

Introduction

Health and Wholeness: Toward a Biblical Worldview

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I appreciate the thought that has gone into the selection of the theme for this forum. It is not only a relevant topic, but a necessary one as we seek a biblical foundation for all our teachings and practice. The early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church focused on developing doctrines through rigorous Bible study. This Biblical foundation for doctrines was a consistent pattern that shaped most of what we have today as the fundamental beliefs. The health message was however given in a series of visions to Ellen G. White. Her major health vision was given in 1863. Therefore, seeking a biblical foundation for health and wholeness should not exclude this important milestone in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Embarking on this journey goes beyond an academic pursuit, it needs to translate into the practical application of Biblical principles in the daily life of a Christian. There are questions that need a serious inquiry into Scripture by investigating the multiple genres of Scripture. The narratives, poetry, historical, prophetic, gospels, epistolary apocalypse, etc., all have to be explored to understand this topic comprehensively.

There are a number of “holistic” health approaches that emerge out of a number of world-religions, including African Traditional

Religions. These have sought to harness health to this idea of connectedness. The idea of wholeness is so broad in its scope that it is almost impossible to define without excluding anything important. This forum brings various models that will hopefully blend to create a mosaic that draws from Scripture as a source, to create a beautiful tapestry that will serve a world-wide church such as we are.

The idea of setting the foundation for health and wholeness in Scripture allows other disciplines to build on that foundation. There is Biblical theology, systematic theology, practical theology, missiology, etc., that need to interact with this theme from their perspective to enrich its applicability. There is an important field of health and medicine that engages this topic as well. This enriches the discussion even further.

We need to stimulate discussion in this multi-disciplinary context, hoping that this will create an environment where we present a harmonious health message that draws primarily from Scripture and from the writings of Ellen G. White, and from all these fields of expertise within our church. I am truly privileged to have been invited to be part of this discussion, as we listen to each other may the experience we have at this forum be of benefit to the diverse communities that form part of the Seventh-day Adventist church world-wide.

I. Wholeness in Scripture

The idea of wholeness is founded in Scripture. There is evidence to this in a number of passages. I will give a sampling of a few passages.

Genesis 2:7

The way human beings are created, offers a strong argument for wholeness. This section of the narrative is characterized by a series of five phrases structured around the *wayyiqtol yhwh Elohim* format (vv. 7, 8, 9, 15, 16). It may be noted that “V. 7b is a conclusion, a synthesis, of the two clauses of v. 7a” (Walsh, 1977, pp. 161-177).

Ellen G. White states: “The Lord created man out of the dust of the earth. He made Adam a partaker of His life, His nature. There was breathed into him the breath of the Almighty, and he became a living soul. Adam was perfect in form – strong, comely, pure, bearing the image of his Maker (MS 102, 1903).

She further asserts: “Man came from the hand of his Creator perfect in organization and beautiful in form” (CTBH 7).

Mittinger sees a pattern in Genesis 2:7: “Having been formed from the dust and having received the breath of life into his nostrils, the man ‘became a living being’ (2:7).” (Mittinger, 2007, p. 14).

Doukhan connects Genesis 2:7 thematically with several Old Testament passages: “The Hebrew verb *wayyitser* ‘He formed’ suggests the image of a potter (Jer 18:2; Ps 139:13-15; cf. Job 10:8). While this verb describes God’s artistic activity (Isa 44:9-10), it also emphasizes the dependence of human beings on their Creator (Isa 29:16)” (Doukhan, 2016, p. 74).

“The human creature is thus the result not of two materials, dust and breath- but of two divine actions. Yet nothing in this description could support the idea of a soul distinct from the body” (Doukhan, 2016, p. 74).

The word “*nepesh* ‘being’ which is sometimes translated as ‘soul’ (JPS, KJV), simply means ‘living being’ . . . The etymology of the word *nepesh* also conveys the basic meaning of ‘breathing’ as the related words *nashap*, *nashab*, and *nasham*.(remove period) testify. There may even be a play on words between *neshamah* and *nepesh*, suggesting the common meaning of ‘breathing’ is intended. So that is to say ‘man became a living being’ would mean that he became a living, breathing, being” (Doukhan, 2016, p. 74).

“Just as v. 18 was intended to show the reversal of the state of the “land” before and after the Fall, so v. 19 was intended to show the same for the condition of man himself. Before the fall man was taken from the ground and given the ‘breath of life’ (2:7). As a result of the fall, however, man must return to the ground and the dust from which he was taken (3:19). The author’s point in showing such a reversal was to stress that the verdict of death, warned of before the fall (2:17), had come about. As a constant reminder of the effect of the Fall, the author draws a connection between the man’s name, ‘Adam’ (*adam*, v. 20), and the ‘ground’ (*adamah*) from which he was taken. Adam, curiously enough, named his wife Eve ‘because she would become the mother of all the living.’ This was the second time Adam named his wife (cf. 2:23). Her first name pointed to her origin (‘out of man’), whereas her second name pointed to her destiny (‘the mother of all the living’)” (Sailhamer et al., 1990, p. 57).

II. Health as an Important Aspect of God’s Comprehensive Law

The laws of God under covenantal terms that bound Him to Israel, included health laws. God urged His people to observe these laws,

“and said, ‘if you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought to the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you’” Ex 15:26 (See also Deut 6:6-9).

