

## THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST IN LUTHER AND ADVENTISM

ALBERTO R. TIMM  
Ellen G. White Estate, USA

God's salvation plan was foreshadowed in the OT and realized in the NT (Heb 8:1–5). The plan gravitates around Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and his priestly ministry in heaven. The centrality of the cross was stressed by Jesus in his statement: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32–33, NRSV). Paul affirmed that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor 5:19, NKJV).

After his sacrifice on the cross, Christ became the high priest of the heavenly sanctuary, where he intercedes "in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24, NRSV). Hebrews 4:14–16 assures us that we have a High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses and invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace.

Martin Luther's emphasis on Christ's atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins has been known as the "theology of the cross" (*theologia crucis*). Seventh-day Adventists have focused on Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. These two approaches raise some questions: Did Luther's emphasis on the cross undermine Christ's heavenly priesthood? Does the Adventists' stress on priesthood overshadow the meaning of the cross? Are these approaches mutually exclusive, or can they be harmonized?

## 1. Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther (1483–1546) challenged the medieval Roman Catholic philosophical theology. This process involved a substantial rupture with Aristotelian theological reasoning<sup>2</sup> and a hermeneutical pilgrimage from the medieval allegorical method to the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Already in September 1517, Luther recognized that “virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace” and that “the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light.”<sup>4</sup> But this does not mean that he eliminated all philosophical-dichotomist traces from his thinking.

Luther viewed the cross as a historical event with deep spiritual meaning. Yet, his notion of “heavenly realms” continued to be portrayed largely in dichotomist terms with strong emphasis upon a theocentric heaven with almost nothing else added to it.<sup>5</sup> Even so, Luther made a significant contribution to a better understanding of Christ’s sacrifice and heavenly priesthood.

### 1.1. Old Testament Types

Luther saw Christ as a true high priest to whom the Mosaic tabernacle, Levitical priesthood, and priesthood of Melchizedek all converged and in

<sup>1</sup> The section is largely based on my chapter “The Priesthood of Christ According to Martin Luther,” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Daniel Heinz, Jiri Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 171–187.

<sup>2</sup> For further study of Luther’s early dependence on Aristotelianism and his later breaking away from it, see e.g. Theodor Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001); Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomir Batka, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91–114.

<sup>3</sup> In 1520, Luther argued that Scriptures “are to be retained in their simplest meaning ever possible, and to be understood in their grammatical and literal sense unless the context plainly forbids.” (*LW* 36:30). See also *LW* 1:232–233.

<sup>4</sup> *LW* 31:12 (thesis 41 and 50 of Luther’s “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology”). In a letter of February 8, 1517, Luther wrote to Johannes Lang: “If Aristotle had not lived in the flesh I should not hesitate to call him a devil.” Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Miriam van Scott, “Theocentric Heaven,” in *Encyclopedia of Heaven* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999).

whom all were fulfilled. As “shadows or pictures of the Christ who was to come, and of His sacrifice,”<sup>6</sup> they were considered by Luther of great significance for the understanding of Christ’s priesthood.

In his reflections upon Heb 9:1–5 (1517), Luther interpreted the Mosaic tabernacle and its furniture from a Christ-centered perspective.<sup>7</sup> Although the Mosaic tabernacle itself was typologically related to the priesthood of Christ, it was in the service of the tabernacle that Christ’s priesthood became more foreshadowed. Luther explained that the reason the Levitical priests were called priests was “to show by means of such dramatic symbols and shadows that the true Priest, the promised Christ, would come, reconcile all men by His sacrifice, and preach and publish this fact in all the world through the Gospel.”<sup>8</sup> That priesthood, with Aaron as its high priest, was instituted by God (Exod 28:1), having the “books of Moses” as its laws and “irrational animals and physical things” as its sacrifices.<sup>9</sup> After distinguishing between the moral law and the ceremonial law, Luther recognized that everything contained in the latter was “promised and pre-figured with reference to Christ and in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

Foundational for the Levitical priesthood was the concept of transference of sin. Luther argued that the expressions “the iniquity of the sanctuary” and “the iniquity of your priesthood” (Num 18:1, KJV) were used “not because the sanctuary or the priesthood have committed them, but because it is the nature and the duty of the priesthood to be the bearer and the carrier of sins.”<sup>11</sup> By carrying the sins of the people, the Levitical priests typified Christ as the one who would vicariously bear “our griefs” and carry “our sorrows” (Isa 53:4, KJV).

