Both Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians believe in the Bible as the infallible revelation of God’s will and as the only rule of faith and practice. Unlike most other Christians, however, Seventh-day Adventists believe that after the apostolic period the Holy Spirit continued to work in the life and experience of people, revealing messages to them and inspiring them in the communication of these messages.

A recent example—and the most prominent one—is the case of Ellen G. White who, as is believed by Seventh-day Adventists, received the gift of prophecy. Her writings explain how she believed that the Holy Spirit worked in the revelation-inspiration process both in her own experience and in the experience of biblical writers. Other researchers have attempted to derive her own concept of inspiration from her writings by synthesizing her statements made over several decades, but no attempts have been made to examine the development of her views of inspiration over time. To see a development of her concept of inspiration or her presentation of the subject it is necessary to consider linguistic changes over time.

Miscellaneous Remarks on Divine Inspiration (1850-1880)

The statements Ellen White made on inspiration in these three decades were exclusively incidental remarks in the context of other subjects such as dress reform, the erroneous doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and discouragement resulting from her literary deficiencies. Apparently, at this point, she was not really interested in a tangible definition of the nature and process of inspiration.

In 1858, she made a few general remarks about the original biblical autographs and the transcriptions of these in subsequent centuries. She suggested that when “his word,” referring to God’s word, was written out by the prophets to form the Bible it was a “copy of God’s revealed will to man.” His purpose in revealing “his designs to man” was to provide them with a clear understanding of His will so that no one would have to fall prey to Satan’s deceptions. Though God was the originator and “author” of Scripture, He also “carefully preserved” and “especially guarded” it beyond its initial production process.

Yet this statement about God’s preservation of the Bible is followed by seemingly contradictory
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http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/131/archives/19-2/ellen-g-white...

remarks. She suggested, for example, that early on, when there existed only few copies of the biblical text, some “learned men” changed some words aiming at making some biblical statements plainer, yet they were guided by their own “established views” and by “tradition,” which led in turn to a mystification of that which had been plain before. Ellen White seems to indicate, however, that God preserved the perfect harmony, simplicity, and clarity of Scripture as a whole, with one part explaining another, and with the text in its entirety showing the way of life and the way to life.

Accordingly, in protecting the biblical text, God was more concerned with the revealed message than with the exact words per se. Although His protective influence on the transcribers should not be equated with the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the inspiration process, Ellen White’s explanations may nevertheless indicate that, for her, inspiration was not so much about specific words but about the message. 8

In 1867, she stated that divine revelations could not be produced by any human means but were given at the will of the Holy Spirit. When she was writing down the scenes presented to her in visions or dreams, she would revive them in her mind as plainly as at the time of the vision. 9 She also indicated, however, that after receiving a vision, she “was left to describe” the scenes and messages of a vision in her own language as best as she could, the only exception being the words spoken by angels, which she would “always enclose in marks of quotation.” 10

Composing sentences with correct grammar and usage was not, however, a skill that came to her naturally. At times, her grammatical deficiencies discouraged her so much that she seriously considered ceasing to write until she was able to improve her literary proficiency. Such considerations illustrate her keen awareness of her need of literary assistants to prepare her manuscripts for publication. Interestingly, she argued that God was more concerned about getting the revealed message out to the people than delaying the publication to ensure correct usage and accurate grammar. 11

During these years, Ellen White expressed deep trust in the reliability and faithfulness of Scripture, although, in her view, minor—and possibly even more extensive—changes of wording did not take away from the ability of the Word to reveal God’s will and His way of salvation. She stressed the divine protection of the Bible but conceded that this protective guidance was concerned with the harmonious revelation of God’s will rather than the preservation of the original text of the autographs. The fact that she realized her own need of literary and grammatical assistance illustrates her experience and understanding that inspiration was first of all concerned with the message, the thoughts, and the ideas—and only secondarily with specific words. Though, in her experience, the Holy Spirit allowed her to choose language to best describe what she had been shown, she left no doubt that it was the Spirit who originated these ideas and thoughts.

No Judgment Between Inspired Writings (1880-1895)

In the following 15 years, Ellen White made numerous statements about the incarnational relationship between the divine and the human in the revelation-inspiration process. Most of these
were accessible to church members in church publications. Though the early and the latter years in this period were characterized by responses to heterodox ideas, the mid-1880s witnessed a few almost systematic statements on inspiration that have received more attention in recent scholarship.

In 1882, she responded to the accusation that her testimonies to specific individuals were simply based on information she had received from other people and thus constituted “merely the opinion of Sister White.”

She objected that she had been “prompted by the Spirit of God” to write down “things that had been shown me,” “which the Lord has presented to me,” and “what God has opened before me in vision.”

Extending the divine influence to other writings, she argued that even her articles in the denominational papers were not merely expressions of her own ideas but the result of what God had revealed to her. She classified the resistance and questioning of her testimonies, in fact, as an insult to the Holy Spirit and a rebellion against God. In the context of this discussion she referred to an interesting biblical example to illustrate that a prophet having some previous familiarity with the circumstances does not necessarily discount the involvement of divine inspiration. Thus she stated that the Apostle Paul sometimes received information about specific circumstances from concerned church members, but it was previous revelations from God that allowed him “to judge the true character of these developments.” In the end, his letters of reproof were not merely his human opinion, but they were “written just as much under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his epistles.”

The fact that Ellen White’s testimonies came from God did not mean, however, that the language of her writings could never be corrected and revised. This may be seen when, in 1883, the General Conference passed a resolution to correct the “grammatical” imperfections in the 30 numbers of the Testimonies for the Church, assigning the task to a group of five people (W. C. White, Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, and G. I. Butler). The resolution affirmed that Seventh-day Adventists believe in the inspiration of the “thoughts” rather than, “except in rare cases,” the “very words in which the ideas should be expressed,” and it was reasoned that these imperfections could, and should, be removed “without in any measure changing the thought.”

Some of the members of the group of five were somewhat hesitant to change words in the text of the inspired messages, but Ellen White herself fully approved of the procedure. Recalling her lack of literary skills and the resulting need for literary assistants, she suggested that God had once convinced her to present the revealed light “in the best manner possible” while removing remaining defects later. Ellen White’s employment of literary assistants and the correction/revision processes show that, in her view, changing the grammar and wording of an inspired text without changing the thought, idea, or sense of the respective statement was permissible, since inspiration did not reside in the exact words but rather in the thoughts and ideas.

During her time in Europe (1885-1887), Ellen White read and paraphrased a passage from Calvin E. Stowe’s Origin and History of the Bible regarding objections to the Bible. Following Stowe’s thought closely, she stated that the human writers of the Bible differed in education, perception,
logic, vocabulary, and rhetoric. The Holy Spirit did not give them the exact words or expressions to write but inspired and moved the writers to express specific ideas in their own human language. Thus they were “God’s penmen, not His pen.” The words each writer chose thus “receive[d] the impress” of his own mind. Since one word can have different meanings, and one idea can be expressed through various words, human language is only an imperfect tool whose lack of precision may lead to misunderstandings. She suggested, however, that the “Bible was given for practical purposes” and that everyone who comes with an honest, open, and searching heart will find the Bible plain and simple.

In the introduction to her classic *The Great Controversy* (1888), she emphasized that God was the author of the Bible even though most of it “was written by human hands” and not by God’s own hand as the Decalogue was. The Holy Spirit had “shed light into the minds and hearts” of the prophets and had revealed to them truth through “dreams and visions, symbols and figures.” Then the Spirit “guided the mind in the selection” of what to speak or write, and to present what was “most forcibly impressed upon his own mind.” The biblical writers presented “the thought [that the Holy Spirit impressed on their minds] in human language.”

Influenced by their respective education, occupation, rank, situation, experience, perceptive faculties, and even their “mental and spiritual endowments,” the biblical writers focused on and emphasized different aspects and details. Thus the same point of truth may be presented in very different ways, yet taken together, all the different presentations form a perfect unity. The final result, the Bible, constitutes a “union of the divine and the human.” It contains the “authoritative, infallible revelation of His will” and the “knowledge necessary for salvation” although both are conveyed through the imperfect means of human language. It is to be the “standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.”

In the same year, Ellen White frequently opposed the assertion that both the Bible and her testimonies could be divided into some parts that were inspired and some that were not, some parts that represented messages of divine origin and other parts that represented only the personal opinion of the writer, some parts that contained intelligence disclosed by a vision and some parts that contained information acquired solely through human informants. In her view, such delicate distinctions were “utterly false.” In regard to the information acquired through human informants, she quoted from her previous remarks on Paul, suggesting that this circumstance did not controvert the Holy Spirit’s guidance and authority in giving the counsel.

Though in previous years she had repeatedly referred to the biblical unity of human language and divine thoughts, now she made mention of the totality of Scripture, the “inspiration of the Scriptures,” the Bible as “the Inspired Word” and as “the Word of God,” thus emphasizing the reliability and divine origin of Scripture. At the same time, she admitted that it was “probable” that mistakes had crept into the biblical text in the postapostolic period. Thus she suggested, as she had previously in volume one of *Spiritual Gifts* in 1858, that inspiration was working on the biblical writers in conveying the revealed message but did not extend to the process of copying and
transcribing in subsequent centuries. Yet she left no doubt that the teachings of the Bible were a plain guidebook to heaven.

As demonstrated above, in the period from 1880 to 1895, Ellen White frequently responded to views of inspiration that tried either to introduce a hierarchy of textual accuracy and authority within the corpus of inspired writings or to distinguish between inspired and uninspired writings, resulting in people distrusting and questioning the authority and relevance of both the biblical text and her writings. She argued that the prophets had to express the revealed thoughts and ideas with their own words, a circumstance that reflected their education, occupation, rank, situation, experience, perceptive faculties, as well as mental and spiritual endowments. As already mentioned in the first period, she herself often felt disadvantaged because of her literary and grammatical deficiencies. She repeatedly emphasized, however, the need to resist the temptation of trying to distinguish between divine and human aspects in the written text and instead stressed the importance of coming to the Bible with an honest, open, and searching heart focusing on its practical teachings for our personal lives.

**Dealing With Diverse Misconceptions (1895-1915)**

In the last 20 years of her ministry and life, Ellen White made numerous miscellaneous statements about inspiration, most of them in private letters to individuals. A few statements were published, such as her letter to David Paulson, because her answers to the misconceptions some of these individuals struggled with were also of interest to the church at large.

