



Asia Adventist Seminary Studies

VOLUME 4
2001

Preface	1-2
The Heartless Corban Vow (Mark 7:11) AECIO E. CAIRUS	3-7
Buddhist Nirvana and a Christian Alternative FERDINAND O. REGALADO	9-18
A Biblical Foundation for the Integration of Faith and Learning JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V	19-34
Another Look at the Serpent on the Pole EDWIN E. REYNOLDS	35-47
Jesus as the Model for the New Humanity in Heb 2 JOEL N. MUSVOSVI	49-55
The Church and Her Mission VIOLETO BOCALA	57-62
United by the Word of God P. D. CHUN	63-67
Reflections on the SDA Church as the Eschatological Remnant Church RONALD D. BISSELL	69-75
The Principle of Authority and the Criteria of Orthodoxy in the Early Church ENRIQUE ESPINOSA	77-88
Leading the Church DONALD SAHLY	89-94
Response to Donald Sahly's Paper "Leading the Church" FRANCISCO D. GAYOBA	95-99
The Church's Mission: Jesus' Example in John 4:4-42 as a Model KENNETH D. MULZAC	101-112

ASIA ADVENTIST SEMINARY STUDIES
PUBLISHED ANNUALLY BY THE
ADVENTIST INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF ADVANCED STUDIES

Asia Adventist Seminary Studies (AASS) is published once a year by AIIAS Publications under the auspices of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS), Silang, Cavite, Republic of the Philippines. It is the official scholarly journal of the AIIAS Theological Seminary. AIIAS is a graduate-level institution of Christian education owned and operated by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, serving the world, but especially the Asia-Pacific region.

EDITOR
Edwin Reynolds

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Kenneth Mulzac

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Anne Bissell

EDITORIAL SECRETARY
Ruby Orate

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Ivy Ambat

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT
Ronald Bissell

THE MISSION of *AASS* is to publish research findings and practical contributions from AIIAS Theological Seminary by which pastors, teachers, administrators, and other church members may be benefitted in carrying out more knowledgeably and effectively the mission of the church in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world.

SUBSCRIPTIONS to *AASS* may be obtained by writing to:

Asia Adventist Seminary Studies
P.O. Box 038
4118 Silang, Cavite
Republic of the Philippines

Annual subscription cost is US\$6.00 within Asia and US\$7.00 elsewhere, including postage. Payment in the Philippines may also be made in PHP at current exchange rates. Payment may be made by cash, check, or money order.

Copyright ©2001 by AIIAS Publications

Preface

We must apologize again for the delay in getting this issue out. We have had a series of complicating factors with our staff and our equipment that have made it impossible to publish this issue on time. We do anticipate getting the next issue out on time, however, if all goes well.

We would like to introduce the authors of our main articles again. They have each published articles in previous issues of *AASS*, so they are not new this year, but for some readers they may be new. They constitute a diverse group.

Aecio E. Cairus, Ph.D., is Professor of Systematic Theology, but is a specialist also in Old Testament and Biblical Languages. He is from Argentina and has been at AIIAS since 1998.

Joel N. Musvosvi, Ph.D., is Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages at AIIAS. Originally from Zimbabwe, he brings a wealth of experience both in the classroom and in church administration.

Ferdinand O. Regalado is a Ph.D. in Religion candidate majoring in Biblical Studies at AIIAS Theological Seminary. A Filipino, he is on a study leave from the Adventist University of the Philippines, where he served as an Assistant Professor and B.Th. coordinator in the School of Theology.

Edwin E. Reynolds, Ph.D., is Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages at AIIAS Theological Seminary. A long-time missionary, he has faithfully served AIIAS since 1991. He also chairs the Biblical Studies Department.

John Wesley Taylor V, Ph.D., Ed.D., is Associate Dean and Professor of Education and Research in the School of Graduate Studies. He also serves as director of the Division of Online Learning. He is from the United States and has been serving at AIIAS since 1995.

Besides the major articles, we again are proud to present a variety of other papers, in which the authors are introduced at the head of the respective papers. There is a paper from the First Professorial Lecture in a new series instituted by AIIAS, wherein those who are promoted to the rank of full professor are expected to present a scholarly lecture before their colleagues to mark the promotion. There are also a variety of devotional presentations, papers, and even a response selected from the AIIAS Theological Forum 2001, held at AIIAS on 8-11 August 2001. Some of these are from AIIAS professors, while others are from specialists in their

respective areas from around the world. The theme of the Forum 2001 was The Church: Unity Amidst Change.

We continue to publish abstracts of the theses and dissertations accepted for degree programs at the AIIAS Theological Seminary. These serve notice of the academic work being done by our students here. Critical book reviews submitted by our faculty and students are also included.

We continue to solicit your regular subscription to the journal as a way of enabling us to continue producing it as more than just an academic exercise. If you still receive the journal on a complimentary basis, please consider subscribing. Thank you for your support.

We also continue to offer exchange agreements with other journals that specialize in biblical studies, theology, church history, church ministries, and world mission. We have entered into many such agreements already and are willing to consider any offers.

The Editor

THE HEARTLESS CORBAN VOW (MARK 7:11)

AECIO E. CAIRUS, Ph.D.

And he said to [the Pharisees]: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said: ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God) then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother” [Mark 7:9-12 NIV; cf. Matt. 15:3-6].

Readers unfamiliar with the OT law on vows have a difficult time with this passage. Jesus seems to speak of a man who has given away, as an offering to the temple, all the resources that could be used to support his parents. But if such support was now in fact totally impossible, why is the man not *allowed* by the Pharisees to provide it (“you no longer let him”)? If, on the other hand, some resources were left over, why would those legal experts be opposed to any kind of aid (“do anything”) from this man to his parents? One standard commentary confesses that “the case referred to is not clear to us. The man might have sworn to give to **God** the property needed for support of **his father or his mother** or he may have merely sworn not to support them.”¹

As we will try to show, the man had not yet sworn either, but *is vowing* something else through the very words cited by Jesus. By saying, “Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban,” the son was not describing a situation or reporting a previous vow. He was declaring that anything potentially useful to his parents, if he would later so earmark it, would, by that very fact, become his gift to God. Such a vow does not actually promise the temple anything, but tries to make pointless any future attempt to help his parents, because

¹S. E. Johnson, “Matthew,” *Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1951), 7:438. Bold type (for *lemmata*) is original.

the intended aid would then become Corban and could not benefit his parents anyway.

It is common to explain that in some cases a Corban vow, through “a typically Rabbinic trick,”² did not have to be paid to the temple. But this only compounds the enigma for the reader. It suggests that Pharisaism upheld the inalterable character of the vow only so far as the heartless deprivation of parents was concerned, but circumvented the obligation in regards to the offering—thereby imputing a doubly impious decision to Rabbinical Judaism. Even in recent times, a commentary hints that Rabbinical norms made Corban vows payable only after the death of the vower:

The *korban* practice meant vowing property and finance to the temple—a vow so sacred that it could not be revoked, even in order to care for your parents in their old age. But it was agreed that you could continue to use *korban* money during your lifetime!³

However, no evidence is anywhere given for the existence of such a “Rabbinical trick” or Pharisaic agreement about the lifetime use of offerings given to the temple. Accusing ancient Rabbis of enacting heartless norms is very serious and should not be done without strong documentary evidence. In contrast, the present article argues that a careful reading of the words cited by Jesus shows that, by the very terms of the vow being then constituted by the son, the latter might indeed keep his money (not just “during [his] lifetime,” but permanently), and was supposedly no longer able to help his parents anymore. However, this paradoxical result was not a consequence of any Rabbinical norm superimposed on the OT laws. It was, instead, merely an effect of the intricate way in which these words are being crafted into a vow by the son, who was obviously bent on severing all ties with his parents.⁴ The crafty terms produce a conditional effect taking place only in the event he would in the future attempt to help his parents—if the principle that vows are inalterable in any circumstance is strictly followed. The tradition to which Jesus refers is merely the practice of privileging such unalterability over and above other biblical norms he quotes in the same passage, which should have been taken into account as well.

The Mishnah tractate Nedarim (“Vows”) analyzes scores of similarly worded Corban vows used to sever, damage or otherwise affect interpersonal relationships

²R. Alan Cole, “Mark,” *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 962.

³Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 170. See also “No More to Do Ought” [Mark 7:12], *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 5:624.

⁴He was cursing his father and mother (Mark 7:10).

in a conflictive manner, without benefitting the Temple at all.⁵ How did a provision for vows originally intended for donations to the Temple develop into a tool to sever interpersonal relationships?

Biblical law accords human speech, as an expression of a free decision, an important creative power: a simple statement by an owner creates by itself the sacred and inalterable obligation of a Corban donation.⁶ But creative power can also be misused, as Corban vows eventually were.⁷

Since the earliest times of their existence as a nation, Israelites made use of a particular kind of vow, which is indefinite at the time of expression, but later becomes definite—the “whatever” vow. A famous case is that of Jephthah, who vowed that “whatever” would meet him at his return to his home “will be the Lord’s” (Judg 11:31). As the narrative shows, this vow had a two-step action: no transference occurred at the instant of formulation, but it did when the condition was met.

Jephthah could hardly avoid the event which would trigger the implementation of his vow, namely, his return home. However, one can also craft a vow in such a way that the trigger clause remains under the control of the vow-maker. In the case of vows in which an owner says, “My gift to the temple is whatever might be of help to” another person, nothing changes until the owner specifically defines some item as being that which could be of help to that person. This future specification functions as a trigger clause.

⁵Nedarim 1:3-4; 2:1-2; and *passim*. In most cases, an Israelite declares that having benefit from another person or eating from another person is Corban. This makes social intercourse almost impossible. For example, the rabbinical sages studied whether the persons affected by such a vow could still eat at the same table. If the bowl with food is small, there is a risk that the other person, by eating little, inadvertently benefits the vow-maker, so this should be avoided (Nedarim 4:4). H. Danby, ed., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 264-80.

⁶A donation to the Temple cannot be revoked (Num 30:2; Deut 23:21,23); any attempt to substitute or modify the scope of the donation may result in additional transfers of property, as in the case of the tithing of cattle (Lev 27:33). This is because vows straightforwardly transfer property to the temple, taking effect immediately. So, if the owner later attempts to retract his vow (Num 30:2), he is then trying to decide on the property of something no longer his own, which is of course invalid. The attempt to modify a Corban vow, say from item A to item B, logically implies two positive decisions (to donate A and B), both of which are valid, plus a negative invalid decision, trying to rescind the donation of A. Instead of changing his donation from A to B, such attempt then results in the obligation of donating both A and B (Lev 27:33).

⁷In the Danby edition of the Mishnah, the glossary defines Korban (or its synonym Konam) as “the usual term introducing a vow to abstain from anything, or to deny another person the use of anything” (Ibid., 794).

In this way, the maker of this type of vow retains all his property,⁸ but he might be no longer able to help in the least the person designated in the vow. By indicating that anything of his property is to be given to that person, he would be making definite what was left indefinite in his vow before, namely, what item could be of help to another. It would become the property of the temple but not of the designated person, so any effort to help would be pointless. The net effect of this type of indefinite but later definable vow, then, is to preclude a particular kind of future behavior on the part of the vow-maker towards another person, and does not affect the Temple.⁹ As such, this kind of vow was misused in order to permanently sever or damage personal relationships, as seen in *Nedarim*.

We are now ready to tackle the analysis of the vow in Mark 7. In the first place, we should take stock of the fact that the words cited by Jesus as being told by the son to the parents cannot be merely a report of a vow previously made. That these words are operative and not merely informative is clear from the fact that, according to the passage, “if a man says [these words] to his father or mother,” then, and only then, the legal experts “no longer let him do anything.” This would not be the case if the son were, in these words, merely making reference to a vow already existent, because only the vow itself can be a legal impediment, not its report for the parents. The *Corban* term functions, exactly as in *Nedarim*, as a formula severing a relationship.¹⁰ The trigger clause is defined as any helping behavior toward his parents. No property is definitely committed to the temple, but the son is able to claim he was no longer able to help his parents in any way. Any disaffected son might be tempted to manipulate the biblical law of vows in this way, though, as Jesus protests, such manipulation transgresses biblical commandments.

The *Mishnah*, in its present form (c. 200 C.E.), is later than the NT, but the latter by itself attests a preoccupation of those times with vows and oaths, and specifically with fine distinctions in their wording which were supposed to make them binding or not (*Matt* 5:34-37; *Jas* 5:12; cf. *Nedarim* 1:2-3). From the complaint of Jesus in the passage under consideration we gather that there was a tendency, in the traditional lore of his time,¹¹ towards a rigorous application of

⁸The trigger clause would not necessarily be activated if another person claims that some item belonging to the vow-maker could be of help. The latter could disagree with the identification, and the donation is not up to the will of another, it is only the owner who can define an item as belonging to the temple. If the owner says, for instance, “This house is my gift to the temple,” the house is thenceforward no longer his; but while he refrains from saying so he keeps his property and nevertheless “will not be guilty” (*Deut* 23:22).

⁹If the owner really wanted to donate something to the temple, he did not need to use the roundabout way of designating another person as an initial beneficiary.

¹⁰Since he “says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is [hereby declared] *Corban*’,” the son is thereby formulating one of those “whatever” vows analyzed above.

¹¹The rabbis later ruled in agreement with Jesus (*Nedarim* 9:1).

Num 30:2 even in a case such as the one mentioned in Mark 7. The effect was very objectionable, for all parts of the Law should have been made to work as an harmonious whole.¹² In particular, severing relationships with parents through a vow of this kind should never have been countenanced, in the light of the commandment against cursing one's parents cited by Jesus (Exod 21:17; Lev 20:9).

An abiding lesson Christians may derive from this elucidation is that, according to Jesus, a hypocritical tradition is not only one which openly contradicts the letter of Scripture, but also any other which ignores the spirit of the latter, especially the "more important matters of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt 23:23).

¹²Traditional Judaism recognizes this fact in the maxim *mišwah b' 'aberah lo 'mišwah* ("a law-fulfillment accomplished through a transgression is no [real] law-fulfillment;" cf. Nedarim 2:2).

Buddhist Nirvana and a Christian Alternative

FERDINAND O. REGALADO

Introduction

In the last issue of the *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies*, Jon L. Dybdahl, Professor of World Mission and President of Walla Walla College in Washington, U.S.A, underscores “the theological challenge” of Buddhism as one of the challenges Christians are experiencing vis-à-vis Buddhism’s emerging influence. He notes, “Adventism (and most of Christianity at large) has not taken seriously the theological challenge of Buddhism.”¹ Some of Buddhism’s teachings that “present a major challenge to the heart of Christianity and its theology,” according to him, are “the concept of God as an all-pervasive impersonal force, of reincarnation as a fact, of meditation as self-culture and a way to discover God inside, and of Buddhist enlightenment.”² Although Dybdahl does not include the Buddhist theology of Nirvana in particular as one of the theological challenges, the end of all these theologies, nevertheless, is Nirvana—the ultimate goal of the Buddhist’s life. Thus, I write this paper in response to such a challenge.

In this paper, I will attempt to analyze and evaluate the Buddhist theology of Nirvana, both in the Mahayana and Hinayana traditions, as to whether it is philosophically and practically valid. Then I will offer a Christian answer to such teaching by discussing eternal life as a better alternative than the Buddhist Nirvana. Thus, it is the purpose of this paper to show that the Christian teaching of eternal life is better than the Buddhist concept of Nirvana.

¹Jon L. Dybdahl, “Meeting the Challenge of Buddhism in a Changing World,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 3 (2000): 81.

²Ibid., 82.

Critique of the Buddhist Nirvana

Nirvana is the ultimate goal of every Buddhist.³ It is perhaps roughly equivalent to the idea of salvation in Christianity. Nirvana is also defined as the end of all suffering. Because of this definition, Buddhism is quite attractive. Although we may acknowledge its attractiveness, the concept of Nirvana has some weaknesses. In the following discussion we will see if Nirvana is theoretically conceivable as well as if it is practically meaningful.

Nirvana Is Theoretically Inconceivable

Nirvana has been misunderstood as “absolute annihilation,” so the idea follows that Buddhism is “essentially nihilistic.” Because of such a misconception, it has been argued that Nirvana is not annihilation. Rather, it is defined as “a state that can only be experienced, that defies our categories of thought and description.”⁴ This is why Siddharta Gautama himself refused to define Nirvana when asked by one of his disciples. He said that he would not do so because he was “primarily concerned with the attainment or realization of *Nirvāna*, not its definition.”⁵ In fact, Buddhism cautions that “it is dangerous to speculate on what Nibbana [the Pali spelling of Nirvana] is; it is better to know how to prepare the conditions necessary for Nibbana, how to attain the inner peace and clarity of vision that leads to Nibbana.”⁶ Indeed, Buddhism teaches that one should experience it rather than theoretically pursue it.

³Richard [Henry] Drummond, “The Buddha’s Teaching,” in *The World’s Religions*, ed. Pat Alexander, Lion Handbook, rev. ed (Oxford: Lion, 1994), 231.

⁴Hans Küng, Josef van Ess, Heinrich von Stietencron, and Heinz Bechert, *Christianity and World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 301.

⁵Richard [Henry] Drummond, *An Essay in Religious Understanding: Gautama the Buddha* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 115. Sulak Sivaraksa, “Christianity in the Reflection of Buddhism,” in *Christianity Among World Religions*, ed. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 57, notes, “In Buddhism, we could not explain or define *Nirvāna* either. We can give some negative indications that *Nirvāna* is not this, is not that, and we can give some positive indications that *Nirvāna* is the perfect state of peace and happiness. Yet it is also a state beyond happiness.”

⁶K. Sri Dhammananda, “Nibbana,” in Chap. 5: “Basic Doctrines,” in *What Buddhists Believe*; available from <http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/Clubs/buddhism/dhammnanda/102.htm>; accessed 4 December 2001.

However, this advice of eschewing to pursue it theoretically is in contradiction to the teaching of the Buddha who encouraged Buddhists to use their reason in considering any teaching that came to their notice.⁷

The Buddha taught that we should believe only that which is true in the light of our own experience, that which conforms to reason and is conducive to the highest good and welfare of all beings.⁸

Another disparity we can point out in the idea of Nirvana is its definition as “the blowing out of the flame of personal desire.”⁹ This definition is based on two Sanskrit root words, *nir* and *va*, which mean “off or out” and “to blow” respectively.¹⁰ However, Nirvana is also described as “supreme happiness (*parama sukha*).”¹¹ If Nirvana is described as supreme happiness, then, theoretically speaking, there must be some kind of good feeling or emotion. So one may ask the question, How come it is bliss, yet there is no feeling or emotion at all? This question is answered by “Sāriputta, one of the Buddha’s two main disciples.”¹² He says, “That is just where the bliss of nirvāna lies, in there being no sensation there.”¹³ A careful analysis of Sāriputta’s answer appears to be untenable.

From the concept of Nirvana as “detachment from phenomenal existence and liberation from passions and uncontrolled desires,”¹⁴ one can see another tension when Buddhism declares that Nirvana “is attainable in this present life,” not only “in life beyond ” with the physical “body remaining.” This is called *Sopadhiśesa Nibbana*.¹⁵ Buddhists are aware that as long as a human being exists with a physical body, he or she is still subject to the chain of causation called *karma*, and therefore cannot be considered to be in the state of Nirvana in its strict sense.

Interestingly, Buddhism teaches two spheres of Nirvana. The first is known as the *sopadhiśesa*,¹⁶ which simply means incomplete Nirvana; the second is

⁷U. Thittila, “The Fundamental Principles of Theravada Buddhism,” in *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists*, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 72.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 112.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Etienne Lamotte, “The Buddha, His Teachings and His Sangha,” in *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 52.

¹²Küing et al., 301.

¹³Ibid., citing *Anguttara Nikāya* V, 414-15.

¹⁴Drummond, *Essay in Religious Understanding*, 116.

¹⁵Dhammananda, “Nibanna.”

¹⁶According to Lamotte, 51, this word means “Nirvana with a remainder of conditioning.”

called *nirupadhiśesa*¹⁷ and means complete Nirvana.¹⁸ If Nirvana has two spheres, it can never be considered as Nirvana in the way Siddharta Gautama understood the concept. Gautama Buddha believed that Nirvana lies outside of this karmic-cyclic cosmos. In other words, he considered Nirvana as something beyond phenomenal existence—beyond our present existence.¹⁹ Apparently, the Buddhist concept of Nirvana has some tensions.

Moreover, it has been said that complete Nirvana is fully realized by the Buddha *at death* after indefinite rebirths in the past, as seen in the life of Siddharta Gautama. At death there is no more becoming, no more rebirth, no desires, no suffering—the complete cessation of sorrow. Now the question is, After death, what then?²⁰

Another problem with the idea of Nirvana is that it cannot be objectively verified, since it is a very subjective experience. This can be seen through its definition as a

subjective state of purity produced by the complete cessation of mental defilements. In it there is no place for either attachment or nonattachment, either to self or to the not-self. It is not an objective reality into which men enter and rest, nor is it a particular mental state. It is pure, eternal, unchanging, unextended, nonsubstantial, quiescent, attributeless, unacquired, and devoid of unsupported cause and condition. It is emptiness but not nothingness, calm but not compassion, self-less but not the Supreme Reality. It is not consciousness (for it is devoid of the five skandhas), nor unconsciousness, nor both, nor either. It cannot be spoken of as existent, for it noncompounded, nor nonexistent, for within the sphere of subjective experience it is a reality.²¹

To put it simply, Nirvana is purely subjective and an empty reality—there is nothing we can hold on to.

¹⁷Or “Nirvana without remainder of conditioning” (Ibid.).

¹⁸Ibid., 51.

¹⁹Drummond, *Essay in Religious Understanding*, 119-20.

²⁰Cf. Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 91-92.

²¹Lobsang Phuntsok Lhalungpa, “Buddhism in Tibet,” in *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists*, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 305.

Nirvana Is Practically Meaningless

Nirvana's pragmatic definition is well illustrated by Malcolm David Eckel. He describes Nirvana in this manner:

Nirvana is the definitive end of the cycle of reincarnation. It is difficult for people who pride themselves on being active and busy to sympathize with the traditional Buddhist concept of nirvana. Instead of busyness, it speaks of quiet and cessation. Instead of a constant drive to create and succeed, it speaks of an impulse to take a bit of what we think of as existence and let it slip away. The word refers literally to a "blowing out," as if the fire of the personality could be allowed to flicker out like the dying flame of a candle.²²

Eckel's substantive description of Nirvana is indeed noteworthy. It "conveys a sense of peace and serenity that cuts through the constant frustration of life."²³ In spite of its positive delineation, the concept of Nirvana has some shortcomings when closely examined.

Not only is Nirvana itself as a goal theoretically inconceivable, but also the path of going to that goal is practically impossible. Buddhism teaches that the Eightfold Path is the way to attain Nirvana. That path is described as "the way of high ethical conduct and stringent mental discipline."²⁴ That path has also been called "a rigorous system of self-salvation."²⁵

Moreover, a Cuban Buddhist from the Indo-Tibetan Mahayana tradition indicates that "the path leading to that state [total transformation of the personality — another way to describe Nirvana] requires a level of commitment and expertise," and this path "is a path for the religious virtuoso."²⁶ He further declares that "even the most committed Buddhists will fail to reach the goal in this life."²⁷ Such a difficult path offers an empty hope for anyone in this present life. It suggests that only Buddhist nuns and monks are able to strictly follow this path. For example, in traditional Buddhism, "the monks and nuns spent sixteen hours a day on study and cultivation" so "there was little time for discriminating or wandering thoughts,

²²Malcolm David Eckel, "Buddhism in the World and in America," in *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, rev. and expanded ed., ed. Jacob Neusner (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox, 2000), 147.

²³Ibid.

²⁴James R. Moore, "Some Weaknesses in Fundamental Buddhism," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 7 (Fall 1970): 31.

²⁵Ibid., 30.

²⁶José Ignacio Cabezón, "Liberation: An Indo-Tibetan Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12 (1992):197.

²⁷Ibid.

and so achievement could be attained relatively quickly.”²⁸ Ordinary persons, therefore, have no hope of attaining such an ultimate state, for he or she could not spend enough time for meditation as one of the means of attaining enlightenment.

This empty hope of Nirvana is compounded by the Buddhist idea of cyclically endless life in relation to one’s salvation. A Buddhist may not be able to reach Nirvana in this present life but “there is always time for [him or her] to find the one true path. There is no hurry to be saved.”²⁹ According to the Cuban Buddhist mentioned above, this “is the most comforting aspect of Buddhism.”³⁰ It may appear consoling, but in reality, it gives false hope. One can never know when this eternal cyclic purification process towards Nirvana will end. There is no clear evidence to verify this indefinite cycle of karmic life. This is hoping for nothing.

The desire and effort exerted in attaining the goal of Nirvana is paradoxical. It has been observed that “Buddhists regard nirvana, the state of desirelessness, as the most desirable state.”³¹ This appears self-contradictory.

The final destination of Nirvana is also vague. It can only be fully realized after death. The Buddha is said to have reached complete Nirvana only when he died. There is, however, no evidence to verify that Buddha truly reached that state. No one who has achieved Nirvana has ever returned to testify about achieving such a state.

One of the factors that makes Nirvana less than ideal, even unrealistic, is its failure to recognize that humans are subject to desire and ignorance. In the history of Buddhism, we can see this reality even in the monastery and among the Buddhist nuns and monks. One author writes,

Of course the monastery is a human institution; monks and nuns are not abstract embodiments of Buddhist principles but living people who are Buddhists. Very few are exempt from secular concerns; some have made great contributions to secular culture. The need to preserve and spread the Doctrine has brought literacy to millions and was responsible for the invention of printing. Monks and nuns, some of them among the most educated and cultivated members of their societies, have been active in every field of artistic and intellectual endeavour. Not all members of the Order have lived up to its ideals, for men and women are subject to desire and ignorance. Some have become involved in the worlds of politics and commerce. In Tibet monks have been rulers; in China monasteries have been markets; in Japan there have even been soldier-monks But

²⁸[Venerable Master] Chin Kung, *Buddhism: The Wisdom of the Compassion and Awakening* (Singapore: Amitabha Buddhist Society, 1999), 11.

²⁹Cabezón, 197.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹“Heaven,” reprinted from *This Rock* magazine, February 1994; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/faq/faq014.htm>; Internet; accessed 4 December 2001.

however varied their actual behaviour, the sons and daughters of the Buddha represent an ideal. Their goal is invisible, its attainment a private experience.³²

So, in actuality, human beings, including sincere Buddhists, are still subject to desire and ignorance. Unless they recognize this, any Buddhist will feel the frustration that, although he or she knows what is good, he or she cannot do it. Hence, we may say that Nirvana as the ideal is practically impossible. It ignores the physical dimension of existence as well as the personal identity of the person. The problem with Buddhists is their belief that they could totally eliminate the desire by eliminating the personality or the self of the person.

Furthermore, Buddhism is also problematic as reflected below.

Although scientists, philosophers and religious scholars may have reached a good understanding about life and the universe, this realization is neither complete nor proper. Why? Although they have obtained some understanding, they are far from having freedom from anxiety, from ending their afflictions. They indulge themselves in Five Poisons of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance and doubt. They remain mired in all the troubles of human relationships and are swayed by personal feelings. In other words, they are human.³³

From this observation it implies that as long as an individual is still human, he or she is far from reaching complete realization or Nirvana. Yet, Buddhists teach that Nirvana is attainable in this life. This is a glaring contradiction. Perhaps aware of this tension, Mahayana tradition developed the concept of Bodhisattvas, who delayed their journey to Nirvana just to help sentient beings in their struggle toward complete liberation. Yet they teach that one's salvation is still an individual effort. So one may question the role of Bodhisattvas, if indeed, salvation is an individual work after all.