Luther noted that the typological relationship between the Levitical priesthood and Christ’s priesthood was inadequate for two reasons. First, God chose the tribe of Levi, particularly the house of Aaron, for the priesthood (Num 8:5–26). “Since Christ was to be born of the tribe of Judah, He could not logically be a priest.” Second, “God clearly wanted the two offices, king and priest, separately maintained. This is something

<sup>6</sup> LW 13:317.

<sup>7</sup> See LW 29:200–203.

<sup>8</sup> LW 13:317.

<sup>9</sup> LW 36:200, 219.

<sup>10</sup> LW 29:212–13. Luther refers to the “Ceremonial Law” also in LW 4:81; 12:85, 398, 401, 402; 26:121–123, 130, 138, 156, 157, 180, 181, 202, 203, 330, 333, 446, 447; 32:178; 46:146; 47:88 (n. 25).

<sup>11</sup> LW 29:168.

which secular insight has also discerned as necessary."<sup>12</sup> Christ would unite in himself both priestly and kingly offices (Zech 6:13) in a new "spiritual" and "not temporal" dimension.<sup>13</sup>

Melchizedek, therefore, a king and priest of the time of Abraham (Gen 14:17-20, cf. Ps 110:4, Heb 6:19-7:28), was a more appropriate type of our Priest Christ than Aaron.<sup>14</sup> In the expression "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4), Luther saw an element that transcends the human level of existence, pointing towards the eternity of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2. The Nature of Christ

Johannes Zachhuber argues, "Luther's theology is strongly Christocentric, but Christology is rarely the central focus of his writings."<sup>16</sup> This means that his Christology must be reconstructed from various "strands in his thought."<sup>17</sup> Some of his most significant insights about Christ as a high priest are found in his remarks on Ps 110:4 (1535), where Christ is portrayed as the everlasting king and priest according to the order of Melchizedek. For the reformer, "this is an extraordinary statement. It is marvelous."<sup>18</sup>

While dealing with the divine and human natures of Christ, Luther was able to distinguish "between the *duality* of natures and the *singularity* of the person."<sup>19</sup> In his book *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he argued that "in order for the divine nature to dwell in him bodily, it is not necessary for the human nature to be transubstantiated and the divine nature contained under the accidents of the human nature. Both natures are simply there in their entirety."<sup>20</sup> In the book *The Freedom of a Christian*,

<sup>12</sup> LW 13:305.

<sup>13</sup> LW 13:306.

<sup>14</sup> LW 2:381.

<sup>15</sup> LW 13:312-313.

<sup>16</sup> Johannes Zachhuber, "Jesus Christ in Martin Luther," Academia, [https://www.academia.edu/29044077/Jesus\\_Christ\\_in\\_Martin\\_Luther](https://www.academia.edu/29044077/Jesus_Christ_in_Martin_Luther); cf. Jan D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ; Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> LW 13:304.

<sup>19</sup> Zachhuber, "Jesus Christ in Martin Luther," 15 (*italics in the original*).

<sup>20</sup> LW 36:35.

he added in clear terms: "Christ is God and man in one person."<sup>21</sup> He stated elsewhere that Christ is "a man who is supernaturally one person with God, and apart from this man there is no God."<sup>22</sup>

This mysterious union also accounted for the fact that Christ remained uncorrupted and incorruptible by sin (John 8:46; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 1:19). In his "Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ" (1540), Luther argued,

Every man is corrupted by original sin, with the exception of Christ. Every man who is not a divine Person [*personaliter Deus*], as is Christ, has concupiscence, but the man Christ has none, because he is a divine Person, and in conception the flesh and blood of Mary were entirely purged, so that nothing of sin remained.<sup>23</sup>

Because Christ is "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:19), he was able to offer himself as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

