

CHANGE OF PARADIGM IN THEOLOGY AND THE NEW ANTHROPOLOGY

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The Hellenization of Christianity has impacted the theological understanding of God and man. Early in the Twentieth Century, evangelical theology began to abandon the Greek presuppositions that had been the framework of theology for centuries. What impact has this process generated? This article presents a historical outline of the dehellenization in Protestant theology, describing how this process started challenging the timelessness of God of the classical theology, and how it impacted the understanding of human nature. In addition, this study will attempt to demonstrate that this paradigm shift offers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church a great opportunity to present its doctrinal system.

Key words: timelessness of God, biblical ontology, doctrine of man, Platonic dualism, constitutionalism, emergent dualism

1. Introduction

Ever since theological historian Adolf von Harnack launched the accusation that almost everything that is considered Christian Orthodoxy ("the Catholic element") is in fact the result of the "acute hellenization of Christianity,"¹ classic theology's very foundation was shaken. A well-known phrase that followed in this regard was Jürgen Moltmann's, "the Fathers baptized Aristotle."²

Since then, Protestants, and above all Evangelicals began a process of "dehellenizing" theology. What were the consequences for theology of this process of dehellenization? Did this change, which began in the early

¹ Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (trans. Buchanan; 7 vols.; vol. 1; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1902), 48-60.

² See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1982), 20-22.

twentieth century, develop further or did it end with merely good intentions? How is it related to Adventist theology?

This study will trace the historical outline of the process of dehellenization in Protestant and Evangelical theology in order to show how it affected the understanding of the idea of God, and its impact on the understanding of human nature. In addition, this article will attempt to demonstrate that this change in paradigm places the Seventh-day Adventist Church in an ideal position to present its doctrinal system.

2. The Dehellenization of God

Beginning with the understanding that theology had been built on the philosophical presuppositions of ancient Greek Hellenism, one of the first elements to be reformulated was the fundamental presupposition of the being of God. If the atemporality of God had formerly been the starting point of classic theology, it would now be radically reinterpreted by a new philosophical paradigm.

As philosophers became more familiar with the underlying temporal nature of reality, they acknowledged that temporal things could be conjectured as being real. Thus, history ceased to be an illusory copy of eternal atemporal realities, such as the one conceived by Platonic Greek philosophy and classic theism—Plato, for example. In his masterpiece, *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), Heidegger rejected the atemporality as set forth by Aristotle, Parmenides and Thomas Aquinas, and arrived at the following concept: “Our provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being.”³ *Dasein* (Being-in-the-world) is interpreted in terms of temporality.⁴ He conceived that the being is “grounded in temporality” and that “temporality is primordially finite”; that is, “authentic temporality.”⁵

Following this same line of reasoning, God was not seen as a Being in which there is an absence of time, but rather as a God that includes time in His Being. In this way, Oscar Cullmann rejected the presupposition of the atemporality of the being of God because it belonged to ancient Greek

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. John Macquarrie, Edward Robinson; San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1962), 1.

⁴ Heidegger also explains time as the transcendental horizon of the question of being. For definition of *Dasein* see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 376, 379, 437. Regarding the importance of this proposition that Heidegger makes, see Gianni Vattimo, *Después de la cristiandad* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2004); John B. Cobb, *Living Options in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962), 199-311.

philosophy. He considered that the key lies in starting with the presuppositions of the biblical text and not with a previous understanding of what time or the being of God should be.⁶

According to Cullmann, the Hebrew mind clearly conceives that God lives in a time without limits and not in an abstract way, as if He was beyond time. In his exegetical analysis of the use of *aiôn* in the New Testament, he concludes that although Plato uses the word *aiôn* in the technical philosophical sense of atemporality,⁷ the biblical concept of eternity is not necessarily an atemporal reality,⁸ but rather an unlimited experience of time. Thus, in the early church's thinking, eternity is not atemporality, but rather time without end—linear time shared by both God and human beings.⁹

