

Discussed: blood—aspersion, atonement, architecture, veils, dates, conditions, judgment, cross,
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The Sanctuary: The Essence of Adventism

By Norman H. Young

The Seventh-day Adventist Church often treats moral lapses more tolerantly than a sincere doubt expressed about our exposition of the 2,300-day teaching in Daniel 8:14. Why is this so? Undoubtedly because “the scripture which above all others had been the foundation and the central pillar of the advent faith was the declaration” of Daniel 8:14.¹ As Arnold Wallenkampf notes, “Christ’s present-day ministry in the heavenly sanctuary” is one of the only “jewel[s] of truth” not gathered from other churches.²

The sanctuary, then, is nominated as our only unique belief. To question this belief is seen as questioning the validity of our origins, and as doubting the genuineness of the experience of the Lord’s leading in our past. But what is the essence of this teaching? To address that question, I wish first to say what the essence of the sanctuary teaching is not.

What the Essence Is Not

The Atonement

The sanctuary teaching is related to the atonement, but it is not the atonement proper. That honored status belongs exclusively to the single event of Calvary’s cross in the

first century. No heavenly process that commenced in the nineteenth century must usurp Calvary’s supreme position within the Christian faith. Paul sets the agenda for all our preaching and teaching: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

In the previous chapter, Paul asserts that he had been sent to proclaim the gospel, and that he did so in simple diction “so, that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1: 17). Note that Paul here equates proclaiming the gospel with preaching the cross of Christ. No wonder he declared, “May I never boast of anything except



the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

All the redemptive words of the New Testament are attached to the death of Christ on the cross. Neither his sinless life nor even his resurrection, and certainly not his heavenly intercession, are ever related to the redemptive terms of the New Testament in the way the cross is.

Architecture

Nor does the essence of the heavenly sanctuary deal with celestial architecture. "No mortal mind can penetrate the secrecy in which the Mighty One dwells and works," writes Ellen White.³

There is little doubt that most of our pioneers thought of the heavenly sanctuary as consisting of two physical rooms, and that in 1844 Jesus literally moved from the outer room into the inner one. But such an understanding is surely not the essence of the sanctuary teaching. If a shift from one room to another by the exalted Christ is our unique "jewel of truth," to use Wallenkampf's term, then it is a rather cheap bauble

Old Testament Types

The essence of the heavenly sanctuary is not defined by Old Testament types, except as they are interpreted by the New Testament. Hebrews asserts that Christ sat down or entered the heavenly sanctuary "after he had made purification for sins" (1:3) and "after he had obtained eternal redemption" (9:12). Christ entered into the presence of God at his ascension not to complete the atonement, but having completed it.

The cross, and not some heavenly offering, fulfills the Old Testament blood-aspersion types. The New Testament, and not the Old Testament types, is definitive in interpreting the cross of Christ. This is why the Consensus Document states that "He [Jesus] is the reality symbolized by the Day of Atonement sacrifices, as by all the ancient services."⁶

Precise Dates

Finally, the essence of the heavenly sanctuary is not precise dates. The Consensus Document conceded that

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and gives us a very trite last-day message.

For this reason the Consensus Document that emerged from the Glacier View Conference of 1980 speaks only of a first phase of heavenly ministry in which "Jesus continually applies the benefits of His sacrifice for us," and of a final phase in which "judgment, vindication and cleansing" take place.⁴ There is no reference in the document of moving from one apartment to another.

Veils

The essence of the heavenly sanctuary is not about veils, either. Does the heavenly sanctuary have two veils, one veil, or no veils? Did Jesus go through the outer veil at his ascension and the inner one in 1844? That's what our pioneers taught. Or did Jesus penetrate beyond both veils at his ascension? Or does the issue deal more with theological meanings than physical numbers or positions?