In the mid-1890s, she explained that God’s infallibility, invariableness, and unchangeableness does not make the prophet infallible. God’s word is true but she as the channel of his messages of reproof never claimed infallibility.34

In 1900, she repeated some of the ideas that she had outlined 12 years earlier about the existence of the biblical writers’ different individualities, styles, and experiences in the various books of the Bible. She stated: “The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. . . . It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate. The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue.”35

Though the biblical writers expressed what had been revealed to them “according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit,” the latter did not cramp or force their mind “into a certain mold” because “diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds.”36 Shortly afterward, she reiterated further aspects of the statements she made in 1888. She stated that although the biblical “penmen selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education,” they were but imperfect human attempts to describe divine realities. In His communication with human beings God has to condescend because “infinite [divine] ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite [human]
vehicles of thought.” He communicates with “human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words.”

In early December 1902, Ellen White suggested that she did not consider herself the “originator” of such books as *The Great Controversy*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Desire of Ages*, and *Christ's Object Lessons* because it was God who had given her the “instruction” contained in these books during her life. Thus, even though these books had the same source as the biblical writings, she viewed her writings as having a slightly different purpose from these, namely as a “lesser light” pointing and leading people to the “greater light,” the Bible.

In several private letters she stated that her books “contain clear, straight, unalterable truth” and instruction that is “not of human production.” That is why they should “certainly be appreciated.” In fact, she outright denied her own ability to have produced these books. The works were possible only because, as she said, “the Lord has given me the help of His Holy Spirit.” In a letter Ellen White had written to her son James Edson shortly before, she explained that as she tried to catch “the very words and expressions” she had heard in a dream, her pen would hesitate a moment until “the appropriate words” came to her mind. Three years later, she wrote to him and his wife that the “Spirit of God” worked upon her mind and gave her “appropriate words with which to express the truth.” In the same vein, she told his brother W. C. White: “When writing these precious books, if I hesitated, the very word I wanted to express the idea was given me.”

In 1906, Ellen White received communication from David Paulson, who sought clarification on some questions relating to her inspiration. Initially he had been taught to believe that the *Testimonies for the Church* had “absolutely no human side” and that “every word” she spoke and wrote, irrespective of “circumstance, place, or manner,” was “as verbally inspired as the ten commandments or the sermon on the mount.” She responded that from studying her writings he should have known that she never “made any such claims” nor did anyone of the early Adventist pioneers make “such claims.” Then she referred him to several of her previous publications such as the introduction to *The Great Controversy* and some passages in volume five of *Testimonies for the Church*.

Though Paulson no longer held that strict view of inspiration, he still believed in God as the source of her writings. Yet he also arrived at the conclusion that she was not “infallible or inspired in every thought, word, and action.” He understood that some of the things Ellen White had written were “not directly inspired” but he felt it would be presumptuous for him “to draw the line and to say: ‘This is human, while this is divine.’” She agreed that God was the source and the originator of the ideas presented in her articles and books, but she could not agree with all of Paulson’s views.

Thus it seems that it was in response to Paulson’s views on distinguishing between the human and the divine that she stated: “To some of the questions you asked, I am not to answer, Yes or No. I must not make statements that can be misconstrued.” In her view, saying Yes or No to the question of whether all of her writings were directly inspired could encourage people to either disregard messages of divine truth or lead into extreme views.
Interestingly, however, three years later, she herself drew a line of distinction regarding her writings, a distinction that did not define the nature, process, or extent of inspiration, but that revealed two different spheres in the life of a prophet. Thus she stated: “In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord, . . . [However, w]hen the Holy Spirit reveals anything regarding the institutions connected with the Lord’s work, or concerning the work of God upon human hearts and minds, as He has revealed these things through me in the past, the message given is to be regarded as light given of God for those who need it. But for one to mix the sacred with the common is a great mistake. In a tendency to do this we may see the working of the enemy to destroy souls.”

She suggested that information on “common” matters may be incorrect since she was a fallible and imperfect human being like everyone else, whereas information on “sacred” matters had to be “regarded as light given of God.” While this difference could technically be described in terms of human (common) vs. divine (sacred), such a distinction would obviously be prone to misunderstandings because sacred matters are, in fact, made known through a revelation-inspiration process that is both a divine and a human process. Thus, she probably preferred to define the difference between uninspired and inspired material as one of the common and the sacred.

To clarify what she meant by “common” she continued: “But there are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these questions must be answered. We converse about houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages.”

Another interesting statement about her experience of the inspiration process is concerned with her experience while writing *The Great Controversy*. She stated that the scenes about which she was writing were frequently presented to her in “visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid” in her mind. It could be argued that the Holy Spirit controlled the writing process or, in other words, guided her through it in this manner.

A last example has to do with the revision of *The Great Controversy* in 1911. When she learned that the printing plates from the original editions were worn out and the book had to be reset, she was determined to have the book “closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages.” The examination was conducted by the “most experienced workers,” though final approval of all revisions lay with her. Her son, W. C. White, described the different editorial tasks as follows: omitting biographical notes; changing archaic or unnecessarily offensive expressions; adapting spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; introducing historical references; replacing quotations with “new quotations from historians, preachers, and present-day writers” because these were “more forceful” or their original sources could not be retrieved anymore.
Although the correction of grammar and usage is easily comprehensible considering that inspiration did not so much concern the very words rather than the thoughts and ideas, the replacement of a quotation by a different quotation may prompt more serious questions. Her son answered these by saying: “It is generally admitted that in Sister White’s discourses, spoken to the people, she uses great freedom and wisdom in the selection of proofs and illustrations, to make plain and forcible her presentation of the truths revealed to her in vision. Also, that she selects such facts and arguments as are adapted to the audience to whom she is speaking. . . . And she has always felt and taught that it was her duty to use the same wisdom in the selection of matter for her books, than she does in the selection of matter from her discourses.”

Thus he suggested that his mother used historical works to illustrate certain developments or specific ideas shown to her in visions and dreams. Therefore it would be possible to use other quotations to illustrate the same point in cases where the original source for that quotation could no longer be found. Ellen White approved these clarifying statements of her son: “What he has written regarding my wishes, and decisions, and instruction relative to this work is a true and correct statement.”

In this last period of her life, Ellen White attempted to explain the relationship between the human and the divine in the revelation-inspiration process. While she could not agree with a division of her writings into human and divine parts, she did acknowledge a difference between sacred and common communications, thus maintaining the connection between the divine and the human in the inspired, sacred writings. She also explained how, during the writing process, the Holy Spirit frequently revived her memory by showing her specific scenes multiple times in visions and dreams during the night. When she at times struggled to find an appropriate word to describe something she had been shown, the Spirit suggested a word which she would choose because it seemed to fit perfectly. Quotations from historical works were usually chosen by her to illustrate scenes and developments she had seen in vision, yet, in the revision process, they could be replaced by more forceful or better-documented quotations.

Conclusion

Though Ellen White’s description of the Holy Spirit’s guidance and supremacy in the revelation-inspiration process did not undergo any dramatic changes across the years, a growth is discernible from rather general statements to more specific ones. The majority of the statements made in the earlier years (1850s-1890s) were published and thus became available to the Adventist public; whereas, in the later years (1890s-1910s) her statements about inspiration remained mostly unpublished and were addressed to only a few individuals.

It is noteworthy that many of her statements were responses to criticisms of her prophetic role or to views about inspiration that weakened the authority and significance of inspired writings. Very few statements, such as the introduction to her classic The Great Controversy, seem to serve the purpose of providing readers with a semi-systematic explanation of how inspiration works. It is
striking that the way she described the generation of Scripture paralleled her own experience with the inspiration process.

Her concept of the revelation-inspiration process may be summarized as follows: Revelation can be produced only by God, not by human beings. Revelation occurs through flashlight picture scenes, the communication of thoughts, ideas, and in a few cases specific words and statements. When she wrote down what had been revealed to her, she was usually left on her own to express the ideas with her own words. In that process she employed human assistants to present the message in the best and most favorable manner. Frequently, however, the Holy Spirit provided guidance to her by suggesting appropriate words and by repeatedly reviving previously revealed scenes. Though she remained open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance, it was still her responsibility to accept these suggestions. It is therefore apparent that the Holy Spirit operated in diverse ways to assist her in faithfully transmitting the thoughts and scenes revealed to her.

Ellen White also opposed a division of inspired writings into inspired and uninspired matter. She similarly disagreed with individuals who tried to differentiate between human and divine aspects in her writing. However, she did allow a distinction between the sacred and the common, acknowledging that inspired individuals could write sacred materials (those that were the product of a divine-human process) but could also write “common” materials (which represented merely human ideas and considerations).

Thus, her concept of the dynamic influence of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration process does not conflict with the notion of the prophet’s freedom of choice. Rather, the concept of the prophet’s freedom is in full harmony with her suggestion that the Spirit does not employ a government of force that totally overrules the will of the person. It is our task to cooperate with Him.

Similarly, she pointed out in regard to the Christian life that believers have to realize the need to keep their “heart under the control of the Holy Spirit,” emphasizing the choice of each person to voluntarily submit his or her considerations to the divine agency and yield the will to the Spirit. She talks of the “desire to be under the Holy Spirit’s influence” and the necessity to search “earnestly for the impartation of the Holy Spirit,” statements that are again indicative of the freedom of human choice in relation to the Holy Spirit’s work. In the inspiration process, the Holy Spirit somehow ensures the faithful transmission of the divine will, plan, and message without overruling the prophet’s will. Thus He reveals Himself as the God of truth. Whether working in the experience of a prophet or in the life of a Christian believer, the same divine principle becomes visible: God grants each person freedom of choice, something one would expect from a God who is love.

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The Holy Spirit in the General Epistles and the Book of Hebrews

The first-century church’s understanding of the Holy Spirit was central to its theology and practice.

Larry L. Lichtenwalter

The most explicit emphasis on the lively activity of the Holy Spirit in the early years of the Christian Church occurs in the writings of Paul and Luke’s and John’s Gospels. But the sometimes overlooked “General Epistles”—those of James, Peter, John, and Jude—in the latter part of the New Testament have something to say as well about the Holy Spirit within the early church—or within normative Christian experience.

What further insight might these books give into the church’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as its members encountered the challenges of the Greco-Roman world, the variety and ferment of its own expanding membership, the emergence subtle heresies, and the articulation of its belief and behavior? What continued link may be observed between the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost and the church’s sustained vision of the resurrected Christ?