### 1.3. Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

The events of the cross, according to Luther, were not merely preparatory, allowing Christ to become a true high priest, but the beginning of his priestly office. The reformer stated that Jesus "has been a Priest since the day He became the Christ and began to sacrifice His body."<sup>24</sup> Luther referred to the cross as "the altar on which He [Christ], consumed by the fire of the boundless love which burned in His heart, presented the living and holy sacrifice of His body and blood to the Father with fervent intercession, loud cries, and hot, anxious tears (Heb 5:7)."<sup>25</sup> Ulrich Asendorf concluded that "at the cross Christ comes to his right priestly office."<sup>26</sup>

Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a real sacrifice consisting of the shedding of his blood "for the remission of sins," through which Christ himself became "the end of sins and the beginning of righteousness. As Gabriel said in Dan 9:24, 'to put an end to sin and to bring in everlasting

<sup>21</sup> LW 31:351.

<sup>22</sup> LW 37:218.

<sup>23</sup> WA 39/2:107. Translated from Latin by Christopher B. Brown, in <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-divinity.txt>.

<sup>24</sup> LW 13:326.

<sup>25</sup> LW 13:319.

<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 103.

righteousness."<sup>27</sup> While "the blood of Abel cries out for wrath and vengeance, ... the blood of Christ cries out for forgiveness and mercy."<sup>28</sup>

While recognizing that God, as the source of life, cannot suffer and die, Luther suggested that Christ's divine nature was so blended with his human nature that it also suffered and died. Luther argues,

If it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, his side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet he can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But he could not sit on the scale unless he had become a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in his own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God.<sup>29</sup>

In his "The Misuse of the Mass" (1521), Luther criticized Roman Catholic priests for teaching that at the Eucharist they were repeating Christ's sacrifice, whereas Heb 9:26 (NRSV) states that the sacrifice was "once for all". He affirmed that "Christ has sacrificed himself once (Heb 7:27; 9:25-26); henceforth he will not be sacrificed by anyone else."<sup>30</sup> Since His "sacrifice is a living sacrifice,"<sup>31</sup> it is powerful and effective forever, and there is no need for any other atoning sacrifice.

#### 1.4. Christ's Heavenly Priesthood

Luther was indebted to the Greek dichotomist perspective of the earthly and heavenly realities. Consequently, he could not conceive the existence of a real and concrete sanctuary/temple in a spiritual heaven. In 1525 he stated, "In the new order, the tabernacle or house is spiritual; for it is heaven, or the presence of God."<sup>32</sup> He saw Christ himself as that sanctuary. However, if this is the case, how do we understand passages that affirm that after His ascension Christ "entered once for all into the holy places" (Heb 9:12, ESV) and became "a minister in the holy places" (Heb 8:2, ESV)?

<sup>27</sup> LW 29:210, 212.

<sup>28</sup> LW 29:169.

<sup>29</sup> LW 41:103-104.

<sup>30</sup> LW 36:147.

<sup>31</sup> LW 36: 201.

<sup>32</sup> WA 17/2:228. English translation from *Sermons of Martin Luther*, 7:164.

We must recognize that Luther did not limit the priesthood of Christ to his atoning sacrifice on the cross, as some are inclined to do. Luther regarded Christ's priestly ministry in heaven as absolutely crucial for our salvation. He confessed that "nothing in Scripture is more comforting than what is said about the priestly office of our dear Christ."<sup>33</sup>

As a high priest, Christ represents God's people "before God and speaks in their interests."<sup>34</sup> Even more, he is also "the true King of Righteousness, who rules us through His priestly office. Through Him we are redeemed from sin and the power of the devil and come to eternal righteousness."<sup>35</sup> In reality, Christ "intercede[s] for us that such weakness and sin may not be reckoned to our account."<sup>36</sup> In doing it, Christ does not only "pray for us" but also applies the merits of his sacrifice to us. He "continues to present His sacrifice to the Father, to plead for us without ceasing, until the end of the world."<sup>37</sup> According to the reformer, after "Christ, by his own sacrifice and blood, has taken away the true sin," "he has gone in once for all through the curtain to God to make atonement for us (Heb 9:12)."<sup>38</sup> In this statement, Luther suggests that Christ's priestly work in heaven is still an atoning work on our behalf.