Thus we can see that the concept of Nirvana is both theoretically inconceivable and practically meaningless. If that is so, is there a better alternative? I think Christianity has a better alternative to the problematic concept of Nirvana. The Christian concept of eternal life offers a better future than the Buddhist concept of Nirvana.

³²Richard Gombrich, "Introduction: The Buddhist Way," in *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 10-11.

³³[Venerable Master] Chin Kung, 15.

A Christian Alternative to Nirvana

Hans Küng acknowledges the similarity between eternal life and Nirvana. He argues that “there *need not be any contradiction between the Christian notion of positive final state (‘eternal life’) and the notion, supported by most Buddhist schools, of a positive final state (nirvana).*”³⁴ He supports his argument by identifying some of these correspondences. He states that

“eternal life” is also a condition that cannot be grasped by our intellectual and descriptive categories, a condition that can only be experienced: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor 2:9). “Eternal life” also is where the drives of the will, desire, and sensation are extinguished, insofar as all this implies inconstancy, imperfection and sorrow. “Eternal life” also can be experienced now, as the Jesus discourses in the Gospel of John repeatedly stress.³⁵

In spite of the similarities between eternal life and Nirvana, there are still significant differences between these two ultimate goals.

Unlike Nirvana, which can only be fully realized at death, eternal life is a renewed human existence beyond death. Eternal life is talking about *real life* in its fullest sense, not the ambiguous cessation of human existence.

Richard Rice, Professor of Theology at Loma Linda University in California, U.S.A., has made an attractive exposition of the elements of the Christian concept of eternal life. I will summarize as much as possible his explanation and contrast them with the idea of Nirvana.³⁶

1. Eternal life is a gift of God. Unlike Nirvana, eternal life is “due entirely to the creative and re-creative power of God;” it is not because of our own making. “We find a close association of these two functions in Rom 4:17, which describes God as the one ‘who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.’”

2. Eternal life is the prospect of personal fellowship with God. This is different from Buddhism’s idea of Nirvana. Note that the Christian’s ultimate destiny of life “is not self-gratification; it is the prospect of personal fellowship with God.” The idea of God and of fellowship with a divine Being that is far

³⁴Küng et al., 327. Italics his.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶The following discussion is based on Richard Rice, *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997), 351-55. Sentences and words in quotations in this section are directly quoted from the cited pages in Rice’s book, though not individually footnoted.

greater than human beings, is absent in Buddhism. However, “for the committed Christian, fellowship with God is the major thing that makes eternal life attractive.”

3. Eternal life is the prospect of future service. Eternal life “gives us a clearly God-centered, rather than self-centered, view of human destiny. It directs us away from the gratification of personal desires and provides us with a truly religious view of the future.” Again, it is opposed to the idea of Nirvana, which is primarily self-centered. The prospect of future service in the future life corrects the notion of “self-indulgence.” Our ultimate destiny

is other-oriented, not self-oriented. It seeks the glory of God and the welfare of one’s fellows. Even when hope reaches its fulfillment, there is a place for love, as Paul’s great hymn reminds us (1 Cor 13:13).

4. Eternal life includes physical and spiritual restoration. This is another dimension that Buddhism overlooks. For Buddhists, the self with its desire should be totally extinguished. They are not able to see the totality of the human being, which comprises a physical body as well as a consciousness. In Christianity, however, this physical body will be restored in such a way that

there will be changes in our constitution, as Paul’s description of the resurrected body indicates (1 Cor 15: 42-50), but our existence will have a corporeal basis. The biblical concept of resurrection is that of the re-creation of the entire person, including a physical form.

Again, “for Christians, the central attraction of the future is the prospect of intimate fellowship with God”—this is the spiritual restoration. In other words, “eternal life restores human beings to the presence of God.”

5. Eternal life includes social restoration. In the concept of Nirvana we have no hope of spending our eternal destiny with our loved ones or with our fellow human beings. It is not surprising, then, that a Buddhist’s life is too individualistic in some respects. I have observed that, in their worship in the temple, Buddhists do not experience corporate worship. They do not socialize in their worship, perhaps because it does not form an important aspect of their spiritual goals. However, in Christianity, “the biblical portrayals of human destiny are emphatically social; they consistently describe the redeemed as a group, a community, rather than as separate individuals.” For Christians, the idea of community will be carried over even in the life beyond.

6. Eternal life includes environmental restoration. Buddhism claims to be a very practical religion. However, in its teaching of an empty human destiny, it offers a future that is an abstraction, void of any reality. In contrast, Christianity teaches that

human beings are terrestrial creatures. This earth was our original home, and it will be our final home. Our ultimate destiny is inseparably linked to that of this planet, so the complete fulfillment of human existence has ecological dimensions. This is why the last book of the Bible speaks of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1).

One final note: the Christian's ultimate destiny is the cessation of all suffering and pain here on earth. It is the hope of an eternal good life in a "new heaven and new earth" in which God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4 NIV).

Conclusion

The theological challenge of Buddhism has been addressed in this paper with regard especially to their teaching of human destiny. In our evaluation and analysis of the concept of Nirvana, it has been shown that such a concept is theoretically inconceivable as well as practically impossible. When the teaching of Nirvana is examined closely, we realize that it raises more questions rather than solutions—it offers an empty hope. Whatever one may find appealing in the concept of Nirvana is neutralized in the presence of a more concrete and hopeful doctrine of eternal life and ultimate destiny in Christianity.

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V, Ph.D., Ed.D.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Holy Scriptures are the written Word of God—inspired, trustworthy, and authoritative.¹ Although Christian education does not appear as one of the twenty-seven fundamental doctrines, it is nevertheless viewed historically by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church as a core ingredient in the fulfillment of its mission. This may be evidenced by the prolific writings on the subject of education by Ellen G. White,² a co-founder of the denomination, as well as by the extent of the SDA educational system, now one of the largest sectarian educational organizations, with over five thousand schools, colleges, and universities, and nearly one million students.

A core concept in the Adventist philosophy of education is the “integration of faith and learning” (IFL). Many Adventist educators, in fact, see this construct as a distinctive ingredient of SDA education that must be nurtured in an assertive, on-going manner. Evidence of this position, for example, may be found in the frequent sessions of the International Faith and Learning Seminars, sponsored by the Institute of Christian Teaching since 1988. Essays developed at these conferences are published in the scholarly series *Christ in the Classroom*.³

¹Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1988), 4.

²These include the following works, among others: *Counsels on Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1968); *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943); *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952); *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub Assn., 1923).

³Humberto M. Rasi (compiler), *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning* (Silver Spring, MD: Education Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1991-2001). Over two hundred of these essays are available online at <http://online.aiias.edu/ict/>.

Given the centrality of Scripture in Adventist theology and the importance of the IFL principle in SDA educational philosophy and practice, it stands to reason that such a concept should find substantial support in the Scriptures. This essay seeks to examine this biblical foundation and provide thereby a defensible rationale for the integration of faith and learning in Christian education. It should be understood, however, that this work does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of all biblical passages relevant to Adventist education. Rather, it endeavors to highlight exemplary passages from Scripture that undergird the integration of faith and learning, and that can serve as a point of departure for further research and reflection.

The Christian Mind

Although the integration of faith and learning can be approached from various perspectives, perhaps the most basic Scriptural concept is embedded in Phil 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”⁴ Set in the context of the incarnation, this passage proposes, first of all, the existence of the Christian mind. Furthermore, it maintains that believers must undergo a personal, transformational process—the receiving of the mind of Christ. Finally, it affirms that as Christians, we must think “Christianly”—endeavoring to view life from God’s perspective.

According to 1 Cor 2:14-16, there are two types of individuals: (1) the natural man or woman, who has no discernment of spiritual things, and (2) the spiritual person, who discerns all things from a spiritual point of reference, having received the mind of Christ. The passage indicates that the difference lies in the mind. Rom 8:6-7 corroborates this view: “To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.” There are thus two kinds of minds, the carnal mind and the spiritual mind. The carnal orientation runs counter to God and His truth. It is a secular mind—a temporal, world-oriented, fragmented perspective (see figure 1). By contrast, the spiritual mind is a Christ-like mind, in harmony with God’s plan for life and the universe at large. It thus incorporates an eternal, supernatural, wholistic perspective.

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, the texts of Scripture quoted are from the NKJV.

<p>The Secular Mind A temporal, world-oriented, fractured perspective</p>	<p>The Christian Mind An eternal, supernatural, wholistic perspective</p>
<p>Living for the present Just do it! Enjoy it while it lasts! Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (1 Cor 15:32).</p>	<p>An eternal orientation Every decision, every action in this life has eternal consequences (1 Tim 6:12).</p>
<p>Assuming that this world is all there is Decisions and behaviors are limited to the criteria of “this world” (2 Cor 4:4).</p>	<p>A supernatural focus Seeing life from God’s point of view. Making value judgments based on God’s character (Mic 6:8).</p>
<p>Segmenting existence One’s life is reduced to a fragmented collection of ideas and activities (Jas 1:8). Often a spiritual/secular dichotomy.</p>	<p>A wholistic worldview Not dichotomized or compartmentalized. Rather, Christianity embraces all of life (1 Cor 10:31).</p>

Figure 1. The two minds (Rom 8:6-7).

Often, individuals seem to assume that the mind is analogous to a suit of clothes—something one puts on and off at will, depending on the season (perhaps the basis for the oft-heard expression, “I just changed my mind”). The Christian mind, however, requires a faith commitment. James states,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it will be given to him. But let him *ask* in *faith*, with *no doubting* [KJV: “nothing wavering”], for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (1:5-8)

Note that there are three conditions to receiving wisdom: commitment, faith, and petition. By contrast, a “double-minded” person, oscillating perhaps between a secular and a spiritual perspective, is caught in a mental dichotomy and cannot receive anything from God—much less the mind of Christ and its consequent wisdom. Whenever there is a living spiritual commitment to God, however, evidenced in singleness of mind and purpose, there is born the prayer of faith, which results in wisdom, the gift of God.

This unwavering faith commitment, evidenced in a singleness of mind, lies at the heart of the Christian experience. Christ Himself declared, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matt 12:25,30 NIV). In essence, the Christian mind is either completely Christian, or it is not Christian at all.

Comprehensiveness of Life and Learning

Singleness of mind brings about a comprehensive, holistic, Christ-centered view of life and learning. This is in direct contradiction to a dualistic perspective.

In ancient Greece, the Gnostics divided mankind into matter (evil) and mind (good). Today we have also tended to fall into dualistic forms of thinking, setting up false dichotomies such as soul/body, piety/action, world/church, mercy/justice, liberty/responsibility, love/authority, theory/practice, student/subject, and faith/learning. The result is fragmented thinking and a compartmentalized, polarized life.

Perhaps the most dangerous dualism for the Christian, however, is to think that some aspects of life are spiritual and others, secular. Sometimes, in fact, we begin to think secularly even about sacred things—such as baptisms, offerings, and Christian education. We emphasize facts and figures more than persons; budgets and policies more than our spiritual mission. The word of God, however, emphasizes that we must “put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised . . . , slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:10-11). Such a comprehensive view of life precludes the creation of a spiritual/secular dichotomy.

This pervasiveness of Christ in every aspect of life is echoed in other passages. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). What are the implications for education? First of all, it would seem that all aspects of life—even such common activities as eating and drinking, teaching and learning—must glorify God. Teaching, furthermore, is a matter of both words and deeds. To teach “in the name of Jesus” means to act as His official representative—to say what He would say, to act as He would act. Paul highlights this imperative: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5 NIV). Curricular programs are made up of courses, courses are comprised of topics, topics of concepts, concepts of ideas, and ideas of thoughts. Thus, if every thought is captive to Christ, it implies that every class period, every subject area, and every educational experience must be anchored in Jesus Christ.

How do these conditions come about? Rom 12:2 admonishes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In the very beginning, mankind was formed “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27). Tragically, however, man chose to be *conformed* to this world, to take the distorted shape of sin, pressed into the thought mold of this secular age. As a result, man was *deformed*—he began to lose the original form, the likeness to his Creator. The good news is that, by the grace of God, human beings can be *reformed* by a

renewing of the mind—a spiritual rebirth. This reformation brings about a change—a metamorphosis, a radical *transformation* in which the image of God is restored in men and women, who form the family of God (see figure 2).

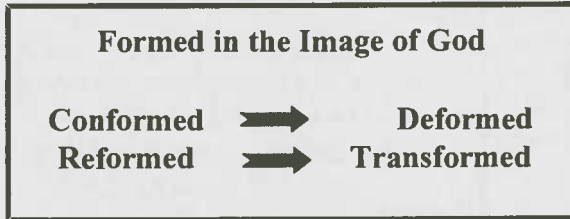


Figure 2. *Processes of change (Rom 12:2).*

As the Apostle Paul aptly summarized, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world [a secular worldview], but the Spirit who is from God [a Christian worldview], that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).

Integrating Faith, Learning, and Life

According to Scripture, faith, learning, and life are closely intertwined. Paul states, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). And the apostle James declares, “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:20, 26; cf. 1:22-25; 2:17). It seems evident that faith and learning have been intimately joined through the power of the word (see figure 3). It is not sufficient, however, to merely know, nor even to believe. Rather, there must be a life response. “In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5 New Century Version). Christians must thus translate faith into practice and grapple with the implications of learning for their lives. Let us consider briefly each of these components from a biblical perspective.

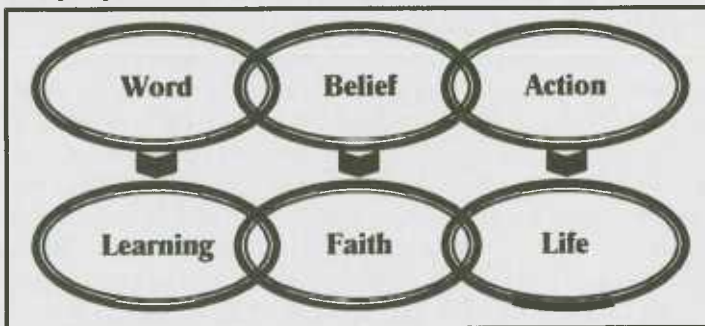


Figure 3. *Linking faith, learning, and life (Rom 10:17; Jas 2:17).*

Faith. Christ asked his disciples, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Faith is not blind devotion or lame belief. Rather, faith is a reasonable commitment, based upon evidences of God’s trustworthiness. Christianity, then, is a matter of significant acts and facts, not simply vague theories or interesting speculations.

Furthermore, faith does not exist in isolation, in a vacuum. It must have an object. One must have faith in something or someone. What type of faith then is needed? (See figure 4.) The overarching tier in the faith paradigm is faith in God, based on an understanding of God that is both theological (knowing

Faith

- *In God—both theological and relational*
- *In divine revelation—of His truth, His character, and His plan*
- *In persons—the potential of others and of self, by the grace of God*

Learning

- *To think Christianly—a change in mind*
- *To live by faith—a change of life*

Life

- *Eternal—a gift of God through Christ*
- *Productive—transforming knowledge into practice*
- *Meaningful—filled with love toward God and man*

Integration

- *Faith and learning fuse within the context of a Christian life.*

Figure 4. Integrating faith, learning, and life.

about God) and relational (knowing God personally). This faith is complemented by confidence in God’s revelation of His truth, His character, and His plan. The third type of faith—sometimes the most difficult to attain—is faith in persons, in the potential of others and of self, by the grace of God.

Learning. To learn is to change. It is a transformation of heart, mind, and being. It represents a change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or values. From a Christian perspective, this change is brought about by a personal encounter with Jesus. Christ invited His listeners, “Come unto Me . . . and learn from Me” (Matt 11:28-29). What type of learning is needed? First of all, there must be a change in the mind—learning to think Christianly. This is followed by a change of life—learning to live by faith.

Life. Life is more than mere existence. Christ declared, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Life then goes beyond simply coping and surviving; it goes beyond self. In its fullest sense, life is God-centered, for God is the Source of life. He is the Sustainer of life. He is the ultimate Focus of life. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3). What type of life is to be desired? Eternal life, a gift of God through Christ; a productive life,

transforming knowledge into practice; and a meaningful life, filled with love toward God and fellowmen.

Integration. Referring to the marriage union, Christ stated, “They are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6 NIV). This covenant is analogous to the concept of integration. The integration of faith and learning in life is more than a mingling or chance encounter. Rather, it is a dynamic union, a bringing together of fragments into a living whole.

- **Focus:** God (4)
- **Dynamic:** Love (5a)
- **Scope:** Comprehensive and wholistic (5b)
- **Source:** The Word—written, illustrated, and living (6a)
- **Instrument:** Committed teacher (6b)
- **Process:** Diligent and excellent, receptive and active (7a)
- **Setting:** Prime moments for learning, linking theory and practice (7b)
- **Dimensions:** Physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social development (8, 9)

Figure 5. *The Integrated Curriculum (Deut 6:4-9).*

What then is the integration of faith and learning in life? It is when

Christian beliefs and values provide the focus and core of the academic endeavor; which, in turn, seeks to relate Christianity to the entirety of human existence and culture.

An Integrated Educational Program

One of the most significant passages in Scripture to delineate the features of a Christian curriculum is found in Deut 6:4-9. This passage begins by declaring, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” The “SHEMA ISRAEL!” injunction, considered by many Jews to be one of the most sacred passages in the Torah, identifies God as the focus of the educational program (see figure 5). This emphasis is reiterated throughout Scripture: “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:6). “My purpose is that they may... have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2-3 NIV). God, in essence, is the core curriculum.

The next verse (Deut 6:5) describes the dynamic and scope of the curriculum. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” In Christian education, love is to be the prime motivational component. Truth, in fact, must always be spoken in a context of love (Eph 4:15). Further, the scope of the educational program must be comprehensive and wholistic.

The source and instrument of the curriculum are next identified. “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart” (Deut 6:6). The words of God include His written word, the Holy Scriptures (Rev 1:1-2); the illustrated word, as

seen in God's created works (Ps 19:1); and the living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:14). These divine words constitute the great unifying factor in Christian education, the foundation of its curriculum. They bring about a transformation in learning and life. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Note, however, that Deuteronomy stipulates a condition: the words must first be internalized in the instrument, in the teacher's life. One simply cannot share what one does not have.

Deut 6:7 specifies the curricular process and setting. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." To teach diligently suggests that effort, perseverance, and excellence are required. Such instruction incorporates both receptivity and activity ("sitting" and "walking"). It takes place both in the teacher's house (the classroom) and along the road (through real-life learning encounters), thus linking theory and practice throughout an on-going spiritual learning experience. Furthermore, certain prime moments for learning seem to be identified—"when you rise up" and "when you lie down" (the beginning and end of one's day). Given that the most important dimension of life is one's relationship with God, this may suggest setting aside prime segments of the day (including the school day, as well as the class period) for corporate devotional and worship experiences.

Finally, in vv. 8-9, the passage addresses the curricular dimensions of the educational program. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Although many Jews interpreted this command in literal fashion, utilizing phylacteries, for example, to attach God's word to their foreheads and wrists (Matt 23:5), it seems that ultimately each of these four components refers to a spiritual aspect of life. God's words are to be on the hand, guiding one's actions and physical development. They are to be before the eyes, directing one's thoughts and intellectual growth.

What about the doorposts and the gates? These words were originally spoken to the Israelites who had recently left Egypt for the Promised Land. The "doorpost" concept would quite readily bring to mind the Passover experience. On that last night in Egypt, they sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their doorposts in evidence of their faith commitment. In ancient times, as in many places today, the gates of one's courtyard were considered to be the avenue of contact with the larger world. Messages, in fact, would often be posted on the gates to announce important events—a form of communication, of witness. The "doorposts" and "gates" could thus suggest that God's words are to guide the student's spiritual as well as social development.

These four dimensions of the Christian curriculum seem to be of particular significance. Luke 2:52, for example, states that Jesus Christ developed in four areas—"in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (see figure 6). But

perhaps even more important is the understanding that God's word is to serve as the foundation for each dimension. In essence, every aspect in the Christian educational program must be Christ-centered, Bible-based, student-related, and socially-applied.

	Spiritual	Intellectual	Physical	Social
God's People	Writing upon the door posts	Frontlets between the eyes	Sign upon the hand	Writing upon the gates
Jesus Christ	Favor with God	Wisdom	Stature	Favor with man
Metaphor	Heart	Head	Hand	Humanity

Figure 6. Dimensions of the Christian curriculum (Deut 6:8-9; Luke 2:52).

Role of the Instrumentalities

The Scriptures identify the *paraklēos* (the Comforter), parents, priests, and pastors/teachers as the principal instruments in the teaching/learning process. Of these, the Holy Spirit is paramount. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV).

Although the Holy Spirit can speak directly to the mind of the student, He also mediates through the other divinely appointed instrumentalities. Paul, for example, stated, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor 2:12-13). He also noted that the changes brought about in students' lives were the result of the Spirit of God operating through human instrumentalities. "You are manifestly an epistle of Christ," he wrote, "ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor 3:2-3).

In the biblical model, the first educational agency is the home. Consequently, parents are to assume a significant, ongoing role in the education of their children. Ps 78:1-7, for example, highlights the intergenerational teaching relationships.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God. (NIV)

This sentiment is echoed in other scriptural passages such as Ps 34:11; Isa 38:19; 2 Tim 1:5 and 3:15; and Eph 6:4. The latter passage, for example, enjoins fathers to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (KJV).

In OT times, the role of parents was supplemented by that of the priests. "For

the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty” (Mal 2:7 NIV). In the NT period, the church functioned as the extended family of God and every leader of the faith community was considered a teacher.⁵ These leaders included apostles, prophets, bishops, elders, and deacons. Elders, for instance, were enjoined to teach by example and to see themselves as “shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:1-3 NIV).

There were, however, individuals who were especially commissioned for the work of teaching. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Paul further observes that God “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13 NIV). It is important to note that, based on the Greek text, the passage refers to four groups of people,⁶ with the function of pastor and teacher considered to be one and the same gift. Thus pastors are to see their role as teachers of their congregations, while teachers are to understand their calling as shepherds (i.e., pastors) of their students. Notice that the ministry of these pastors-teachers results in the development of faith, knowledge, and service; in essence, an integration of faith, learning, and life.

In the biblical paradigm, however, teachers are but representatives of the Master Teacher. “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11 NIV; also 2 Tim 2:15). In the ultimate sense then, God is the teacher in biblical education. As the prophet Isaiah points out, “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isa 54:13 KJV). The passage denotes something more than merely learning about God. Rather, students are to be taught by God, through His human instrumentalities.

⁵K. Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989).

⁶D. L. Hocking, “The Theological Basis for the Philosophy of Christian School Education,” in *The Philosophy of Christian School Education*, ed. P. A. Kienel (Whittier, CA: Association of Christian Schools International, 1978), 21.

Perspectives on Content and Method

From an integrational perspective, divine truth and values form the bedrock of the educational experience. An understanding of God's truth is mediated through His word (John 17:17), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (16:13). It is also illustrated tangibly through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (14:6). Given that all truth in any subject area is ultimately God's truth,⁷ students must be led to relate the truthfulness of every topic they study to the ultimate Source of truth.

The integration of faith and learning also emphasizes the importance of moral values in the formation of the character. "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8). Teachers, for example, are to help students understand "the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek 44:23 NIV). This is best accomplished through a process of values formation and maturation that involves analysis, reflection, and action. The apostle Paul portrays that vast value-laden agenda for Christian education:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble [KJV: honest], whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9 NIV)

This perspective regarding God-derived truth and values-oriented learning permeates every subject area. In the sciences, for example, students must be encouraged to integrate the words and works of God. The basis for this integration is found in the fact that the living Word formed nature (John 1:1-4); that God set aside a day of rest in which to view His handiwork from a spiritual perspective (Exod 20:8-11); that Christ derived spiritual truth from natural settings (e.g., Matt 6:28-30; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 12:6-7); and that in the New Earth, the redeemed will continue their study of God's creation (Isa 11:6-9).

An integrated Bible-based approach to language and literature might incorporate the understanding that it is God who gave the gift of creative expression (Gen 2:19). While sin has distorted language (Gen 11:4-9), God has taken the initiative to bridge the communication gap (Acts 2:7-12), ultimately restoring and reuniting language (Rev 7:9-10). This approach may also consider the concept of the study of quality literature as a Christian mandate (1 Tim 4:13), as well as the existence of literature that is worthless or injurious (1 Tim 6:20). It may further help the student realize that there are God-given standards for Christian literature (Phil 4:8), and that life is

⁷Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977).

either uplifted or debased by what we read (2 Cor 3:18).

In the arts, an integrational approach might seek to help the student to develop Christian criteria for evaluating musical renditions, as well as other art forms. This might include an analysis of the following considerations, among others:

1. Is it in harmony with divine values? (e.g., Phil 4:8)
2. Does it direct attention toward God, or does it exalt self? (e.g., Isa 14:12-14)
3. Does it glorify immoral conduct? (e.g., Exod 32:15-19)
4. Can it be listened to, played, or sung to the glory of God? (e.g., 1 Cor 10:32)
5. Does it mingle the sacred and the common? (e.g., Lev 10:1-2)
6. Is its effect to bring one closer to God, or does it make God seem irrelevant? (e.g., Matt 7:20)

Similar Bible-based approaches might be developed in any subject area—technology, history, psychology, research, social studies, and manual arts, to mention a few.

Illustrations of IFL in Practice

Having sought to establish from Scripture a conceptual framework for the integration of faith and learning, we should also note that the Bible also provides multiple examples of these concepts at work. We consider, in chronological order, a representative sample.

Abraham, father of the faithful (Rom 4:16), instructed his extended family to adhere to a God-centered code of ethical conduct. “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19 KJV).

In later years, the priests and Levites were charged with educating both adults and children in the divine precepts (Lev 10:10-11). This was to be especially performed at the yearly feasts and during the sabbatical year (Deut 31:9-13).

During the time of the kings, some, such as David (Pss 119:12; 143:10), endeavored to understand God’s revealed will and transmit that to their people. Most, however, failed to instruct the nation in the ways of God, with resulting apostasy and national ruin.

For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. . . . In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another. (2 Chr 15:3-6 NIV)

There were moments of revival and reformation, however, and these were brought about largely through education. A case in point may be found in Jehoshaphat’s reform.

In the third year of his reign he sent his officials . . . to teach in the towns of Judah. With them were certain Levites. . . and the priests . . . They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people. (2 Chr 17:7-9 NIV)

The result was felt in both political and economic prosperity:

The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats. (17:10-11)

The reformation influence was seen in the case of Daniel and his friends. Although studying at a secular institution, they continued to integrate faith and learning on a personal level. They stood firmly for divine principle (Dan 1:8-16), turning to God as the source of wisdom and understanding (2:18-23). The result was remarkable.

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. . . . In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. (Dan 1:17-20 NIV)

After the exile, another reformation took place, prompted through the teaching/learning process. Ezra, a scribe who “had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10 NIV), read the word of God before all the people. He was joined in this work by the Levites. “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God, and they gave the sense, and helped [the people] to understand the reading” (Neh 8:1-8). The responsibilities of these educators were threefold—proclamation, explanation, and exhortation.⁸ The response of the learners involved listening, understanding, obedience, and worship. The outcome was a revival of godliness among God’s people.

Jesus Christ, in His ministry, taught multitudes and individuals, children and adults. But His focus was invariably God-centered, values-oriented, and anchored

⁸R. W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

in the Scriptures. Consider these passages:

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:1-3 NIV)

Now so it was, as the multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God, that he stood by the Lake of Gennesaret And he got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. (Luke 5:1-3)

Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God . . ." (John 3:1-2 NIV)

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 19:14)

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself And they said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:27,32)

In the early Christian church, Philip, one of the seven deacons, was directly involved in a Spirit-led teaching/learning situation.