According to the Consensus Document, "the symbolic language of the Most Holy Place, 'within the veil,' is used to assure us of our full direct, and free access to God ([Heb.] 6:19-20; 9:24-28; 10:1-4)."⁵ If this is true, then Hebrews should not be interpreted as providing the details of celestial architecture, but rather the means for clarifying the benefits that result from Christ's death.

although the idea of taking a day in prophecy for a year could be biblically supported, it was "not explicitly identified [in Scripture] as a principle of prophetic interpretation."⁷ And that's a major concession.

In practice few Adventists give any thought to the year 1844. Does any Adventist live his or her Christian life focused on a date? Indeed, I know of no creed or any other denomination (unless it is the Jehovah's Witnesses') in the whole of Christian history that makes a date the test of orthodoxy. The New Testament does not spend any time attempting to calculate the time sequences of Daniel; not the times, times and half a time of chapter 7; not the seventy sevens of chapter 9; not the 2,300 evenings and mornings of chapter 8, and not the 1,290 and 1,335 days of chapter 12.⁸

Calvary is not about a date. Gospel accounts of the crucifixion date the event of Christ's death while Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea (26-36 C.E.). That is as exact as the New Testament gets. Just as the importance of Calvary is not the date of its occurrence but its meaning, so the essence of the sanctuary teaching is not an exact date but its meaning.

Despite what many Adventists have often mistak-

enly thought, the essence of the sanctuary teaching is not a heavenly atonement, not apartments, not veils, not Old Testament types, and not dates. If that is the case, what, then, is the essence?

The Essence of the Sanctuary Teaching

Conditionality of Salvation

Our pioneers felt that if one accepted that the atonement was finished at the cross, then either the elect alone had their sins forgiven (Calvinism) or everyone did (Universalism). By restricting the atonement to the first and second apartments they thought they had found a middle ground: the first apartment was an atonement universally available and the second apartment was an atonement limitedly applied to those “who have confessed and forsaken their sins.”⁹ There is a valuable insight here, but it needs to be restated so as not to downgrade the cross-event.

According to the Bible, the atonement in some sublime way neutralized the disruptive power of sin and allowed humans to be reconciled to God. God reconciled the world unto himself through the death of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19), but each individual is now urged to be reconciled to God (v. 20). Through the death of his Son, God bore within himself the cost of his forgiveness, but that forgiveness is not simply a mechanical cover of our sins; it is an invitation to fellowship again with God.

The offer of forgiveness is universal, but the experience of the resultant fellowship is personal. Just as the purpose of sin is to destroy relationships, especially our relationship with God, so the objective of grace is to restore our fellowship with God and with each other. We cannot have the forgiveness and reject the forgiver. Forgiveness unites us again to God. It is impossible to have the divine forgiveness and refuse the offer of fellowship with God (“and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” [1 John 1:3]).

The Adventist sanctuary teaching reminds us that Christian assurance is not equivalent to carnal security. Like any relationship, our relationship with God is a pure gift, but also like any relationship, demands appropriate behavior. And this is not some optional extra; it is an absolute necessity. What we do within our fellowship with Christ is just as vital as our receiving the gift of that relationship in the first place.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in

him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7). “If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true” (1 John 1:6).

The sanctuary teaching, then, protects us from misconstruing the gospel as merely a mechanism for removing our guilt or sin without in any way challenging, changing, or conditioning our lives. Christian assurance unlike carnal security accepts the conditional sentences of the gospel message. Note the following:

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided [ean] you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Rom. 11:22)

[T]through which [gospel] also you are being saved, if [ei] you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. (1 Cor. 15:2)

[He] has now reconciled [you] in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him provided [eige] that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard. (Col. 1:22)

Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if [ei] we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. (Heb. 3:6)

For we have become partners of Christ, if only [eanper] we hold our first confidence firm to the end. (Heb 3:14)