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost enabled the early church to envision (as well as experience and proclaim the benefits of) the exaltation and coronation of Christ. The Spirit was to fall on all because Jesus was Lord of all. The Spirit’s coming shattered the church’s understanding of reality with a new image of Jesus and discipleship. The Holy Spirit was a worldview-transforming sign from heaven.

Thus, the Spirit’s descent animated the church’s identity and zeal for mission to the world, so much so that the church literally burst upon the Greco-Roman world. Within one generation, the gospel of the exalted Christ reached across the civilized world, turning it upside down (Acts 17:6). This incredible expansion was not without opposition both from the Greco-Roman world, which the church sought to win, and from the ferment of heresies within her own community. How could the church sustain momentum and maintain spiritual/doctrinal integrity against these counter-realities? How could she sustain her vision of the exalted Christ? Would matters of the Spirit still factor large?

The answer in part is found in the General Epistles together with the Book of Hebrews. Written in during many challenges, their respective messages unfold theological and practical concerns during the chaotic years throughout first century Christian writing. They reveal, so to speak, “a theology on the run,” in which much is assumed, tacit, unfinished. Throughout, significant elements of faith regarding the Holy Spirit emerge by way of passing comments or brief points made during the course of argument.

The church’s understanding of the Holy Spirit, however, is more pervasive than the few
references might suggest. Each writer worked within a larger conception of a triune God in which two persons of the Godhead could be related together, and by implication includes the third. The implications of this Trinitarian mindset comprise distinctness of persons, ontological equality/oneness, and role diversity. In other words, the three members of the Godhead equally share in the divine being. Christian experience, in effect, is envisioned as one with the Triune God.

This means—from the standpoint of the Godhead—Triune atonement (Heb. 9:14; 10:29-31), invitation to know the Triune God (Acts 2:38, 39), Trinitarian salvation (Rom. 5:5, 6; 1 Peter 1:2), Trinitarian witness of salvation (Heb. 2:3, 4), and Trinitarian assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:14-17). From the standpoint of the believer, it includes a Triune understanding of spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:12, 13, 16), an abiding in the Triune God (1 John 3:23, 24), a Triune growing and building up in faith (Jude 20, 21), Trinitarian test of the spirits (1 John 4:2, 3), praying with Triune intercession (Jude 20, 21), Triune discipleship and making disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20), the Trinity and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:3-6), Trinitarian ministry (Rom. 14:17, 18), a Trinitarian ecclesiology (Eph. 4:3-5), and Trinitarian peace and grace (Rev. 1:4-6), the future in Trinitarian hands (Rev. 1:4-6), and Triune doxology (2 Cor. 13:14).1 Obviously, the reality of the Holy Spirit is assumed throughout this view of triune God reality—therefore not needing either specific or considerable mention in any of the documents.

Furthermore, the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the General Epistles and the Book of Hebrews unfold against backdrop discussions of Christology, orthodoxy, unity, ethics, identity and worldview, character, trials and adversity, suffering, church and state, revelation and inspiration, salvation, spiritual warfare, the heavenly sanctuary in view of the passing away of the earthly, ecclesiology/community, the covenants, personal and corporate lifestyle, assurance, perseverance, hope, spiritual disciplines, the mission and message of the church, and truth. References to the Holy Spirit throughout these numerous (and interconnected) themes reveal that the Holy Spirit is integral to every aspect of Christian thought, life, hope, and apologetics.

Together, these vibrant writings reveal the complex world of first-century Christianity and provide a sober look at the early church’s Spirit-driven life in spiritual, doctrinal, and ethical terms. In unique, yet complementary ways, each work unfolds the role of the Holy Spirit. The phenomenon of the Spirit in each underscores how the understanding of the Holy Spirit is more a matter of divine revelation and inspiration than it is a matter of the church or its growth in the first century.

The Holy Spirit in James

The Letter of James hardly ever appears in discussion of the Holy Spirit. The word pneuma—the Greek word for “spirit” most often translated as “Holy Spirit” in Scripture—occurs only twice in the book (James 2:26; 4:5). Only the second of these references could conceivably refer to the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God: “Do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’” (4:5).2 The question is whether the word pneuma refers here to the divine Spirit or to the human spirit. Problems of translation and the source
from which James drew his thoughts make this a challenging passage.

The passage in question appears within a discussion of the turbulent manifestations of worldliness and an adulterous friendship with the world among God’s people. The context leading up to this verse affords repeated references to humanity’s inner attitude (spirit?) and drives. James has not yet directly alluded to the Holy Spirit in his epistle, so a sudden appearance here is rightly questioned. On the surface, then, the context seems to suggest that it is best to understand “spirit” as the human spirit, for James has just finished calling his audience “adulteresses” (vs. 4) in their relationship with God and is not likely to be thinking of the Holy Spirit living in them at this point. This verse would be an amplification of the theme picked up from verse 2 of the destructive power of human desire and envy, rather than that of God’s jealous relationship with His people. It would then be translated “The [human] spirit which He [God] has made to dwell in us is one which feels passionate envy.” In articulating such, James would not be suggesting a dualism, but rather that it is the same human spirit (which God has placed within humankind) that can bring forth good or evil, virtue or vice. This reading would suggest two spirits at war within individuals for the allegiance of human beings—a basic reality of fallen human nature.

Although some assert that pneuma here does refer to God’s Spirit, the only other use of the term in James clearly means the human spirit (2:26). Nevertheless, numerous commentators suggest that this passage refers to the Holy Spirit’s reaction to the believer’s envious worldliness. It is possible that humankind’s envy of the world, which expresses hostility toward God (4:4), is met by God’s own enmity toward human envy—via the Holy Spirit. In this case, a reference to the human spirit would be an unnecessarily indirect way of pointing to God’s own opposition to envy. To pneuma, then, would refer to the divine Spirit rather than the human spirit. If one understands the 10th commandment as in view here (“thou shalt not covet”) as per the preceding argument, it is possible that spirit could mean the Holy Spirit who speaks authoritatively through that commandment against the covetousness in the human heart and in the early Christian community. Or, following James’s discussion forward toward his ensuing reference about God giving “a greater grace” to the humble (vs. 6), one could conclude that God’s jealousy is surpassed by God’s grace. This, again, could open the way for understanding to pneuma as being the Holy Spirit. If James does have the Spirit in mind in the passage, he provides an early insight into the interior work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the grace, which God gives to those who are humble.

Some suggest that the way in which James 3:13-18 refers to the wisdom that “comes down from above” (vs. 15) and produces the fruits of ethical qualities in Christians resembles the Pauline understanding of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). In this view, wisdom in James would be effectively equivalent to the Spirit in the New Testament. This idea would complement the understanding of to pneuma in James 4:5 as being the Holy Spirit, i.e., “both the wisdom from above of 3:13-18 and the Spirit of 4:5 are opposed to envy.” Since James begins with a reference to two members of the Godhead: Jesus and the Father (1:1), one can rightly assume James is working within the larger triune God thought context as per above.
This being so, one could assert that the Holy Spirit is integral to James’ argumentation while not specifically named. If so, the wisdom of which James speaks as coming from God or coming from above could be understood as taking place via the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It would be tacit reference to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, which brought divine resource in His train.

Wisdom for James, then, would function much as the Spirit does elsewhere in the New Testament, thus explaining the fact that there is no unambiguous reference to the Holy Spirit in the book. This understanding, however, would not necessitate that *to pneuma* in 4:5 be a reference to the Holy Spirit.

If James does have the Spirit in view, the work provides an early insight into the interior work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the grace God gives to those who are humble. Nevertheless, the book reflects the Trinitarian thought mix, which includes the Spirit in its purview.

**The Holy Spirit in 1 Peter**

*An eschatological ministry.* Though some would suggest that the Holy Spirit does not figure prominently in 1 Peter, the epistle begins with an extended threefold “Trinitarian structure,” consisting of parallel prepositional phrases, which includes the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus: “who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure” (1 Peter 1:1, 2). The epistle closes with references to two members of the Trinity: Jesus and the Father (5:10). This opening and closing set the context for understanding all of the material in the book in light of the three persons of the Godhead.

There is a clear view of the Triune God at play throughout the document. Everything that follows its opening assumes this Trinitarian vision and includes a Holy Spirit connection in all that is said. It is a given that within the church’s Trinitarian vision, the Holy Spirit is viewed as a distinct person who ontologically shares the divine being. The role of the Holy Spirit is thus more pervasive than the Epistle’s few references might suggest.

First Peter displays most of the main elements of the Holy Spirit’s work in relation to the believer that one finds mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. And much of what unfolds appears to mirror Pauline tradition in particular (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; Thess. 2:13). The Epistle is strikingly original and comparably creative, however, with regard to the Holy Spirit’s function in Christian experience and life. Here, readers are encouraged to think of themselves as living in the new age of God’s salvation heralded by the prophets and brought to reality by Christ (1 Peter 1:10, 11). This suggests that the Spirit’s ministry is eschatological. The person and work of the Holy Spirit unfold within four broad areas: (1) salvation and becoming a disciple of the triune God (1:2, 23); (2) Christology (1:11; 3:18); (3) gospel proclamation (1:11; 3:18); and (4) suffering, trials, adversity (4:14).

In one of the clearest Trinitarian passages of the New Testament, one that speaks about the purposes of God, the atonement of Jesus, and sanctification by the Spirit (1 Peter 1:1, 23), salvation
and discipleship are envisioned as a Triune experience. Each member of the Godhead communicates “grace” and “peace” to believers (vs. 2). Yet within this Triune mix, the process of salvation or making “holy” (vs. 2, NLT) is clearly asserted as the Spirit’s domain.

Within biblical imagery, “holiness” is the chief attribute of God. Peter thus identifies the Spirit as both a distinct person and with the essential being of God (1 Peter 1:2, 15, 16). This making holy includes the Spirit’s cleansing work in applying the atonement accomplished by Christ to the sinner. Christian life begins now by the power of our share in Christ’s resurrection and regeneration by the Holy Spirit (vs. 23).

The Spirit’s work in salvation further includes the activity of the prophets, the proclamation of the good news, and an abiding divine presence as a source of hope (1 Peter 1:10-12). By implication, the injunction to live holy lives and to exhibit honorable and loving conduct—despite one’s difficulties—is made possible by the presence of the Spirit (vss. 15, 22). This is how one becomes a disciple of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit plays an important role in Christian initiation alongside Christ’s redeeming blood. He plays a role, too, in being born again through the imperishable word of God (vss. 12, 23-25). The person and work of the Holy Spirit are the effective mediating source of divine grace and peace (1 Peter 1:2).