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man [an Ethiopian official] reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. (Acts 8:30-31,35)

Timothy, one of Paul's fellow workers, received Bible-based instruction as a child from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). The church later recognized in him the gift of teaching and commissioned him for this ministry. Paul refers to this singular event.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Tim 4:13-14 NIV)

Similarly, Titus, a Gentile convert supervising the work of the church on the island of Crete, was appointed to teach various groups of individuals according to their distinct needs and responsibilities (Titus 2:1-10,15). These groups, which included older men and women, younger men and women, and slaves, were to be given a Bible-based, values-oriented education.

Finally, all Christian believers are called to teach the word of God in whatever context they find themselves:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. (Matt 28:19-20 KJV)

It is perhaps significant that the word “teach” (NKJV: “make disciples”) is the only imperative in this verse in the Greek, thus constituting the thrust of this gospel commission.

Conclusion

The concept of the integration of faith and learning in Christian education seems to be biblically defensible. The Scriptures present evidence regarding the importance of receiving the mind of Christ; the comprehensiveness of Christian life and learning; as well as the interrelationship of faith and learning in the life. Furthermore, the Bible delineates the parameters of an integrated educational program, describes the role of divine and human instrumentalities in the educational process, and provides spiritual perspectives for both content and method. Finally, the word of God presents an array of real-life examples of the integration of faith and learning in practice.

Through the integration of faith and learning, Christian education remains distinctive—in the world, but not of the world (John 17:15-6). It enables students to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). Such education represents a challenge, a high calling for teachers, administrators, and all other involved constituencies. It is, nevertheless, attainable.

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (Deut 30:11-14 NIV)

Today, we must choose whom we will serve—whether the gods of traditional education that our mentors served on the other side of the river, or the gods of this secular age in which we now live—or the one true God (adapted from Josh 24:15). May our faith commitment affirm, “But as for me and my house, as for me and my classroom, as for me and my school, we will serve the Lord!”

AASS 4 (2001):35-47

First Professorial Lecture presented at the
Inauguration ceremony for AIIAS Administration Building
August 28, 2001

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE SERPENT ON THE POLE

Edwin E. Reynolds, Ph.D.

In the Gospel of John, chap. 3, Jesus was attempting to explain to Nicodemus the mystery of salvation. As a teacher in Israel, Nicodemus should have had a thorough understanding of how a person comes to salvation, but Jesus was having trouble getting even the basics through to him. Finally, He explained it on the basis of an analogy from the OT, with which Nicodemus must have been familiar. Citing the experience of Israel in the wilderness of Zin, Jesus said to Nicodemus in vv. 14-16, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."¹

This well-known passage is not always properly understood due a lack of clarity regarding what actually happened in the original incident. The analogy becomes confusing when we lose sight of the nature of the original event and how it functioned as a type of Christ's work for human salvation.² Many wonder how

¹Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NIV.

²Some scholars do not understand the original event to have been typological in its essence, but rather that Jesus made a typological application of it later in His illustration to Nicodemus. See, e.g., Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Deuteronomy* (N.p., 1868; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers*, Expositor's Bible (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 248. However, Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 397, 402, 420-22, argues convincingly that typology requires that the original event contain already within it, by divine design, the essential features that make it typological. See also Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Genesis–Song of Solomon* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 215. This paper attempts to implement such a typology.

a snake could properly function as a type of Christ that would reveal the way of salvation. Actually, Nicodemus, as a scholar of the Scriptures, may have understood better than we do.

Background

The original event involved another in a series of rebellious acts on the part of God's people. They had rebelled against God's instruction to go in and possess the land of Canaan (Num 14:1-12). Then they had rebelled at His decision to let them die in the wilderness, and they decided to try to possess the land after all (14:39-45). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram then led another rebellion, against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, which God signally put down with an awesome display of divine indignation (16:1-35). Although God provided abundant evidence of His choice of Moses and Aaron as the leaders of His people, Israel continued to rebel against them and against God (16:36-17:13).

The people rebelled again at Kadesh, this time because of a shortage of water (20:2-5). After the death of Aaron at Mount Hor, Israel was attacked by Arad, king of the Canaanites. God delivered them from Arad after they promised to destroy the Canaanite cities (21:1-3).

This should have prompted a better attitude on Israel's part, but it did not. No sooner had they begun to move again than they became impatient with having to travel around Edom. Num 21:5 says, "They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'" They were referring, of course, to the manna, which typified Christ, the true Bread from heaven (John 6:32-33,49-51). They despised it, denying that they were given bread. They also denied being provided with water, though the water from the rock in Meribah, which typified the water of life from Jesus, followed them in their travels (1 Cor 10:4; cf. Pss 78:15-16,20; 105:41).³ They preferred the food and drink of Egypt to that which Heaven provided, and they wished to return to that

³Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical: 1 Cor*, enlarged type ed., ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949), 181-82, observes that it is entirely reasonable to assume that the text is correct in declaring that the abundant water from the rock did not form a pool but rather a flowing stream that accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings (or vice versa). A. R. Fausset, "1 Corinthians—Revelation," in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 4, *Acts—Romans, 1 Corinthians—Revelation* (N.p., n.d; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 310, notes the tradition of Rabbi Solomon that the rock, or at least the stream from it, followed the Israelites in their wanderings during the nearly forty years they spent in the desert.

pagan land. They spoke as though God was unable to provide for their sustenance and protection in the wilderness.

After all He had done for them, God was very displeased. He sent poisonous snakes among them, which bit them so that many died. Then the people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us" (Num 21:7). So Moses interceded on behalf of the people. Then God said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" (v. 8). So Moses cast a snake out of bronze and put it up on a pole. When anyone who had been bitten by a snake looked in faith at the bronze snake, he or she was restored.

Many have wondered at this seemingly strange situation. Snakes were the cause of the people's death, yet God had Moses prepare a representation of the snake to be held up before them, by looking at which they would be restored. There was no restorative power in the bronze snake. Why did God choose to use a snake on a pole to heal their deadly wounds? Certainly they were not expected to worship the snake as a deity with healing power.⁴ The command of God explicitly forbade the formation and worship of images as deities. What was the function of the serpent on the pole as a means of effecting a remedy against the poison of the serpents? Let us assess the situation as described in the text of Num 21 first. Then we will turn to the use Jesus made of it in John 3 and to other biblical backgrounds for understanding the theological significance of the symbolism.

Num 21:4-7

The text says that "the people grew impatient on the way" (v. 4); as a result, "they spoke against God and against Moses" (v. 5). This was in direct violation of Exod 22:28: "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people." The penalty for blasphemy, one of the most serious of offenses, was death by stoning

⁴A number of scholars have noted that snakes were held by peoples in contemporary religious cultures to have life-giving powers and to function as healing deities. See, e.g., Karen Randolph Joines, "The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 251; John Joseph Owens, "Numbers," *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *Leviticus-Ruth*, ed. Clifton J. Allen et al. (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 139; However, as observed by James Philip, *Numbers*, Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 232, these observations of contemporary pagan beliefs and practices "do not explain why this particular symbolism was enjoined by the Lord and enacted by the people." Similarly, Watson, 248, observes, "It has been rightly pointed out that the heathen view of the serpent as a healing power has no countenance here." On worship, see 2 Kgs 18:4.

(Lev 24:16).⁵ After death, the law required that the corpse would be hung up on display as a warning to others (Deut 21:22-23).⁶ In this case, since God was the one to carry out the sentence, He provided a symbolic substitute. Rather than stoning and hanging up the guilty people, He sent serpents, symbols of their ancient enemy who sought their destruction, to punish them with fiery poison, then He executed the sentence, symbolically, against the serpent rather than against His people. A representation of a dead serpent must be hung up for all to see. In the symbolic death of the serpent, the instrument of death to them, God's people were to see the substitute for their own deaths, the opportunity for the gift of life of which they were unworthy. In looking to the serpent held aloft on the stake, they were to see not an object of admiration or worship but the death of their hated enemy, the death they had deserved to die.

The text indicates that their first complaint was that God had brought them out of Egypt to die in the desert (21:5). This slanderous accusation came despite the many miracles by which He had delivered them both from Egypt and from the many perils in the wilderness for thirty-eight years. It was right for God to let them see what it was really like to die in the wilderness when His protection should be withdrawn. The snakes had been there all along, but Israel had been protected from them (Deut 8:15). Now God removed His protection so they could see the falsity of their accusation. At the same time, God could effect their restoration again by a miracle of His power without any effort on their part, just by the seemingly absurd obedience of looking at a metallic representation of the lifeless instrument of their destruction.

The second part of their complaint was that they had no bread or water. This was, of course, totally untrue. God had provided bread from heaven faithfully for the past thirty-eight years, and water had been provided from an ever-abundant source. But they despised the manna from heaven: "We detest this miserable food!" (v. 5). The Rabbis point out that, in the curse, the serpent had been given dust to eat, but had never complained; now God's people are given bread and water by a daily miracle from heaven, yet they complain vehemently.⁷ Thus the serpents

⁵Cf. Matt 26:65-66; John 10:33; Herbert Danby, ed., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 391-92 (Sanh. 7.4-5).

⁶*Mishnah*, 390 (Sanh. 6.4): "All that have been stoned must be hanged. So R. Eliezer. But the Sages say: None is hanged save the blasphemer and the idolator." Cf. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Bronze Serpent," *Estudios biblicos* 49 (1991): 324, who says, "The standing punishment for blasphemy, idolatry, and rejection of YHWH (John 15:24) is to be stoned, then hanged: Dt 21:22-23."

⁷Patrick J. Willson, "Snake on a Stick," *Christian Century*, 2 March 1994, 223, cites *Targum Neofiti* on this verse, in which the divine voice declares: "Let the serpent which does not murmur concerning its food come and rule over the people which has murmured concerning their food."

are permitted to get their revenge on those from whose seed is to come One who will crush the head of the serpent.

When the people begin to die from the venom of the deadly serpents, they realize that it is a punishment for their sin of complaining against God and His provision for them. They come to Moses and admit, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” Moses prayed, but God did not remove the snakes. Instead He elected to deliver them in the midst of the snakes, indeed, through a representation of the very instrument of their deaths.⁸

Num 21:8-9

God instructed Moses to fashion a snake and mount it atop a pole so that anyone who had been bitten could look at it and live. So Moses fashioned a bronze snake, mounted it on a pole, and when anyone looked at the snake, he or she lived (21:8-9). The text does not say that Moses was instructed to make the snake of bronze, but to make a *saraph*, literally, a “fiery” or “burning” object, a snake in the context. Moses made it of bronze.⁹ Why of bronze? Some scholars speculate that the light reflecting from the bronze most closely imitated the natural colors of the “fiery serpents” (KJV).¹⁰ Others argue that bronze (*nʿh ošet*) naturally belongs to the snake (*nāhās*), and that this may be seen in the description of what Moses made: *nʿhasʿ nʿhošet*.¹¹ J. D. M. Derrett sees a typological significance in that the bronze makes it a light-bearing object pointing to Christ as the light to be

⁸Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 665, observes: “That which cured was shaped in the likeness of that which wounded. So Christ, though perfectly free from sin himself, yet was *made in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom. viii. 3), so like that it was taken for granted that this man was a sinner, John ix. 24.” (Emphasis his.)

⁹Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 156-57, argues for “copper” as the better translation, and sees in the reddish color a symbol of the blood of the atonement. However, most commentators opt for “bronze,” although the Hebrew word can have either meaning. I follow the latter in this paper, but it is not a critical point in the discussion. Either alternative is valid.

¹⁰The Hebrew term is *hannʿchāšim hasʿrāphim*, which is translated literally “fiery serpents” in the KJV, but is more correctly translated “venomous snakes” in the NIV, since *hasʿrāphim* no doubt refers to their fiery or poisonous bite more than to their color or appearance. See C. F. Keil and F[rantz] Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols. in one, trans. James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 3:139; and Watson, 246. Still, Moses may have made an association with the color, since he could not make it poisonous.

¹¹See Derrett, 320, n. 53.

gazed at when He is lifted up before the world.¹² Merrill Unger says that the bronze symbolizes judgment, as suggested by the bronze altar and bronze laver in the court of the sanctuary.¹³ It may be speculative to propose a final solution to this query. Perhaps there is validity in more than one of these answers.

The significance of the fabrication of a bronze snake on a pole seems to lie in three things: (1) the relationship of the snake to the cause of their pain and death; (2) the mounting of the snake on a pole or standard for all to see; and (3) the necessity of looking to it in order to find life.

As for the relationship between the poisonous snakes that were causing death among the people and the harmless snake on the pole, it was apparently important that a link be made in the mind of the observer that the instrument of their death should be transformed into the means of obtaining new life.¹⁴ This could only be true if the snake on the pole were represented as dead.¹⁵ A representation of a live snake would be meaningless as a symbol to those who were dying of snake venom. But a representation of a dead snake held aloft as a trophy of victory over the snake and its poisonous bite would give hope to the dying and would typify the death of the coming Savior who would make life available by enduring the death of the sinner. A single look, in faith, at this illustration of God's plan for the salvation of the human race would be sufficient to give life to the dying.

By mounting the snake atop a pole or standard, it was elevated or lifted up for all to see. If the snake was to be represented as dead, it would make sense to impale it on the pole as on a stake or gibbet.¹⁶ Thus it would function as an ensign for the people to rally around. The word for the pole used by Moses is *nāš*, which most commonly refers to a standard with a banner affixed or a military ensign with the symbol of the authority atop. However, this does not preclude the use of a stake, lance, or spear on which to mount the object being displayed. George B. Eager says that a banner was sometimes formed by applying something to a

¹²Ibid., 319-21. Derrett bases this on John 12:32-36, a parallel to John 3:14-15, which seems to imply that Jesus is to be raised up as a light. In answer to the question of who the Son of man is who is to be lifted up, Jesus points to Himself as the light in whom they should put their trust.

¹³Unger, 214. See also Philip, 234.

¹⁴Wenham, 157-58, suggests that "the clue to the symbolism should be sought in the general principles underlying the sacrifices and purificatory rites in the Old Testament. Animals are killed so that sinful men who deserve to die may live. Blood which pollutes when it is spilled can be used to sanctify and purify men and articles. . . . In all these rituals there is an inversion. . . . In the case of the copper serpent similar principles operate. Those inflamed and dying through the bite of living snakes were restored to life by a dead reddish-coloured snake."

¹⁵Ibid., 158, notes the significance of the fact that the snake was represented as dead. See also Keil and Delitzsch, 3:140.

¹⁶Derrett, 320, says it was "pierced (no doubt) to be fixed to the pole."

streamer on the end of a lance.¹⁷ A snake impaled on a stake would make a very meaningful trophy to hold aloft as a standard if one wanted to give hope to those bitten by venomous snakes.

The necessity of looking at this representation of God's plan for salvation from the poison of sin involved not only the act of obedience but also the cultivation of faith. To see beyond the symbol to the salvific realities to which it pointed would require faith. What possible good could come from looking at the representation of a dead snake? If God supplied the grace to turn a curse into a blessing for those willing to take Him at His word and obey, anything was possible. That was asking a lot, though, from those so recently complaining at God's providences. Faith would develop only as one saw meaning in the symbolism of the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole. The meaning must have been evident to those asked to look at the serpent, and the meaning appears to derive inherently from the portrayed death of the serpent.

Jesus' Use of the Story in John 3:14-15

Jesus took this incident and brought out of it a meaning that might otherwise have been overlooked. He compared the lifting up of Moses' serpent in the desert with His own lifting up (v. 14). The use of the term "lifted up" (from *hypsōō*) is full of significance. John later explains what Jesus means by it. In John 12:32-33 we learn that the lifting up of Jesus is a reference to the death He would die on the cross. Jesus' use of the term is a probable allusion to Isa 52:13-53:12,¹⁸ where the Servant of Yahweh is to be lifted up very high (52:13) in the context of great suffering and death, to be stricken for the transgression of the people (53:8) and to bear the sin of many (v. 12).

He made the comparison explicitly in terms of the faith required to gain life: "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (v. 15). This pointed to the fact that one must see something beyond the external appearance. The bronze snake had no power to give life to the people. It was their faith in God's promise to do what He said on condition of their obedience that gave life to the dying. But the condition was to look in faith to the serpent on the pole. In what sense could looking to the serpent on the pole produce faith? Only if the individual needing life could see some significant meaning beyond the external appearance of the serpent. A dead snake pierced on a stake would provide that significant meaning.

¹⁷George B. Eager, "Banner," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1956), 1:384. Herbert Lockyer, Sr., ed., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1986), s.v. "Standard," states that "standards were probably . . . raised on a spear or pole (Num 21:8-9)," and mentions that the "Assyrian armies carried the moon sickle mounted on a spear" for their standards.

¹⁸So Derrett, 325-26.

It would speak of the triumph over the enemy causing their death. Specifically, it would represent the death of the source of evil whose fiery poison was killing them.

Is it reasonable biblically to see the serpent on the pole as a dead serpent pierced through by a stake and raised in a show of triumph to serve as a standard to rally around? Indeed, there is considerable evidence to support such a view. First, we will look at the textual and historical evidence, then we will look at the theological support for such a view.

Biblical Methods of Exposing the Dead

In the OT it was a frequent practice to expose the dead after death.¹⁹ This occurred primarily in one of two contexts. Either the victim was notoriously evil, and the corpse was exposed as a warning to others, as in Num 25:4, or the victim was a conquered foe whose corpse was exposed to show that the enemy was dead, as in Josh 8:29 and 10:26. Both of these practices have significance for the serpent on the pole, as we will see.

In Gen 40 two of Pharaoh's officials were put in prison because they had angered him. Each one had a dream and came to Joseph to interpret their dreams. Joseph told the chief butler that after three days Pharaoh would lift up his head and restore him to his office (v. 13), but he told the chief baker that after three days Pharaoh would lift off his head and hang him on a tree (v. 18). This is exactly what happened (vv. 20-22). The chief baker was beheaded and his corpse exposed by "hanging" it on a tree. This does not mean that he was hanged by the neck, for his head was cut off. The word translated "hang" is a form of the verb *tālāh*, which

¹⁹"Suspension, whether from cross, stake, or gallows, was not used as a mode of taking life, but was sometimes added after death as an enhancement of punishment." *The Bible Commentary on the Old Testament: Exodus-Ruth*, ed. F. C. Cook, abridged and ed. J. M. Fuller, Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 312. Keil and Delitzsch, 3:408, concur: "The hanging, not of criminals who were to be put to death, but of those who had been executed with the sword, was an intensification of the punishment of death (see at Num. xxv.4), inasmuch as the body was thereby exposed to peculiar kinds of abominations."

means to suspend, to hang up, or to impale or gibbet.²⁰ It later came to be used for the act of crucifixion.²¹

This is the same verb used in Josh 8:29 and 10:26, cited above, as well as in 2 Sam 4:12, where David killed the murderers of Ishbosheth and exposed their bodies by the pool in Hebron. It is also the verb used throughout the book of Esther for execution, which was not by the gallows, as many believe, but by impalement and exposure on a tall stake.²² More significantly, the same verb is used in Deut 21:22-23, a text of great significance for our study, both historical and theological, to which we will return later.

A different verb is used in Num 25:4, namely *yāqa*ʿ, which when used causatively means to expose by impalement.²³ There God commands Moses to take those leaders who had indulged in sexual immorality with Moabite women and kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that His fierce anger would be turned away from Israel. This passage offers solid evidence that in the book of Numbers impalement on a stake was used by the people of Israel as a means of exposure after death.

The same verb is also used in 2 Sam 21:6,9,13, which records the actions of the Gibeonites against the sons of Saul to avenge Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites by killing and exposing seven of Saul's sons before the Lord in Gibeah.

²⁰William Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), s.v. "*tālāh*," says that when used with *ʿal hāʿēš* the expression means "to hang anyone on a stake, to crucify, a kind of punishment used among the Israelites, Deuter. 21:22; the Egyptians, Gen. 40:19; the Persians, Est. 7:10; 5:14." Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 241, state, "The language of Joseph describes minutely one form of capital punishment that prevailed in Egypt—viz., that the criminal was decapitated, and then his headless body gibbeted on a tree by the highway, until it was gradually devoured by the ravenous birds (Deut. xxi. 22, 23)." Keil and Delitzsch, 1:348, concur.

²¹Ronald F. Youngblood, "*tālāh*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 3:971, argues that *tālāh* in the OT signifies impaling and includes various forms of crucifixion in the later period.

²²Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Hanging," says, "The Persians hanged persons by impaling them on a stake (Ezra 6:11; Esth. 6:4)." Henry Snyder Gehman, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (1970), s.v. "Gallows," states, "Hanging by strangulation was not a Persian method of punishment. Haman no doubt intended to impale Mordecai (cf. Esth. 2: 23; Herod. iii. 159); the 'tree' probably was a pole or stake."

²³Paul R. Gilchrist, "*Yāqa*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:397, says, "The Hiphil clearly brings out the causative, although it serves euphemistically for the idea of execution by hanging or, more likely at that time by impaling (as in Num 25:4 . . .)." See also John Arthur Thompson, "*yq*," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (1997), 2:521.

Interestingly, *talah* is also used in the same context (v. 12) to refer to the hanging up of the corpses of Saul and Jonathan by the Philistines in Beth Shan.

A third word which refers to impalement, *m^eha'*, is found in the Aramaic of Ezra 6:11. There Cyrus threatens anyone who changes his edict concerning the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem that "a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it." C. F. Keil notes that the word translated "lifted up" in this passage is the usual word used for being crucified, and because *m^eha'* has the meaning of "to strike," with *al* it implies that the person is to be fastened or nailed to the beam as in crucifixion.²⁴ They further report that this was a common means of capital punishment among the ancient Assyrians and Persians, though the manner of impalement or crucifixion varied.²⁵

Since there are at least three different words used in the OT for hanging or impaling a body after death for the purpose of public exposure, and since there are numerous examples of this kind of activity, including one in the book of Numbers itself, we must conclude that it was a fairly common means of displaying the dead when they wanted the people to take notice of the execution. Thus it is not unreasonable to assume that the serpent may have been portrayed as impaled on the pole, even though the text may not make it explicit. If its death was to be flaunted before the people, that would be the most natural way of accomplishing the task. The fact that it was to be displayed on a *nēš* (standard) indicates that the purpose of lifting it up was to flaunt it before the people as a rallying point. The people would be much more likely to have rallied around the symbol of a serpent impaled on the end of the *nēš* than around the symbol of a live serpent like the ones that were in the process of killing them.

Let us return briefly to Deut 21:22-23 to learn more about the significance of being exposed by having the body impaled on a stake. There God instructed the people of Israel,

If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's

²⁴C. F. Keil, *I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 3 vols. in one, trans. James Martin, Andrew Harper, and Sophia Taylor, Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978 reprint), 3:88.

²⁵"Among the Assyrians it generally consisted in the impalement of the delinquent upon a sharp strong wooden post; comp. Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon*, p. 355, and *Nineveh and its Remains*, p. 379, with the illustration fig. 58. According to Herod. iii. 159, Darius impaled as many as 3000 Babylonians after the capture of their city (ἀνεσκολόπισε). Crucifixion proper, however, i.e., nailing to a cross, also occurred among the Persians; it was, however, practised by nailing the body of the criminal to a cross after decapitation; see the passages from Herodotus in *Brissonii de regio Persarum princip.* I. ii. c. 215." Ibid.

curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

The word translated “tree” in this passage is עֵץ, which also means a piece of wood, a branch, a stick, a pole, a beam, and so forth.²⁶ The executed criminal might be either impaled on the end of a pole or stake, or his hands might be tied together and he would be suspended from a branch or cross member; affixed to an upright post.²⁷ This treatment, we can see from the text, was for those who had committed capital crimes. We see also that the issue takes on theological dimensions, since God states that anyone who receives this kind of treatment is under God’s curse. God made a rule that the corpse should not be left exposed overnight, because the curse would desecrate the land.²⁸

This passage makes the connection between the exposure of the corpse of an executed criminal and the curse of God, thus introducing us to the theological dimension of the significance of the serpent on the pole.

Theological Significance of Exposing Criminals

The apostle Paul in the NT points to the theological significance of the exposure of criminals in relation to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In Gal 3:13 he writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” In this short analysis everything comes together. We can now see why Jesus could say to Nicodemus that the serpent on the pole becomes an analogy to His own impending death on the cross. Jesus had to become a curse for mankind in order to redeem mankind from the curse of the law.²⁹ He did this by being killed as a criminal who had committed a capital offense, being nailed to a tree and exposed to public humiliation. By so doing He came under the curse of God in our place, dying the death we deserved to die. And by manifesting faith in this substitutionary atonement, we receive the gift of new life from God. The serpent had played a similar role in the wilderness, representing the cursed one who committed a capital offense and deserved to die and suffer public exposure. By its symbolic death the serpent provided, by the mercy of God, a means of attaining life through the obedience of

²⁶Larry L. Walker, “עֵץ,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (1997), 3:474.

²⁷The latter is described in the *Mishnah*, Sanh. 6.4.

²⁸Keil and Delitzsch, 3:408, point out that the desecration was not a matter of hygiene but of spiritual defilement, since it had to do with the victim being under the curse of God.

²⁹“The curse of the law” means that we are under a curse because of our inability to keep the law perfectly (v. 10).

faith, looking to God's provision and seeing beyond it God's readiness to extend forgiveness and life to the sinner.³⁰

We gain a further insight into the significance of the serpent on the pole as a type of Christ from Paul's statement in 2 Cor 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The concept represented by the impalement of the serpent on the stake is substitutionary atonement: the serpent is judged and killed not because it has sinned but for what it represents, while those who have sinned and deserve to die are forgiven, healed, saved, given life. John Philip writes concerning the bronze serpent,

As Israel was given this symbol of substitutionary atonement—their sin, represented by the bronze serpent, was cursed and cancelled, and it was this they were bidden to look upon—so also Christ, for our sakes, and for our healing, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and made sin for us, and was lifted up from the earth, when he bore in His own body the judgment of a holy God upon sin.³¹

Paul further elaborates the theology of Christ's atonement in Rom 8:3: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man." Jesus came into this world in the likeness of sinful man, to be an offering for sin (cf. Heb 9:28; 10:5-12). Through His perfect, sinless life while in the garb of sinful flesh (Heb 7:26-27; 1 Pet 1:19), God condemned sin in the flesh, showing that there was no excuse for sin. Still, Jesus paid the penalty of the sinner on his or her behalf.³² Although innocent, He became a condemned criminal in place of the sinner, so that those who were condemned to die might be spared by the mercy of God in providing the substitute. Similarly, the bronze serpent apparently represented the death that must occur so that others could live. Notably, R. H. Lightfoot observes that the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up "on a pole or stake, like a condemned criminal, for all to see."³³ The symbolic corpse of the condemned serpent became an ensign for the people, signifying God's provision of life through the death of the enemy, which represented sin.

³⁰Unger, 214, states, "It was the divine purpose that the lawless principle of sin, expressing itself so fully in fallen man (cf. Matt. 27:27-31), should be judged and condemned in man, the God-man, Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:3)."

³¹Philip, 234.

³²Rom 5:6,8; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Gal 1:4; 3:13; 1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 3:18.

³³R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary*, ed. C. F. Evans, Oxford Paperbacks (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 117.

In this connection, Matthew Henry points out that “Christ crucified *stands for an ensign of the people*, Isa. xi.10.”³⁴ The NIV of Isa 11:10 states, “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious” (cf. v. 12). The serpent on the pole functions as a type of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, being lifted up as a banner for the people to rally around as they look in faith to God’s provision for their forgiveness and salvation.