Thus, the sanctuary teaching prevents us from misconstruing the cross as a device for guilt-free sinning. It reminds us that our cleansing is conditional on our faith in Christ remaining a living and continuing reality. This is well stated in the Consensus Document: “So this end-time judgment at the close of the 2300-day period reveals our relationship to Christ, disclosed



in the totality of our decisions. It indicates the out-working of grace in our lives as we have responded to His gift of salvation.”¹⁰

Pre-Advent Judgment of Believers

Some Christians, including some Adventists, captivated by John 5:24 (“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life”) deny that believers face the prospect of future judgment. It is felt that including Christians in any future judicial decision destroys their assurance of salvation. John, of course, is speaking of condemnation in the judgment, he is not denying the possibility of future judgment, as is clear from verses 27 to 29.

Some also suggest that Daniel and Revelation focus exclusively upon the persecuting power, with vindication being the only prospect for the believer. The desire to exclude the believer from judgment is understandable, but it is contrary to Scripture. Adventists have had the humility to include not only outsiders in the judgment of God but also themselves. There are too many texts about judgment of believers to avoid this truth (for example, Rom. 14: 10; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Heb. 10:30).

Furthermore, it is difficult to exclude the people of God from the judgment texts of Daniel and Revelation. These books were not written to Babylonians or Romans, but to believers. The episodes concerning testing in Daniel chapters 1 (the king’s food), 3 (the king’s image), and 6 (the king’s edict against prayer) were written to warn believers that faith in God could require putting one’s life on the line.

The language of Daniel 12:1–3—“everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered,” and “some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”—also indicates that God will separate the faithful and the unfaithful from among his people. Paul Petersen in a recent article also demonstrates that Daniel includes the people of God in the judgment.¹¹ The warning would seem to be that those who succumb to the little horn’s demands will receive the little horn’s reward.

Likewise, given the oscillation between acceptance and rejection in the counsel to the seven Christian churches in Revelation 2–3, it is hard to accept that the dire warning in 14:9–12 against worshipping the beast and his image is not relevant for the Church.

For Paul, the judgment is according to works, and

it includes the believer (Gal. 5:2 1; Rom. 2: 1–11; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Eph. 5:5). As we have seen, Daniel and Revelation also make it plain that God’s judgment includes the believer. “For Paul as for the authors of the synoptic Gospels judgment begins at the house of God.”¹² By asserting that believers are judged prior to the Second Advent, Adventists place the judgment of believers within the gospel age.

Consequently, this pre-Advent judgment occurs while the benefits of Jesus’ atonement are still available.¹³ Perhaps we need to bring our teaching concerning the judgment of Christians back to where it belongs, just before the Advent, which is where our pioneers had it. By clinging to the precise date of 1844, we sever the judgment of most believers from the Second Advent and turn it into a protracted process instead of a climatic event.

The important point is that Christians do come into judgment, and that there is mercy in the judgment—the atonement is still efficacious. But who receives mercy in the judgment? All those whose lives demonstrate the reality of their verbal claims; it is the merciful who receive mercy in the judgment (Matt. 53; James 2:13). We cannot claim the benefits of the cross and then refuse to live by its terms. That is like wanting to be a jockey so as to dress up in colorful attire, but refusing to ride a horse.

The sanctuary language that Adventists use means that the cross, though effected in time, affects all time. Its benefits are available to every repenting sinner (one might say the first-apartment ministry), and to every persevering believer (one might say the second-apartment ministry). To maintain that believers must take the judgment seriously is not anti-gospel, but a reminder that a root without fruit means the tree is dead. It is the direction or consistency of the Christian’s life that indicates the genuineness of the profession.

None are sinless in the judgment, but those in Christ are serious about the relevance of the gospel for their treatment of others. Nothing demands my love of God and my fellow humans so powerfully as the cross: “Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.”¹⁴

If the tenor of my life is away from the cross, then the cross condemns me. The forgiveness of a ten-thousand-talent debt requires a response more consistent with the king’s generosity than was manifested by the unforgiving servant (see Matt. 18:23–35). It is the servant’s niggardliness in stark contrast to the king’s generosity that condemns him. This is the practical value of the pre-

advent judgment. It reminds believers that the gift of the gospel must be revealed in the daily transactions of their own lives if it is to have any ultimate effect.