For Luther, Christ's heavenly priesthood had an extremely meaningful existential dimension. We are encouraged,

Do not despair after sin, but lift your eyes on high to where Christ intercedes for us. He is our Advocate. He intercedes for us and says: "Father, I have suffered for this person; I am looking after him." This prayer cannot be in vain. In Heb 4:14 we read: "We have a great High Priest." But even though we have had Christ as our High Priest, Advocate, Mediator, Reconciler, and Comforter, yet we have fled for refuge to the saints and have regarded Christ as Judge. Accordingly, this text should be written with golden letters and should be painted in the heart. Therefore you should get understanding and say: "Christ, I know Thee alone as the Advocate, the Comforter, and the Mediator; and I do not doubt that Thou art such a Person for me but cling firmly to this with my heart and believe." Christ is born for us, suffers, as-

<sup>33</sup> LW 13:306.

<sup>34</sup> LW 13:308.

<sup>35</sup> LW 13:311.

<sup>36</sup> LW 13:320.

<sup>37</sup> LW 13:326.

<sup>38</sup> LW 35:247.

cends into heaven for our sakes, sits at the right hand of the Father, and intercedes for us.<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, Luther regretted that Catholic priests taught “the people absolutely nothing concerning this priestly office of Christ.”<sup>40</sup> He saw the Catholic priesthood as an abomination intended to cast away the truth about Christ’s priesthood. He stated that

into this holy, glorious, happy, gracious priesthood [of Christ] the devil’s swine, the pope, has fallen snout and all; not only defiling it, but completely destroying and suppressing it, and setting up another priesthood, one of his own, stirred together out of all the heathen priesthoods like a stew of abominations.<sup>41</sup>

Luther declared, “Every promise of God includes Christ; for if it is separated from this Mediator, God is not dealing with us at all.”<sup>42</sup>

We have highlighted basic concepts of Luther’s understanding of Christ’s priesthood as comprising the atoning sacrifice of the cross and also a mediatory work in the heaven. Keeping these concepts in mind, we turn to the Adventist understanding of the theme, with special attention to Ellen G. White’s contributions.

## 2. Seventh-day Adventism

While there are many similarities between Luther and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding about Christ’s priesthood, some basic differences exist. The Roman Catholic and Protestant worldviews were largely shaped by the Greek concept about the immortality of the soul or spirit that survives the death of the body.<sup>43</sup> This view became the basis of their anthropologies and distinctions between the present *tangible* world and the heavenly *spiritual* reality.

<sup>39</sup> LW 30:236.

<sup>40</sup> LW 13:326.

<sup>41</sup> LW 36:201.

<sup>42</sup> LW 3:26.

<sup>43</sup> A classic exposition of this theory is found in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Henry W. Longfellow (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008). This epic poem was written between 1308 and 1321.



By contrast, Seventh-day Adventists have a more Hebrew wholistic perspective of reality.<sup>44</sup> According to H. Wheeler Robinson, in Hebrew psychology there is no trichotomy dividing “human personality into body, soul, and spirit” and “not even a dichotomy in any strict sense.” “The Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul.”<sup>45</sup>

For Roman Catholics, and many Protestants, the idea of a real sanctuary in heaven sounds too *literalistic*. At the same time, Adventists find this notion in harmony with the Bible. While Luther provided insightful glimpses into the ongoing conflict between Christ and Satan,<sup>46</sup> Adventist theology is shaped by the great cosmic-historical controversy between good and evil.

## 2.1. Old Testament Types

Luther viewed the Mosaic tabernacle, Levitical priesthood, and priesthood of Melchizedek as pointing to Christ’s atoning sacrifice and His heavenly priesthood. Even so, sometimes he tended to overemphasize the distinction between the Old and New testaments, between the law and the gospel.<sup>47</sup> White, for example, softened that distinction by speaking of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith as already available in the OT (Gen 15:6; Isa 55:1–3; Eph 2:8–10).<sup>48</sup>

White argued that “there is no such contrast as is often claimed to exist between the Old and the New Testament, the law of God and the gospel of Christ, the requirements of the Jewish and those of the Christian dis-

<sup>44</sup> A helpful analysis of how philosophical presuppositions can influence one’s understanding of the biblical sanctuary is provided in Fernando L. Canale, “Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary,” *AUSS* 36.2 (1998): 183–206.