Conclusion

In taking another look at the bronze serpent on the pole, we have observed that there appears to be a typological connection between the serpent’s being lifted up on the pole and the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. This typology appears to transcend a simple analogy between two things that are lifted up to be looked at in faith. Meaningful faith requires comprehension, and comprehension requires that the symbols used be understandable within the context. Looking to the representation of a live venomous serpent lifted up on a pole would not be very understandable as inspiring faith in the context of people dying from the bite of such serpents. The more likely response would be either fear or, in the context of Canaanite and Egyptian practices, worship. Neither of these were the responses intended by God in giving directions to Moses.

Only a slain serpent, portrayed as impaled on a stake and lifted up as a banner to rally around would properly symbolize the victory over the enemy that would instill faith and hope in the hearts of a disconsolate and dying people. Looking in faith to the vanquished serpent lifted up as a trophy on the pole would serve to remind the people of God of the promise in Gen 3:15 that the head of the serpent would be crushed by the Seed of the woman, but the heel of the promised Seed would be bruised in the process. Thus, within the type was already found, by divine design, the essential elements of the archetype, and these elements could be perceived by faith on the part of the original observers and participants, if they were so inclined.

³⁴Henry, 665.

JESUS AS THE MODEL FOR THE NEW HUMANITY IN HEB 2

Joel N. Musvosvi, Ph.D.

The author of the book of Hebrews argues convincingly for the full deity of Jesus. In chap. 1 he demonstrates that Jesus is the express image of God, the Creator and upholder of the universe, the all-sufficient high priest who sits at the right hand of the throne of God (1:3); the One to whom the Father ascribes ultimate glory and eternal majesty (1:8,9); the One who is accorded worship by all angels of God (1:6). Having established the unchallenged position of the Son in relation to the Father, the author turns his attention in chap. 2 to the discussion of Jesus in relation to humanity.

Reflection on Ps 8

To answer this question the writer of Heb goes back to Ps 8. This psalm may be divided in two parts:

1. Verses 1-3 form a tripartite doxology: God's name and glory are universally majestic (v. 1); His power and greatness, proclaimed even by infants, subdues all adversaries (v. 2); His dominion extends beyond the heavens (v. 3). Thus the first three verses focus on the majesty, glory, power and dominion of God. They may be referred to as the *gloria in excelsis Deo* of the OT, lauding God's undisputed and unmatched glory and splendor.

2. Verses 4-9 focus on humanity. This section opens with a question, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him" (v. 4)?¹ Coming as this question does right after such a vivid description of the greatness of God, our natural answer is to acknowledge and affirm humanity's nothingness. Placed in juxtaposition to such an awesome God, what is a man? But we must note that the question is asked in a double context. First, there is the context of the awesome majesty of God shown over the whole universe. Second is the context of the divine attitude and relation of tender thoughtfulness and care as expressed in the question; it already acknowledges divine care and solicitude as present and active towards humanity.

¹All Bible quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

The question is an expression of wonder at this divine attitude. Were the first context the only one, the answer would be very simple and straightforward. However, the second context complicates the answer. The question is not whether God will take thought of and care for humanity; rather, it is a question of humanity's identity in view of the fact of the evident and on-going solicitous divine thought and care for him. God is already caring for humanity. So in view of the fact that God cares for humanity in this way, what is mankind that God cares for him?

The psalmist then asserts that humanity has been made a little lower than God (v. 5). Such an answer was so astounding and perfectly incomprehensible to the OT community that the Septuagint translators apparently took liberty to translate **lōhîm* (God) with *angeloi* (angels) without clear textual support for the change.² The text must have seemed to exalt humanity too highly for theological comfort. Thus by a simple word substitution the translators sought to preserve the original intent of the statement while removing the obvious theological *scandalon*.

But the psalmist's answer to the question of human identity is more elaborate. Having placed humanity as being created a little lower than God, the psalmist proceeds, "and (you) crowned him with glory and honor" (v. 5b). As F. F. Bruce has observed, "The psalmist is overcome with wonder as he thinks of the glory and honor that God has bestowed on mankind, in making them but little lower than Himself and giving them dominion over all the lesser creation."³

The very same divine attributes of the opening doxology are now here being ascribed to humanity. And it is noteworthy that the act of crowning is not stated in the perfect tense, connoting humanity at the time of creation, but in the imperfect tense, portraying the future condition of mankind. Difficult as this statement might have been even in humanity's pristine glory, it is even more baffling when now made with reference to fallen human beings.

In vv. 6-8 humanity's conferred dominion or reign over God's creation in the terrestrial realm is stated. While God exercises dominion over the celestial realm—the heavens, the moon, and the stars, mankind has been given rulership over the terrestrial realm—the sheep, oxen, beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fishes of the sea. In this passage humanity is portrayed as a dim reflection of God in majesty and dominion.

²Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 85. The same word **lōhîm* is again rendered *angelous* in Pss 82:1,6; 97:7; and 138:1. The LXX translators reasoned that in these verses, to translate **lōhîm* with *Theos* would give a misleading meaning. Therefore, they opted for a theologically safe translation rather than a literal equivalence.

³F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 34. H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1956), 20, thinks that the statement about giving dominion to mankind was originally addressed to the king who exercised dominion over the world.

Verse 9 closes the psalm with the same exclamation as the opening doxology, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" It reaffirms the glory and majesty of God. In this psalm the identity and glory of God are self-evident. In fact, these are so self-evident that even babies and infants sing of them. It is the glory and identity of mankind, which seems shrouded in mystery, that is here unveiled by special revelation.

The psalm's focus on the glory and dominion of humanity alludes to the creation story: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Gen 1:26).

Humanity is a reflection of divine glory and majesty. It is noteworthy that after the statement of humanity's creation, there follows the statement of human dominion over all the terrestrial works of God's creation. The sequence of God's work in Gen is first the creation of mankind in God's glory and majesty, then the conferring of dominion on them. This same sequence is evident in Ps 8. Clearly the two passages are related and must not be studied in isolation. Thus in studying Heb 2 we must consider this thematic context of Gen 1, and we need to keep Ps 8 as the immediate passage in view.

Heb 2 and Ps 8:4-7

As we turn back to Heb 2 we discover that the author's focus is on Ps 8:4-7, specifically that portion which deals with humanity's position and glory. It seems that the author wishes his readers to view the nature of Christ from the nature of mankind. And so he has made an extended quotation of the passage, which he uses as an introduction to the identity and work of Christ.

Heb 2 begins with an exhortation to pay close and careful attention to the message already proclaimed (v. 1). The author pronounces judgement on those who neglect such a great salvation proclaimed by Jesus Himself and confirmed by those who heard Him (v. 3). Further, God did not subject the world to angels but to humanity (v. 5). And in an intriguing parallel construction, the author also points out that Jesus did not take on Himself the nature of angels but the nature of the seed of Abraham (v. 16). To state this parallel construction more clearly, when God decided to place the world under dominion at creation, He did not place it under the angels, but under humanity (v. 5). And when God sent His Son, Jesus did not take on himself the nature of angels, but the nature of the seed of Abraham (v. 16). It may be presented diagrammatically:

GOD'S ACTION

WITH REFERENCE TO
CREATION (Ps 8)WITH REFERENCE TO
REDEMPTION (Heb 2)

God creates humanity lower than angels (v. 5)	God sends Jesus lower than angels (v. 9)
God crowns humanity with glory and majesty (v. 5)	God crowns Jesus with glory and majesty (v. 9)
God places creation under humanity (vv. 6-8)	God places all things under Jesus (vv. 8-9)

Thus in both divine actions of grace, God bypassed the angels and chose humanity. Clearly, there is established a special relationship between Jesus and humanity.

The writer of Heb recalls that all things were put under the dominion of humanity. He emphasizes that this means that everything is subjected to humanity's dominion. He argues that we do not yet see all things under human dominion. And immediately following this observation he says,

But we do see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Heb 2:9-10

Therefore, while we do not as yet see all things under the dominion of mankind who was made a little lower than angels, we see another, namely Jesus, made a little lower than the angels. The first dominion was given to the first man, Adam, and his posterity. That dominion was lost to Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). Now we see the second dominion given to the second man, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.⁴

⁴A messianic Son of Man was already anticipated in Ps 80:17, "Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself." Pauline Giles points out that even though "Son of Man" was not used as a title for Jesus outside the gospels, except in the passage under consideration (Heb 2:6), in Stephen's vision recorded in Acts 7:55,56, and in the Apocalypse, the title was known and important. Pauline Giles, "The Son of Man in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Expository Times* 86 (1975), 328-32.

The writer of Heb understands Ps 8 to refer to humanity as well as to Christ. He sees in Christ the archetypal human being.⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker suggests that “it is preferable to interpret the psalm citation as referring first to man and second to Christ.”⁶

We must note carefully the points of affinity between Jesus and humanity in Heb 2: like human beings, Jesus is given dominion over creation (v. 8); made a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and majesty (v. 9); enters suffering and death (v. 9); comes under the fatherhood of God [although from a unique perspective] (v. 10); and shares in flesh and blood (v. 14). The author summarizes his argument by stating that in all things Jesus was made like His brothers (v. 17). Kistemaker writes, “Jesus became fully human in such a manner that He is related to us. He is our blood relative.”⁷

The bond between Jesus and His people is close and unbreakable. That bond is heaven’s pledge of eternal commitment to mankind. At a number of points in Heb 2:9-18, as summarised in the preceding paragraph, the author reaffirms this link with humanity. He makes use of three OT passages to bolster this linkage: Ps 22:22, a messianic reference that points to the post-resurrection Christ sharing in praise with His brothers and sisters; Isa 8:17, which refers to humanity’s dependence on God; and Isa 8:18, which mentions children as sharing in that dependence on God. Being of the same family (v. 11), Jesus is not ashamed to call humanity His “brothers” (Heb 2:11), or with endearment, “my brothers.” The bond is upheld in His declaration, “Here am I, and the children God has given me” (v. 13b). He fills the role of humanity’s High Priest (v. 17). It is noteworthy that a majority of these linkages are expressed using family models. This portrays Jesus as the head of the redeemed family. Indeed, “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family” (v. 11a).

In helping us to understand the human nature of Jesus the writer of Heb moves from the known to the unknown—from the nature of mankind to that of Jesus. It is as if Jesus was being patterned after humanity. It needs to be stressed, however, that in fact Jesus is the prototype of the new humanity. Notice, for instance, that in this chapter Jesus is not portrayed as being made after the pattern of humanity, though He took upon himself the nature of humanity. His oneness with humanity enables Him to lead us back to God. John F. MacArthur notes that in entering into fellowship with people Jesus took on himself something alien to His nature. The Greek word *metechō* translated as “shared” in v. 14,

has to do with taking hold of something that is not naturally one’s own

⁵Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 14, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 45.

⁶Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 66.

⁷*Ibid.*, 75.

kind. We by nature are flesh and blood; Christ was not. Yet he willingly took hold of something which did not naturally belong to him. He added to Himself our nature in order that he might die in our place, and that we might take hold of the divine nature that did not belong to us.⁸

Though in point of time Jesus took upon himself human nature after humanity had been created, He enters humanity as the prototype of God's new creation. He is portrayed in leadership roles: He tastes death for everyone (2:9); leads children that God has given to Him (v. 10); pioneers humanity's salvation (v. 10); sanctifies (v. 11); destroys the devil that has the power of death (v. 14); frees those who all of their lives have been subject to the fear of death (v. 15); fills the role of High Priest (v. 17); and helps tempted humanity (v. 18).

The portrayal of Jesus in Heb 2:9-18 clearly places Him at the head of redeemed humanity. The word *archēgós*, translated "captain" in Heb 2:10, has the connotation of source, pioneer, and exemplar. It points to a hero, a founder or patron of a city. It is used with the sense of an originator or a pioneer. The LXX uses it with the idea of a military leader who as captain participates with His people as He leads them on.⁹ Thus in this passage Jesus not only leads the children to glory; He is the source of their salvation. Jesus is the Great Exemplar—the Pattern Man. He is the paradigm of God's new humanity and the touchstone of God's new creation. In Jesus we get a preview of what God's new workmanship will be. He is not a static pattern like a statue, to be studied in passive contemplation; He is a dynamic pioneer to be actively followed as He leads many people to glory.

It is interesting to observe that in all the linkages of Jesus and humanity the implications are not to general humanity but to redeemed humanity. The author connects Jesus to the seed of Abraham. Kistemaker argues, "The name *Abraham* obviously must be understood to mean that all those who put their faith in Jesus are Abraham's descendants."¹⁰ His brothers are those who are led to glory (v. 10) and who are sanctified (v. 11). They constitute the congregation in which Jesus proclaims God's name (v. 12). Jesus refers to them as the children God has given to Him (v. 13). The redeemed are delivered from the fear of death and the devil (v. 15). This suggests that the humanity of whom Jesus is a pattern is not general humanity but the new humanity being re-created in the image of God.

⁸John F. MacArthur, *Hebrews*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 69.

⁹G. Delling, "archēgós," *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 83.

¹⁰Kistemaker, 76 (emphasis his).

Conclusion

Heb 2 makes an important contribution to our understanding of the human nature of Jesus Christ. There are indications within the text that point to His role as source, pioneer and exemplar of God's new creation. The writer of Heb, by going back to Ps 8, demonstrates that the dominion that God gave to humanity over the earth, though lost at the Fall, is restored through Jesus as the new leader or head of the redeemed family. Therefore, Jesus portrays both God's new creation and the restoration of dominion. In Heb 2 Jesus is the fullness of the new humanity, with all that God intended in the beginning.

AASS 4 (2001):57-62

Devotional presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

THE CHURCH AND HER MISSION

Violeto Bocala

President, Southern Asia-Pacific Division
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Silang, Cavite, Philippines

Introduction

The only reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church is the proclamation of the gospel. The objective of all departments of the church and of all our institutions is the proclamation of the gospel. The gathering of SDA church leaders at its various meetings is to achieve the mission of the church—“To evangelize and not to institutionalize.” Someone has said, “If we don’t evangelize, we fossilize.”

The Role of Ministers in OT Times

What was God’s plan for His church in the OT period? The OT church, the Israelites, were God’s chosen people, a uniquely special and holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). According to the divine plan and purpose, the Israelites were to be both a royal and priestly race (v. 6). In an evil world, they were to be kings, moral and spiritual, in that they were to prevail over the realm of sin (Rev 20:6). As priests, they were to draw near to the Lord in prayer, in praise, and in sacrifice (2 Cor 5:17-18,20). As intermediaries between God and the heathen, they were to serve as instructors, preachers, and prophets, and were to be examples of holy living—heaven’s exponents of true religion.

While it was true that there were priests and Levites that led ancient Israel in spiritual matters, it was also equally true that in the divine blueprint the whole nation was to be a kingdom of priests—missionaries to the world (Isa 43:10; Pss 22:27; 96:3).

The role of the priests and Levites was to teach and lead the people for a global mission. That mission was to proclaim the message of salvation to the whole world. Rightly understood, the sanctuary service was not a doctrine. It was an illustration pointing to Calvary, the hope of humanity—the saving grace of God.

The failure of the OT church was that they kept the gospel for themselves. They did not evangelize, so they fossilized. When they stagnated, they started to become liberal, accommodating the doctrines of Baal and Molech. Their distinctive doctrines were toned down so that they would not appear odd when they mingled with the theologians of big religions. During the time of Ahab, 850 theologians were trained to teach the people of Israel about the theology of Balaam (1 Kgs 18:19). These theologians ate at the table of the queen—honored teachers that corrupted the fundamental beliefs of the church.

Once we tone down our distinctive doctrines and accommodate liberal thinking in conformity with the theology of the world, we are pronouncing extreme unktion on the SDA Church. Would to God that every pastor and every leader would be firm not to remove the old landmarks (Prov 22:28).

The Role of Ministers in the NT Church

What is God's plan for his *ecclesia* in the Christian era? In 1 Pet 2:9-10 we find a reiteration of the unchanging plan of God as recorded in Exod 19:5-6. We are (a) a chosen people, (b) a royal priesthood, (c) a holy nation, and (d) a people belonging to God. Please give special notice to what Peter says about the people that compose the NT church. "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" (v. 10).¹

The Jewish nation was once "chosen" to represent God on earth. Isa 43:10 says, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen." But because of unbelief and hardness of heart they lost their favored position. Peter here declares that God has now assigned the privileges and responsibilities of the Jewish nation to the Christian community, not as a national group, but as a people called out of every nation to constitute one spiritual entity, one great family, throughout the world (Gal 3:28).

The former status of literal Israel has been revoked² and given to this *ecclesia* which in the time past was not a people but now constitutes the chosen people of God, called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9-10). In this present *ecclesia*, Paul says in Gal 3:28, "there is neither Jew nor Greek." In other words, there is no racial boundary. His church, now chosen to evangelize the world, is composed of all races. Yet Paul says, "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (ibid.).

¹All Scripture passages quoted in this paper are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.

²"The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 4:30-31, 35-36.

“That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today.”³

Eph 4:7,11-12 tells us that God gave gifts to edify the body of Christ, which is the church. And the gifts given to the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. I want to emphasize at this time the role of the pastor. Ellen G. White describes the various functions of the pastor.

1. Planning

The best help that ministers can give to the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. Give each one something to do for others. . . . Let all be taught how to work.⁴

2. Teaching

Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth.⁵

3. Training

In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable cooperation. Let him labor for them individually, endeavoring to arouse them to seek for a deeper experience themselves, and to work for others.⁶

4. Organizing

Time is short and our forces must be organized to do a larger work.⁷

5. Putting the Members to Work

³Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917, 1943), 713-14.

⁴Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:82.

⁵Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1940), 69-70.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are “Laborers Together With God”* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1915, 1948), 196.

⁷White, *Testimonies*, 9:27.

Our ministers are not to spend their time laboring for those who have already accepted the truth. . . Just as soon as a church is organized, let the ministers set the members to work.⁸

Unless the total membership of the church unite their efforts with those of the ministers and church officers the work of God on this earth will not be finished.⁹

Let us take a look at the early Christian church. One hundred and twenty members were in the Upper Room organizing and agonizing before the Lord, seeking His power for evangelistic outreach. Peter was their main speaker, but all of them united their efforts with his. The result was three thousand baptisms (Acts 2:41). With all the church members involved in evangelism, Acts 4:4 records the conversion of another five thousand. The church went on to speak “the word of God with boldness” (4:31). “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (5:14).

The early Christian church multiplied rapidly. Now, with a large constituency, there was a temptation toward institutionalism, to develop the hierarchy of the priesthood. The ministers confined their work to the sanctimonious services in the sanctuary of the church. And the believers were satisfied merely going to church listening to the ceremonies, and giving their tithes and offerings. There was no more outreach work.

When the disciples were still alive, they did not succumb to the temptation of institutionalism. Acts 6:1-2 tells us that the apostles called a constituency meeting and made this declaration: “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (v. 2). What does this suggest for us?

The decision of the apostles means that we should not confine ourselves among ourselves. The problem of the local church was given attention. “Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” were appointed for the business of the local church (6:3). And the apostles continued mobilizing all believers to move forward in evangelizing the world.

There were hardships. There were persecutions. Acts 8:1 says, “And at the time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad.” Verse 4 continues, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. The strong witnessing of the total membership of the church “turned the world upside down” (17:6).

Read the book of Acts and you will see the penetration program of the early Christian church:

⁸Ibid., 7:20.

⁹White, *Gospel Workers*, 352.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Acts 1:1-6:7 | Jerusalem evangelized |
| 2. Acts 6:8-9:31 | Palestine penetrated |
| 3. Acts 9:32-12:24 | Syria penetrated |
| 4. Acts 12:25-16:5 | Asia Minor penetrated |
| 5. Acts 16:6-19:20 | Europe penetrated |
| 6. Acts 19:21-28:31 | Rome penetrated |

In a short period they evangelized the then-known world. But when the church became strong, it became corrupted. The hierarchy of the priesthood was established. The leaders of the church became different sizes of gods. The size of each one corresponded to the magnitude of his authority according to his level in the hierarchy. They were showing themselves as gods in the church (2 Thess 2:4). The priesthood of all believers was forgotten.

Similarly, church members today have become ordinary people. They are no longer members of the royal priesthood. They are no longer missionaries. Hence, they are not involved in the direct personal proclamation of the gospel. Their only part is to give their money for the support of the church. And the leaders confine their activities to making dogmas and policies to govern the constituency. There is no aggressive evangelism.

The next move is to study the different philosophies of the world in order to be on par with the wisdom of men. Following that, there is a temptation to synthesize the different theologies so that the church will not look eccentric by highly acclaimed theologians from other denominations. In that process, liberal theology finds its place inside the church. Some of the distinctive doctrines are thrown overboard. The fundamental beliefs are compromised. When that happens it is time to prepare the obituary of the evangelistic movement.

The Role of the Pastor in the Advent Movement

The leadership must change the direction of the church from institutionalism to an evangelistic movement. Leadership must recognize that every member of the church is a missionary. Each person belongs to the royal priesthood. Each pastor must be a trainer and every local church a training center.

Here is what Ellen G. White says:

The work of God is retarded by criminal unbelief in his power to use the common people to carry forward his work successfully.¹⁰

¹⁰Ellen G. White, "The Great Need of the Holy Spirit," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 16 July 1895, 450.

The idea that the minister must carry all the burdens and do all the work is a great mistake.¹¹

Church members who just rely on the preaching of the ministers and make no effort to share their faith with others are religious weaklings.¹²

The church of Christ is organized for service. Its watchword is ministry Christian ministers . . . have a broader work than many have recognized. They are not only to minister to the people, but to teach them to minister

Every church should be a training school for Christian workers.¹³

Let us go back to the NT model of church movement. Let every minister be a trainer, organizer and a leader—leading the church in the proclamation of the last warning message.

A pastor who is a trainer will multiply his efficiency a hundredfold if he keeps his flock active in missionary work and educates them to bear responsibilities. The spiritual condition of his congregation will grow and his sheep will multiply. Let the sheep multiply themselves. Here is a simple illustration:

New Zealand has a population of 3,000,000 people. In that country, they have 60,000,000 sheep. But do you know that the shepherd does not reproduce sheep? Sheep reproduce sheep. But here we are, trying to make the shepherd do the reproduction of the sheep.

We must redefine the pastor's role to be that of a trainer, teacher, motivator and organizer. Ellen G. White puts it succinctly:

The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers until the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends upon the ordained ministers.¹⁴

If we effect the role of the pastor as a trainer and the total membership of the church will become involved in evangelism, our global mission effort will turn the world upside down.

¹¹White, *Testimonies*, 6:435.

¹²Ibid., 434-35.

¹³Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905, 1942), 148-49.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 822.

AASS 4 (2001):63-67

Devotional presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

UNITED BY THE WORD OF GOD

P. D. Chun

President, Northern Asia-Pacific Division
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Seoul, South Korea

The greatest concern of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was about to depart from the earth for heaven was how the young church would survive the furious assaults of Satan and successfully accomplish its mission. In order to protect and enable His church He has given it two great gifts. One is the Holy Spirit and the other is the word of God. These two are always working together in fulfilling Christ's will on earth.

Even while Christ was with them, His disciples were not quite united. Each of them still maintained their inherent weaknesses. Often they quarreled with each other. They were not able to overcome their selfishness. If they could not maintain unity while Christ was with them, how much more difficult it would be after their Master had departed.

The subject of Jesus' earnest prayer on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane was the unity of His disciples after His departure.

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom you have given Me, that they may be one as We are I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. (John 17:11,20,21)¹

¹All Scripture passages quoted in this paper are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

The Holy Spirit and the word of God work together in bringing and maintaining unity among God's church. The Holy Spirit is working tirelessly among God's people to bring unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. He gives spiritual gifts to each individual to strengthen the unity of the church. The unity and love among the followers of Jesus is the most powerful and irrefutable evidence that they are true people of God (John 13:34-35).

The Holy Spirit does not work apart from the word of God. He works with the word of God for unity. Unity apart from the word of God cannot be conceived; it is not a unity at all; it is a false unity or a conspiracy. Adventists are people of the Bible. The Bible alone is the norm and standard for every belief and all conduct. "To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa 8:20 NIV). God has warned us that there would always be attempts of Satan to make us stray from the sure truth.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:3-5)

On his way to Jerusalem, realizing that it would be that last opportunity to see the leaders of the church of Ephesus, Paul called them to Miletus to give them practical instructions. He counseled them,

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

The word of God is the only safe foundation on which to build up our faith. Only the word of God protects us from the attack of savage wolves. The word of God alone keeps us from all kinds of perverse teaching and doctrines. The word of God helps us preserve our sound and pure doctrine. The word of God binds us together in unity despite the diversity among us. "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever" (Ps 12:6-7).

Our church is firmly established upon the unchanging word of God. “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18 NIV). Jesus said,

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt 7:24-27 NIV)

God has established His church as the depository of the truth. “The Lord chose a people and made them the depositories of His truth,” Ellen G. White wrote concerning the Seventh-day Adventist Church.² At another time, she stated, “We have many duties to perform because we have been made the depositories of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory.”³ “The church of the living God” is “the pillar and foundation of the truth,” Paul declared in 1 Tim 3:15. The church has to make every effort to preserve the truth and to disseminate it to the world. The mission of the church has not changed since its inception, for the truth is unchangeable. No matter how much the world and society have been changing, the truth is always the truth. It is established forever.

God has revealed the truth in the Bible. But people have neglected some parts of it and have even forgotten them almost completely. The enemy of the truth has distorted the truth. A certain portion of the truth has been kept sealed until the designated time comes. God has unsealed such truth in these last days. He has chosen and appointed a people to “build the old waste places” to “raise up the foundations of many generations,” and to repair the breach (Isa 58:12). In the middle of the nineteenth century a group of earnest Bible students restored many of the neglected and forgotten truths in their full measure. These landmark truths are the literal second advent of Jesus Christ; the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus, our High Priest, has been ministering on behalf of His people and an investigative judgment has been in process since 1844; the Three Angels’ Messages of Rev 14:6-12; the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath; the non-immortality of the human soul; and the revelation of the Spirit of prophecy.⁴

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1855-1909, 1948), 8:25.

³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923, 1962), 31.

⁴See Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), 30-31.

The enemy of the truth has been constantly attacking these landmarks. Scholars have brought up many plausible theories which dilute the landmark truths. Ministers are preaching these landmarks less and less in the pulpits. Instead they are pronouncing louder and louder that we are not very much different from other Protestant denominations. But if we de-emphasize the identifying truths, we lose our identity and our mission.

Our church and its doctrines have been tested by, and have survived the rain of higher criticism, the stream of pantheism, the storm of skepticism, and the wind of modern liberalism for about one hundred and fifty years. There will be even greater deluges and typhoons which will beat and shake the foundation of our faith as we come near the end of the world's history. No matter how strong these storms may be, the church whose foundation is laid upon the solid rock, the word of God, will stand firm. Everyone who builds his faith upon the word of God will overcome them all.

Satan is constantly attacking God's people with skepticism in order to lead them to doubt the very foundation of our faith. Started from within academia, such dangerous and destructive skepticism is even preached in the church pulpits.

The inspiration of the Bible, the authenticity of the gift of prophecy, the literal creation account, the Three Angels' Messages, the heavenly sanctuary doctrine, and our distinctive eschatological views, are all severely challenged and attacked by Satan under the disguise of intellectualism. As leaders of God's church we should be vigilant in defending our landmark truths and in protecting God's people from the influence of theological liberalism, which denies God's activity in history as well as the authority of God's word.