This led to a revolution in theology, with a subsequent redefinition of the God of the Bible. Charles Hartshorne, for example, adapted the philosophy of process¹⁰ to theology. His ideas, far from being filed away, still have a strong impact within today's theology.¹¹

However, although Process theology made an important step, it still depended on philosophical presuppositions foreign to the Bible, which finally led it to think of God in bipolar terms. One pole or aspect of God is seen as temporal and related to the world, and the other pole as atemporal and invariable.¹²

⁶ According to Cullmann, the textual exegesis must operate within certain limits that exclude dogmatic considerations. To approach a text from a perspective that has been generated by an understanding that remains outside the text (Barth, Bultmann) is to go beyond its limits (Martin Theodore Dorman, *The Hermeneutics of Oscar Cullmann* [Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilm International, 1990], 174). Several scholars have opposed Cullmann's attempt to modify hermeneutics and make it start directly from the biblical text's presuppositions. See, for instance, Jean Frisque, *Oscar Cullmann: Une Théologie de l'histoire du salut* (Belgica: Casterman, 1960), 213-225. However, Cullmann's concern over a theology purely based on exegesis that attempts to reproduce what the Biblical writers believed has been approved by many; for instance, K. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IDB* 1:418-432.

⁷ James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM, 1969), 76.

⁸ Ver Carl F. Henry, "Time," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 524.

⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, (trans. Floyd V. Filson; 3 ed.; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 49.

¹⁰ Other early promoters of this philosophy were Ivor Leclerc y John B. Cobb. See Denis Hurtubise, "God and Time in Whitehead's Metaphysics: Revisiting the Question," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2003): 110.

¹¹ Charles Hartshorne, "Redefining God," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2001): 107-113.

¹² Actually, Hartshorne suggests a bipolar God, in which one aspect of the Being of God is totally involved with the world, and the other is totally independent from it.

According to Norman Gulley, the one who was really able to solve this bi-polar issue into a synthesis was Fernando Canale. Canale suggested, "that biblical ontology calls for an understanding of time as a primordial presupposition."¹³ Thus, Canale stated that, based on the temporal presupposition of the being of God, "a new theological system will arise, which, for the first time, will be free from extra-theological conditioning."¹⁴

John Feinberg, in his analysis of the current trends in this area, stated: "I believe, however, that anyone working within theology proper must engage in discussions about God's relation to time and eternity as we move toward the next millennium. I believe this is and will be a watershed issue for evangelical theism in the upcoming years."¹⁵

3. Doctrine of Man: The Next Step

The doctrine of man was next to be challenged and reformulated. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas had taught that human beings were rational animals. In contrast to the Greek philosopher, Thomas Aquinas thought that the soul is separated from the body at death. He considered that the soul was a non-bodily lasting entity that could exist without the body during the time between the death of a person and the general resurrection.¹⁶

In this way, God suffers through His contingent nature, but remains untouchable by the world through His transcendent nature. Thus, Hartshorne is assured that God "follows the rules" of the universe and is not exempt from suffering, while at the same time He remains outside the world as the Supreme Mind that sustains everything. See Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 124; Edgar A. Towne, "The New Physics and Hartshorne's Dipolar Theism," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2001): 114-132; Ver Denis Hurtubise, "God and Time in Whitehead's Metaphysics: Revisiting the Question," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2003): 109-128.

¹³ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (3 vols.; vol. 1; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 10.

¹⁴ Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 399.

¹⁵ John Feinberg, "Doctrine of God," in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought* (ed. David S. Dockery; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 247.

¹⁶ ST, I, Preg. 89, art. 1. See Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Resurrection of the Body According to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham," *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 1 (1992):1-33; Straining the Limits of

One of the pioneers who attempted a reformulation of the Greek philosophical influence was Oscar Cullmann. In an essay that was originally presented in 1955 as part of a series of lectures, entitled "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament," Oscar Cullmann stated that the concept of the immortality of the soul is one of the "greatest misunderstandings of Christianity."¹⁷ He also expressed that the resurrection of the dead was anchored in the teachings of Christ, and is "incompatible with the Greek belief in immortality."¹⁸ In this sense, early Christians did not consider that the soul was intrinsically immortal, but rather that it was immortal only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and by faith in Him. In reference to this, Cullmann also denied the duality between body and soul, belonging to Greek Platonism.