**The Spirit of Christ.** 1 Peter provides an unusual combination of themes with respect to the Spirit in relation to Christ. It asserts that the Spirit that dwelt in the prophets was Christ’s Spirit, i.e., “the Spirit of Christ within them” (chap. 1:11). This is not to be read principally Christologically as the activity of the pre-existent Christ, but rather eschatologically as the divine Spirit who speaks of hidden things to come—in this case, Christ.

The work of the Spirit here is both revelatory and dynamic. It is not quite the same as the mode of inspiration and interpretation of the Scripture outlined in 2 Peter 1:19-21. The model for Christian living in 1 Peter is Christological in empowerment, model, and intimacy—for Christ is the chief shepherd and guardian of the flock (2:25). The Spirit plays a fundamental effective role in these realities, enabling one to love the unseen Christ (1:8).

The Spirit was an active agent in the resurrection of Christ (3:18). This is in contrast to Hebrews 9, where it was through the eternal Spirit that Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God (Heb. 9:14). Thus the Spirit would play a unique role in both the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and His glorious resurrection.

The link between “the Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12) and gospel proclamation echoes Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and implies that gospel proclamation by the Spirit is being made to the present generation (vs. 39). The author would have personal knowledge of these realities. Through the Spirit the gospel has been preached to Christians who have already died (1 Peter 4:6). The Spirit was also active in appeals to the antediluvian world (Gen. 6:3) and in the rebuke of demonic spirits (1 Peter 3:18, 19).

**Helping hurting believers.** Suffering is a paramount theme throughout the Epistle, and, in view of it, the author unfolds a theology of suffering. Peter addresses the issue of Christians in a
non-Christian society and offers a challenging discussion of sociopolitical thought, i.e., church and society. Christians have a duty toward the state, non-Christian neighbors, and all human beings (2:17). A broad strategy of nonviolent resistance and gentle defense is outlined. It is in the living presence of the Spirit that sufferers already possess something of the glory that is to be revealed with Christ (4:14). This is true for both the individual and believing community. In this challenging context of suffering and the need for orientation and patient perseverance, the Spirit’s ministry in the life of the hurting believer takes on a practical and pastoral character. Persecuted believers are comforted in their trials by the assurance that the divine Spirit rests as a protecting shield over them. This strengthening of the Spirit in time of stress is in line with what is promised in other New Testament books (Matt. 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 12). Given the larger biblical witness, one would assume that the Spirit’s protective shield has to do with truth, courage, perseverance, hope, and witness rather than any physical protection (Acts 4:31; 7:55).

In view of the heightened pagan-Christian conflict or tension, 1 Peter addresses the Christian reality of a new life that resulted from the Father’s call, the Spirit’s sanctifying activity, and Jesus’ obedient submission of His life for the salvation of the believer (1 Peter 1:2). Believers have been called by God out of the pagan populace and, like the Jews of the time, as a result of divine election live in communities among the Gentiles, that is the diaspora (1:1, 2). The book underscores “the fact that as a result of God’s call through the Christ-event, mercy was conferred on humanity and a new people constituted. By means of the death and resurrection of Jesus, whether employing the imagery of ransom, purification, conversion, or new birth, the author establishes the basis for the community’s unity, strength, and source of life. Though tested and in religious exile, it is nonetheless a house built of living stones, along with the rejected, chosen, and precious salvific stone. It is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation.”5 In this context the study of the Holy Spirit touches matters of Christian self-identity and being. Ecclesiological implications abound.

First Peter thus places the person and work of the Holy Spirit squarely in the experience of salvation and what it means to become a disciple of the Triune God (1:2, 23) as well as Christology (1:11; 3:18), gospel proclamation (1:11; 3:18), and suffering, perseverance, self-identity (4:14).

**The Holy Spirit in 2 Peter**

*Spirit-engendered truth.* Though considered an “elaborately constructed polemic document”6 and “on the fringe” of New Testament thinking,7 2 Peter nevertheless opens with the Trinitarian mindset that pervades the New Testament by referring to two members of the Godhead: Jesus and the Father (1:1, 2). Later in the same chapter it is the Father and the Spirit who are placed together (vs. 21). In this context, the Spirit is linked with the fundamental reality of God—holiness. All the implications of divine personhood, ontology, and diversity of the person and work of the Spirit in this thought matrix are assumed and implied.

Second Peter is a homily on Christian growth set in the context of threats to Christian stability from heretical teachings. The bold claims and fictitious anecdotes of false teachers were confusing
the churches with notions that God’s Spirit was speaking a fresh message through them. There were accusations that the apostles had been following cleverly invented stories (vs. 16). There was need to assert the reliable eyewitness of the apostles’ gospel preaching (vss. 1:16-18). The book’s purpose is threefold: (1) to expose false teachers for what they are; (2) to link the words of the apostles with those of the prophets; and (3) to set before the churches the conditions of survival when doctrinal and moral perversions infiltrate their fellowships.

The question is: What can Peter put before the churches to counter the influence of the new voices being heard everywhere, especially when his own voice would soon be silent (vs. 14)? The answer is the apostolic eyewitnesses, which Peter sets against the firm backdrop of Spirit-engendered truth through the reality and certainty of the prophetic word (vss. 12-21). This is perhaps the greatest single treasure within this short letter, regarding a number of theological issues: the Holy Spirit, revelation and inspiration, prophecy of the Second Coming, Christology, spiritual life, and assurance.

The “prophetic word” (vs. 19) remains forever God’s Word. It is not merely the prophet of long ago who speaks (as per 2 Peter 1:17, 18), but the living God Himself via the Holy Spirit (vs. 21). The Spirit has spoken and continues to speak via the Word of truth already given. And if this is so, one is wise not to attempt to reinterpret what the Holy Spirit says as though he or she is now in possession of some superior wisdom. The Spirit continues to speak through the prophetic Word, which He initiated, rather than in a fresh message through new teachers. Believers are to be anchored in the Word of God, and thus the Spirit’s guiding influence.

*Christian life and ethos.* Peter’s call to trust God’s witness and pay attention to the Scriptures is followed by his assertion that the message of Scripture originates with the Holy Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Here we find the Holy Spirit in relation to the inspiration of Scripture and prophecy in particular. “We can have utter confidence that God truly speaks to us in His Word because both the divine revelation given to its authors and their interpretation of it was direct by the Holy Spirit.” The text describes a divine-human partnership, not that of equals but as a powerful, energetic superintendence by the Spirit: “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 21, NIV).

These insights into the person and work of the Holy Spirit appear against the backdrop of an ill-defined spirituality. More than correct doctrine or the reliability of the biblical message is in view. It is Christian life and ethos that is nuanced. Peter understood that we have miraculous resources for godly living (2 Peter 1:3, 4). We have everything we need for life and godliness. One of those heavenly resources is the comprehensive nature of the revelation given to believers (1:16-21; 3:1, 2). The Holy Spirit brings divine resources for here and now via and alongside God’s Word. Ultimately, genuine spiritual life is linked to the true voice of the Holy Spirit via the prophetic word (1:19).

The reference of the Holy Spirit at the end of chapter 1 provides an interpretive hinge relating both backward and forward in the author’s discussion regarding the accusations by false teachers.
who suggest God’s Spirit is speaking a fresh message through them. Not only does the Spirit continue to speak through the prophetic word, which He initiated, but also genuine spiritual life is linked to the true voice of the Holy Spirit via the prophetic word.

The Holy Spirit in 1, 2, and 3 John

_Fourth Gospel backdrop._ Within the Johannine Epistles, only 1 John refers directly to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Even there the prominence and role of the Holy Spirit does not appear to be a key theme. Any theology of the Spirit in 1 John appears restrained against a generally theocentric feel of the Epistle, suggesting that the writer may be more preoccupied with the “Godhead” itself than with individual members of the Godhead.

However, 1 John reveals a community struggling for a balanced understanding of the person of Jesus. The author seeks a balanced Christology. There were some who emphasized the divinity of Christ, while others exaggerated His humanity. The historical and life-giving Jesus is obviously central to the writer’s vision of the doctrine of God. This may further explain some of the constant ambivalence of John’s reference to the Spirit (i.e., anointing, seed, born, abide in you, etc.).

Because 1 John does not include an extensive or unrestrained body of material on the Holy Spirit, the pneumatology expressed therein has not received the same degree of scholarly attention as that of the fourth Gospel. Frequent points of contact between 1 John and the fourth Gospel, however, suggest that 1 John might reflect to a smaller scale both the structure and content of the Gospel. Common themes in 1 John and the farewell discourse of John 14–17 are evident.

One of these thematic links is the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13; John 14:16, 17). Both books begin with Christology (the incarnation), themes of divine light, and the reality of fellowship with God (1 John 1:1-7; John 1:1-14). Both books highlight love to God and love for one another (1 John 3:16-18; John 3:16). Both books highlight the atoning work of Christ (1 John 4:9, 10; John 3:14-17). More specifically, both books focus on the reality of the Holy Spirit in relation to the new-birth experience (1 John 3:9; John 3:5-8). Reading the letters against the backdrop of the fourth Gospel highlights the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as of fundamental concern for 1 John, indicating that any dealing with this Epistle must reckon with its position on the role of the Holy Spirit. While guarded and indirect, what the Epistle does say about the Holy Spirit is significant.

In keeping with New Testament Trinitarian context, 1 John begins and ends with references to two persons of the Godhead: Jesus and the Father (1 John 1:3; 5:10). Second John likewise opens with reference to Jesus and the Father (2 John 3, 9). Only 3 John has a reference to God without any specific reference to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. Implications of divine personhood, ontology, and diversity of the person and work of the Holy Spirit within this Trinitarian thought matrix are assumed and implied. First John never refers to the Spirit as the “Holy” Spirit.

_A crisis in understanding the Holy Spirit._ Despite the paucity of references to the Spirit, 1 John gives evidence that at least one of the theological/experiential crises facing the churches in John’s community pertained to the personhood and role of the Holy Spirit. Two broad areas of the Spirit’s
person and work are articulated in response to this conflict. One is theological (Christological); the other is experiential (conduct or behavior).