“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20). “If the church attempts to take the fruits of salvation without assuming the responsibilities that go with them then the judgment portends loss and possible ruin.”¹⁵

The New Testament does not shy away from the verb “to do” in the context of salvation (Luke 10:28, 37; Rom. 2:10, 14; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 2:6–8; 6:8), nor is it anywhere negative about good works (Matt. 5:16; Acts 9:36; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16, 23; 3:1, 8, 14). Our deeds, of course, are indicators of faith in Christ, but they have no independent validity. The question is still the Son question: Have we continued our life of practical faith in him? An affirmative answer is based on the fruit of our lives

Of course, without Christ’s intercession, no saint, let alone sinner, could silence the accuser of the brethren in the judgment. In the end “the measure we use will be the measure we get” (Luke 6:38), “because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). Thus, the gospel judges us; either denying us or confirming us depending on whether the direction of our deeds is consistent or inconsistent with the love and mercy of God manifested at the cross (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

The pre-Advent judgment of believers is demonstrated by a simple three-step proof:

1. There is a judgment of believers based on their deeds of grace.
2. God’s mercy is guaranteed to those who have shown mercy.
3. Therefore this judgment is pre-Advent when God’s mercy is still available.

The Consummation of the Cross

Adventists naturally look forward to the return of Christ. They look forward to the day when sin and death, which have been abolished in the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10), will be abolished universally. Our looking to the future does not make us indifferent to the present—quite the opposite. A people that truly prays for God’s righteousness to reign will be zealous for justice now.

A people that looks for a new heaven and a new earth will not rubbish the present one. A people longing for God’s coming peace will be peacemakers, for to look for one thing and then to do another is the worst sin in the New Testament—the sin of hypocrisy.

Adventists look forward to the day when God and his Christ will dwell among the redeemed, when God wipes away every tear. Tears are the product of sin, often caused by our human disdain, indifference, or hatred toward one another. Tears will cease when sin is no more. On the Day of Atonement, after Aaron had made atonement for the most holy place, the holy place, and the incense altar (Lev. 16:20), he came out and confessed all the sins of Israel over the head of a live goat. This goat then symbolically carried these sins to the wilderness demon, Azazel.

For us, this indicates that the ultimate responsibility for sin is sheeted home to an evil supernatural being. Whatever difficulties the problem of evil may have for theism, the biblical view is that the cause of sin resides with Satan, but its cure comes from God. Adventists are thus optimists, people of hope who see God presently at work in the world, bringing it to the day of grand restoration when he makes all things new. The sanctuary symbolizes and assures us of the fulfillment of that hope of a new world in which dwells righteousness and righteousness alone.

Conclusion

What is the way forward from here? The noted sociologist Rodney Stark concluded that “the basis for successful conversionist movements is growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments.” Most new religious movements soon fail, he believes, because they become closed networks. To sustain exponential growth over a long period of time, Stark argues, a movement needs to “discover techniques for remaining open networks, able to reach out and into new adjacent social networks.”¹⁶

If we are to preach the gospel of the cross in a context that interfaces the judgment with the Second Advent and remains relevant in the twenty-first century, perhaps we need to jettison some of the nineteenth-century elements that belonged to the birth pangs of the movement.



"My reason nourishes my faith and my faith my reason."
—Norman Cousins

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Such elements would include items such as the dark day, the falling stars, and the Lisbon earthquake. Perhaps even the pre-advent judgment itself needs to be attached more powerfully to contemporary time and released somewhat from its bonding with 1844.

Be that as it may, a growing movement must be one that knows where the essence of its message lies and therefore be open to and capable of change. If we fail to retain the reforming aspect of our origins, then Stark's observation about closed networks causing movements to fail may become true of us.

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