<sup>45</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, “Hebrew Psychology,” in *The People and the Book*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 362.

<sup>46</sup> See Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 19 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of Luther’s distinction between the law and the gospel, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), 251–273; Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. W. Wilson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1972), 110–124; William M. Landeen, *Martin Luther’s Religious Thought* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1971), 174–190.

<sup>48</sup> Ellen G. White, “Obedience Better than Sacrifice,” *Signs of the Times* (Seventh-day Adventist), September 14, 1882, 409; republished in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1980), 6:1061.

pensation.”<sup>49</sup> “The whole system of types and symbols was a compacted prophecy of the gospel, a presentation in which were bound up the promises of redemption.”<sup>50</sup> “The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other.”<sup>51</sup>

The most significant difference between Luther and the Adventist view of Christ’s priesthood concerns their understandings about the typological relationship between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries. Both hold to a Christ-centered interpretation of the former. Luther reduced the latter to the person Christ enthroned on the right side of God the Father (John 2:21; Heb 10:19–20). Adventists expand upon this notion<sup>52</sup> to comprise also Christ’s priestly ministry *within* His heavenly sanctuary/temple (Heb 8:2; Rev 11:19).<sup>53</sup>

White explains that God not only presented to Moses “a view of the heavenly sanctuary” itself but also gave him “the plan of that construction,” “a miniature representation of the heavenly temple” as a model for the earthly sanctuary (Exod 25:9, 40).<sup>54</sup> Richard M. Davidson argues,

In Exod 25:9, 40, it appears probably that תכנית (and τύπος in vs. 40, LXX) refers to a *Nachbild* [copy] of an original *Urbild* (or perhaps the *Urbild* itself) that serves as a *Vorbild* [model]. It has in view the “pattern” for the earthly sanctuary that is simultaneously a miniature of the

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958), 2:104.

<sup>52</sup> For Adventist reflections on God’s throne motif, see e.g. Daegeuk Nam, *The “Throne of God” Motif in the Hebrew Bible*, Korean Sahmyook University Doctoral Dissertation Series 1 (Seoul, Korea: Institute for Theological Research, Korean Sahmyook University, 1994); Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 487 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Helpful Adventist assessments of the heavenly sanctuary/temple motif in the Bible are provided by Sanglae Kim, “The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2002); Elias Brasil de Souza, *The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), published also as Elias Brasil de Souza, *Toward a Theology of the Heavenly Sanctuary in the Hebrew Bible* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008); Leonardo G. Nunes, “Function and Nature of the Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple in the New Testament: A Motif Study” (ThD diss., Andrews University, forthcoming).

<sup>54</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958), 343.

heavenly sanctuary and ultimately encompasses a vision of the heavenly sanctuary itself.<sup>55</sup>

White, like Luther, defined the OT sanctuary services as foreshadowing Christ's atoning sacrifice and his heavenly priestly ministry. She explains,

Christ was the foundation and life of the temple. Its services were typical of the sacrifice of the Son of God. The priesthood was established to represent the mediatorial character and work of Christ. The entire plan of sacrificial worship was a foreshadowing of the Saviour's death to redeem the world.<sup>56</sup>

She also stated that "in the sacrificial offering on every altar was seen a Redeemer. With the cloud of incense arose from every contrite heart the prayer that God would accept their offerings as showing faith in the coming Saviour."<sup>57</sup>

While Luther spoke of the sanctuary services in more general terms, Adventists draw a clearer distinction between the daily and the annual services. Already by 1843, William Miller suggested that as the spring feasts of Israel were fulfilled at Christ's first coming (Lev 23:4–22; cf. John 13:1; Acts 2:1–4), so the autumn ones pointed toward events related to his second coming (Lev 23:23–43).<sup>58</sup> In his article "The Law of Moses" (1846), O. R. L. Crosier argued that the two compartments of the earthly tabernacle—the holy place and the most holy place—reflected the two compartments of the heavenly sanctuary/temple (Heb 9:1–3) and foreshadowed two distinct phases of Christ's heavenly priesthood.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 388. See also *ibid.*, 367–388; Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), 121–186.