First, there is the major role of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to the significance of the earthly life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (1 John 5:5-8). Jesus is the One who “came” into human history “with the water and with the blood.” The water and blood refer to the terminal points in Jesus’ earthly ministry: His baptism and His crucifixion. Historically, Jesus came into His power by the water of His baptism and even more so by the blood of His cross. These are empirical truths regarding Jesus in whom faith is placed (vs. 5), and which the Holy Spirit affirms (vs. 6). Two important and closely related truths are affirmed: “(1) the human Jesus cannot be ontologically separated from the divine Christ, for they are one person, the Son of God, and (2) the same person who was baptized was also crucified, Jesus Christ.” Thus one person, Jesus Christ, came through both the baptism and crucifixion. Again, these are truths to which the Spirit testifies both objectively and experientially for the believer (vs. 6). The context suggests that this double witness to which the Spirit testifies is to highlight the latter, i.e., the blood—Christ’s atoning work on the cross. This suggests that any view of the Holy Spirit “that de-emphasizes the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross is suspect.”

Furthermore, as the custodian and guarantor of these Christological truths, the Spirit does not do this by mere subjective feeling, intuition, or experience, but as He bears witness of Christ who has acted in history. The Spirit brings believers back to what they have heard from the beginning (1 John 1:1). In this context, the Spirit is also the virtual presence of the absent Christ.

His witness in the believer summarizes Jesus’ ongoing self-disclosure until He returns. As such, John’s assertion that “there are three that testify” (1 John 5:7, NIV) affirms that there are three foundational underpinnings to Christ’s historical earthly self-disclosure: water, blood, and Spirit, i.e., baptism, crucifixion, and Pentecost. The Spirit was at work during each of these defining historical Christ-events. The Spirit is given priority over the witness of “water and blood” because He testifies through them (1 John 5:6). Though “water and blood” give witness of Christ as non-personal historical events, the Spirit does so as a personal being. The Spirit’s witness in relation to Christ’s baptism and crucifixion give them an enduring living witness and power.

Second, there is the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is the Holy Spirit who brings: (1) the new birth and its genuine fruit [1 John 3:9, 10]; (2) the assurance of eternal life and hope at Christ’s return [3:24; 4:13]; (3) the ability to remain in the truth [2:20, 27]; and (4) the discernment between truth and error [4:1-6].

Agent of new birth. According to 1 John, the Holy Spirit is the agent of the new birth as well as the practical evidence of it: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (3:9). Parallels with the fourth Gospel are evident. No one reading the phrase “born of God” would have missed the association with the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). Spiritual regeneration is the means of divine sonship (1 John 2:29). The use of the perfect tense born indicates not only the initial act of Christian rebirth, but also its continuing results
The words "his seed abides in him" point to the divine nature, which is implanted in the person who is spiritually reborn, and which is responsible for Christian growth and obedience (vs. 10). From the standpoint of Johannine theology, the "seed" refers to the Holy Spirit.

**Twofold assurance.** In 1 John 3:24 and 4:13, the work of the Spirit is described as bringing assurance to the believer who may question his or her standing with God, evidently one of the larger reasons for the Epistle. It is the knowledge of the indwelling Spirit that gives the believer assurance of his or her membership in the family of God: "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (3:34); "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (4:13). The primary evidence of our mutual abiding experience in God is the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

Here the study of the Holy Spirit in 1 John grants a twofold assurance: We are present possessors of the life of God, and we can enjoy a sense of confidence that we are identified as being in Christ. This is not a subjective feeling but is "knowledge obtained by drawing a conclusion based on facts. When one possesses the Spirit of God, it is divine evidence of the reciprocal relationship, enjoyed and experienced."\(^{11}\)

**Safeguard against apostasy.** The Spirit’s ministry of safeguarding Christians against apostasy is expressed in the vivid imagery of "anointing": "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (2:20); "as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him" (vs. 27).

Believers are to be encouraged because they have received an anointing from “the anointed one,” here called the “Holy One.” Origin, character, and communion are all involved. Jesus sends the Spirit (John 14:16, 26; Acts 2:33). It is the Spirit who abides in the believer (John 14:17). It is the Spirit who teaches the truth (John 14:26; 1 John 4:6). It is the Spirit who enables one to continue in Jesus’ word and confess Him as the Christ (John 6:60-71). In 1 John the Word and Spirit complement each other. The proclamation of the gospel is an objective exercise; whereas the anointing of the Spirit is subjective, personal, inward—but also objective in that it is real. The Spirit "manifests himself objectively in the life and conduct of the believer,"\(^{12}\) inspiring a true confession of Jesus and enabling one to act rightly. The Spirit bears witness to God’s indwelling presence without explaining this phenomenon.

In 1 John 2:20, 27, the abiding presence of the Spirit (the “anointing”) assures the believer of discernment in his or her struggle with the legion of antichrists (1 John 2:18). The Spirit enables one to know God. The Spirit mediates the knowledge of God. The Spirit invalidates the authority of false teachers, assures a proper doctrine of Christ, enables one to remain in the truth, and brings personal and corporate assurance. The anointing of the Spirit is an established fact for every believer.

**Spiritual discernment.** Finally there is the matter of the Spirit and spiritual discernment in relation to competing spirits or spiritual warfare (1 John 4:1-6). John asserts that there is the "Spirit...
of truth and the spirit of falsehood” (vs. 6, NIV), a divine Spirit and a diabolic spirit who manifest themselves in human behavior specifically in relation to true and false confessions of faith. Given this conflict between the two spiritual realms, and perhaps two spiritual beings, the Holy Spirit and Satan (though they are in opposition, the structure does not put them on a par). John exhorts the testing of all spirits to determine their truthfulness. Believers are warned not to believe every spirit as if it were the Spirit of God (3:24). They dare not be indiscriminate and accept everyone who claims that the Spirit directs his or her teachings.

Two criteria are given for making this determination: the content of the teaching, and the character of the audience.

The first is Christological: Who is Jesus Christ? What does this spirit say about Jesus Christ? Does the spirit confess Christ’s incarnation—that He came in the flesh? The true Spirit is one who affirms the historicity of Christ’s appearance, i.e., His incarnation. More precisely, this confession concerns Christ’s humanity together with its salvific importance. God actually came to earth, permanently taking upon Himself human nature (1 John 1:1-4).

The second is ecclesiological: Who listens to whom? What is the nature or character of the audience? John writes: “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:4-6).

“He who is in you” refers to the Spirit. “He who is in the world” refers to the “spirit of antichrist.” Heretics “align themselves with the world and speak the language of the world as evidenced in the denial of Christ.” True believers align themselves with the Spirit and receive only what the Spirit says regarding Christ. In other words, we listen to those who speak our own language.

This points to the true character of the listener(s) in response to the correct confession of Jesus as much as it does the content of that confession itself. This, too, is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work within the community of faith in that He creates that community of spiritual discernment. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned via the Spirit. The greater Spirit of God who lives within believers renders the world powerless. Through the Spirit the church recognizes her own and listens to their message, which originates in the Spirit and reflects the Spirit’s perspectives. He who belongs to God hears what God says. This is how we know the Spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood.

John’s first Epistle unfolds a question in which the Holy Spirit’s person and work become key. In this context, according to 1 John 5:6, 8, the Holy Spirit plays an essential role in Christ’s self-disclosure in the world: baptism (water), crucifixion (blood), and exaltation/coronation (Spirit, i.e., Pentecost). In keeping with the Epistle’s fourth Gospel backdrop (both in structure and content), the Holy Spirit’s role in the “new birth” experience (3:9) along with its genuine moral/spiritual fruitage is highlighted (vss. 7-24). The “anointing” of the Spirit engenders assurance of eternal life and confident hope of Christ’s soon return as well (2:20, 27, 28; 3:24). One’s ability to remain in the...
truth and discernment between truth and error (or true and demonic spirits) are likewise linked to
the Spirit’s work in both the individual and church community (4:1-3).

The Holy Spirit in Jude

_Divine keeping power._ Jude is basically a polemical document in which argument and
arrangements of material are closely woven in artistic style. The 25-verse Epistle follows a
well-known pattern in which an authoritative text is followed by an interpretive application to the
reader’s own day. This implies theological/ethical reflection on implications of biblical materials in a
contemporary context. Elements of faith regarding the Holy Spirit emerge through the running
argumentation.

In keeping with the other general Epistles and Hebrews, Jude opens with typical Trinitarian
thought by referring to at least two members of the Godhead: Jesus and the Father (Jude 1).
Eighteen verses later, the Spirit, the Father, and the Son appear in close connection: “But you,
beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves
in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (vss. 20,
21). Positively growing as a disciple means building oneself up in the faith (vs. 20). Jude presents
this reality of building oneself up in the faith as a “trinitarian challenge.” As per 1 and 2 Peter, all
the implications of divine personhood, ontology, and diversity of the person and work of the Holy
Spirit are assumed and implied in this thought matrix.

As Jude begins and ends with the theme of being kept by divine power (vss. 1, 24, 25), the
assumption is that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role providing divine power. More specifically, two
insights emerge into Jude’s representation of the Holy Spirit regarding the aforementioned growth in
faith: (1) the person and work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christian orthodoxy, unity, and
worldview (vs. 20); (2) the person and work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christian spiritual
discipline and growth (vs. 21).

_Orthodoxy, unity, and worldview._ In a section that might be termed “signs of the times” Jude
invites readers to remember how the apostles spoke about life in the last times where mockers would
arise and individuals would follow their own desires. There would be grumbling and faultfinding.
There would be freethinking and loose theology. The combination of these realities would bring
damaging effects on Christian life (vss. 15-18).

Jude asserts that the individuals against whom he writes are the very people whom the apostles
have warned against. They divide. They follow mere natural instincts. And they do not have the Holy
Spirit (vs. 20). The implication is that in their twisted theology, they not only misquote Scripture, but
also are actually claiming that the Holy Spirit is guiding them in their lawless rebellion against both
truth and church leaders. In the process, they assert that anyone reluctant to follow them (the false
teachers) would not have the Spirit at all. Jude turns this argument on its head, stating that it is
self-proclaimed “Spirit-led” people who do not have the divine Spirit and that their ideas are not open
to the Spirit but to their own lower desires. Proof for this assertion is based on the writer’s text-and-
interpretation pattern, which keeps readers coming back to biblical referents. Since Jude consistently castigates the false teachers for immorality, slavery to passion, self-interested flattery, and the like, Christians in Jude’s day must have been taught that the “life in the Spirit required a serious moral transformation.” The Greek word translated as “worldly-minded” is derived from the word for “soul” and can mean what is merely natural. In contrast, however, with what Jude assumes as the essence of being spiritual, his use of the word translated as “worldly-minded” implies that he views such individuals as not spiritually mature—that they are not Christians. Applying Jude’s logic (vss. 19, 22, 23), this would mean that if a person does not have the Spirit, he or she is no believer. And this would resonate with Pauline thought in which only a Christian has the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). It also underscores the reality that moral dysfunction is proof of Holy Spirit’s absence in the life.