"Our only safety is in preserving the ancient landmarks," advises Ellen G. White.⁵

Our faith in reference to the message of the first, second, and third angels was correct. The great waymarks we have passed are immovable. Although the hosts of hell may try to tear them from their foundation, and triumph in the thought that they have succeeded, yet they do not succeed. The pillars of truth stand firm as the eternal hills, unmoved by all the efforts of men combined with those of Satan and his host.⁶

In Eph 4:13-15, Paul emphasizes the necessity for us to "all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:199.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946, 1970), 223.

We, as leaders of God's church, should make every effort to cooperate with Christ in preserving the unity of the church and the purity of the truth so that He may "present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).

AASS 4 (2001):69-75

Devotional presented during the

AIIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

REFLECTIONS ON THE SDA CHURCH AS THE ESCHATOLOGICAL REMNANT CHURCH

RONALD D. BISSELL, Ph.D.

Acting Dean & Professor of Systematic Theology

AIIAS Theological Seminary

Introduction

During recent years there has been a tendency among some Seventh-day Adventists, including some leaders and scholars, to question the traditional claim that, in a special sense, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church constitutes the eschatological Remnant Church depicted in the book of Revelation. On the one hand, some feel that such a claim is arrogant, that there are dedicated Christians in other churches, and that other churches beside ours are preaching the gospel of Christ and have much truth. On the other hand are those who are involved in independent ministries and who believe and teach that the SDA Church is in deep apostasy, and though it once was the Remnant Church, it is no longer so.

One factor that may help individuals who are troubled about this issue to feel more comfortable with the traditional claim, is a clear understanding of how early believers during the formative years of the SDA Church came to understand themselves as the "Remnant Church." A second factor is a clear understanding of the distinction between the "visible" church and the "invisible" church. A third factor is reflection upon how and why a visible church may lose its standing as the visible church of God.

The Idea of a Separateness before the "Great Disappointment"

During the Millerite years, before the "Great Disappointment" of 22 October 1844, William Miller had not wanted to create a new church, and had expressed

concern when those who accepted his teachings began to refer to themselves as "Adventists." Although Miller was very hesitant to agree, when other churches began threatening and disfellowshipping pastors and laypersons for advocating Millerite beliefs, some Millerite leaders reacted by declaring that these churches had fallen and were part of "Babylon." They believed that Miller's message constituted the message of the first angel of Rev 14, and that they should proclaim the second angel's message when these churches rejected the first message.

The Idea of a Separateness after the "Great Disappointment"

The Shut Door

The first weeks and months after the "Great Disappointment" of 22 October 1844 were a time of uncertainty and confusion for Millerites. Many came to believe that the whole movement had been a mistake, and either returned shamefacedly to their former churches, or, disillusioned, abandoned religion altogether. Others believed that the date had been mistaken, but that the coming of Christ was still very near. A third group concluded that the date had been correct but that there had been a misunderstanding concerning the event that was to take place on that day.

For several months, William Miller was among those who believed that the date had been correct. Though Christ had not come then, the parable of the Ten Virgins had been fulfilled. Christ had gone into the "wedding," and the door of salvation was closed to the "foolish virgins," namely, "sinners" and those who had rejected and scoffed at the belief that Jesus would come. The wicked had been warned, their probation had passed, and the work of judgment had begun. He who was holy would remain holy, and he who was filthy would remain filthy. Believers should now focus only on encouraging one another to remain faithful until Christ would come. Miller firmly believed this would occur before the close of the Jewish year that ended in March or April 1845. However, by late March, Miller had changed his views, largely as a result of the influence of the reports from Millerite preachers who were apparently reporting conversions of sinners through their ministry. Of course, such conversions would not have been possible if the "door" of the parable was truly "shut."

The Albany Conference

On 29 April 1845 a conference of Millerite leaders and believers was convened at Albany, New York. One reason was to lay plans and coordinate efforts for future work. A second was to bring order out of confusion that had come in part as a result of practices which had arisen and/or "new tests" of believers that were being promoted by some Millerites which mainstream leaders considered to be fanatical. Among practices that had arisen were footwashing, the

holy kiss, multiple-repeated rebaptisms, the idea that the Jubilee had begun and no secular work should be done, and belief that believers must fulfill the words of Christ and become as little children by creeping and crawling on the floor like babies who could not yet walk. Some Millerites believed that the number of Millerites before the “Disappointment” had been too large, swelled by many who joined the movement through fear of the coming of Christ but had not been sincere. Some new “test” or “tests” were needed to weed out the false believers and identify the true.

At the Albany Conference, a strong stand was taken against the so-called “new tests,” and the rejection of the “shut door” idea was clear. Millerite preachers were to preach the gospel of salvation to anyone and everyone who would hear. Miller, who was present, agreed with these views. A few months later, in August 1845, he wrote that he no longer had any confidence in any of the new theories that had arisen in connection with what had happened on 22 October 1844, and implied that he no longer believed that date had been correct.

The Remnant in Ellen White’s Early Visions

During the first few weeks after the “Great Disappointment,” Ellen White and her family appear to have at first concluded that the date had been wrong. This conclusion was changed, however, by two of Ellen White’s earliest visions. The first vision came in December 1844, the second in February 1845. These two visions, plus another that she received in March 1847, provided much of the basis for the belief of the group (which later developed into the SDA Church) that they clearly constituted the eschatological “remnant” of Rev 14.

The “Midnight Cry” Vision of December 1844

Ellen White’s first vision is sometimes referred to as the “Midnight Cry” vision. In it she saw God’s people struggling toward the Holy City on a narrow path high above the rest of the world. Behind them was a bright light—the pre-disappointment “Midnight Cry” proclamation that Christ would come on 22 October 1844. This light shone all along the pathway to the Holy City. Those who rejected or abandoned and rashly denied belief in the light fell off the path and down into the wicked world below.¹ The meaning of the vision seems clear. Belief that the date was correct, and that something of great significance for the Plan of Salvation had taken place then, was of great importance.

¹Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851), 10.

The "Bridegroom" Vision of February 1845

In the second or "Bridegroom" vision, Ellen White saw "the Advent people, the church, and the world." One group, evidently the "Advent people," was bowed before the throne of Jesus offering their prayers to Him while the rest stood by "disinterested and careless."² This disinterested group appears to be those who heard but did not accept Miller's message that Jesus would come soon, including those in churches which rejected it. Then an "exceeding bright light,"—an obvious reference to the "Midnight Cry" message—"came from the Father to the Son, and from the Son it waved over the praying company."³ Few received this light. Many came out from under it. Some received, but did not cherish it. But others welcomed it, and joined those who were bowed in prayer before the throne of Jesus. This group had received the "Midnight Cry" message, and rejoiced in it.

Ellen White next saw God the Father leave His throne in a flaming chariot and go to the Most Holy Place in heaven. Then Jesus arose from His throne, and those bowed before His throne arose with him. She did not see one single ray of light come to the careless, disinterested multitude after that, and they were left in complete darkness.⁴

Jesus told His followers that He was going to His Father to receive His kingdom, and would soon return from the "wedding," a clear reference to the bridegroom in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. He then was taken to the Most Holy Place in a cloudy chariot with wheels like flaming fire. There He ministered before His Father as a Great High Priest. When those who had risen up with Jesus would send their faith to Him there, and pray for His Holy Spirit, He would breathe upon them the Holy Ghost, filling them with light, power, love, joy, and peace.⁵

Those who had not risen up when Jesus left the throne, and did not know He had left it, would also pray to Jesus for the Holy Spirit. Satan, not Christ, would breathe upon them an unholy influence. In this, there was also much light and power, but there was no sweet love, joy, or peace.⁶

Ellen White's earliest visions were first written out in a letter to Enoch Jacobs in December 1845, and published by him in the *Day Star* in January 1846.⁷ About four months later, the "Midnight Cry" and "Bridegroom" visions, plus a third vision given about October 1845, were printed in a broadside under the name, Ellen

²Ibid., 43.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 43-44.

⁶Ibid., 44.

⁷"Letter from Sister Harmon, Portland, Me., Dec. 20, 1845," *Day-Star*, 24 January 1846.

G. Harmon (Ellen White's maiden name). The title of this broadside was, "To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad."⁸

It is interesting and important to consider when these visions were first written out. It was after Miller had abandoned belief in the significance of 22 October 1844 because of the conversions of sinners reported by his colleagues in ministry.

It thus appears that the deceptive, unholy influence from Satan, about which Ellen White wrote, was connected with these and subsequent conversions which Ellen White regarded as false conversions. It also appears that in this may lie the roots of her belief that just before the last great "latter rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the return of Christ, there would be a false revival among Christians.

The "Bridegroom" vision raises three interesting questions. First, when Ellen White was shown that no further ray of light came to those who rejected the "Midnight Cry" message, did this refer to any particular new message of truth, and if so, what? Second, why was it important to follow Christ by faith into the Most Holy Place? Third, why were apparent conversions by those who did not send their prayers to Christ *in the Most Holy Place* regarded as false conversions?

The "Halo of Light" Vision of March 1847

The third vision in our study provides an answer to these questions and to why early SDAs came to regard themselves as the eschatological Remnant. The vision came to Ellen White in March 1847, after she and her husband had accepted and had begun to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. In this "Halo of Light" vision, which was published in the booklet *A Word to the "Little Flock"* in 1847,⁹ Ellen White again saw Christ ministering in the Most Holy Place as she had seen Him in the "Bridegroom" vision of February 1845. But there was a very significant difference between these two visions. In the "Bridegroom" vision, no explanation of the meaning or significance of Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place was given. In this vision the meaning and significance were made plain. Christ was ministering before the Ark of the Covenant. In the Ark were found the tables of stone containing the Ten Commandments. These tables were shining brightly, but around one commandment—the fourth or Sabbath commandment—was a special halo of light. Could the truth about the Sabbath have been the ray of light that those who had earlier believed that Christ had entered the Most Holy Place would receive? Does this answer the question concerning what ray or rays of light the rest would not receive? Does this also give one very important reason for the significance of Christ's entrance into the Most Holy Place? I believe the answer to these questions is Yes.

⁸Ellen G. Harmon, *To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad* (broadside), 6 April 1846.

⁹Ellen G. White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (n.p., 1847; facsimile reproduction, Washington, DC: Review & Herald, n.d.), 18.

In recounting this vision, Ellen White declared that when Christ entered the Most Holy Place and began ministering before the Ark in the presence of God, the Sabbath had become a special, separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers. At the beginning of the time of trouble before Christ's return, the Sabbath message would be proclaimed more fully. This would enrage other churches, but many would see the truth and come out from them to unite and endure persecution with those proclaiming the Sabbath.¹⁰ It is important to note that the acceptance and proclamation of truth—the truth of the Sabbath—is, in a special sense, the identifying mark of “True Israel”—the eschatological “Remnant” (Rev 12:17). Churches that do not accept that truth are not, and cannot be, a part of the visible eschatological “Remnant Church.”

The Visible and the Invisible Church

What, then, should be said of the many wonderful Christians found in other churches? Are these Christians not clear evidence that the churches to which they belong are at least a part of the eschatological “Remnant?” The answer to that question is No—if one recognizes the clear distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. A study of Rev 12 suggests that the Remnant Church of prophecy is the visible church—a church which had gone into hiding for a long period of time, but had come out of hiding with a message to proclaim to the world—the message encompassed within the Three Angels' Messages of Rev 14.

Then how are these sincere Christians in other churches to be explained? They must be a part of the eschatological remnant of believers in the invisible church, who are revealed and become a part of the visible church when the Second Angel's message—the call out of Babylon—is repeated in the loud cry of Rev 18:1-4.

Rejection of a Visible Church

In dealing with those in independent ministries who claim that the SDA Church is no longer the “Remnant Church,” it is of vital importance to ask when and why a visible church might be rejected. The answer to this question may be found by studying the history of Israel. Does God reject a church because widespread apostasy is found in it—because most of its people, including leaders and even prophets, are in apostasy? Why did God reject the nation of Israel as His visible church?

One does not need to read very much in the OT before it becomes clear that there was often widespread apostasy among the children of Israel. God repeatedly reprovved the people and urged them to repentance. He allowed the consequences of their actions to come upon them. He brought redemptive punishment upon them. But time and again they returned to disobedience and outright idolatry.

¹⁰Ibid., 18-19.

After returning from Babylonian captivity, however, there seems to have been little worship of heathen idols among the Jews. Under the leadership of scribes and Pharisees, the nation abandoned much of the open apostasy of the past. Yet they were eventually rejected as the visible church. Why?

According to the NT as well as the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9, the Jewish nation was rejected when its leaders and the mob rejected and crucified the Messiah, and sealed that rejection by the persecution of Christians, epitomized in the stoning of Stephen. But something more was involved. The Jews had rejected the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ. Because they had rejected this truth, it was impossible for them to be used to proclaim it to the world. They were not rejected so much for apostasy as for no longer being a group in which truth could be preserved and by which it could be proclaimed.

On this basis, it seems clear that the special identifying mark of God's visible church has been and is its acceptance and proclamation of truth. Only that church which has been given, has accepted, and has been entrusted with proclaiming the fullest revelation of truth is the visible church of God, in spite of the possibility that apostasy may be widespread within its midst. The traditional SDA belief that it is in a special sense God's visible eschatological "Remnant Church" is based firmly upon this belief. And it is based upon the belief that the Three Angels' Messages of Rev 14, which the SDA Church accepts and has been entrusted with proclaiming, constitute the final great revelation of truth before the Second Coming of Christ.

Conclusion

While the SDA church's claim to be the eschatological "Remnant Church" may place a wall of separation between SDAs and other Christians, this is not its intent. On the basis of Christ's prayer in John 17 for unity among His followers, Christians can and must seek unity in every way possible. However, unity is only possible where there are a common source of authority, the Bible, and common principles of interpreting that source. Truth must not be sacrificed to obtain a false unity, but rather be the basis of unity. This belief should underlie our evangelism as we seek to bring people into unity in accepting the Bible as God's Word and guiding them in understanding it.

The fostering of this kind of unity holds the secret of unity within the SDA Church. Even though there are wide cultural, educational, social, and economic differences between members in different countries, and even in the same country; and even though there is constant growth, development, and change; unity is possible and can be achieved through unity in Christ, unity in His Word, and unity in believing, accepting, following, and proclaiming His teaching as found in His Word.

AASS 4 (2001):77-88

Paper presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY AND THE CRITERIA OF ORTHODOXY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

ENRIQUE ESPINOSA, Ph.D.

Dean Elect, AIAS Theological Seminary

In earliest Christianity, at the time when the apostles were alive and the documents of the NT were still in the process of production, the discrimination between true and false belief and teaching was a matter of living activity in the church. According to the testimony of the NT, even though Christians regarded the writings of the OT as their authoritative Scriptures,¹ they also accepted the teaching of the apostles as being invested with the Lord's authority. In Acts 2:42 we read of Christian converts who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching."² The church is said, in Eph 2:20, to be "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Peter exhorts the readers of his second letter (3:2) "to recall . . . the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles." In his warning against the heretics, Jude wants his readers to "remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold" (Jude 17). Furthermore, Christians believed that the permanent activity of the Holy Spirit guided the church not only in matters of daily life but also in illuminating the believers in their understanding of the true meaning of both the OT Scriptures and the proclaimed deeds and words of Christ. God's leading and ruling in matters of Christian life and doctrine was exercised through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit

¹It must be observed that Jesus' use of the OT reveals that He regarded them as possessing divine authority. See, for instance, the pericope of the temptation of Jesus in Matt 4:1-11 and the Lord's saying in John 5:39. That both the apostles and the first disciples also held the Scriptures in highest esteem is expressed in such passages as Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 3:14-17; and 2 Pet 1:19-21.

²All Scripture quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

in the leaders of the church.³ This may be labeled the “pneumatic-charismatic” model of authority.

In early Christianity the general principle⁴ of authority found concrete expression in two criteria of orthodoxy.⁵

The Revelational Criterion of Orthodoxy

The revelational criterion may be regarded as the first criterion of orthodoxy in the history of Christian theology. The important fact which comes to the forefront is that the first Christians recognized that the legitimacy of their beliefs was based on divine authority. For them, this meant specifically that the Christian message had been delivered by divine revelation. When asked about their reason for holding to their particular beliefs, Christians answered with a “thus said the Lord.” Christian truth was defined by the authority of revelation, not by the logics of reason or by empirical evidence. Later, the principles of authority would find expression in the ecclesiastical criterion of orthodoxy, which shall retain our attention subsequently. It should be pointed out, however, that I count both the revelational and the ecclesiastical among the “traditional” criteria of Christian truth. In other words, they are the main criteria of “classical orthodoxy.”

The principle of religious authority is the general ground on which the criteria for distinguishing between correct and incorrect belief were established. The notion of authority was present in the conscience of the apostolic church, along with its awareness of the existence of God, from its very beginning. That the orthodoxy of a doctrine is defined on the ground of divine authority means that it is not defined on philosophical, scientific, or any other grounds. The early church’s acceptance of the authoritative nature of its beliefs and teachings should not surprise us if we keep in mind that, from its inception, Christianity was firmly

³This does not mean that the Holy Spirit did not also indwell each member of the Christian community.

⁴By “principle” I refer to the fundamental, primary, and general notion undergirding the criteria and norms of orthodoxy. In other words, principles are those essential concepts which may be regarded as the general frame or context necessary to understand the criteria and norms of Christian truth. To some extent, it might be held that the criteria and norms of orthodoxy are derived from those principles.

⁵When I speak of criteria of orthodoxy, I have no specific technical philosophical usage in mind. By “criterion” I merely intend to designate that which enables one to decide whether a doctrinal proposition is true or false. In this way, the criteria of orthodoxy are related to the question as to the basis on which a particular doctrine is affirmed to be true or false (orthodox or heretical). I use the term in the broad sense of the ground, basis, or means of judging Christian doctrines as to their legitimacy. In brief, “criteria” are here understood as those general and abstract areas of reality where the elements which guide the believers in their testing of Christian truth are grounded.

rooted in its self-understanding as a religion of revelation rather than a system of philosophical speculation or a scientific theory of the world.

As for the term "authority," while it is filled with a multitude of meanings,⁶ it is used in this paper as "a relational word which signifies the right to rule. It is expressed in claims and is acknowledged by compliance and conformity."⁷ In this sense, we may consider that God's right to rule in doctrinal matters (His teaching authority) was acknowledged by the first Christians, who were willing to relate to Him reverently and recognized Him as their ultimate authority. Indeed, Christianity has traditionally claimed that all authority comes ultimately from God.⁸

The early church, however, was not without doctrinal controversies. The diversity already evident in the first century C.E.⁹ originated some theological differences which at times caused conflicts between the contending parties¹⁰ (see 1 John 4:2b-3; cf. 2:18-19). In view of these controversies, the question necessarily arose concerning the specific authority which might determine "right" doctrine.¹¹

The situation of a church which was organized in accordance with its faith in the leading activity of the Lord through His Spirit during the so-called short span of time prior to His return, could not remain unchanged when every individual Christian was claiming the guidance of the Holy Spirit while holding beliefs that

⁶For many, the idea of authority is colored with negative images. See Gregory G. Bolich, *Authority and the Church* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 1. It is associated with arbitrary, despotic, capricious, and absolutist rulers. It is thus identified with "authoritarianism," namely, that corrupt form of exercising command that demands submission which "cannot be justified in terms of truth or morality" according to J. I. Packer, *Freedom, Authority & Scripture* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 16. Not a few think that authority is immediately related with, and necessarily opposed to, the idea of freedom. For them, this makes authority despicable. On the other hand, A. D. J. Rawlinson attempts to prove that a synthesis between authority and freedom is both possible and necessary. See A. D. J. Rawlinson, *Authority and Freedom: The Bishop Paddock Lectures for 1923* (London: Longmans, Green, 1933).

⁷Packer, 15.

⁸Cf. Jack Dominian, *Authority* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1976), 7.

⁹The existence of such a diversity seems to be undisputed even by evangelical NT scholars. I. Howard Marshall, for instance, asserts that the only valid point in Walter Bauer's thesis is that there was a variety of belief in the first century. I. Howard Marshall, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity," *Themelios* 2 (1976), 13; cf. Daniel J. Harrington, "The Reception of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* during the Last Decade," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980), 292.

¹⁰Variety of belief does not necessarily mean that conflict has to arise. Nevertheless, when such variety goes beyond mere pluralism into open contradiction, and a central teaching of the church is challenged, thus threatening the spiritual stability and the very existence of the community of faith, the categories of true and false teaching become relevant.

¹¹See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1951, 1955), 2:138.

at times were contradictory with those of his or her fellow believers (see 1 John 4:1). The pneumatic-charismatic model of authority, then, did not seem to be suitable for settling the controversies which sprang from such contradictions. The necessity of a concrete court of appeal or specific authority able to settle the doctrinal conflicts which at times threatened to divide the church became obvious. Some urgent questions arose: Who was to judge among differing opinions? Who was to decide the legitimacy of an alleged Spirit-led instruction? In brief, these questions express the concern as to “the norm” which was to define who was right and who was deviant.¹² The issue was not whether or not Christian beliefs were based upon divine authority. For the first Christians the problem of authority was confined to what, in the view of some, is called “mediate authorities,”¹³ which may also be identified with what I call “norms” of orthodoxy.¹⁴

Agreeing on an authoritative norm which defines true Christian doctrine and prescribes religious belief can be considered one of the most disturbing problems arising from the issue of distinguishing between right and wrong doctrine. It can also be regarded as the fundamental theological issue concerning the structure of the orthodoxy-heresy antithesis, particularly at the inception of Christianity. For some people, the issue of religious authority, placed in center stage from the beginning of the Christian theological reflection, is at the heart of most, if not all theological questions in our own time.

¹²We must note that the expressions “concrete court of appeal,” “specific authority,” “mediate authority,” and “norm” are used synonymously.

¹³Besides the authority of God, which is traditionally recognized by Christians as final, some authors have spoken in terms of “mediate authorities,” i.e., some “critical tools” used to judge among conflicting theological positions, such as the Bible, church tradition and teaching, the inner experience of individual believers, and philosophical reasoning. See Dennis M. Campbell, *Authority and the Renewal of American Theology* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976), 2. Campbell, 3, correctly points out that “Christianity has never been of one mind with regard to mediate authority for theological thought and ethical prescription.” These mediate authorities are the ones that Rupert Davies wants to replace with the concept of “witnesses” to the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. His argument is that, since Christ Himself is the supreme authority for the Christian, what we need are “trustworthy witnesses” rather than “unimpeachable authorities.” See Rupert E. Davies, *Religious Authority in an Age of Doubt* (London: Epworth, 1968), 219 and passim. In brief, to put it in Auguste Sabatier’s words, “The diverse religious orthodoxies differ as to the form or the seat of authority; some put it in the Bible, others in the Church; but they are in accord as to its nature. All of them claim that the authority which they have constituted within themselves is the expression of a divine authority.” Auguste Sabatier, *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 16.

¹⁴I use the term “norm” to designate specific and concrete standards over against the more general and abstract nature of a criterion. In this usage, norms are regarded as concrete expressions of a given criterion. Norms are tangible, explicit models or patterns against which a particular doctrine can be measured in order to verify its orthodoxy.

At this point it may be profitable to examine the problem as to the norm which was to define correct doctrine through the testimony of the apostle Paul. He is significant not only because he often found himself confronted by religious opponents but also because his corpus of writings is sufficiently large to be used for this specific purpose. His case may be considered as an illustration of the dilemma of the early church regarding who was right and who was deviant.

In referring to the experience of Paul, I address what may have been the first movement toward the development of "classical orthodoxy," namely, the recognition of the apostles as the bearers of a reliable and authoritative tradition,¹⁵ and hence of their teaching as the norm of Christian orthodoxy.

When Paul's authority (which was not final but mediate) was disputed in the churches of Galatia, Christian believers faced the dilemma of to whom they were to listen, to Paul or to his opponents? This in turn implied a more basic question: What was the criterion by which their claim of authority and correctness was to be assessed? Paul's answer involved the revelational criterion. The rightness of his doctrine came from its origin in the Lord's revelation.¹⁶ He indeed claimed divine endorsement for his teachings: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12).

One may suppose, however, that the apostle's opponents, those "false brothers [who] had infiltrated our ranks" (Gal 2:4), claimed the same divine origin for their own teaching.¹⁷ To what or to whom could Paul appeal as a norm for the

¹⁵The notion of tradition as a technical term needs some definition. In the language of the NT (e.g., Luke 1:2; 1 Cor 11:2,23; 15:3; 1 Thess 2:13; Col 2:6; 2 Pet 2:21; Jude 3) and of the Apostolic Fathers (e.g., Pol. Phil 7:2; 1 Clem 7:2; Did 4:13; Barn 19:11), the term conveyed the idea of "transmission" (παράδοσις), i.e., authoritative delivery. By "tradition" the Apostolic Fathers usually meant doctrine which the Lord committed to the church through His apostles, irrespective of whether it was handed down orally or in writing. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 30-31; cf. Bultmann, 2:119-27. More recently, tradition has denoted the body of unwritten doctrine handed down in the church, in contradistinction from the Scriptures, as indicated in the Council of Trent, "Decree on Apostolic Tradition and Holy Scriptures." See Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari from the 30th ed. of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, rev. Karl Rahner (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1957), 783.

¹⁶Since Christianity came into the world as a religion of revelation, it is of its *esse* to claim a supernatural origin for its message. Its ultimate source lies in Jesus Christ as the climax of God's revelation (see Kelly, 29).

¹⁷Jaroslav Pelikan observes that "the heretics were no less implacable than the orthodox in claiming that only their position was the correct one." Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, The Christian Tradition Series, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 69. This fact may explain why Bultmann holds that an appeal to a revelation directly accorded by the Lord or by the Holy Spirit "could only make the

correctness of his teaching in this situation? Since the logical answer, namely, “to the teaching of Jesus Christ,” seemed to be the answer of his opponents too, Paul’s argument was that his preaching of the gospel had been accepted by those who were apostles before he was (Gal 2:6-10; cf. 1:17) and who also had received their message directly from the Lord. In effect, fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem to see Peter and James, in response to a revelation, he had gone to those “who seemed to be leaders” in Jerusalem and privately “set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles” (Gal 2:2). The apostles recognized that Paul’s teaching was in harmony with what they had received from the Lord, and therefore, it had the endorsement of God’s authority (Gal 2:7-9). The matter of Paul’s authority was thus settled in apostolic collegial agreement. This means that a new criterion of orthodoxy was emerging very early in the history of the church. I call it the “ecclesiastical criterion.” This term underlines its collegiate, corporative, or associate nature. It must be pointed out that revelational and ecclesiastical criteria were not opposed but worked along the same lines.¹⁸

The Ecclesiastical Criterion of Orthodoxy

The importance of this incident can hardly be overestimated. It should be noticed, first, that Paul did not receive his authority through apostolic succession, though it was recognized by the college of the apostles. The implicit notion of an apostolic college, which included such diverse views as those of Peter, Paul, James, and John (Gal 2:9),¹⁹ discarded the individual authority of any of the apostles as the only or superior norm of Christian truth.²⁰ This should be an

problem all the more delicate and the embarrassment all the greater.” Bultmann, 2:138.

¹⁸What needs to be underscored here is that the Christian truth was not seen as entrusted to one individual alone, but to the whole *ecclesia*.