<sup>56</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 165.

<sup>57</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Two Dispensations," *Review and Herald*, (March 2, 1886): 129.

<sup>58</sup> W. Miller to [J. V.] Himes, *Signs of the Times* (Millerite), May 17, 1843, 85.

<sup>59</sup> O. R. L. Crosier, "The Law of Moses," *Day-Star Extra*, (February 7, 1846): 37–44.

## 2.2. The Nature of Christ

Over the years several discussions and tensions emerged within Seventh-day Adventism about the nature of Christ.<sup>60</sup> The important point for this chapter is to observe a few statements and expressions by White that represent her stand on this topic.

In agreement with Luther, White declared, “In Christ, divinity and humanity were combined. Divinity was not degraded to humanity; divinity held its place, but humanity by being united to divinity, withstood the fiercest test of temptation in the wilderness.”<sup>61</sup> For her, Christ’s claim, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), implied that “in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”<sup>62</sup> In reality, “the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”<sup>63</sup>

White acknowledged, “Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin”<sup>64</sup> and that he “took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity..., with the possibility of yielding to temptation.”<sup>65</sup> However, she also warned, “Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ.... He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> For an introduction to the Seventh-day Adventist Christological discussions, see Eric C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Lang, 1984).

<sup>61</sup> White, “How to Meet a Controverted Point of Doctrine,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890, 97; republished in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1082.

<sup>62</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530. White borrowed the language of John Cumming who, in 1856, stated that “in him [Christ] was life,—that is, original, unborrowed, underived.” John Cumming, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Word Made Flesh,” *Signs of the Times* (Seventh-day Adventist) (April 26, 1899): 1; republished in *Selected Messages*, 1:247.

<sup>64</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 49.

<sup>65</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 117.

<sup>66</sup> Ellen G. White to “Dear Brother and Sister Baker”, Lt B-8 (Feb. 9, 1896), 1895; published in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1128-1129.

### 2.3. Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

White stated that Christ's "whole life was a preface to His death on the cross."<sup>67</sup> As Luther, she emphasized the value of Christ's atoning sacrifice for the salvation of the sinners. She explained that

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed."<sup>68</sup>

White saw the cross as having a broader and far-enduring cosmic influence. She declared, "But the work of human redemption is not all that is accomplished by the cross. The love of God is manifested to the universe."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, "all the blessings of this life and of the life to come are delivered to us stamped with the cross of Calvary."<sup>70</sup>

She even recognized the cross as the only means to prevent any future rebellion after sin and sinners are finally destroyed (Mal 4:1). In her words,

the death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to [do] evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy.... The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ellen G. White to W. W. Prescott, Lt 67 (June 12), 1895; published in idem, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 382.

<sup>68</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 626.

<sup>70</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1941), 362.

<sup>71</sup> Ellen G. White, "What Was Secured by the Death of Christ," *Signs of the Times* (Seventh-day Adventist) (December 30, 1889): 786; republished in *The Seventh-day Ad-*

Luther recognized that only by becoming man could Christ die on the cross. White stated more explicitly, however, “When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible.”<sup>72</sup> After quoting John 11:25 (“I am the resurrection and the life”), she added,

He who had said, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17), came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died; divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will.<sup>73</sup>

The apostle Paul says that at the cross “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,” and now through Christ’s mediation in the heavenly sanctuary we can be individually “reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18–21). No wonder White acknowledged that “the intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross.”<sup>74</sup>

## 2.4. Christ’s Heavenly Priesthood

Both Luther and Adventists saw Christ’s heavenly priesthood as crucial for salvation. In agreement with the reformer, White stated, “By the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and his work of mediation in our behalf, we may become reconciled to God.”<sup>75</sup>

However, Adventists differed from Luther in two major aspects. The first is with the *place* of Christ’s mediatory work in heaven. While Luther’s view of the heavenly sanctuary was focused on the biblical image of God’s throne (Acts 7:55–56; Heb 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; etc.), early Adventists expanded that view to include also the many biblical allusions to a real sanctuary/temple in heaven (Ps 11:4; Heb 8:1, 2; 9:11, 12; Rev 11:19; 14:17; 15:5; 16:17; etc.).<sup>76</sup>

*ventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1132. See also *idem*, *The Truth About Angels* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 296.