**Spiritual discipline and growth.** The three linked verbs building, praying, and expecting (“the mercy of Jesus”) are a syntactical arrangement suggesting an intimate connection and emphasizing that human endeavor is needed to ensure divine protection. The phrase “keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21) appears to be the focus of the complex sentence, suggesting that God’s love is not only the source of the believer’s election but also the protection of the faithful. The reference to the Holy Spirit in relation to prayer (Jude 20) opens a window into spiritual discipline and experiential realities of spiritual life, growth, and perseverance. The preposition phrase “in the Holy Spirit” can designate a variety of situations including prophetic/apocalyptic inspiration (Rev. 1:10; Eph. 3:5) as well as the believer’s life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11). Both the authenticating activity of the Spirit and the Spirit’s activity in the believer who comes to God in prayer are in view here. In sharp contrast with the heretics who are devoid of the Spirit (Jude 19), what explicitly marks the community of believers is the possession of the Spirit and communion with God through His agency. The context gives the sense that it is “by means of prayerful invocation of God’s Spirit that believers will remain in God’s domain where they will receive protection in view of Jesus’ return.” Jude affirms the activity of prayer as intrinsic to Christian life. “Believers cannot keep themselves in God’s love without depending on him by petitioning him in prayer. Love for God cannot be sustained without a relationship with him, and such a relationship is nurtured by prayer.”

The sphere of this activity is the Holy Spirit.

Jude contains one of the few yet important Trinitarian passages that mentions the three members of the triune God together (vss. 20, 21). The Holy Spirit is seen in relation to Christian orthodoxy, unity, worldview, and ethics (vss. 19, 20) as well as Christian spiritual discipline and growth (vs. 21). In doing so, the Epistle unfolds spiritual growth as a “Trinitarian challenge.”

**The Holy Spirit in the Book of Hebrews**

Reorienting vision of reality. With the longest sustained argument in the New Testament, Hebrews provides “one of the earliest examples of Christian theology as faith seeking understanding.” The concepts are powerfully argued, difficult, sweeping, enigmatic—not the easiest
book in the Bible to understand. Nevertheless its purpose is both plain and basic. It is a “word of
exhortation” (Heb. 13:22), inviting a positive personal response to Jesus Christ. It is more a sermon
that has been adapted to letter format than a standard Epistle or theological treatise.

It has long been asserted that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to
return to Judaism. In effect, though, the book provides a coherent reorienting picture of the issues
any Christians living during the time were facing. It explains what the exalted Jesus has been doing
for believers since His ascension, and why that matters now. In the process, readers are challenged
with a vision of reality, an understanding of Jesus Christ, and a sense of Christian identity and hope
in a world of ambiguity and uncertainty. They are invited to see beyond the realities of this visible
world and take refuge in the promised certainty of the ultimate triumph of God in Christ. In doing so,
the book posits a worldview.

Though Hebrews makes only seven references to the Holy Spirit (2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8, 14; 10:15,
29), an understanding of the Holy Spirit is nevertheless integral to its vision of reality. The writer
asserts how the Holy Spirit brings divine confirming witness of the definitive word spoken through
Christ: “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,
God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts
of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (2:3, 4). The verbal testimony of those who originally
heard Jesus along with the Spirit-inspired deeds of His contemporary followers validated the truth of
Christ’s message. These evidences of the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit are joined by the
other distributions of the Holy Spirit, which refer to an inward experience compared to the
aforementioned outward phenomenon.

If these Holy Spirit-empowered confirmations have indeed occurred, then God has acted in
Christ among believers, and they “are faced with a reality—and a demand—from which they truly
cannot ‘escape’” (Heb. 2:3). This passage is key to the argument of Hebrews as a whole, and as
such it places the person and work of the Holy Spirit at the very heart of the Christocentric reality
that the book advances. The definitive expression of the divine will in relation to the Holy Spirit’s
distributions describes the active exercise of will, i.e., continued intentional action. The Holy Spirit as
both gift and Giver is still with the church—still casting vision regarding the exalted Christ. Echoes of
Pentecost are evident (Acts 2:1-36).

Applying Scripture today. Elsewhere, Hebrews places emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as the
source of Scripture’s inspiration (3:7, 9; 9:8; 10:15). The Holy Spirit speaks through the written
word enabling Scripture’s message and appeal to remain current and contemporary: “Therefore, just
as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as when they
provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness’” (3:7). Because of the Holy Spirit, the words of
Scripture are living words and have power. Scripture is not simply revelation in the past, but the
present ongoing Word of God. The Holy Spirit speaks in the present. Holy Spirit interprets Scripture
for today.

In Hebrews 3:7-11 the author repeats five verses from Psalm 95. Then he explains the passage
(which is the main subject for Hebrews 3 and 4). He introduces reference to Psalm 95 with the words: “as the Holy Spirit says” (3:7). Two meanings are possible: (1) Although David wrote that Psalm (Heb. 4:7), the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. This would mean that the Scripture’s origin is not human and that its authors did not just write from their own initiative or intelligence. Scripture then is the Word of God; (2) The Holy Spirit is saying these very things again now. These are not just some words that God spoke long ago. God’s Word is active and alive today (vs. 12), and its message is ever contemporary—for today.

The author undoubtedly believes both, so the message of the Psalm still warns. Believers today must obey God’s message from the past, as they hear His voice. This is so because of the Spirit’s activity both past and present. The Holy Spirit is principally One who both inspires Scripture and interprets it for contemporary believers. He speaks to humanity by means of the inspired Word of God. In this context He even speaks to those reading the Book of Hebrews. Because this is so, it is always today that one is to both hear and keep his or her heart open to the Holy Spirit’s appeal (3:7, 13, 15; 4:7). This moves the Holy Spirit’s interpretation of and appeal from the Word of God into the very depths of the human self: heart, soul, spirit, mind, motives, conscience.

**Interior transformation.** This generative and interpretive work of the Spirit in relation to Scripture involves the believer’s experience of worship and conscience: “The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience” (9:8, 9). Here the Holy Spirit reveals the limitations of the ministry of the Israel’s sacrificial system as well as its deeper meaning in relation to fulfillment in Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit who unlocks how the earthly sanctuary accomplished the purpose for which God created it, but even more so how only the sacrifice and ministry of Christ would eliminate once-for-all the problem related to sin and condemnation. As one who so speaks and interprets the Word of God in relation to Jesus’ sacrifice and priestly ministry, the Holy Spirit is clearly involved in the work of life-transforming redemption on a very practical, interior level (heart, thought, motive, conscience).

Reference to the new covenant promise of Jeremiah provides yet another glimpse into the Spirit’s role in the transformational aspects of redemption: “The Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them,’ He then says, ‘and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’” (Heb. 10:15-17). This is the third time in Hebrews where the Holy Spirit is said to speak or reveal through Scripture.

Jeremiah nowhere places the hope of this profound experience in the context of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel does, but not Jeremiah (Eze. 36:23-27; 37:1-28; Jer. 31:31-34). Yet Hebrews attributes Jeremiah’s prophecy to the Holy Spirit, and by implication the realization of the very experience to which the prophecy points. Evidently it is not only the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus that brings about
such an interior change in humanity and the removal of sin. Such interior transformation and release from guilt falls within the Holy Spirit’s realm as well (Heb. 6:4, 5), at least here in terms of the Holy Spirit bringing to one’s consciousness the conviction of the profound work of Christ and how with the completion of His sacrificial work the promised era of the new covenant has commenced, something each believer can experience—today! If this is true, then any believer who responds to the Holy Spirit’s prompting on these matters can realize the full assurance of hope that Jesus alone brings.

The individual who rebels against God during this time of new covenant opportunity rejects the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the person of the Holy Spirit—thus placing himself or herself in spiritual and eternal jeopardy: “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:29). The contrast posed between insults hurled at the Holy Spirit and the grace granted by the Holy Spirit highlights the personhood of the Holy Spirit, who can be intentionally insulted.

This implies that any speaking by the Holy Spirit in relation to the incredible truths about Christ is expressed personally. It is a Person who addresses persons. And one’s response to this Person will ever be personal. The implication is that such personal insult can result in the loss of the Holy Spirit’s personal work of grace in the life.

The Spirit of grace. The phrase “Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29) draws together for the first time two terms, each of which points to the presence and power of God among humans. In Hebrews, the Spirit speaks through Scripture. The Spirit is the source of the many gifts distributed to believers. One becomes a partaker of the Holy Spirit when he or she accepts Jesus Christ. Here the Holy Spirit and grace are connected. The Spirit is the source of grace and an expression of divine grace.

When one traces the term translated as “grace” throughout Hebrews, this connection between the Spirit and grace becomes evocative. It was by the grace of God that Christ tasted death in behalf of all (2:9). Those who belong to Christ can “approach the throne of grace” and “find grace” to help in time of need (4:16). There is warning against “falling short of the grace of God,” which is the grace of an “unshakable kingdom” (Heb. 12:15, 28). One’s heart can be strengthened by grace (13:9). A benediction of grace rests upon every reader (13:25).

At the minimum, insulting the “Spirit of grace” would mean insulting everything that has come from God. But on the other hand, welcoming the “Spirit of grace” would mean not just receiving all that comes from God, but actually opening one’s way via the Spirit to the very “throne of grace,” where divine grace through our great High Priest is anchored, offered, and sure. It is there at the “throne of grace” via “the Spirit of grace” that the interior transformational work in relation to the new covenant experience is fully realized in the heart (Heb. 10:15).

Falling away or holding fast. The Holy Spirit is integral in yet another discussion of how the enormity of apostasy is measured by the greatness of the experience of God it abandons: “In the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age
to come, and then have fallen away” (Heb. 6:4-6). This describes a singular event in the lives of the readers. The cumulative effect is to recall the enormity of the conversion experience as personal participation in an unrepeatable event in which believers became participants in the victory of Christ. What lies behind all these images is the church’s claim to have received the Spirit of God. To be a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” (3:14, "partakers of Christ") is to receive the heavenly power of the new age.

Again, the Holy Spirit is integral to profound spiritual realities of the most powerful and transforming interior experience. Sharing in the Holy Spirit implies an experience that is realized in fellowship with other believers. Implications for our understanding of the Holy Spirit in relation to empowering grace and perseverance are obvious. Both “falling away” and “holding fast” have obvious significance. People are capable of turning away from their own most powerful and transforming experience with the Holy Spirit. Likewise, they are capable of holding it fast through continued faith in Christ.