The laws of health as they were given to Israel in the wilderness provide a balanced view that covers a number of areas:

1. Diet is given attention in these health laws (Ex 22:31; 23:19; Lev 3:17; 7:23-27; Deut 12:23-25; Lev 11; 20:25). There are specific prohibitions that were given to guide Israel to be a healthy nation. Diet plays a vital role in health.
2. Disease management was another area that was legislated in the wilderness. Such diseases as leprosy (Lev 13, 14; Deut 24:8) were regulated by health laws to avoid the spreading of this infectious disease.
3. Hygiene and ritual cleanness (Lev 12:2; 15:16-18; 15:19-30) are also covered in the set of health laws.

III. An Adventist Theology of Health: Growing Wholistically

The emphasis on comprehensive health is not new in the health forums. This is a long-standing focus within Seventh-day Adventist circles. The idea of the harmony between the physical, mental and spiritual has its foundation in Scripture. One of the clearest examples is Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” The dimensions mentioned here are wisdom = mental; stature = physical; favor with God = spiritual and favor with men = social. Often the social aspect is left out, yet it is so important particularly for communal societies especially in Africa.

Wilbur Nelson and Leo Van Dolson put together an unpublished and undated document entitled: “Health Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This document can be found in the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University and at the General Conference Library. They observed in their historical section that, “through a combination of error from Greek philosophy, and an abhorrence of sensual Roman life, plus the confused interpretation of Scripture based on the influence of Gnosticism, there came into the church a divided view of man which placed low value upon the physical” (Nelson & Van Dolson, n.d., p. 80). These dichotomous influences are still prevalent in many Christian circles today. To buttress this point further, Nelson and Van Dolson, appeal to the Apostle Paul’s preaching “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present

your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” Rom 12:1. This view of the body was a radical paradigm shift for Paul’s audience. Further in addressing the Corinthians Paul states: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” 1 Cor 6:19, 20. This called for a radical change of worldview for the Corinthians. This brings us to the next section which addresses worldviews.

IV. Clash of Worldviews

The context of Daniel 1 deals with a clash between the gods of Babylon and the God of Israel. The worldview of the Babylonians informed their rituals around diet and the diet itself, on the other hand the Israelite worldview also informed their dietary rituals and the food itself. The choice of food requested by Daniel and his companions was not arbitrary.

The application of Daniel 1 may be found in Ellen White’s book *Sanctified Life* pp. 18-24. She states:

The life of Daniel is an inspired illustration of what constitutes a sanctified character. It presents a lesson for all, and especially for the young. A strict compliance with the requirements of God is beneficial to the health of body and mind. In order to reach the highest standard of moral and intellectual attainments, it is necessary to seek wisdom and strength from God and to observe strict temperance in all the habits of life. In the experience of Daniel and his companions we have an instance of the triumph of principle over temptation to indulge the appetite. It shows us that through religious principle young men may triumph over the lusts of the flesh and remain true to God's requirements, even though it cost them a great sacrifice. (SL 23.1)

The story of Daniel as presented chapter 1, weighs heavily both on the worldview and on the health application. The principles drawn from this narrative are helpful to African communities in which the foods that are served at a funeral, wedding, and many other communal gatherings have been dedicated to ancestral spirits. The diet itself is many times not necessarily the ideal diet. The principles of temperance when one is aware of the background story behind the communal meal

become an important consideration.

There are a number of studies on health and wholeness that stem from scientific, religious and philosophical foundations (Sorajjakool & Lamberton, 2009). A biblical foundation on this subject is important for the Seventh-day Adventists who discuss this topic in a multi-religious context. "Religion and healing have been integrally linked throughout most of recorded history. The role of the healer, priest, shaman or other religious practitioners were one and the same." (Sorajjakool & Lamberton, 2009, p. 1).

Many other examples could be given of the multidimensionality of religion and spirituality and the perspectives from which their effect on behavior and health can be studied (see Hood et al., 1996; Koenig, McCullough, and Larson, 2001; Pargament et al., 1995). An understanding of this research is beneficial for health care professionals in a number of ways. First, research that documents the potential health benefits (both mental and physical) of religion and spirituality provides a rationale for offering spiritual care to patients who want it. Second, an awareness of the variety and complexity of religious experience helps the caregiver avoid premature or simplistic judgments about a patient's faith. Third, research that develops and tests models to explain how spiritual beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors interact and influence health can increase the practitioner's skill of observation in a clinical setting. Furthermore, knowledge of such research can help overcome the natural tendency to limit one's view of spiritual phenomena to what can be seen from the viewpoint of his or her own experience- whether that experience has been positive or negative. (Sorajjakool & Lamberton, 2009, p. 4).

In this volume "Rice also outlines a theological/philosophical basis for spiritual care by providing a wholistic view of persons. The various dimensions we describe to personhood (physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, etc.) are differentiations of convenience, but we must never forget that persons are indivisible and that each dimension affects others. Care for the whole person requires attention to all of the dimensions that make us human, including the spiritual dimension" (Sorajjakool & Lamberton, 2009, p. 7).

"Throughout history, human experience has led people to understand that the mind and body affect each other. But it is only recently that the biological mechanisms of the mind-body connection have begun to be understood" (Sorajjakool & Lamberton, 2009, p. 7).

V. Conclusion

As we surveyed selected biblical pointers to the concept of wholeness and health in the Scriptures, we discovered that the worldview plays a leading role in the formation of values that are based on biblical principles. We have examined specific passages within their context and found that there are theological themes that flow from the study of the text. This brief introduction challenges the Seventh-day Adventist church in Africa to examine both the indigenous and imported rituals that tend to hinge on the worldview, using the Bible as a standard from which to draw applicable principles. The few examples address only a few among many issues that the Seventh-day Adventist church world-wide is wrestling with. Each chapter in this book addresses issues of relevance to Africa both within the continent and in the diaspora. It is hoped that the same principles may be applied by any Seventh-day Adventist in spite of their continent of origin.

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