<sup>72</sup> Ellen G. White, “To Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers,” *Lt* 280 (Sept. 3), 1904; published in *idem*, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1113.

<sup>73</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, 1:301.

<sup>74</sup> White, *The Great Controversy*, 489.

<sup>75</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Cities of Refuge,” *Signs of the Times* (Seventh-day Adventist), (January 20, 1881): 26.

<sup>76</sup> E.g., O. R. L. Crosier, “Law of Moses,” *Day-Star Extra* (February. 7, 1846): 38, 40, 41; J. N. Andrews, *The Sanctuary and Twenty-Three Hundred Days* (Rochester, NY: James

The notion that the heavenly sanctuary/temple comprises two compartments—a holy place *and* a most holy place—derived from (a) the concept that both the Mosaic tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple were built with two holy places that at the same time resembled (Exod 25:8, 9, 40; 39:32–43; 1 Chr 28:10–19; Wis 9:8) and foreshadowed (Heb 9:1–9) the heavenly sanctuary; (b) the use of the plural “holy places” (from the original Greek *ta hagia*) in reference to the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:2; 9:8, 12; 10:19); and (c) those descriptions of God’s heavenly temple in which allusions are made to such holy place furniture as the candlestick with seven lamps (Rev 4:5; cf. Zech 4:2), the golden altar of incense (Rev 8:3; 9:13), and the golden censer (Rev 8:3) as well as to the most holy place ark of God’s testament (Rev 11:19; cf. Ps 99:1).<sup>77</sup>

The second area in which Adventists differed from Luther is the actual *nature* of Christ’s priesthood in heaven. While Luther limited it to a single mediatory work of atonement for the forgiveness of sin, Adventists describe it as a two-phase priesthood carried on in the two-apartment heavenly sanctuary/temple. The first phase corresponded to a mediatory work in the holy place (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:14–16; 1 John 2:1–2) very much in terms of what Luther described. However, the second phase was seen as taking place in the most holy place and adding to the mediatory work, also the cleansing of that sanctuary (Dan 8:14; Heb 9:23) by means of a pre-advent investigative judgment (Dan 7:9–14; Rev 11:19; 14:6–7).<sup>78</sup> The transition

White, 1853), 52–54; [Uriah Smith], “Synopsis of the Present Truth. No. 15,” *Review and Herald* (February, 18, 1858): 116, 117; [idem], *The Sanctuary and Twenty-Three Hundred Days of Daniel 8, 14* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1863), 36–51.

<sup>77</sup> E.g., Crosier, “Law of Moses,” *Day-Star Extra*, Feb. 7, 1846, 38, 40, 41; Andrews, *The Sanctuary and Twenty-three Hundred Days*, 52–54; [Smith], “Synopsis of the Present Truth. No. 15,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1858, 116, 117; [idem], *The Sanctuary and Twenty-three Hundred Days of Daniel VIII, 14*, 36–51.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Crosier, “Law of Moses,” *Day-Star Extra*, Feb. 7, 1846, 42–44; Joseph Bates, *An Explanation of the Typical and Anti-Typical Sanctuary, by the Scriptures with a Chart* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsay, 1850), 10; [Smith], *The Sanctuary and Twenty-three Hundred Days of Daniel VIII, 14*, 51–78. For further study of the early Adventist understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment, see Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages*, 70–78, 161–174. For a more detailed Adventist exposition of the biblical bases for an investigative judgment, see William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, rev. ed., Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992).

between the two phases was marked in 1844 by the end of the 2300 symbolic evenings and mornings of Dan 8:14.<sup>79</sup>

Describing the installment of that judgment, Dan 7 mentions that “thrones were put in place” (v. 9); the movable throne of God had wheels like “a burning fire” (v. 9); and the Son of Man (Christ) went to the Ancient of Days (God the Father; v. 13).<sup>80</sup> Daniel 7 explains that the judgment is at the same time against the “horn” that persecuted the saints and “in favor of the saints of the Most High” (vv. 21, 22).