¹⁹On this matter, see F. F. Bruce’s relevant study *Peter, Stephen, James, and John: Studies in Early Non-Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

²⁰Edwin Hatch notes that the mainstream church found it necessary to lay stress on an “apostolic consensus.” All parties within the church agreed as to the need of a tribunal, he observes, but the problem was that each party had its own, i.e., each made its appeal to a different apostle. The Gnostics, for instance, built upon one apostle or another. Thus Basilides preferred to follow a tradition from Matthias (see Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.8.1 [ANF, 5:103]); the Naaseni traced their doctrine to James (Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.2.1 [ANF, 5:48]); and Valentinus was said to be a follower of Theudas, who was a pupil of Paul (see Clement of Alexandria *Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.17.1 [ANF, 2:555]). Origen explains the origin of Christian heresies (i.e. parties) not as the result of factions and strife, but of following individuals who admired Christianity while holding some discordant views (Origen *Contra Celsus* 3.12 [ANF, 4:469]). Conversely, Hatch points out, the Catholic tendency stressed the unity of the apostles; their tradition was not that of Peter or James or John but of “the twelve.” See Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church: The Hibbert Lectures, 1888*, 2d ed., ed. A. M. Fairbairn (London: Williams & Norgate, 1891), 316-17.

example to follow even in our day, when diversity of opinion arises in the church. In 1889 Ellen White addressed this issue in a morning talk in Chicago:

That another holds a different opinion, should not stir up the very worst traits of your nature. You should love your brother, and say, "I am willing to investigate your views. Let us come right to the Word of God, and prove by the law and the testimony what is truth."²¹

In the second place, the juxtaposition of direct revelation and mediated tradition²² as sources of authority was unquestionably the reality in the life of the early church. In fact, Paul himself appeals to some teachings which, it seems, he did not receive through direct revelation but through the channel of human tradition (1 Cor 15:3-7). This tradition had its origin, however, in God's Revelation, namely, in the Christ-event.

In the third place, the private *nihil obstat* on the one hand, which Paul's teaching received from "those reputed to be pillars" and, on the other hand, the objections to his preaching by those whom he regards as "false brothers" (whose position had influenced Peter's conduct—Gal 2:11-16), both witness not only to the diversity that existed in the early church but also to the necessity to define the latitude of an acceptable variety of doctrine.

Finally, but not of minor importance, it is clear that God desired this meeting of Paul with the other apostles, even though the contents of Paul's teaching remained unchanged, and the distribution of the missionary territory was not modified. The purpose of the assembly was not to introduce changes in doctrine or church missionary strategies but to grant Paul and the other apostles assurance: God was indeed leading all of them in the same way. Only in mutual consultation could this assurance be reached.

The Teaching of the Apostles as a Norm of Orthodoxy

In the case just mentioned, one discerns that in consonance with, and in addition to, both the principle of authority and the criteria identified thus far (revelational and ecclesiastical), a concrete norm of orthodoxy had come into focus, namely, the teaching of the apostles. The documents of the NT, as well as extracanonical writings of the first two centuries, witness to the widespread acceptance of the authority of the apostles through whom the Lord's will was

²¹Ellen G. White, "The Test of Doctrine," *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, 27 August, 1889, 259.

²²This refers to the leadership-of-office pattern of church authority. This model of authority is represented in the NT by the appointment of bishops or elders to be pastors and overseers of the local congregations (see Acts 14:23; Phil 1:1).

regarded to have been expressed. As far as the noncanonical writings are concerned, one reads in 1 Clem 42:1-2: "The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus, the Christ, was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ."²³ Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, ranks the apostles with the Lord in Magn 7:1: "The Lord did nothing without the Father (either on his own or by the apostles)." He admonishes in Magn 13:1, "Make a real effort, then, to stand firmly by the orders of the Lord and the apostles."²⁴ Likewise the letter of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians (6:3) exhorts: "Let us 'serve him with fear and all reverence,' as he himself has commanded, and also the apostles who preached the gospel to us."²⁵ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that about 200 C.E., Serapion, bishop of Antioch, stated that "Peter and the rest of the apostles we accept as the Lord."²⁶ The idea that the church's message rested upon the apostles' witness of Christ was more fully elaborated by Justin's time.²⁷

The authority of "the twelve"²⁸ remained unquestioned even after their death. This is attested, for instance, by the fact that the earliest known Church Order, the *Didachē*, bears the title, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." Due to the authoritative status reached by the apostles, their teaching was logically regarded as the fundamental norm of correct Christian belief.

The NT Canon as a Norm of Orthodoxy

Apart from the question of apostolic authority, Paul's case might be regarded as an illustration of a further step in the development of classical orthodoxy. It seems clear that Paul's authority had rapidly become widely recognized, at least in the churches founded by him (1 Cor 9:2). Those early believers who had accepted the apostle's gospel (1 Cor 15:1)²⁹ soon faced a dilemma concerning the authenticity of his letters. Already in Paul's lifetime there seems to have been some writings falsely attributed to him in which he reputedly rejected some teachings as incorrect (see 2 Thess 2:1-5). Paul was not alone here. The fact that several Christian documents were attributed, at times falsely, to other apostles, witnesses to the authoritative status that the latter had reached among the churches. Since Christians regarded the teaching of the apostles chosen by Jesus as

²³Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 33.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Serapion, *Libro de Evangelio Petri* (PG, 5:1373, 1374).

²⁷See, for instance, Justin Martyr *First Apology* 66.3 (ANF, 1:185); idem *Dialogue with Trypho* 103.8 (ANF, 1:251).

²⁸Bultmann, 2:105, 139, points out that the title "apostle" (a sent man, a messenger), which originally was accorded to all Christian missionaries, was narrowed down to include only "the twelve." Paul was the only exception to this restriction.

²⁹For references to Paul's gospel ("my gospel"), see Rom 2:16; 16:25.

normative, their writings as well as those of their closer collaborators³⁰ came to be considered, especially after the death of the apostles, as the normative source of Christian doctrine.

However, other questions arise: Which among the apostles' writings were to be regarded as genuine and holding apostolic authority? Which ones were authentic apostolic documents? This particular predicament would further increase from the second century on as the struggle between the mainstream Christian body and the marginal groups became more intense. Due to the authoritative status of the apostles, the authenticity and canonicity of the apostolic writings became almost synonymous.³¹

Before the existence of an officially sanctioned NT Canon, Christians were increasingly confronted with the issue of identifying the books which were to be accepted as normative. The available historical evidence shows that at first there was no unanimity on this point among the various centers of Christianity.³² In the gradual process of the formation of the NT Canon, which took place essentially during the second and third centuries C.E., the criteria for recognizing the

³⁰E.g., Mark and Luke.

³¹John Knox, *Criticism and Faith* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury 1952), 66-67.

³²According to the synods of the late fourth century, the exact shape of the canon of the NT still remained imprecise until the beginning of the fifth century. Theodor Zahn, "Canon of Scripture," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1908 ed., 2:399. For the different lists of NT documents regarded as canonical by early Christian communities, see Adolf von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 1-114, especially appendix II: "Forerunners and Rivals of the New Testament" (ibid, 169-83). See also Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament*, 2d ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1954), 137-220; Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins, trans. A. J. B. Higgins and S. Godman (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 39-54; Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 148-80; Werner Georg Kümmel, ed., *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. A. J. Mattill, Jr., 14th rev. ed. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1966), 334-58; Hans F. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 147-268; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); and Charles F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3d ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 235-69.

canonical books as such³³ seem to have been both authenticity and apostolic origin, as well as the liturgy of the church and the content of the books themselves.³⁴

In this way, simultaneously and in correlation with the emphasis on the doctrine of the church as apostolic, another norm of classical orthodoxy was naturally developing with the fixing of the list of the neo-testamentarian documents regarded as the definitive standard of Christian doctrine.

The importance of recognizing a corpus of writings as a norm of true belief can hardly be exaggerated. In fixing and accepting the NT Canon, the church³⁵ was officially setting the boundaries of what it had already acknowledged in practice as the written source and standard of legitimate Christian doctrine. Since the church had accepted a written norm, its beliefs and preaching, not to mention its liturgy, structure, and practices—in general, its whole life—were bound to be constantly checked by that standard. Besides, and of utmost importance for our study, delineating the limits of the NT Canon meant that the living and Spirit-led activity of discernment of correct teaching would progressively give place to the doctrinal authority of a set of sacred writings. To be true, this set of writings was believed to contain the kernel of the very same apostolic, living proclamation and teaching.³⁶ This means that the principle behind the establishing of the NT Canon was that the tradition of the apostles was regarded as normative for all subsequent tradition of the church.

A historical-theological analysis of the development of classical orthodoxy shows that the controversies between parties claiming to hold to the truth³⁷ served

³³Both the fact that the church had to recognize its authoritative Scriptures through a process which lasted about four centuries and the considerations presented so far in our main text and footnotes, pose the old problem of finding out whether it was orthodoxy that selected a canon of scriptures or whether certain scriptures shaped orthodoxy. In other words, it must be decided which proposition is correct: either “the church created the canon” or “the Scriptures created the church.” In the understanding of conservative Protestants, the idea that the canon is not the product of the church means that it was not the church as a human community which attributed inspired value to some writings. In their view, the church was led by the Spirit to recognize the intrinsic inspired nature and authoritative status of those writings.

³⁴In connection with the last criterion, i.e., the content of the books, R. M. Grant observes that the fact that the Gospel of Thomas, for instance, was not treated as canonical indicates that the bulk of early Christian theology was not Gnostic. Grant, 180.

³⁵From what has been discussed above, it should be clear that by “the church” we mean the whole community of Christian believers, not merely its leaders. This is the sense in which I use the term in this whole section dealing with the NT canon.

³⁶This apostolic, living proclamation and teaching can also be technically referred to as the “living tradition” of the apostles.

³⁷In addition to the controversies concerning the apostolicity of Paul, we can mention the controversies between those who later began to be called orthodox, Catholic Christians in their confrontation with syncretistic Gnosticism, sectarian Marcionism, enthusiastic Montanism, and the like. Interestingly, the Montanist movement (c. 175 C. E.) advocated

as the catalyst for the emergence of the two related norms of Christian truth which we have identified so far, namely, the teaching of the apostles and the canon of the NT.³⁸ These norms may be regarded as the concrete expression of the revelational criterion of orthodoxy. They are indeed the first norms of orthodoxy clearly identifiable in the history of Christian theology and, as such, they may be considered the authoritative original sources³⁹ of the Christian message.

We cannot overlook the fact that the establishing of these two norms means that in their proclamation and teaching the early Christians looked back to a unique event in the past, namely, God's revelation in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ The revelational nature of the Christ-event and the authoritative witness of the apostles to Christ were regarded as so fundamental to the Christian message that a retrospective attitude, a constant "return to the sources," in the church's definition of correct belief and teaching was considered as the essence of the kerygmatic dimension of its mission.

The possession of a written norm of Christian truth had at least two important consequences. First, the unalterable nature of a written source of doctrine made it possible for the church to have a reliable tool for checking its own orthodoxy and orthopraxis.⁴¹ To the extent that the church would indeed submit itself to the normativity of the apostolic witness as recorded in the Canon, the latter would outrank it in authority. This statement brings to the foreground the question of the church's authority. A second consequence of having a written norm of orthodoxy is precisely that the authority of the church and the authority of the canon of Scriptures found themselves in a state of potential tension. The latter was openly manifested in the Tradition-Scriptures controversy at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

The authority of the Scriptures (which, the church confessed, had been recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) and the authority of the church (which Christians regarded as derived directly from the Lord and assisted by the charism of the Spirit) set up two seemingly contradictory criteria for the definition of correct belief and teaching. That these criteria are not necessarily contradictory

the revelational criterion by contending that a new period of prophecy had already opened, against the mainstream church's position, which regarded the age of revelation as closed with the death of the last surviving apostle, and the canon of the NT as completed.

³⁸This refers to the list of NT documents regarded as legitimately containing the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

³⁹The expression "original sources," even though redundant ("source" already has the semantic connotation of origin), is intended to designate the historically or chronologically primordial sources of Christian doctrine.

⁴⁰"The mark of all orthodoxy is that truth has been given somewhere in the past," remarks Kenneth Cauthen, *Systematic Theology: A Modern Protestant Approach* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 16.

⁴¹This meant that the risk of being found faulty when measured against that norm was an open possibility for the church.

may be demonstrated theoretically. The challenge remains for us to demonstrate in the life of the church that they can really work together.

AASS 4 (2001):89-94

Paper presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

LEADING THE CHURCH

DONALD SAHLY, Ph.D., Ed.D.

Global Leadership Training Director

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

While we are all called to be followers of Jesus Christ, we are also called to lead in a variety of capacities. We teach our children about Jesus, we put forth every effort to model a Christ-like demeanor in our places of work, we lead institutions, we teach Bible classes, we share our faith with a neighbor—we are all called to lead. Our following Jesus Christ should ultimately lead others to Him as we travel the road of this life.

Throughout history the church has struggled with the idea and concept of leadership. God has provided for people through His word both direction and principles for those who choose to be leaders and those He chooses to lead the church. When the subject of leadership is mentioned, many concepts come to mind. We can find hundreds of volumes written on ideas and concepts of what leadership is and what real leaders should do and practice. These books are for the most part very good and the ideas they contain are worthy, but in many respects they are secular and general in nature and do not fit what the church needs for this new century. If we would teach leadership for a church setting, we must look to material that is both specific and spiritual. Professional leadership must exist, but at the same time professionalism must be overshadowed by spirituality. Business-based attitudes and concepts, which are secular in their origin, will drain from the church spiritual strength and vitality. Jesus was critical of the highly professionalized clergy of His day and referred to them as hypocrites. Servant leadership does not emphasize academic degrees over and above spiritual service to others. “God does not put any premium on ignorance, but that does not mean He puts His priority on academic training.”¹

¹Frank Damazio, *The Making of a Leader* (Portland: Bible Temple, 1988), 2-3.

The Call to Leadership

Biblical history points out that spiritual leadership has been obtained in one of three ways:

1. Self-appointed leadership. In Num 16-17 we have the story of Korah, who rebelled against Moses out of envy for his leadership position.

2. Man-appointed leadership. These people may claim to have received a call from God, but it is a request through human channels, not divinely appointed.

3. God-appointed leadership. These calls follow the true biblical pattern. God requests a person under varied and unusual circumstances to fulfill a special assignment. God's call to Samuel in the night, to Moses at the burning bush, and the unusual call to Saul on the road to Damascus, are but a few examples of His intervention in the human life.

When God calls a leader He does so through specific spiritual acts of appointment, separation, sending, or calling.

Effective spiritual leadership does not come as a result of theological training or seminary degrees, as important as education is. Jesus told His disciples, "You did not choose Me; I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16). The sovereign selection of God gives great confidence to Christian workers.²

In each of these acts God chooses to show His divine action, and that action is accompanied by a specific assignment. It should also be noted here that God not only calls leaders in a specific manner, He calls each one as a believer, to be part of the body and represent Him in all they do. We must also note that when God calls He also enables. Self-appointed and man-appointed leaders fail because they have not been given by God the gifts, grace, and talents required for the tasks assigned by God. When God truly calls, we cannot fail if we put all in His hands. As surely as the walls of Jericho came down, and Daniel walked out of the lions' den, we too can succeed only when we are totally committed to God and place ourselves and our leadership in His care.

²J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 22.

Changed Thinking is Required for Changed Leadership

In his books *Teaching the Elephant to Dance* and *The Flight of the Buffalo*, James Belasco points out a need for changed thinking in organizations today. Our church was organized more than one hundred and thirty years ago. The church has grown but the organizational pattern is still very much the same. It responds like an elephant—solid, sure-footed, dependable, but slow to adapt to current trends and needs. The comparison is also made to a herd of buffalo with its strong leader and the herd going wherever the lead buffalo determines the herd should go. Belasco suggests that the organization of today should be more like a flock of geese in its “V” formation. Leadership changes constantly, and each member of the flock is capable of providing some leadership in some area at some time, keeping the flock on course as it travels. When following the flock-of-geese pattern, true servant leaders will:

1. Transfer ownership and responsibility of the work to those who are called to carry out the tasks involved.
2. Create environments where each member chooses to be responsible.
3. Empower and coach others to assume greater tasks and responsibility.

While this example sounds logical and easily achieved, leading a V-shaped herd of buffalo across the open prairie is not a simple procedure. Because not all creatures were made to fly, it does take organization, planning, coordinating, and measures of control.

Our Response to God’s Call

Every Christian is called by God to a ministry, be it great or small. To sit and wait for some supernatural happening before we begin is to show a lack of faith in what God has already done and is presently doing for us. How we respond to God is the true indication of our own spiritual condition.

Heart is what separates the good from the great. If you want to make a difference in other people’s lives as a leader, look into your heart and see if you are really committed.³

As we look at the responses of those called from biblical history, we can gain some powerful insights and lessons for our own lives. Gideon and Moses provide

³John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 19.

good examples of some things we should not do. Gideon responded to God's call with six reasons why he should not accept:

1. Present world events and local problems. Israel was living in a time of oppression by enemies. Life consisted of hiding in fear from those who would come and steal the harvest from their storehouses. Gideon questioned, "Where is God, and why is this happening to us? Why is God asking me to deal with this? This is really God's problem, so why does He not solve it?"

2. Gideon's second question was somewhat related to the first. "If God is a God of miracles, then why has He not taken care of the problem?"

3. As the angel pursued the call for Gideon, Gideon's frustration grew. He honestly felt God had forsaken the people, yet he knew in his heart this was not so. His frustration signalled his lack of faith.

4. Gideon's next reason for not accepting the call was that he was inferior to others. God does call the weak and the unlikely. It is His way of making a bold statement and it is also proof of who has the real power and control. God does not really need us. He is big enough to do and accomplish any work He wants done. God chooses people to be vessels.

5. Gideon's fifth reason was that he came from a poor family. There had not been any famous people in his family tree. Why should God want anyone from this low status to speak and lead the nation? (Read 1 Cor 1:23-27.)

6. The last excuse Gideon used was one we could all use at one time in our lives, but many, like myself, have passed that point: "I am too young and not qualified" does not hold up with God. As the Spirit of God took hold of the heart and mind of Gideon, he answered the call and did a mighty work.

The ministry that God gives to each believer is one of the many treasures He puts in our lives as Christians. The call to service, and possibly to leadership, will change your life as nothing else will.⁴

Qualifications of Leadership

Accepting the call of leadership and succeeding at doing what God has asked you to do as a leader depends on a fine balance of divine and human factors. No life example more clearly teaches this concept than the life and leadership of

⁴Damazio, 66.

Nehemiah. The key to Nehemiah's success is clearly stated in Neh 2:8, where he recognizes that the "good hand of my God [was] upon me."⁵ Knowing, admitting, and remembering where the real power lies is the key to good leadership. "He was not only willing to pray for his people, but he was also willing to be the channel through whom God could work to deliver His people out of their desperate situation in Jerusalem."⁶

Following our recognition of God's place and our place in an assignment comes our responsibility to prepare ourselves and to remember that we will not be totally effective if we try to do anything in our own power. God is trying to speak through us, but it is God's message and His leading, not ours, that is to be conveyed to others.

Another qualification of a Christian leader is the knowledge of prayer. The prayer of Nehemiah outlines for us a prayer process that we can apply to our own lives and experiences as we answer the call of God to lead. True leaders are filled with love; they practice integrity coupled with a deep concern and intense compassion for the welfare of others. These qualities bring the true leader to a practice of these prayer principles:

1. We pray out of a heart of deep concern.
2. We make prayer a priority over all other needs.
3. We pray persistently.
4. In prayer and in all other things, we recognize that God is great and awesome.
5. We remind God of His promises.
6. We acknowledge our unworthiness, our sinfulness, and our human weakness and failing.
7. We request specific things and expect specific answers.

The apostle Paul, in Eph 3:20-21, has a specific prayer for the young Christian church, and he closes that prayer with words that encourage all leaders: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

God's Call to Leadership in Our Lives

Mark 1:11 NIV says, "And a voice came from heaven: 'You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'" To take the view that a direct call from God to a particular individual is a quaint or archaic happening is damaging

⁵Scripture quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise noted.

⁶Gene A. Getz, *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 10.

to God's work and to individual lives and careers. As Christians, we need to believe that God has a purpose for our entire lives, professions, and careers. To take a view other than this is to deny our allegiance to God and what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. We must never let the opinions of others determine what God's will is for us in our own individual lives. Rom 14 states clearly that each of us must face God individually. Each of us must personally determine what God intends for our lives and how we should respond to what we believe and know is God's call to us and His will for our lives.

Reproduction in Leadership

Reproduction in leadership is not just an idea or concept; it is a law. Many who accept leadership positions are afraid of, or ignore, this law, but overlooking it is a serious mistake and usually leads to some kind of disaster. King Saul, who was given the opportunity of grooming David to take his place as king, became jealous, and his jealousy took him down the road to disaster and ruin. Those who practice the law of reproduction and train others to succeed them in their work are blessed and rewarded. Good leaders never have to be afraid of someone eclipsing them in their work. When we train others who follow us, we leave a legacy. Moses' training of Joshua, Jesus' training of the Twelve, and Paul's reproducing his ministry through Timothy, are examples of what God expects of us when He calls us to leadership. Leaders who fail to train others to take their positions fail to lead. Ignoring this law in the end will lead to organizational failure.

God the Father sent His Son Jesus to meet the people's needs, to be a source of beauty in a world of decay, to bring joy to those who mourn, to be a source and avenue of praise. Jesus reproduced these abilities in His disciples, who have, in turn, passed on to us the ability to lead and meet the spiritual needs of His children in our world today. As leaders, we must follow and obey the law of reproduction in leadership. It is a "must" that we bring up a new generation of youth, trained and empowered to carry forward the work of God on this earth.

Anyone can be a leader. We do not need a budget, a staff, or a title. What is needed is a willingness to do as Jesus did—to place ourselves in an attitudinal position of heart, mind, and soul to be of service to others. When we develop a servant's heart, then we have developed true leadership. It is not a matter of what we say or what we do when we are up front that counts. It is a matter of attitude—the attitude of being of service to others in whatever way we are able.

AASS 4 (2001):95-99

Response presented during the

AIIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

RESPONSE TO DONALD SAHLY'S PAPER "LEADING THE CHURCH"

Francisco D. Gayoba, D.Theol.
Assistant Professor of Church History
AIIAS Theological Seminary

When we asked Dr. Don Sahly to come and speak during this forum, we asked him to address Asian, or Third World, issues in church leadership. We asked him to address dimensions where we, leaders of the church in our part of the world, need to grow. We asked him because he has served in our part of the world and because he leads the leadership training department of our world church.

When I first read the paper, I was looking for specific references or applications for the Asian setting. Dr. Sahly has not mentioned anything explicit about the Asian, or even Third World, context at all in this paper. I initially thought that Dr. Sahly had missed the intent of his presentation. But as I read and read again, this time with the mind-set of an Asian, I began to see that the issues in Asian church leadership are all there.

I think Dr. Sahly has mastered the art of indirect speech, having served in Southeast Asia for seven years. You are aware of the ways of wisdom in Asia. A guest comes into your house on a hot day and he says, "It is hot today." If you are wise, you will switch on the fan and open the windows. In case you missed the implied request, he might say, "I wore clothes that are too thick for this weather, because I am perspiring." The message, without being explicitly stated, is, "Please turn on the electric fan." There is a story of a salesman who comes to sell his wares just about lunch time. First he says, "I am thirsty." The message? "May I have a cup of water?" The host gives him a cup of water. Then the salesman says, "Is it wrong to drink water when you are hungry?" The message? "Can I have lunch with you?"

When we analyze the main points being emphasized in Dr. Sahly's paper, we can infer, I believe, what he sees as growing points for our leadership, the areas

where we need improvement. When we look at the message and major points of this paper, we can infer the Asian situation that he saw as needing change.

At the beginning of Dr. Sahly's paper, he states that he is focusing on two issues: "What leadership is," and "What real leaders should do and practice."

The kind of leaders needed in this new century are "true servant leaders that will transfer ownership and responsibility of the work to those who are called to carry out the tasks involved." Is he implying here that in Asia ownership and responsibility are mostly in the hands of the senior leaders and not in the hands of the younger ones? Or, that ownership and responsibility are mostly in the hands of the leaders and not in the hands of the members?

He further suggests that leaders "create environments where each member chooses to be responsible." Is he implying that in many of our churches and institutions, members feel obligated to accept responsibility rather than freely choosing to accept it?

Another characteristic of "true servant leaders" is that they "empower and coach others to assume greater responsibility." Dr. Sahly emphasizes the reproduction of leaders at the end of his paper. Is he implying that in our leadership style, we are forcing rather than empowering, finding faults rather than coaching, eliminating upcoming candidates rather than reproducing leaders?

Historians look at what actually is taking place, to understand what is actually happening beyond the rhetoric and postures. Historians also evaluate what has happened and is happening in the light of our stated ideals and goals.

I have an observation about church leadership in Asia, an observation which many of you may challenge. We are educated and attend leadership courses and training. However, most of the ideas and strategies in these leadership seminars are formulated in Western contexts and cultures. My observation is that, beyond our personality differences, many of the leadership concepts, many of the conceptions of what leadership is and what real leaders should do and practice, are very much based on culture rather than shaped by our education. In spite of education, yes, in spite of the M.A. or the Ph.D. here at AIIAS, when people go back to their fields or institutions, the leadership styles they practice go back to their cultural traditions.

I believe that in training leaders, a very basic step is to make them aware of their cultural background, especially in the Asia-Pacific and African contexts where culture is a dominant factor in human thought and behavior.

Of course, culture is also dominant in the part of the world we call the "West." But in the West, individualism is a very important cornerstone in their culture. Nobody can dictate to anybody what leadership is and what real leaders should do and practice. But that is not the case in cultures in this part of the world. A culture of conformity and community standards is the implicit and the explicit mold of thought and behavior. Culture serves as the social control in most if not all aspects of life.

When I point out the areas in which we need to grow, I am not saying we are willfully bad. The ideal of what leadership is and what real leaders should do and practice, is part of our values, beliefs, and attitudes. We do not intentionally practice them. It comes naturally. In a sense, we cannot be blamed if we continue to think and act that way. In fact, our societies continue to provide affirmation in regard to how we think and act according to our cultural standards.

However, we are not just Filipinos, nor just Koreans, nor just Kenyans anymore. We are Christians first of all. We have surrendered our motives, our minds, our talents and capacities to Christ our Lord. We are not just leaders, we are Christian leaders, leading a people who also have given their lives to the Lord. And we all have one aim in life: to do the will of God individually and collectively, to fulfill His mission as a church.

As we will notice by now, what I am doing, in order to be true to the intent of this part of the Forum, is more of a reflection rather than a response to the paper. But I will use the criteria given in Dr. Sahly's paper of what leadership is and what real leaders should do and practice, as the basis for my reflection. Let me summarize the criteria briefly:

1. Christian leadership makes one's relationship to God the source of authority and power. Christian leaders are always conscious of their dependence upon God as evidenced by a prayerful life.
2. The priority in our lives should be God's call and will, as well as God's will for the church, over the views and demands of others.
3. The structure of decision making and responsibilities for Christian leaders should be characterized by shared and participative leadership.

Let us now take each of these points and relate them to the cultural elements in our contexts. Speaking of contexts, you may say that Asian contexts do not apply to those of you from Africa. Geert Hofstede made cultural maps based on his interviews of thousands of business executives and managers. In his maps, he placed the contours of Asian leadership and those of East and West Africa quite close together.

The first issue is, What or who is the source of authority and power in our leadership? What is the source of authority and power in our contexts? There is not one general answer, because in the East Asian contexts at least, there are two.

The Southeast Asian countries, particularly the Malay cultures, have a strong point in this issue. Leadership in this context is people centered and relationship oriented. However, the weakness is that the source of authority and power is perceived in relation to the number of people loyal to the leader. Many a leader in this culture cultivates a following or a network of relationships because, in his eyes, without that following, without those connections, he has no power at all. I

remember a piece of advice I got when I was beginning denominational work. The person asked me if I aspired to be a Conference president. His suggestion? "You'd better learn how to play tennis so that you make the important connections."