According to Cullmann, at the resurrection the whole man, who had already truly died, "is recalled to life by a new act of creation by God."¹⁹ Thus, the Christian belief in the resurrection, in contrast to the Greek belief in immortality, is linked to a complete divine process that implies liberation from sin and death.²⁰

From an Old Testament perspective, Hans Walter Wolff also came to the conclusion that there is no anthropological dualism in the Scriptures. He stated that an erroneous translation of the anthropological terminology of the Bible had "led in the false direction of a dichotomic or trichotomic anthropology, in which body, soul and spirit are in opposition to one another."²¹ According to Wolf, "the question still has to be investigated of how, with the Greek language, a Greek philosophy has here supplanted Semitic biblical views, overwhelming them with foreign influence."²²

This denial of Platonic dualism in favor of an integrated vision of man has been further developed. Currently, there are many voices from different theological lines of thought that are proclaiming a similar message. Peter van Inwagen states that the Platonic and Cartesian vision of the survival of the soul after death is "unsatisfactory, both as a

Philosophy: Aquinas on the Inmortality of the Human Soul," *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2003): 208-217.

¹⁷ Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament," in *Immortality and Resurrection* (ed. Krister Stendahl; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ Ibid., 29

²¹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974), 7.

²² Ibid.

Christian and as a philosopher."²³ In this same line of thought, Baker argues that "a nondualistic conception of human persons best accords with the picture of human persons presented throughout the Jewish and Christian Bibles," and that the doctrine of the resurrection also requires a monistic vision of the human being.²⁴

Based on Luke 24:36-49, Marilyn McCord Adams states that the ideal state is not that of the disincarnate soul independent from the body, but the final objective is the resurrection of the body.²⁵ From a psychological perspective, David Myers advocates for a wholistic vision of the person. He states that the biblical vision of knowledge is based on its vision of the person as an integral entity, not as a dichotomy of mind and body.²⁶ And from a philosophy of religion perspective, based on logic as a discipline, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann have also attempted to argue against the dualistic Cartesian view of man.²⁷

However, even though there are various theologians that deny the dualistic vision of man, they remain doubtful regarding the state between death and the resurrection. Most of them seem to lean toward an existence "with Christ" in that intermediate state. Thus, for instance, Berkouwer thinks that there is no anthropological "division" in man,²⁸ but maintains that man exists in an intermediate state with Christ after death.²⁹ Likewise, Helmut Thielicke states that there is "no division of the I into body and soul," but he also leans toward an intermediate state.³⁰ In this same sense, several scholars deny the immaterial existence of the person—the disincarnate "soul"—and favor the bodily resurrection—glorified and

²³ Peter van Inwagen, "Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995): 475.

²⁴ Lynne Rudder Baker, "Need a Christian Be a Mind/Body Dualist?," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995): 501.

²⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Resurrection of the Body: Luke 24:36-49," *The Expository Times* 117, no. 6 (2006): 252.

²⁶ David Myers, *The Human Puzzle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 125.

²⁷ Eleonore Stump y Norman Kretzmann, "An Objection to Swinburne's Argument for Dualism," *Faith and Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1996): 405-412. See the reply: Richard Swinburne, "Reply to Stump and Kretzman," *Faith and Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1996): 413-414.