When Christ finishes his mediatory/judicial work in the heavenly sanctuary/temple, he will take his faithful children to heaven, where they will serve him in his temple. As foreseen by the apostle John, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them” (Rev 7:15).

In line with Luther, Adventists view the Roman Catholic papacy with its priestly system—including the sacrifice of the mass and the claim that Catholic priests can forgive sins—as a counterfeit to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and His heavenly priesthood (Dan 7:20–25; 8:9–13; Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:1–12).<sup>81</sup> White declared that the “compromise between paganism and Christianity” resulted in the development of a “gigantic system of false religion” that can be considered “a masterpiece of Satan’s power.”<sup>82</sup>

In part, the Catholic priesthood challenged Luther to start the Reformation of the sixteenth century. More than three centuries later, early Ad-

<sup>79</sup> More in-depth historical-chronological studies of the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14 are provided in Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1970); Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Daniel*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); Brempong Owusu-Antwi, *The Chronology of Dan 9:24-27*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society, 1995); Juarez R. de Oliveira, *Chronological Studies Related to Daniel 8:14 and 9:24-27* (Engenheiro Coelho, SP, Brazil: Imprensa Universitária Adventista, 2004). See also Alberto R. Timm, “Miniature Symbolization and the Year-Day Principle of Prophetic Interpretation,” *AUSS* 42.1 (2004): 149–167.

<sup>80</sup> See Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1945), 55.

<sup>81</sup> See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 181–189.

<sup>82</sup> White, *The Great Controversy*, 50.



ventists felt the burden to continue that restoration process. As Luther restored the centrality of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and, to some extent, also his heavenly priesthood, so Adventists viewed themselves as restoring both dimensions.

### 3. Conclusion

One of the most meaningful themes of Scripture is the sanctuary and its services. This theme flows from the early patriarchal altars through the Mosaic tabernacle and the temple of Jerusalem. It reaches its climax at Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The sanctuary is the abiding place of God (Exod 25:8; Isa 6:1; Rev 11:19), the depository of His law (Exod 25:16; 31:18; Rev 11:19), and the place where salvation is available to all (Heb 4:14–16; 1 John 2:1, 2).<sup>83</sup> Luther confessed, "Nothing in Scripture is more comforting than what is said about the priestly office of our dear Christ."<sup>84</sup> White added, "The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."<sup>85</sup>

According to Luther, Christ offered himself as a single, self-sufficient, and unrepeatable atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. At the right hand of God, Christ now "make[s] atonement for us (Heb 9:12),"<sup>86</sup> and he "continues to present His sacrifice to the Father, to plead for us without ceasing, until the end of the world."<sup>87</sup> According to Luther, the Catholic papacy and priesthood attempted to overthrow Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His heavenly priesthood.

Adventists resonate with Luther's view of the atoning nature of both Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His priesthood in heaven. Luther limited the heavenly priesthood exclusively to the biblical image of God's throne. Adventists see Christ's priesthood as taking place within a real heavenly sanctuary/temple, comprised of two compartments—a holy place and a most holy place—or at least of two distinct phases. At the end of the 2300 symbolic evenings and mornings of Dan 8:14 in 1844, Christ began a

<sup>83</sup> Alberto R. Timm, "Recognizing Heavenly Realities: Ellen White's Insights into the Heavenly Sanctuary," *Adventist World* (February 2013): 24.

<sup>84</sup> LW 13:306.

<sup>85</sup> Ellen G. White to George C. Tenney, Lt 208 (June 29), 1906; published in idem, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 221.

<sup>86</sup> LW 35:247.

<sup>87</sup> LW 13:320, 326.

special work of pre-advent investigative judgment (Dan 7:9–14; Rev 11:19; 14:6–7).

As I argue elsewhere, “the everlasting gospel flows through the sanctuary motif, integrating the plan of salvation into an unfolding whole.”<sup>88</sup> We can better understand what Christ already did, what he is now doing, and what he will still do for our salvation. We can, by faith, accept his atoning sacrifice on the cross; behold his priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary/temple; and look for that glorious day when we will worship him “in His temple” (Rev 7:15).

<sup>88</sup> Timm, “Recognizing Heavenly Realities,” 25.