The source of authority and power for the Northeast Asian cultures, the cultures influenced by the Chinese civilization, is different. In these contexts, the good thing is that leadership is also person centered and relationship oriented. However, the weakness is that, if you are young or do not belong to the hierarchy, you have no power, no authority.

Yes, cultural concepts with regard to authority and power shape the degree of our influence in our groups and societies. We have to be sensitive to, and work with, group behavior patterns in our culture. But, as Christians, we must move away from the mainly humanistic thinking of Asian cultures, that power and authority are derived from people.

As Dr. Sahly reminds us, the power and authority in Christian leadership come from God, flowing from a spiritual life, a life intimately related to God in prayer. Our dependence is not on the arm of men but on the strength of God.

Let us go to the second issue: motives in leadership, an issue that can only be understood in relation to the conceptions of the function of groups in these cultures.

For the Malay cultures, the main purpose of the group is to keep social order and make people happy. One good thing in this value system is that people and relationships are in the center and are given priority over any task. The weakness, however, is that when we talk about happiness, we are not talking here about an abstract set of ideals. The conception of happiness, and therefore how people can be made happy, is highly particularistic and personalistic. What will please now may not please them next year; therefore, the struggle of a leader to always please and avoid criticism and blame is constant. Many a leader in this context has one goal: to make people happy and satisfied. In this setting, the task of the group is often forgotten. Actually, this is an inaccurate comment, because the main task of the group is to make people happy.

With such a setting, where the satisfaction and valuing of individual members are most important, the leader cannot be too autocratic. He must be a good consensus builder. The best leader in this context is one who is "soft outside, but firm and tough inside."

For the Chinese-influenced cultures, the main purpose of the group is to maintain social order, so that each part of society functions to meet its role and delivers. The strong point is that the groups are still centered on people and relationships, with the leader making sure that the members of his/her group are taken care of and are growing in prosperity. People in this context are willing to trust their leaders in making decisions. Another good point is that groups in this context are task oriented. Leaders are evaluated based on whether or not they deliver on promises. The weakness of the Northeast Asian cultures is that they

have very strongly centralized groups and autocratic leadership. The best leader in this context is one who is hard outside and hard inside, but has a soft spot inside for each member of his group.

Dr. Sahly reminds us, in the light of our cultural contexts, where people's wishes and approval are the measuring point of leadership, that God's call and will have priority for our lives, and that God's will for the church is more important than the views and demands of others.

Let us look at the last issue: the structure of decision making and responsibilities. In the Southeast Asian contexts, the strong point is the high value for consensus, harmony, and the consideration of the views of others. The good result is that once most of the people in the group are happy and satisfied, you have their support. The weakness is that it takes a long time to reach a consensus, if ever a consensus is reached in many issues. Many a Malay leader will not accept full responsibility without a consensus.

In the Northeast Asian setting, the strong point is that the group moves fast once the leaders decide. The Northerners are already marching like an army while the Southerners are still sitting down at a potluck trying to reach a consensus. The weaknesses in the Chinese-influenced setting are the rigid pyramid structures, and the large distance between those in power and the ordinary members. Decisions are made by a few, with very little input from members.

Dr. Sahly reminds us that in Christian leadership, decision making and responsibilities should be shared. People should participate in making decisions and be given corresponding authority and responsibility that go with the decision-making prerogative. The ideal of a shared and participative leadership is above culture because it is based on the theology of the Holy Spirit and the gifts He bestows.

We need to examine ourselves and ask God to change our hearts, minds, and actions. This examination and reflection is like what should take place between the stages of childhood and adulthood. Nobody is born into a perfect family. Nobody has a perfect background or training. We must be aware of, and overcome our weaknesses, while building up the strong points. We must consciously form an identity so that we can stand firm in the challenges and rigors of life. Otherwise we will always be like children, tossed to and fro by external influences.

The work that needs to be done is like the work of repentance. What should take place is the simultaneous work of the Holy Spirit that opens our eyes to the perfection of the law, showing our mistakes and failures against that ideal. More than that, the Spirit gives us hope that with His power, we can change, slowly but surely; that He is writing the principles of the law in our hearts; and that He is empowering our faith so that it is manifested in good works.

AASS 4 (2001):101-112

Paper presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

THE CHURCH'S MISSION: JESUS' EXAMPLE IN JOHN 4:4-42 AS A MODEL

Kenneth D. Mulzac, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of OT and Biblical Languages

AIAS Theological Seminary

Brief Overview of John 4

Owing to the possibility of opposition by the Pharisees toward His work and ministry, Jesus departed Jerusalem for Galilee (4:1-3). At noon, He rested beside a well in the Samaritan town of Sychar, which means "drunkenness" (vv. 4-6), while the disciples went into town to find food (vv. 27,31). Verses 7-30 record for us the encounter between Jesus and a woman, commonly referred to as the Samaritan woman. Raymond Brown divides the encounter into two parts: The Living Water (vv. 6-15) and True Worship of the Father (vv. 16-26), each comprising two short dialogical exchanges between Jesus and the woman.¹ In vv. 32-38 we have the discourse of Jesus with His disciples (using agricultural metaphors), followed by His witness to the Samaritans who believed and accepted Him (vv. 39-42).

After spending two days with the Samaritans, Jesus resumed His journey. John illustrates the superficiality of the faith of the Galileans (vv. 43-45) by placing it in bold contrast to the expression of faith by a royal official who sought audience with Jesus on behalf of his sick son (vv. 46-54). In that story Jesus confronts unbelief and effects trust. At the same time, He demonstrates that distance has no effect on His miraculous power.

¹Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 1-XII*, Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 176-77.

Setting

The events of John 4:4-42 occurred by Jacob's well (vv. 5-6), which was about thirty meters deep. It was first mentioned by Christian pilgrims in the fourth century C.E. This well was located some eighty meters from ancient Shechem, a town located in the valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. Jerome identified Sychar with Shechem. The Syriac reads Shechem.

The town of Shechem was the most important center of ancient Israelite worship. According to Genesis 12:6, Shechem was the first place Abraham went when he entered the land that God was leading him to. Shechem was the place where Jacob went when he returned from Palestine to Mesopotamia (Gen. 33:18-20). Israel's first convocation for worship in Canaan after the Exodus took place on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, on either side of the valley of Shechem (Deut. 11:29-32; 27:1-13; Josh. 8:30-35). Mount Gerizim became the "mount of blessing" (Deut. 11:29; 27:12); thus the Samaritans were not crazy to think that Mount Gerizim was a holy mountain. Shechem was also the place where the body of Joseph was buried after the Exodus (Josh. 24:32).²

Shechem and Mt. Gerizim were central to the Samaritan cultus. In fact, Shechem was the center of worship for at least 1000 years *before* David established Jerusalem as the locus of worship around 1000 B.C.E. The Samaritan Pentateuch highlights the value of Shechem by adding to Gen 12:6 that Shechem is "the land of Moriah where Abraham sacrificed Isaac."³ In other words, according to Samaritan tradition, the *Adekah* (sacrifice of Isaac) did not occur at Mt. Moriah where the Jewish temple was later erected, but at Mt. Gerizim.

The important point here is the centrality of worship at Gerizim, based on long-standing tradition, adhered to by the Samaritans. This obviously created opposition between the Samaritans and Jews on the point of *religion*.

Further polarization between Jews and Samaritans occurred when the new returnees from Babylonian exile, led by Zerubbabel, refused the help of the local population (Samaritans)⁴ in rebuilding the temple. Ezra 4 records this fact, plus

²Jon Paulien, *John*, Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 100.

³The Samaritans accused Ezra of tampering with the Hebrew text in order to favor Jerusalem over Mt. Gerizim as the site for the second temple. Roland F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (1995), s.v. "Samaritan."

⁴Sargon replaced the deported Israelites with foreign colonists (2 Kgs 17:24).

These newcomers intermarried with the Israelites who remained in Samaria. Later their numbers were increased when Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (the biblical Osnappa, Ezra 4:10) sent more Assyrian colonists to the district of Samaria. These people took the name "Samaritans" from the territory and attempted to settle the land. However, "they did not fear

the resultant opposition which caused the cessation of the rebuilding of the temple (v. 24). Further, Neh 2:10-6:14 records the opposition Nehemiah faced by Arab and Samaritan factions when he attempted the reconstruction of the Jerusalem wall. The gulf between both groups only widened when Ezra called for divorce between Israelite men and their pagan wives who had married during the captivity (Ezra 10:18-44). So there were *ethnic* problems as well.

Around 330 B.C.E., the Samaritans built a temple atop Mt. Gerizim. This was destroyed some two hundred years later (in 128 B.C.E.) by the Jewish revolutionary, John Hyrcanus. The break was now complete and both groups refused to have anything to do with each other. The division was so deep that a Jew felt that anything touched by a Samaritan was certainly defiled. In fact, to be called a Samaritan was a truly derogatory term (see John 8:48).

These divisions were deep, based on long standing prejudices and rivalries, religion, philosophy, ideology, and hatred. Jesus stepped into this milieu of acrimony and animosity, "this prejudice-filled atmosphere to make a statement about the universality of God's love to 'whoever' (John 3:16) believes."⁵

Discussion

Jesus' actions as described in John 4 appear programmatic for the church in its attempts to make inroads into modern, secular-minded society with the gospel. The fact, simply put forward, is that the same or similar chasms exist between the church and the world today as those that existed between Jews and Samaritans during the early decades of the first century. We do not need to rehearse these differences. Rather, we may explore the strategy Jesus took, which serves as a model for the church today.

the Lord, and the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them" (2 Kgs 17:25). In despair they sent to Assyria for "one of the priests" who would "teach them the rituals of the God of the land" (v. 27). Thereafter the Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel, but they also continued their idolatry, worshiping the pagan gods imported from foreign lands (v. 29).

So the Samaritans were a "mixed race" contaminated by foreign blood and false worship. The Jewish historian Josephus indicates that the Samaritans were also opportunists. When the Jews enjoyed prosperity, the Samaritans were quick to acknowledge their blood relationship. But when the Jews suffered hard times, the Samaritans disowned any such kinship, declaring that they were descendants of Assyrian immigrants. Ibid.

⁵Paulien, 102.

Initiative

John 4:4 says that Jesus had to go through Samaria. This is a statement of theology, not of geography. There were several routes available for someone travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee. However, the route through Samaritan territory was the most direct and the shortest. "In this case, the necessity lay in the plan of God. . . . His meeting with the woman at the well was God ordained."⁶ In 3:14, "the expression of necessity means that God's will or plan is involved."⁷

With His request, "Will you give me a drink of water?" (4:7)⁸ Jesus initiated conversation with the woman. This is in sharp contrast to the disciples, who "marveled that He talked with the woman" (v. 27). According to Jewish ideas, to touch anything, especially a drinking vessel, used by a Samaritan, would render a Jew inevitably defiled, since Jews considered Samaritans "unclean." Further, the Rabbis taught that

a man must not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even his sister or daughter, because of what men may think. A man must not talk with a woman on the street, not even his wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say.⁹

Obviously, Jesus was breaking the social norms. The narrator contends, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans (v. 9)." This becomes even more intriguing as John unfolds the kind of woman Jesus was now engaging. The fact that Jesus was conversing with this particular woman highlights the value of His taking the initiative.

The event took place at noon. This was an unusual time to be drawing water from the community well, since women generally preferred the cool hours of the early morning or late afternoon. Therefore, the time of day provides a hint that the woman may have been a social outcast, possibly because of her adulterous lifestyle (cf. vv. 17-18).

Right from the start, the woman had three strikes against the possibility that she might develop a relationship with Jesus. She was a woman in a public place, she was a member of a hated race, and she was living in sin. No respectable Jewish man would have been caught speaking to her. But Jesus *took the risk* of reaching across all these barriers to provide for her

⁶Ibid., 103.

⁷Brown, 169.

⁸Except otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

⁹Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 274. See especially n. 68.

the living water that He had come to give to whoever was willing to believe.¹⁰

The church must be willing to initiate contact with the world. (In the view of John, the world is related to the unbeliever.) In taking this risk, the church follows the example of its Founder. His foundational principle was to make salvation available and real for “whosoever believes in Him” (3:16). He would take any measure, design and devise any possibility, and execute any means by which He could encounter a soul. This was His *modus operandi*. It should be that of the church too.

Confrontation

In 4:10 Jesus invited the woman to receive “living water,” but she side-stepped the issue by telling Jesus that He had nothing with which to draw water (v. 11) and by asking if He is greater than Jacob (v.12). In vv. 13-14 Jesus insists that He will provide an abundant supply of water that will quench thirst forever and provide eternal life. This is generally interpreted to mean the gift of the Holy Spirit whose indwelling becomes a source of new life that holds unlimited possibilities for the believer.¹¹

To this remarkable invitation, the woman responds, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (v. 15). Jesus immediately seized upon this opportunity to confront the woman with the sinful realities of her lifestyle (vv. 16-18).

This confrontation (vv. 16-18), however, is not one that is spiteful or vindictive in nature. Rather, it is more like an invitation. (The approach appears Rogerian from the point of view of counseling psychology). As Jon Paulien comments insightfully, “For the woman at Jacob’s well, this was the crucial moment of judgment. How would she respond?”¹²

Jesus was not judgmental or condemning. In a rather gentle and inviting manner, He confronted the woman’s sordid life and focused her attention on making a choice, a decision for acceptance or rejection of His gift. In doing this, He preserved the dignity of the woman while allowing her the opportunity to confront her own self, her own character and life, her own moral and ethical choices. This is what makes the drama of the confrontation so impressive.

The church must confront sin but it must be willing to do so on Jesus’ terms. Regarding this confrontation of sin, it is necessary to understand that Jesus uses

¹⁰Paulien, 103 (emphasis mine).

¹¹See Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1934), 1033. This interpretation is based on John 7:38-39.

¹²Paulien, 104.

the method He sees most fitting to do so. It appears that for those situations where sin is systemic, Jesus used an aggressive, strong-arm tactic. Such was the case when He threw the moneychangers out of the temple precincts while brandishing a whip (John 2:12-17). However, when Jesus confronted sin or ignorance on a personal level he appears generally to use a less aggressive approach. Such is the case in face-to-face encounters with people like Nicodemus, whose apparent ignorance of salvation is strange (3:1-21); or the nobleman, who needed to exercise his faith (4:46-52); or the woman caught in adultery, who needed forgiveness and unconditional love (8:1-11).

While the church must be applauded for its role in helping to stamp out evil in society at large (for example, legalized racism in the United States and apartheid in South Africa), it cannot rest on its laurels in happy bliss. It must be about the business of confronting these evils as it involves itself in Christ's ministry of embracing "whosoever believes in Him."

Revelation

Jesus' confrontation produced a response on two levels:

(1) *The woman herself* (v. 18). Jesus was not uncovering anything new to the woman. She was already aware of her adulterous lifestyle. But it highlighted to her that her secret was open, no longer hidden. It was beyond the town limits. She was exposed. This was the moment of judgment. Would she confess and receive the gift He was offering or would she reject it and continue a life of exposed shame? She attempted to deflect attention from this moment of personal revelation and response by sidestepping it, changing the subject to prophecy and worship (vv. 19-21). Jesus provided an adequate response to the issue of worship (vv. 21-24),¹³ thereby forcing the woman to go back to the idea of the prophet. This she did by bringing up the subject of the Messiah (v. 25). This change of subject introduces us to the second level of revelation.

(2) *Jesus Himself* (v. 26). The self-declaration of His messiahship is tersely expressed, "I who speak to you am he," (v. 26). He is the *ego eimi*. Paulien comments, "The openness with which Jesus confesses His Messiahship to the Samaritan woman is breathtakingly unique to all four Gospels (vs. 26)."¹⁴

The Samaritans emphasized that the Messiah would be a reformer like Moses (cf. Deut 18:15-18). He would be the Taheb, "the one who returns," as a prophet

¹³Jesus' point in vv. 21-24 is that the location of worship is not as important as the attitude of the worshipper. It is not *where* you worship that is significant, but *how* you worship. Jesus, in effect, tells the woman that the Samaritans' knowledge of God was limited, since their Scriptures were limited: they accepted only the Pentateuch. Since the Jews had the Pentateuch plus the Prophets and the Writings, their understanding of God was more complete.

¹⁴Paulien, 105.

like Moses. Hence, the Messiah “would teach them a better way of worship. Jesus reinforced the Samaritans’ correct picture of the Messiah by revealing Himself openly to them in a way that He never did among the Jews (John 4:23-26).”¹⁵ This self-revelation is based on the divine condescension, where the pre-existent Word became flesh and dwelled among us. The human side of this is seen in Jesus’ tiredness (v. 6) and thirst (v. 7). The divine side is seen in His revelations: (a) giving eternal life (“living water,” v.10); (b) exercising supernatural knowledge (vv. 17-18); (c) explaining the proper way to worship (vv. 23-24); and (d) identifying Himself as the Messiah (v. 25).¹⁶

It is the responsibility of the church to consistently paint a correct picture of the Messiah. It can be argued that Jesus revealed Himself. But it can be argued also that the Bible contains a complete picture of the Christ, and when He lives in us (Gal 2:20), we become, in effect, the revelation of His character. Paulien makes an insightful application for us as a church today:

The lesson for Seventh-day Adventist readers is quite pointed. A people may have a corner on revelation (Ellen White) and know exactly what they are about, yet may miss out on God’s next great revelation, because their adherence to past revelation makes them less open to the new work God wants to do in changing times (5:39, 40). People who have an abundance of revelation seem to find it easy to pick and choose what they want to follow, whether intentionally or not. People with little revelation may at times be more focused in the simplicity of their understanding.¹⁷

The effect of Christ’s self-revelation was a response by the woman. She promptly accepted Him as the Messiah, then issued an invitation to the townspeople, “Come, see a man who told me everything that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (v. 29). It was this invitation, issued in conjunction with a provocative question, which excited the people to investigate. The result was marvelous. Many believed in Jesus on the basis of the woman’s confession and testimony (v. 39). Jesus accepted their invitation to stay with them for two days, then, based on their own hearing of His word, many more believed (vv. 40-42). In this Samaritan town of Sychar (“drunkenness”), Jesus found disciples. Unlike the Jews, cultured in their religion, tradition, and vast knowledge, who demanded

¹⁵Ibid. Brown, 172-73, indicates that Jesus, who “does not give unqualified acceptance to the title of Messiah when it is offered to Him by Jews, accepts it from a Samaritan. Perhaps the answer lies in the royal nationalistic connotations the term had in Judaism, while the Samaritan Taheb (although not devoid of nationalistic overtones) had more the aspect of a teacher and a lawgiver.”

¹⁶Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 88.

¹⁷Paulien, 105-6.

signs before they would believe (cf. 2:18; 4:48), the hated and despised Samaritans believed on the basis of the word of Jesus alone (4:42).

Instruction

Just as Jesus made the startling revelation of His Messiahship, the disciples arrived and were marveling that Jesus was speaking with the woman. The use of the imperfect tense indicates that their shock was more than momentary surprise. Yet none of them dared confront Him (v. 27). Instead, they implored Him to eat. Jesus took this as His starting point, the daily necessities of life. With the woman it was water. Water was the symbol that pointed to Jesus' ability to give eternal life. In dealing with the disciples, Jesus talked about food to describe His mission (v. 35), and, by extension, the mission of His disciples. Jesus used this as an opportunity for instruction to His disciples (vv. 31-38). Three notable factors arrest our attention here:

(1) *Jesus is purpose-driven* (vv. 32-34). In v. 32 ("I have food to eat that you know nothing about") He betrays the fact that the disciples are slow to comprehend the purpose of His mission. This is certainly illustrated in their question, "Could someone have brought Him food" (v. 33)? Just as the woman misunderstood about the water (vv. 7-11), the disciples misunderstood about the food. In both cases, Jesus was speaking on a spiritual level, while the others were understanding on a material or temporal level. Jesus then plainly revealed that He was not talking about food for physical sustenance but that He was talking about His mission: to willingly obey God and complete the task for which He was sent (v. 34). It was this singularity of purpose that motivated and drove Him.

(2) *Urgency and vigilance* (v. 35). Using an agricultural motif, Jesus called the disciples' attention to the fact that they must be vigilant in reaping the harvest of souls. In an agrarian society, one cannot be lackadaisical or indifferent concerning the time of harvest. One must pay constant attention to the times, the rains, and the tendering, nurturing, and growth of the grain in preparation for the harvest. This is a matter of great importance: one must either stave off hunger or face starvation. It is a matter of life and death. Jesus proclaimed forcefully, therefore, that the same vigilance must be brought to bear on the harvest of souls. To illustrate this He used a proverb: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest?'" (v. 35). Four months comprised the interval between sowing and harvesting. Yet Jesus, referring to the Samaritans already rushing to meet Him, declared that the fields are white for harvest (v. 35). Brown says,

Jesus announces that in the eschatological order which He has introduced the proverbial principle is no longer valid, for there is no longer any such interval. The OT had prepared for this. Lev 26:5 had promised, by way of ideal reward to those who would keep the commandments: "Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage till the time of

sowing”—in other words, the abundance of crops will be so great that the idle intervals between the agricultural seasons will disappear. Amos' dreams of the messianic days pictured the plowman overtaking the reaper (9:13). So now in Jesus' preaching the harvest is ripe on the same day the seed has been sown, for already the Samaritans are pouring out of the village and coming to Jesus¹⁸

C. H. Dodd claims that this embodies the theme of Realized Eschatology.¹⁹ The harvest in John is not at the end of time (as Matt 13 depicts) but it is now, in the ministry of Jesus and the Church. In other words, the end is now. Indeed, “the harvest has arrived with Jesus' mission.”²⁰

(3) *Cooperative and joint efforts* (vv. 36-38). In these verses Jesus indicates that a bountiful harvest is the result of the cooperative, interconnected efforts of several individuals: “One sows and another reaps” (v. 37). This is not the place for individual triumphalism. Brown comments that originally this was a “pessimistic reflection on the inequity of life.”²¹ For example, Mic 6:15 denotes, “You shall sow, but another reap.” However, Jesus applies it optimistically, since the disciples reap where they did not sow. This shows “eschatological abundance.”²²

In so many instances, we have given kudos to the evangelist who reaps the harvest, while forgetting those who did the hard work of preparing the fields, tilling the soil, planting the seeds, weeding and watering, and so forth, that we have wounded the sensitivities of some people.

The Main Point

With the above four practical and doable factors, Jesus illustrates the main point of His ministry: the *universality* of His mission, the “whosoever” of John 3:16. The Fourth Gospel illustrates this by highlighting two people at the opposite extremes of the “whosoever” spectrum: Nicodemus of chap. 3 and the Samaritan woman of chap. 4.

¹⁸Brown, 182.

¹⁹C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 391-99.

²⁰Köstenberger, 89.

²¹Brown, 182-83.

²²*Ibid.*, 183. When the disciples were “sent” is difficult to resolve. Brown offers two solutions: (a) in the post-Resurrection perspective of the Gospel, the idea of being “sent” was fulfilled in the mission of 20:21; (b) it is possible that this points to a previous mission that is not narrated in John. Cf. Luke 10. To this, Köstenberger, 89-90, retorts that, while the past tense (sent) is usually given, the present tense “send” is “a superior rendering.” Jesus is then talking, not about a past sending, but about “the disciples' mission in general.” Unfortunately, Köstenberger provides no justification or evidence for this conclusion.

The “whosoever” boasts a cosmic and an international flavor. The emphasis clearly is placed on people: “whosoever,” not “whatsoever.” God’s agenda deals with people. But not just in a community or collective fashion but on an individual basis. Note how John values the individual nature of “whosoever” by sandwiching it between two individuals of different background, character and dynamics in chapters three and four:

Nicodemus – Woman at the Well
 Named – Unnamed
 Man of means – Woman dispossessed
 Respected – Rejected
 Loved – Lonely
 Exalted – Disenfranchised
 Esteemed – Disavowed
 Honored – Ashamed
 Jew – Despised Samaritan
 Rich – Poor (otherwise won’t be getting her own water)
 Highly Educated – Illiterate (woman in the 1st century)
 Highly respected – Despised
 Great name- Anonymous
 Holy City – “drunkenness”

“Whosoever” is broadly inclusive of politician and policeman; the prudent and the prostitute; black and white; tall and short; rich and poor; Adventist and Anglican; those with Ph. D’s and those who get only D’s.²³

The point of the Samaritan encounter is that the gospel has broken all barriers: ethnic, religious, geographical, historical, and philosophical. The Good News has penetrated all long-standing walls that have divided and separated people. God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) has been brought to fruition.

Conclusion

The ministry of Jesus to the Samaritans as described in the passage delineates four significant points of relevance for the church today.

(1) *The agenda of the church’s mission.* Jesus’ agenda is people, not programs. The church can learn this by elevating people above programs. Programs are not bad, but often they take precedence over people. For example, pastors are given yearly goals for churches and districts to meet: magazine subscriptions,

²³Kenneth D. Mulzac, *Praying with Power: Moving Mountains* (Huntsville, AL: Beka, 1996), 101.

ingathering, baptisms and so forth. Sometimes in soul winning, the number is made more important than the soul.

(2) *The importance of the mission of the church, which is the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20)*. John 4 records the *only* place in the four Gospels where Jesus explicitly directs His ministry toward the Samaritan populace. [This is unlike the incident where He healed ten lepers and only one, a Samaritan, returned to give Him thanks (Luke 10). It is not certain that this miracle occurred in Samaria]. This is significant, especially in light of Matt 10:5, where Jesus sends out the disciples and explicitly tells them not to go to the Samaritans but only to the lost sheep of Israel. Further, in Luke 9:51-56, an unnamed Samaritan village rejected Jesus, and the fury of James and John was unleashed so much that they wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy the village. Jesus rebuked them for their rash impulse, "You know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (v. 55, KJV). He then explicated His mission: "For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (v. 56, KJV). This outworking of His mission and of the gift of salvation is seen in Jesus' ministry to the Samaritan woman and the town of Sychar.

In the commission of Acts 1:8, Jesus is clear that the Good News must be taken to Samaria, even to the traditional enemies. The point is that the Gospel must penetrate those barriers that separate people. Note that in the Gospel of John, Jesus first witnesses to a Jew (Nicodemus, chap. 3), then to the Samaritans (chap. 4), and finally to the Gentiles who approach Him (12:20-22). This mirrors the Great Commission of Matt 28:19-20.²⁴

(3) *The universality of the mission of the church*. The message of the church is not for a select few, a privileged group, members of the status quo. It is for all people. John later wrote that he saw another angel "having the everlasting gospel to preach unto *those that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue and people*" (Rev 14:6).

Paulien summarizes the lesson from John 4:4-42:

No matter who you are, no matter what you have done; no matter where you have been or how you have been treated, Jesus' arms are open to you if you are willing to come. Our present society is seemingly becoming increasingly divided into various competing groups. We need to hear that in the gospel there is no more male or female, no more slave or free, no more Jew or Gentile, no more black or white (Gal. 3:28, 29; Eph. 2:11-22). How can anyone claim to understand the gospel and fail to grasp its glorious lack of prejudice toward people of any heritage and background? If Jesus were physically present today, would He be found in our schools and churches, or would He be found in the bars, the prisons, and the

²⁴Köstenberger, 187.

hospices, among the oppressed and those with AIDS? I'm not sure I want to know the answer!²⁵

(4) *Don't underestimate the possibilities of the mission.* Brown's comment is insightful:

If our story in ch. iv . . . has portrayed the steps by which a soul comes to believe in Jesus, it also portrays the history of the apostolate, for the harvest comes outside of Judea among foreigners. We can scarcely believe that the evangelist did not mean for us to contrast the unsatisfactory faith of the Jews in ii 23-25 based on a superficial admiration of miracles with the deeper faith of the Samaritans based on the word of Jesus. Nicodemus, the rabbi of Jerusalem, could not understand Jesus' message that God had sent the Son into the world so that the world might be saved through him (iii 17); yet the peasants of Samaria readily come to know that Jesus is really the Saviour of the world.²⁶

Even the so-called "hard territory" is conquerable for Christ.