Interior application of Christ’s atonement. A possible reference to the Holy Spirit in partnership with Christ in providing an unblemished sacrifice for sin is found in a discussion of the unique saving work of Christ: “If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:13, 14).

Many suggest that the word spirit describes not the Holy Spirit, but the selfhood or person of Jesus, who, by virtue of His resurrection, is eternal. No doubt, the trajectory of the author’s argument does revolve around Christ’s eternal personhood in the context of the power of an indestructible life. It is because Jesus continues forever (does not die) that He holds His priesthood permanently. In the immediate context the author speaks of “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) and “eternal inheritance” (vs. 15). Elsewhere, he refers to “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal judgment” (6:2), and “eternal covenant” (13:20). Each of these adjectival references however, has personal dimensions in the context of the believers’ experience as well as the one mediating such an experience to individual and corporate life.

Though the eternal personhood of Jesus is integral to the ensuing argument, so is the reality that the purification of the flesh by the blood of goats and calves or the ashes of a heifer does not adequately address the human dilemma of defiled conscience. What was lacking in earthly sacrifices was the perfection of conscience, i.e., interior cleansing (Heb. 9:9, 10). The “once for all” (7:27) Christ event, however, provides an eternal redemption (9:12) that in effect cleanses one’s conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (vs. 14).

But how is this so? Clearly this is interior heart work, which we have already seen Hebrews posits as facilitated by Holy Spirit in personalizing the better work of Christ. The believer does not become perfect in conscience merely because Jesus is eternal. He or she experiences such profound cleansing on the deepest level of conscience and spiritual awareness: both because the eternal Christ
who died for the sins of humanity lives forever and because the Holy Spirit brings the effective power of Christ’s crucifixion and mediatorial work to a person’s innermost being.

We must catch the thread of inner and outer defilement and cleansing running throughout the discussion. This cleansing is absolutely dependent on the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The blood of Christ does that which the blood of goats and calves could not do. This is so because the Holy Spirit effects the application and implications of Christ’s blood to the soul.

Even though we could be more certain if the author had written “Holy Spirit” instead of “eternal Spirit,” we know that Christ’s entire ministry was in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Christ’s incarnation was a Holy Spirit phenomenon (Matt. 1:20). Christ’s baptism was a Holy Spirit anointing (Mark 1:9-11). Christ’s ascension and coronation as High Priest was a Holy Spirit phenomenon as per Pentecost (Acts 2:1-39). Christ’s entire ministry was Holy Spirit driven, Holy Spirit engaged, and Holy Spirit bathed.

Though the four Gospels say nothing about the Holy Spirit’s role in the sufferings of Christ, John’s first Epistle asserts that the Spirit gives testimony of each of significant turning points of Christ’s life: baptism, death, and ascension (1 John 5:7). Likewise, Revelation affirms an organic link between the slain-but-resurrected and now exalted Christ and the partnering role of the Holy Spirit in each of these experiences. As the Holy Spirit was at work during each of these Christ-events, it is very likely that He played a profound role in the moments of Christ’s offering Himself without blemish to God on the Cross. If so, the phrase “eternal Spirit” would hint of the spiritual mystery of how Divinity could both die and come to life as well as to how Christ’s offering would be both unblemished and bring in eternal redemption.

Hebrews begins and ends with a Trinitarian thought context with all that that thought mix implies regarding the Holy Spirit. The person and work of the Holy Spirit is integral to the Book of Hebrews’ explanation of what the exalted Jesus has been doing for believers since His ascension, and why that matters now. An understanding of the Holy Spirit is at the very heart of the Christocentric reality (worldview) that the book advances. Through the Spirit, the written Word still speaks today to heart, mind, and conscience, encompassing the interior work that every believer must experience. The Spirit partners with Christ in realizing the hope of a cleansed conscience in keeping with the interior application of Christ’s shed blood.

Conclusion

The General Epistles together with the Book of Hebrews provide robust insight into the first-century church’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as its members encountered the challenges of the Greco-Roman world, the variety and ferment of its own expanding membership, the emergence within of subtle enervating heresies, and the articulation of its beliefs and praxis. The person and work of the Holy Spirit unfold against the backdrop of numerous (and interconnected) concerns that these diverse yet complementary writings engage. Though references to the Holy Spirit are rare, brief, and passing—seemingly more of an aside than a well-defined focus—they nevertheless reveal
the church’s profound knowledge of the reality of the Holy Spirit as integral to every aspect of Christian thought, life, hope, and apologetics. They demonstrate how the possession of the Spirit as a mark of the new life in Christ forms part of the primitive gospel preached by the apostles. Throughout their evident “theology on the run,” these writings reflect a larger New Testament Trinitarian thought context expressed with literary inclusion affirming the Holy Spirit’s crucial role in a triune experience of prayer, discipleship, spiritual gifts, ministry, and worship.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible*.
7. Ibid., pp. 146, 147.
10. Ibid., p. 36.
15. Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude*, op. cit., p. 144.
Prayer That Pleases God

Many prayers, even though disguised in a pious cloak, are in the final analysis based on wrong motives.

I might pray for another person, but the real reason for my prayer is that I am afraid of losing a precious friendship. I might pray for success in the cause of God, but I am also playing an important role in it, and my influence will be strengthened if what I pray for succeeds. I might ask to be spared a defeat because I am afraid of the malicious comments of others. I might pray for health because I am afraid of pain and do not want to live a restricted or disabled life. I might pray that someone’s life be spared because I do not like living alone. I might pray for the conversion of a person because my life will then be easier. I might pray to find a boyfriend or a girlfriend because I yearn for love and seek recognition. I might ask God for specific things because I have become used to a certain standard of living and am not content with less. I might ask for success because I desire money and property and also like the admiration of others that goes along with it.

Actually, my prayers often center on myself. They speak about what I wish to have, what I want to receive from God—sometimes even in His name.

Prayer that is pleasing to God has a refreshingly different focus. No longer is my “want-to-have” the center of my prayer. Instead, God becomes the central focus. This is the important point.

Prayer that is pleasing to God first and foremost recognizes God as a faithful friend whose companionship I seek because He is important to me, not because I want something from Him. God’s presence is much more important than the things He gives to me. More important than anything I can ask for is the desire to be with Him. Without Him, my life would lack its most important element. But in His presence I feel sheltered. Without Him, I don’t want to live. This is the reason that I want to get to know Him better. I want to learn from Him. The time I spend with Him is precious because He is precious to me. I can confide everything to Him. He understands me. He loves me tenderly. This is why I long to be with Him. This is the center of any true prayer.¹

Prayer that is pleasing to God is focused on God. It begins with a personal communion with Him, not with my wishes and requests. It is not about following specific religious formulas or adhering to specific prayer techniques. They do not guarantee the fulfillment of my wishes. Prayer that pleases
God has Him at the center and relates to Him. When my requests, even my intercessory prayers, are not anchored in this living relationship with Him, they relate more to my wishes and my own well-being than to God and His will. Without this living friendship with God, my prayer resembles more the operation of a divine prayer machine, in which I feed in my prayer requests at one end and take out my granted wishes at the other.

However, prayer that pleases God first of all expresses my admiration and love for Him. Once I understand that my relationship with God is the center of my prayer, my prayer gains a totally new focus. I begin to think from God’s perspective. I start to view my requests, my wishes, my yearnings, my whole life through His eyes. I tell Him what is really on my heart, what makes me anxious, what I really desire deep inside, what I would rather avoid, what embarrasses me, what makes me happy, what makes me shout with joy, and what drives me to despair. In short, I share my life with God. And I am willing to view every aspect of my life through His eyes. This perspective ennobles prayer. Remove the relationship aspect from prayer, and prayer becomes one-sided—selfish and wrong.

Prayer that pleases God focuses on God. He is deeply interested in me. He longs to be part of me, in all aspects of my life: my worries, my fears, my wishes, my hopes, my wants, my abilities, my yearnings, my success, my honor, my recognition, my joy, my children, my money, my possessions, my friendship, my marriage, my needs, my health, my talents, my plans, my love, my anger, my creativity, my energy, my thoughts, my admiration, my music, my songs, my praise, my gratitude, my appearance—in short, my entire life. I talk about these things with Him as with a good friend. And I look at all of it through His eyes.

Prayer that pleases God frees my thinking from revolving around the “big ME.” It allows me to become honest with myself and with God. In the light of His love and His holiness, I begin to see myself differently. Gently I move toward the true purpose of prayer, not the fulfillment of my wishes but my relationship with the life-changing God. To pray in this way fills my life with the knowledge that He is the center of my life. My thoughts and wishes are in accordance with Him. To pray in this way is a real challenge.

It is so easy to pray as I am used to. In more than a thousand ways I am told that God will give me that which I ask Him, and my natural, sinful heart insists that all my wishes be fulfilled. It is so easy to ask God for something before I have enjoyed His companionship in prayer. The fulfillment of my wishes often is more important than my relationship with Him.

However, prayer that pleases God has God at its center. It opens up new perspectives for me. When I consciously think about His character, His abilities, and express my adoration for them in my own words, my prayers are filled with spiritual life and even have an element of reverence and admiration that goes along with them. My problems and needs are not the center of my prayers, but God is the center.

Prayer that pleases God means to step into His presence. It is an expression of my relationship with Him. Prayer does not bring God down to me. It lifts me up into His presence. Prayer does not change God; it changes me. Begin to pray like that. Try it out. It will change your life.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. I have gained some of these insights into prayer from a book by Larry Crabb that is well worth reading: The Papa Prayer: The Prayer You’ve Never Prayed (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2006). It provides many additional worthwhile thoughts.

One of the lesser-known paintings of the well-known American illustrator Norman Rockwell depicts an elderly couple, the white-haired man hunched eagerly over a table next to an early radio-phone, wearing a pair of headphones with a broad smile on his mustachioed face. Lying across his knee is a newspaper open to a page that headlines a radio listing featuring opera music. His wife is leaning in closely behind him, head inclined near to the man's ear, trying to listen along to the sublime sound that is being made available to them through this amazing miracle of new technology.¹

Back in the time when radio was quickly becoming the dominant electronic medium in everyday human existence, students of communication theory designated “noise” as anything that interfered with the ability to receive, send, or understand a message. They applied the concept of noise metaphorically to any kind of communication at the time: interpersonal conversation, radio transmission—even the print media that had preceded radio.