²⁸ G. C. Berkower, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 265.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Helmut Thielicke, *Living with Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 173. For more examples, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 173-195.

incorruptible bodies—although they are open to the idea of an intermediate state, although this state is neither definitive nor ideal.³¹

The constitutional view states that human beings are *constituted* by a body but they are not *identical* to the body that *constitutes* them, in the same way that a statue is constituted by bronze, but is not identical to the bronze that constitutes it.³² This means that the person is constituted by a body, in such a way that, if the body were to cease to exist, the person would do so as well.³³ What the constitutional view attempts to avoid is a merely materialistic view of man, which claims that human beings are wholly made up of common physical matter and that everything in them may be explained in materialistic terms.³⁴

Thus, Corcoran states that this position is more in agreement with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. This author significantly points out that none of the ecumenical creeds confesses the belief in the immortality of the soul, but rather that this Christian doctrine has been understood as the doctrine of the bodily resurrection.³⁵

Similar to this view of man is what is known as “emergent dualism.”³⁶ This position accepts that human beings, as well as other organisms, initially consist of nothing more than common physical matter, organized in surprisingly complex structures. But in addition to this, the idea of emergence is added. The main idea of emergence is that, when elements of a certain type are organized in the right way, something new comes into existence, something that did not exist before.

³¹ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Material Persons and the Doctrine of Resurrection,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2001): 151-167. Baker actually discusses the idea of whether there can be continuity and identity between a person with an earthly body and the re-created one after resurrection, but that is a discussion that does not pertain to this article. To study this subject in depth, see Kevin J. Corcoran, “Persons and Bodies,” *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (1998): 324-340.

³² Kevin J. Corcoran is one of the greatest proponents of this position. See his recent work *Rethinking Human Nature: a Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 65.

³³ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁴ See Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy y H. Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Joel B. Green, ed., *What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004). To clarify, these theologians are not naturalists: there is an existence beyond the material; God, for instance. They only apply their argument to the nature of man.

³⁵ Corcoran, 18.

³⁶ Here the Word “dualism” must not be understood in a Platonic or Cartesian way, but rather as opposed to merely material monism, which presents human beings as only animals.

This new thing is not only a restructuring of what was there before, but rather something which emerges from the being through the work of the elements that constitute it. In the case of the human being, what emerges must include mental properties such as the conscience, sensations, emotions and thought, as well as the ability to reason, the moral conscience and a relationship with God. In this sense, it is not new properties that emerge, but rather a new individual.

William Hasker, one of the proponents of this position, draws a parallel with an electromagnet. In essence, it is only a coil of wire. But when an electric current goes through the wire, something new appears: a magnetic field. This field exerts causal powers that were not there before it was created, enabling it to activate a motor or lift something. Hasker states that: "As a magnet generates its magnetic field, so an organism generates its field of consciousness."³⁷

Regarding resurrection, Hasker states that emergent dualism does not deny this Christian doctrine. Continuing with the same illustration, he asks: If the magnet (human body) is destroyed and the magnetic field (conscience/mind) disappears, does that mean that the emergent (conscience/mind) ceases to exist after the destruction of the body? The answer is "Yes," but Hasker adds that God has the ability to "retain" that emergent and clothe it with a new glorified body at the resurrection.

However, since he does not want to be confused with platonic dualism, Hasker clarifies: "So, for emergent dualism, eternal life is entirely possible, but it will come about through an amazing and miraculous act of God, not as a natural attribute of our 'immortal souls' ."³⁸ And the list could go on.³⁹ Everything seems to indicate that the Greek dualistic view will continue to be challenged from multiple perspectives. The question is, where does this trend lead?

³⁷ Hilliam Hasker, "Philosophical Contributions to Theological Anthropology," in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology* (ed. James K. Beilby; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 257. Another proponent of this position is Timothy O'Connor, "Causality, Mind, and Free Will," in *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* (ed. Kevin Corcoran; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 50.

³⁸ Hasker, 258.

³⁹ Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

4. A Matter of Presuppositions

To answer this question, we must once again return to Feinberg's analysis regarding the state of contemporary theology. This author mentions several challenges that must be faced:

Those who hold the traditional view that God is atemporally eternal must not only meet the challenge of the many biblical, theological and philosophical arguments against that view but also answer process theism's complaint that the atemporal, totally immutable, absolutely sovereign and thoroughly remote God of traditional theism is utterly irrelevant to the religious needs of men and women today. On the other hand, those who believe that God is temporal are bucking tradition and a long line of arguments supporting that tradition. They must also show, since a temporal and mutable God is one of the hallmarks of process theology, how they can hold to a temporal God without capitulating to process theism.⁴⁰

Since the new view of man, which rejects the dualistic Greek view and approaches a new monistic Biblical view, is based on a temporal presupposition of the being of God, it must provide an answer to the challenge of demonstrating that it is possible to "hold to a temporal God without capitulating to process theism."

Although the so-called open theism has fiercely criticized classic theology's dependence on Greek philosophy, Canale has shown that it does then build upon a more biblical paradigm from which to draw its fundamental presuppositions. He affirms that process philosophy "has developed a bipolar ontology according to which God is simultaneously timeless and temporal. In the absence of an ontology built from biblical thought, process ontology appears as a logical candidate to ground the open view of God."⁴¹ Furthermore, he states that open theism theologians implicitly assume a dipolar ontology, typical of process philosophy.⁴²

In this same sense, Horton states, "Pinnock gives the impression in this book and elsewhere that the detection of unintended philosophical influence from the quarter of ancient philosophy disqualifies a theological model, while his own explicit dependence on modern philosophical trends is greeted practically as *praeparatio evangelica*."⁴³

⁴⁰ Feinberg, "Doctrine of God," 247.

⁴¹ Fernando Canale, "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology?," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 12, no. 2 (2002): 28.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Michael S. Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 319.

Pinnock himself has justified Hegel, Teilhard and Whitehead's choice of philosophy because "modern culture [...] is closer to the biblical view than classical theism."⁴⁴ He also states that, "as an open theist, I am interested in authors such as Hegel, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Whitehead because they make room in their thinking for ideas like change, incarnation and divine suffering."⁴⁵

Many theologians favorably view the adoption of philosophical "metaphysics" to interpret the Scriptures, since according to them, the Scriptures do not display one in particular,⁴⁶ Canale states that the Bible itself presents a certain metaphysical framework (fundamental presuppositions) that must be elaborated.⁴⁷

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its very beginning,⁴⁸ has held to a monistic view of man.⁴⁹ This position came about as a consequence of having moved itself from traditional theological conditionings in order to read the Bible based on its own presuppositions. Currently, the Seventh-day Adventist Church states:

Opposed to dualism is biblical monism, the position according to which all expressions of the inner life depend on the whole of human nature, including the organic system. The components of a human being function as a unit. There is no separable soul or spirit capable of conscious existence apart from the body. Thus the words "soul" or "spirit" describe intellectual, affective, or volitive manifestations of the personality.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (ed. Clark Pinnock; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 24.

⁴⁵ Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 142.

⁴⁶ Janet Martin Soskice, "Athens and Jerusalem, Alexandria and Edessa: Is there a Metaphysics of Scripture?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 2 (2006):149-152.

⁴⁷ Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, 400-409.

⁴⁸ Even one of the early "adventists," Argentinian Francisco Ramos Mexia, Sabbath keeper and believer in the Second Coming of Christ, around the year 1816 wrote a sharp comment regarding Hebrews 2:34 on the margin of his personal copy of *Venida del Mesías en gloria y majestad*, by Manuel Lacunza (III, 293): "Man, together with his soul or what you may call it, will dissolve: 'To dust thou shall return.' But he will later raise from it, Gentlemen!"

⁴⁹ Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:646-740.

⁵⁰ Aecio Cairus, "The Doctrine of Man," en *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 212.

The current theological outlook makes room for Adventist theology to play a role. Although Protestantism in its orthodox form has been built over Greek ontological presuppositions, some scholars disagree with Platonic dualism. In Kuhn's words, these are anomalies that eventually would require a paradigm shift. This paradigm shift occurred in Adventist theology. Adventist theology is able to demonstrate that it is possible to "hold to a temporal God without capitulating to process theism." As Adventist theologians, it is time to enter into the Christian theological arena and to show that Adventism has a Biblical, sound theology.