Noise could thus be a radio played too loud when you’re trying to express your thoughts to your teenager, a furious argument between your children when you’re hoping to listen to the radio weather report, a typographical error in a newspaper story, or the pulsing rhythm from the sound system of a passing vehicle when you’re attempting to read Psalm 23 for evening worship.

In addition to these more obvious applications of this metaphor, noise could also be such things as a jammed photocopier, a person speaking with a foreign accent, bad handwriting, downed telephone lines, radio static, a poor cable TV connection—anything that interferes with optimal communication of any kind.

And sometimes it may happen that message “A” is noise when you’re trying to receive message “B”! You are jarred awake at 2 A.M. by a seemingly urgent request (message “A”) from your 3-year-old in the room next door: “I’m thirsty. May I have a drink of water?” Just at that moment, however, the smoke alarm goes off (message “B”). And you are faced with the decision as to which message to respond to first. What is the priority?

That one is easy. What do you do, however, when you’re barraged with four, five, six, or more messages from several media all at once, and all of them of seemingly equal urgency—or sometimes the lack of it? You’re browsing through the Internet, and a Webpage comes alive with animated
Almost by its very nature, the impact of technology bursts outward, in every direction. And this has resulted in an explosion of information, what some have called a "data deluge." "Information," writes Quentin Schultze, "tends to overshadow knowledge and even wisdom—a problem I have called 'informationalism.'" Every breakthrough seems to bring yet another whole category of information—much of it noise!

What's the difference? you may be asking yourself, and you're supposed to be able to access and respond fully only to the most important of the information that is out there. If, as Leonard Sweet has observed, today's wealth is informational, then certainly there is the possibility of a great portion of it being counterfeit. And, if so, it could be worthless or even destructive.

Decades ago, T. S. Eliot anticipated the discrepancy that we face today between data and discernment:

"All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"


With such mind-numbing technological advances, noise itself has become the dominant message. "The media" wrote Glenn Ward, "are so saturated with information, and with so many different voices demanding to be heard, that it is no longer possible to know what you either know or want any more." And Ward wrote this more than three decades ago—before Google, spam, Wikipedia, the blogosphere, Facebook, playlists, or Twitter. Clearly things have become, well, less clear since then.

Yet if Christians hope to find truth, if they hope to be able to communicate God's love in today's world, they cannot become Luddites. The apostle Paul tells us, "Test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21, italics supplied). This suggests that Christians should be fully conversant with the culture in which they live. Certainly the ministry of Paul himself indicates his familiarity with sports (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 2:5), politics (Acts 26:3), philosophy (17:22), religion (vs. 23), and the arts (vs. 28).

And there is evidence that Jesus was informed by the news of His day and readily drew on current events to illustrate ideas. He referred to the recent collapse of a tower in Siloam, killing 18 people, asking if that accident had indicated the particular sinfulness of each of the victims (Luke 13:4, 5).

Scripture balances the benefit for awareness of culture, however, with the necessity of a healthy, analytical mind: "Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). And it even offers counsel that could be considered pointedly appropriate in response to today's data deluge: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking" (Prov. 10:19, NKJV).

The Prophet Elijah was fully aware of the culture around him, and it had become alien to him. He felt surrounded and badly outnumbered, so much so, in fact, that he fled hearth and home for the comparative safety of Mount Horeb. There God found him hiding in a cave, and the ensuing discussion turned to the subject of noise.

"A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:11, 12).

Elijah had fled because the noise in his culture was loud and threatening. In Ellen G. White's description of the prophet's times, she points out telling influences that are strikingly similar to those in today's noise. She speaks of "the exaltation of the human above the divine, ... the praise of
popular leaders, . . . the worship of mammon, and . . . the placing of the teachings of science above the truths of revelation.”6 “It is publicly taught,” she says, “that we have reached a time when human reason should be exalted above the teachings of the Word.”7

The predominant messages in today’s technological wind, earthquake, and fire—as both subtle and as dramatic as they have become—must never be confused with God’s “gentle whisper.” Even when the noise may be related in some way to the spiritual life, there are surely times when it would be appropriate to exercise a prayerful, judicious use of the mute button.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


5. Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New International Version of the Bible.


7. Ibid.

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Choosing a Bible Translation 1

I love the Bible. I read it every day. I teach and preach it in church. And I have the high privilege of teaching it every week at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Berrien Springs, Michigan) in the New Testament Department.

Sometimes I am asked: Which is the best Bible translation? This is somewhat like asking which exercise is best. When I am asked that question I smile and say, “The best exercise is the one you will keep on doing.” In a sense we can say the same thing about Bible translations. The best one is the one you will keep reading! It matters not which translation has the best manuscripts behind it, the best wording, the most erudite translators, or the best exegetical notes. If it sits on the shelf and gathers dust, it is useless for you.

But there are varieties of translations, and the question of which is most useful for a given purpose is an important question that deserves a clear answer. In my next two articles, I will take time to answer this question, setting forth the exciting and encouraging data for why we can trust the Scriptures.

We begin by looking at different Bible translations. Three types of Bible translations exist, categorized as word-for-word translations, dynamic-equivalence translations, and paraphrase translations.

**Word-for-Word Translations**

This type of translation seeks to translate each individual word in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek of the Bible into an equivalent individual word in English. Indeed, it is not uncommon in this type of translation to put in italics any additional words that must be added to clarify the meaning. An example of such translation would be Genesis 1:4 in the King James Version (KJV): "And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness." The “it was” was added by the translators since in Hebrew it simply states, “And God saw the light, that good . . ." This is fine.
Hebrew, but it does not do so in English, hence the addition of “it was.”

Because of their word-for-word pattern of translation, these versions of the Bible tend to give a little closer feel of the original language patterns with additional words clearly visible in the italic words. This characteristic makes it possible for those who do not read Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek to see more clearly the patterns of the original languages.

This type of translation also tends to maintain metaphors used in the original language. An example is 1 Peter 1:13 in the New King James Version (NKJV): “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind.” “Girding up the loins” was something people wearing a flowing robe in a hot, dry climate would do if they wanted to run. They would gather up the flowing robe and tuck it into their belt around their waist leaving their legs bare for quick movement. The metaphor suggests being ready for quick action.

These characteristics also produce the major drawback of word-for-word translation, a somewhat wooden sentence structure with wording that may not be easily understood by most readers unacquainted with the language patterns and metaphors. These pluses and minuses point toward the role that such translations can best fill. They are useful for more in-depth study for individuals keenly interested in getting at the original meanings of texts and unafraid to learn background data to decipher the text’s meaning.

Versions that fall into this category include the King James Version, the New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the English Standard Version.

**Dynamic-Equivalence Translations**

Dynamic-equivalence versions of the Bible take the thought of the original language and seek to express it in an equivalent pattern in the target language. Thus instead of trying to find one word in English that matches one word in the original, this type of translation moves to a larger structure—the sentence or paragraph—and translates it as a whole.

Anyone who has learned a foreign language recognizes how this works. When I was a missionary in Brazil, I learned Portuguese. I came to the place that when I was talking to someone in this beautiful language I was not thinking in English, I had a new language center in my mind with Portuguese words for making sentences. When asked by someone to translate Portuguese into English, it is easiest to listen to an entire sentence and then translate it. Some idioms and words just do not translate easily into another language, and one must seek idioms and word patterns in the target language that match them.

Dynamic-equivalence translations read more smoothly than word-for-word translations and usually require less knowledge of idioms, metaphors, and thought patterns of the original language to make sense of reading the text. A return to 1 Peter 1:13 can illustrate this concept. The New International Version reads, “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.” The metaphor of “girding the loins of the mind” is replaced with “minds that are alert.” The gain is ease of reading for most readers of English. The loss is the colorful metaphor of the original language and culture.

The characteristics noted here point toward the best use of such translations. If I were studying the Bible with a person who had just become a Christian, an individual without background in the church or Bible study, I would recommend for their daily reading a dynamic-equivalence translation. The reason for this recommendation is to encourage the person in daily reading of God’s Word and having their heart fed with its rich truths in an easily understandable format.

Those who have been in the church for a long time little realize just how much they have absorbed over the years. Our culture is quickly becoming Bible illiterate with much greater knowledge of Hollywood movies and music than of the biblical world and its thought patterns. Dynamic-equivalence translations help bridge the gap between our present culture and the cultures and customs of the ancient world. These translations preserve some of the more easily understood metaphoric language and patterns of the original languages, but give dynamic equivalents of the
harder ones.

Versions that fall in this category include the New International Version, the New English Translation, and the Good News Bible: Today's English Version.

**Paraphrase Translations**

This last type of translation goes further than the dynamic-equivalence model. Here the translator simplifies and interprets the original words to place them squarely within the reach of anyone in our modern culture. The translator is not tied to individual word or metaphor patterns and feels free to add words to make sense of the original meanings as he or she understands them.

An example of this type of translation is the New Living Translation of 2 Corinthians 5:1-3: "For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies."

It is quite clear that this translation is a paraphrase that contains both added information and a particular interpretation of the original words. In the Greek text of verse 1 the Apostle Paul makes a contrast between an earthly tent and an eternal heavenly house. The words “that is, when we die and leave this earthly body” in the New Living Translation have been added by the translation team to express what they think the text is trying to say.

This interpretive style shows up again in verse 3, in which the translator describes heavenly existence as “For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.” Translating the Greek more literally, we have this thought, “If indeed also having been unclothed, we shall not be found naked.” It is not difficult to see how the translators arrived at this paraphrase, but it illustrates that the translators were guided not solely by putting the words across in English, but also by a particular view of death and life in heaven. The concept of “naked” in verse 3, however, can just as easily, and it seems to me more correctly, be understood to represent the state of rest in the grave that we believe happens when people die.

The combination of a dynamic style of translation combined with the interpretive viewpoint of the translators is both the benefit and bane of paraphrases. These translations read very smoothly and have the appeal of speaking quite directly to people within the target culture. But they are also quite interpretive, and the reader may not realize where the Bible's message ends and the interpreters' viewpoint begins. For that reason, this type of translation is not recommended as a mainstay for serious Bible study. But returning to the idea at the beginning of this column, the best translation is the one a person will keep reading, whether it be a word-for-word translation, a dynamic one, or a paraphrase.

Bible versions that fall into the paraphrase category include The Living Bible, The New Living Translation, and The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language.

All this discussion of various translation types may seem unnecessary to some because of the conviction that the only translation that should be used by Christians is the King James Version or the New King James Version. That is such an important question that it will be the topic of the next President's Page. Until then, I hope you will keep reading your Bible every day. That is where the power is!

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