²⁵Paulien, 107.

²⁶Brown, 185.

AIAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DISSERTATION AND THESIS ABSTRACTS

STRATEGIES FOR ENLISTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PREPARE FOR MINISTRY IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IN SINGAPORE: A CASE STUDY

Researcher: **Michael Ho Shiong Chun, D.P.Th., 2001**
Adviser: **Ronald D. Bissell, Ph.D.**

The main concern addressed in this study is that of why are there so few Singaporean Seventh-day Adventist youth entering the ministry in Singapore and what can be done to help the situation? The purpose of this study is to develop a strategic plan designed to increase the number of youth preparing for and entering the ministry in Singapore Adventist Mission (SAM).

The study is based on the case of Wang Yu who prepared for and entered full-time pastoral ministry in spite of the advice of his friends and the opposition of his family. Later he left the pastoral ministry for employment as a family counselor, but subsequently re-entered the ministry.

A major factor contributing to the problem addressed in this paper is that few youth fully understand or sense God's call to the ministry. Societal factors influencing the non-enrollment of youth in ministry are family disapproval, lack of prestige associated with the ministry, peer pressure, secular educational influences, the impact of media exposure, and low income received by ministers.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the biblical, theological, and practical foundations of God's call to the ministry. Chapter 5 concludes that, although different persons may experience God's call in different ways, there is a close connection between a sense of being called by God and commitment to full-time ministry. Chapter 6 concludes that evidences of God's call include an inner sense of conviction, confirmation according to the spiritual qualifications and gifts outlined in the Scriptures, and recognition by the body of believers.

The concluding chapter presents strategies designed to enlist more young people into preparing for and entering the ministry in Singapore. These strategies are based upon seeking to help them understand, recognize, and respond to God's call, emphasizing the positive rewards of ministry, and seeking to minimize any negative factors which might discourage them from entering the ministry.

TOWARD A STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVE CONVERSION OF PRISON INMATES IN A PHILIPPINE JAIL: A CASE STUDY

Researcher: **Daniel Opoku-Boateng**, D.P.Th., 2001

Adviser: **Adrie H. Legoh**, D.Min.

The need to help prison inmates experience true conversion is reflected in this study. The focus of concern presented is the inmates of Philippine jails. The main objectives of the study are to provide a pastoral strategy in response to the challenge of helping bring conversion to inmates in the Philippines and to explore the biblical and theological nature of conversion. The study is made up of four components: description, analysis, interpretation, and action plan.

Part 1 introduces the study and outlines the mechanics of the research. The case of Mario Pastrana, a prison inmate, is presented and highlights the challenges of helping prison inmates experience genuine conversion.

Part 2 examines two dynamics relevant to the case: socio-cultural and religio-psychological dynamics. The analysis reveals factors that might have influenced the situation of Pastrana.

Part 3 probes the biblical and theological nature of conversion. It provides the biblical-theological undergirding for the suggested strategy.

Part 4 provides a suggested strategy and action plan based on the findings of the study, the problem, and pastoral-theological issues presented.

A DISCIPLE-MAKING PROGRAM EMPHASIZING LAY EVANGELISM AMONG THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN NORTH SUMATRA MISSION

Researcher: **Rudolf Weindra Sagala**, D.Min., 2001

Adviser: **Reuel U. Almocera**, D.P.S.

The study is designed to address the perceived inadequate concept of disciple-making among lay members in the North Sumatra Mission (NSM) of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. The goal of the study is to suggest an appropriate

intervention program to be carried out by local pastors so that the problem may be arrested.

To reach this goal, the study examined the disciple-making procedures of Jesus and Paul in the NT. This was done to identify the basic model of disciple-making.

The study reveals that a biblical disciple-making program should use the means of (1) evangelism, (2) nurturing, (3) establishing, and (4) reproducing.

A converted person is not really a disciple until the stage has been reached when he/she is capable of reproducing another disciple. This understanding is consistent with the church's belief on the priesthood of all believers.

The third chapter of this study chronicles the result of the survey conducted among randomly selected church members and pastors of NSM as to why fervor for disciple-making seems to have diminished, compared to the earlier church growth experience of NSM. The study suggests three major factors for the phenomenon: (1) pastors and members have a misconception about disciple-making; (2) the role of a pastor has been perceived not as a trainer of soul winners, but as a visiting shepherd; and (3) there has been a lack of a concrete, intentional discipling program in the local church.

The last section of the study suggests a concrete discipling program which may be adapted by pastors in the local churches. The design of the program is based on the discipling structure of Jesus and Paul and the present realities of the SDA churches in NSM.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN WORLD RULERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND EVALUATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST INTERPRETATIONS OF DANIEL 11

Researcher: **Hotma Saor Parasian Silitonga, Ph.D., 2001**

Adviser: **Aecio Cairus, Ph.D.**

Dan 11 is a prophecy about the forces of good and evil on the international scenario from the time of Daniel until the end. The message of this revelation summarizes and expands the preceding visions of Dan 2, 7, 8 and 9. Seventh-day Adventist historicists, though sharing a common outlook of the book of Daniel as a whole, hold two views on this chapter. Most interpret Dan 11:1-30 in a strictly historical way and 11:31-45 spiritually. They regard Dan 11 as the history of Medo-Persia (11:1-2), of Greece (11:3-15), of pagan Rome (11:16-30), of papal Rome (11:31-39), and of the world during the time of the end (11:40-45). In contrast, Jacques Doukhan, the main proponent of the second view, interprets 11:1-4 historically and 11:5-45 spiritually. He suggests that 11:1-2 deals with Medo-

Persia, 11:3-4b with Greece, 11-4c with pagan Rome, and that 11:5-45 applies to the power of the Little Horn after the fall of pagan Rome.

In view of this, a further study on the historicist interpretation of Dan 11 has been done to determine the validity of the respective arguments. Chapter 1 starts the study with a review of relevant literature. Chapter 2 presents a comparison of the two views of historicism. Chapter 3 presents a grammatical-historical analysis of Dan 11 and evaluates these two views. Chapter 4 deals with the summary and conclusion.

The difference centers on the interpretation of the “others beside these” in 11:4c. Doukhan interprets the “others” of this verse as the Romans, and applies the “these” to the four generals among whom Alexander’s empire was divided after his untimely death. However, a study of the parallel construction of Dan 11:4 suggests that the “these” to whom the kingdom goes is connected with (1) Alexander’s posterity and (2) his dominion, and that the “others” is connected with the four divisions of the Greek empire and not with the Roman empire. Doukhan’s interpretation, then, is not seen as correct at this point. Nonetheless, the dissertation points out a common Babelic/Luciferic character underlying the successive powers depicted in Dan 11, which approximates them to the “Little Horn.”

Recognition of this continuity of character in a succession of changing rulers spanning many centuries can be helpful to those who support historical-critical, historical-preterist, and dispensational-futurist views, as well as to historicists, and has an important spiritual message for all schools of prophetic interpretation. God indeed “declares the end from the beginning” (Isa 46:10).

LAY MINISTRY TRAINING BASED ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES OF THE JAKARTA CONFERENCE

Researcher: **Bachtiar Simanjuntak, D.Min., 2001**

Adviser: **Adrie H. Legoh, D.Min.**

The purpose of this project is to develop a training program to help members to minister according to their spiritual gifts in the Seventh-day Adventist Jakarta Conference. To reach this goal, the biblical and theological foundation of lay ministry training will be explored. The biblical and theological findings prove that there is no distinction between clergy and laity as far as belonging to the people of God and ministry are concerned. The difference is found only in function. They have accepted the mandate through the baptism ceremony.

Training is a vital aspect in order to make the church alive. It is biblical, urgent, and necessary. It is part of the Church's life. Training is not an option; it must be a priority in the church.

The Church is defined as a group of people who believe and worship God. Its nature is a spiritual fellowship and also a functioning institution to fulfill its mission to the world.

God has endowed various spiritual gifts on believers in order to enable them to serve. After identifying their gifts, He wants all believers to utilize them for ministry, and be in the right place to work enthusiastically.

Gift-based ministry is a meaningful gift that God gave to His Church in NT times. It is significant to consider, use, and put into practice all the gifts of the members in His Church. Everyone can enjoy the ministry according to their respective spiritual gifts.

INSTITUTING SERVANT LEADERSHIP AS A MODEL FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS IN THE CENTRAL PHILIPPINE UNION CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Researcher: **Luisito T. Tomado**, D.Min., 2001

Adviser: **Reuel U. Almocera**, D.P.S.

Though noticeable improvements have been achieved in local Seventh-day Adventist church leadership in the Central Philippines, not many are excellent models of harmony and effectiveness in ministry. Some observers believe that the popular notion of church leadership has undergone a shift from humble service to a power and "command and obey" type of leadership.

This paper considers "servant leadership" as a promising response to the aforementioned condition. There seem to be spiritual dynamics in this model of leadership that closely follow biblical principles and Ellen G. White's concept of leadership.

Moses acknowledged that developing the potential of others strengthens leadership. David did not lead, but people came to follow him because he valued and harnessed them for productivity. Jesus, the greatest servant leader, taught that kingdom leadership is "serving first." The apostle Paul defines qualities of a servant leader in many of his letters to the Christian churches. Ellen White emphasizes humility, service, and self-sacrifice, the right use of power and authority, and the value of delegating, among other things. Her concept of leadership is servant leadership.

Introducing this model of leadership to the local churches in the Central Philippine Union Conference would improve and enhance the ministry of the local church and lay involvement of church members. Unlearning wrong and unbiblical

concepts of leadership, and instituting an excellent training seminar on the concept of servant leadership is one of the best options in making this attempt a reality. This paper develops and presents seminar notes on the concept of servant leadership, which may be used as an effective pastoral strategy.

DONALD A. MCGAVRAN AND ELLEN G. WHITE ON DISCIPLING,
THEN PERFECTING, IN CHURCH GROWTH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Researcher: **Jantje Tumulun, Ph.D., 2001**

Adviser: **Nkosiyabo Zhou Zvandasara, D.Th., D.Min.**

Both Donald A. McGavran and Ellen G. White agree on the importance of “discipling, then perfecting” in church growth. McGavran teaches that Christ’s Great Commission is God’s command for discipling, and obeying it is the evidence of believers’ faithfulness to God. “Discipling” should be followed by “perfecting,” because without “perfecting,” the church is enfeebled. Similarly, White maintains that Christ’s Great Commission is God’s command for every believer to win souls to Christ, and obeying it is the evidence of believers’ love for Christ. White also believes that discipling should be followed by perfecting. The difference between the two key aspects of church growth is not obvious at a cursory glance. Yet upon careful investigation, some distinctions emerge.

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare McGavran’s and White’s views concerning “discipling, then perfecting” in church growth. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the research. It indicates the motivation for the study, the problem, the purpose, the significance, the definition of terms, and some of the basic assumptions. Chapter 2 describes McGavran’s understanding of “discipling then perfecting.” It begins with exploring the context for McGavran’s concept of “discipling, then perfecting,” which includes the meaning, the purpose, and the process of both discipling and perfecting.

Chapter 3 investigates White’s church growth concept of “discipling, then perfecting.” This chapter also includes the historical and theological backgrounds of her ideas on this subject, followed by exploring the meaning, the purpose, and the process of discipling and perfecting.

Chapter 4 offers a comparison between McGavran’s and White’s understanding of “discipling, then perfecting,” highlighting the similarities and the differences and showing how these may enrich the theory and practice of Adventist mission. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the study by focusing on McGavran’s and White’s key points on church growth.

BOOK REVIEWS

Douglass, Herbert E. *Why Jesus Waits: How the Sanctuary Message Explains the Delay of the Second Coming*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2001. 96 pp., paper.

Herbert Douglass is the author of *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Pacific Press, 1998), which is a comprehensive study of Ellen White's prophetic ministry. He is also the author of *The Faith of Jesus* (Upward Way, 1991), in which he seeks to find the true biblical meaning of faith. He received his doctoral degree in theology at the Pacific School of Religion in 1964. In his long professional career, Douglass worked as theology professor, editor, president of Atlantic Union College, and president of Weimar Institute.

In *Why Jesus Waits*, as other advocates of so-called Historical Adventism usually do, Douglass emphasizes the close relationship between the development of our character and the second coming of Jesus Christ. His main task in this book is to find out the reason why the second coming is delayed. He does this by studying the interrelationship between the sanctuary message, the theme of the great controversy, and the plan of salvation. According to him, the sanctuary message is where we can find the reason why we have been waiting for Christ's coming for so long. In other words, the sanctuary message shows us what Heaven is waiting for.

Douglass begins his argument with emphasizing the significance of the sanctuary doctrine, especially in Seventh-day Adventism. He contends that "the sanctuary doctrine is God's way of picturing the plan of salvation—both His part and ours" (20). This doctrine, which is closely related to the "distinctive mission of the Adventist Church" (19), constitutes "the historical and theological uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (29).

The discussion then moves to the twofold role of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. As Sacrifice, "He silences the accusations of Satan," and as High Priest, "He is free to provide the power of grace to all those who choose to live overcoming lives" (46). By this power "sins are truly eradicated from the character of trusting, willing Christians" (51). In his conclusion, Douglass argues that the delay of the second coming is not because of "heavenly inefficiency or change in His plans" (69), but because of the imperfection of the character of His people. In 1844, entering the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, Christ began the

work of “the character fitness of the last generation” (69). When this work is done, that is, when God's people demonstrate the perfection of their characters, God's character will be gloriously vindicated in the whole universe and Jesus will return.

In relation to his arguments in this book, I want to contest Douglass on two points. First, in this book, he presupposes that the second coming of Christ has been delayed. But in this presupposition he overlooks the fact that the concept of delay is possible only from a human perspective. From God's perspective, nothing is delayed, for He is the God for whom there is no past, no present, and no future.

Secondly, it is also hard for me to agree with the author on his idea of “divine-human cooperation” (63) in the work of human salvation. It seems to me that Douglass argues that the completion of the plan of salvation is dependent on human works, for he believes that God is waiting for the demonstration of the perfection of character by human beings, and that this is why Christ has not come yet. In this argument, however, one important fact is ignored. It is that the plan of salvation is entirely God's work. The perfection of character, if it were possible, is to be understood as one of the results of God's salvific work, not as the condition of Christ's coming, for this great event of the Second Coming is also a part of the plan of salvation.

Despite these perceived weaknesses in its argument, this book, though quantitatively small, is quite commendable to those who study the doctrines of the sanctuary and salvation, for the following two reasons. First, it presents the significance of the sanctuary doctrine, which has been ignored for a long time by most of the schools of Christian theology. The other reason is that this book gives us an overall picture of the great controversy between good and evil. The author, throughout the whole book, tries to show the inseparable relationship between the great controversy theme and the plan of salvation.

Kyung Ho Song

Johnsson, William G. *Glimpses of Grace: Scenes from My Journey*.

Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2001. 126 pp.

In seventeen brief chapters, Johnsson provides a biblical exposition on grace. He does not approach this subject from a strictly theological perspective. Rather, his approach is experimental; that is, for Johnsson, grace is the fruition of living life to the fullest because of the indwelling Christ. Indeed, “there is a word that, better than any other, describes Jesus. Grace” (24).

While the book holds theological language to a minimum, this does not mean that Johnsson disregards exegesis. Indeed, to the contrary, he makes excellent use of exegetical method, as can be easily detected in his word studies (for example, see his description of *sapros*, “decayed,” “rotten,” on p. 74) and extended discussions on certain pericopes (for example, see his evaluation of 2 Cor 12:7-10

on pp. 99-101). His base is the Bible as the authoritative word of God. From this platform he launches his exposé on grace. But he delivers grace from the clutches of theological jargon and places the effects and blessings of this totally free, undeserved gift of God to humanity, within the flesh of life. Grace is not merely a word or a concept; it is a living, breathing, feeling experience. This experience affects our laughter (32-37), our family relations (60-70), our speech (71-77); (he describes encouraging words as “grace bouquets” on p. 76), and in fact, all of life. So while Johnsson has not written a theological treatise, strictly speaking, his work is entirely theological. What draws the reader’s attention is that grace is operative in life; hence, the subtitle, “Scenes from My Journey.”

Using a narrative approach, Johnsson effectively illustrates grace within the gifts of life: freedom, being oneself, being surrounded by beauty, and so forth. Totalitarian societies that are based on suspicion, phoniness, force, and fear (33-35) deface grace. Yet grace is demonstrated in the “obedience of poverty” (50), as seen in children. They receive freely with happiness and joy.

The child is a pauper, and so are we. But the child can respond with a smile, a squeal of delight That gift costs nothing but means everything. And we come to God with nothing in our hand. Any monetary offering seems an insult; any good deed we might claim, a banality. We can give only a poor man's gift, but that means everything to God. We can . . . be content to receive without deserving and without returning. (Ibid.)

For Johnsson, grace is help from outside, as illustrated in the experience of Hagar (57). It is like the atmosphere, all around us, yet we may not be cognizant of it. “Grace is as close as the nose on your face, but you can go through life and not see it” (21). That is why we must turn to Jesus, because He is “grace personified” (26), as demonstrated in His life of active goodness, compassion, thoughtfulness, giving, and forgiving (25-31). Our only condition for receiving the gift of grace is our need of it. And in this regard, Jesus is “reckless in His generosity” (27). Hence, Johnsson can conclude, “*As powerful a force as evil is in our world, grace is even more powerful*” (119, emphasis his).

Despite its many positive features, I have three concerns regarding this book:

1. Since grace is a marvelous gift, there should be an expression of gratitude and praise. One is surprised that Johnsson does not dedicate at least one chapter to describe this response.

2. In noting that grace does not keep score of wrongs, Johnsson presents several examples of the effects of the “payback” mentality which characterizes those who do not operate by grace. One of these examples deals with the sensitive factor of racial realities in the USA. He says, “Time was when no Southern jury would bring down a guilty verdict for a White man’s atrocity against a Black. Is it any wonder that the Los Angeles jury in O. J. Simpson’s first trial acquitted him

after minimal deliberation?" (30). In this question, Johnsson reflects his own bias. It suggests the assumption that Simpson was guilty and explains his acquittal as merely a revenge factor by a majority black jury. How then would he explain the second trial where a majority white jury convicted Simpson? Perhaps we all need to live the dictum, "Grace gives, and grace forgives" (31).

(3) After detailing the feeling of being unwelcome in the graceless former East Berlin, Johnsson describes his joy in crossing back to West Berlin. He says, "Dragging our cases, we came to a line across the road. We looked up and saw, instead of slogans vaunting the triumph of capitalism, neon signs and billboards for Coke and McDonald's" (37). The idea is suggestive that big businesses are a symbol of true freedom. This does not show sensitivity for those, especially in the developing world, who are all too familiar with the greed and exploitation of big businesses.

However, Johnsson is not a person of malice. In fact, I am touched by his honesty and openness—that he is not a perfect family man (65) or that he spoke words that hurt and wounded others (74). The reader can identify with him. He recognizes his weaknesses and failures but lives by the grace of God so abundantly and freely given. Indeed, while Johnsson does not define grace, upon completing this book, the reader knows exactly what grace is. Grace, like love, is better *experienced* than *explained*.

For the sheer power of its depth of thought, clarity of expression, and gripping illustrations, this book stands in the same aisle with Philip Yancey's bestseller, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* It teaches us to be more than friendly. Be gracious!

I believe that the learned theologian, ordinary churchgoer, and even the casual reader will find rich benefit in reading this book. *Glimpses of Grace* is the kind of book you would like to gobble up in one sitting, but are obliged to digest slowly, thoughtfully, like a cow chewing its cud.

Kenneth D. Mulzac

Koranteng-Pipim, Samuel. *Must We Be Silent? Issues Dividing Our Church*. Ann Arbor, MI: Berean, 2001. 640 pp.

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim is currently the Director of Public Campus Ministries for the Michigan Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. He holds a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Andrews University, Michigan, USA. He is best known for his book on hermeneutics, *Receiving the Word* (Berean, 1996). Koranteng-Pipim claims that this recent work is an apologetic book in which he attempts to "defend sound biblical teaching by counteracting the false" (7). His concern is that the SDA Church is beginning to embrace nonbiblical ideologies that are becoming a threat to the church's traditional theology. These

dangerous ideologies are homosexuality, feminism, racism, higher criticism, and congregationalism. His book is an attempt to show why all Bible-loving Christians should reject these ideologies. The book is divided into five sections, each section tackling one of the above ideologies. Each section has a brief background, a description of his opponents' view and Koranteng-Pipim's polemic against those ideas. This method makes him quite repetitive, sometimes at the expense of losing the reader's interest.

The first section deals with the problem of homosexuality, addressing the issue of "whether or not homosexuality is compatible with the Christian lifestyle" (19). He presents three views that are currently held by different Christian groups: the nonacceptance view, the qualified acceptance view, and the full acceptance view. The difference between these views is in their basic tenets—the nature, morality, way out of, and response to homosexuality. Traditionally, SDAs have held the nonacceptance view, but now, according to Pipim, the attitude is changing and a growing number of scholars are adopting the qualified acceptance view. In support of the traditional view, Pipim points out twenty-one myths about homosexuality and gives a response to each. He rejects the commonly held theory that homosexuality is a natural orientation and therefore ethically neutral. Instead, he sees homosexuality as an aberration, a sin, which should be countered by the gospel. He totally rejects the acceptance of gays or lesbians as full members of the church except after they repent of their homosexual lifestyles.

In section two Pipim deals with the problem of the ordination of women. He has written this section as a response to the book *Women in Ministry* by twenty pro-ordination scholars at Andrews University (Andrews University Press, 1998). According to him, the main issue on ordination of women is whether "women may legitimately be commissioned through ordination to perform the leadership functions of elders or pastors" (133). He concedes that the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White support ordination of women to "perform certain specific functions" (ibid.). Pipim challenges *Women in Ministry's* conclusion that women should be ordained as elders and pastors. He rejects the claims that there were women priests, apostles, and ministers in the Bible. He argues against the priesthood of Eve, the leadership role of the women prophets, the apostleship of Junia, and Phoebe's ministerial role. He accuses the authors of *Women in Ministry* of making misleading and erroneous claims regarding the role of women as pastors in SDA Church history. The SDA Church has never had ordained women ministers. Even the most famous woman preacher, Ellen G. White, was not ordained.

However, some of his arguments are not conclusive. His exegesis of 1 Tim 2:11-15 (217-21) should have considered the main purpose of I Timothy, to control heresy (1:3). The argument that women were not the main heretics is correct, but the heresy could have distorted the role of women in worship services. If the church had adhered to the traditional role of women, such distortions would have been addressed. There is also no clear differentiation of roles in the NT ministries

of apostles, pastors, and elders as there was in the roles of priests and prophets in the OT. It is also not clear whether the NT role of a pastor is identical to that of either the OT priests or prophets, since in the OT neither priests nor prophets are referred to as shepherds.

Section three, in my opinion, is the best written section. In this section he defines racism as a secular religion like communism, socialism, fascism, and secular humanism. As a religion, it is anti-Christian and in opposition to the gospel commission. The SDA Church in the United States, by having race-based churches and conferences, has either knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to the ideology of racism. He argues against the commonly held theory that the racial conferences were organized to enhance ministry in the Black communities, to create opportunities for leadership for the Blacks, and to increase Black representation in elected offices and boards. To him, the racial conferences are a result of the church's inability to deal with racism. His answer to the church's problems of racism is to begin with eradicating the racial conferences. If this section had dealt with the cultural issues related to Black/White relationships that have developed independently since the 1940s, and offered a feasible program or process for integration, it could have been a major contribution.

The fourth section is a response to some of the criticisms of his views in his previous work, *Receiving the Word*. The major part of this section deals with a document written by Charles Scriven entitled, "Embracing the Spirit: An Open Letter to the Leaders of Adventism." In his typical confrontational style, Pipim asks the question whether those riding Scriven's "fast train of change" might be "drifting away from Adventism towards an unknown destination" (490). He challenges Scriven to deal with the real issues in the problem of hermeneutics: (1) the separation of the human from the divine aspect of God's word, (2) the use of sources: Are some parts of Scripture less inspired? Did the NT use the OT correctly? (3) Does the use of imperfect human language compromise the message? (4) Does the historico-cultural setting of the Bible condition its message? (5) Do the Bible writers' purposes, selection of materials, and style of presentation distort the facts? (6) Should different parallel accounts be viewed as complementary or contradictory? (7) Are there factual errors in the Bible? (8) Is the Bible infallible in all aspects? (9) What is the best description for our view of inspiration? And, (10) What role does Scripture play in interpreting Scripture, and what role should E. G. White's writings play in interpreting Scripture? But even if one agrees that the above questions are the only ones at the center of the controversy on Adventist hermeneutics, can anyone guarantee that the answers to them will be uniform? And could not the variety of answers be necessitated by the broadness of the questions?

Pipim's last section deals with the practical problems of worship and church unity that are facing the church. He sees the unity of the church threatened by two wings of the church—the liberals within and the independents right outside. He rejects the unity in diversity propagated by those he calls the liberals within, and

argues for a theologically based unity. This section needs more work. The arguments lack support and are unconvincing.

Even though I do not accept all the ideas of Koranteng-Pipim, I applaud him for his boldness in addressing issues with regard to which many would think "silence is wisdom." I also congratulate him for being thorough and forthright in his research and presentation. He, however, should guard against the appearance of confrontation and of belittling the work of his opponents. Such an approach limits his audience and his influence on those of the opposing camp. He should also guard against repetition, a problem that is acute in this present work. The book also needs some careful editing to remove the spelling and other mechanical errors.

Despite these weaknesses, this book should be a must read for all church members, and especially for pastors, administrators, and thought leaders of the SDA Church.

Julius Muchee

Mercado, Leonardo N. *From Pagans to Partners: The Change in Catholic Attitudes Towards Traditional Religion*. Philippine Inter-religious Dialogue Series No. 6. Manila: Logos, 2000. vii + 134 pp.

Leonardo N. Mercado, a Divine Word missionary, has done pioneering work in the study of Filipino Philosophy and theology. He is the executive secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Inter-religious dialogue, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. A prolific writer, his other works include *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Divine Word University Publications, 1992); and *Doing Filipino Theology* (Divine Word University Publications, 1997), to name a few. To date, he has edited or co-edited all the books in the Asia-Pacific Missiological series.

Mercado contends that there has been a shift in attitude, from arrogance to respect, among Roman Catholic authorities towards Traditional Religion (TR). Indigenous peoples (IP) who practice Traditional Religion are no longer regarded as pagans but are accorded partnership in inter-religious dialogue. "Traditional Religion . . . should now be ranked as equal to others world religions" (1). The purpose of this book is to trace why and how Catholic attitudes changed toward Traditional Religion.

A brief introduction (chap. 1) underlines three factors: (1) the theoretical framework which posits a change, from negative to positive, in the Catholic dialogue with TR; (2) scope and limitations which set the boundary for inter-religious dialogue as the discussion between the Catholic Church and lowland Filipinos who, although they "have embraced Christianity, Traditional Religion remains the substructure of their Christianity" (4); and (3) significance of the study, more so, because about "forty percent of the world's population base their lives on TR thinking" (5).

Chapter 2, "The Nature of Traditional Religion" (9-22), first defines IPs.

They are minority communities which are culturally and socially distinct from mainstream societies by being closely attached to their ancestral territories, by the desire to preserve their cultural identity, by their own languages, beliefs and practices; by their distinct social and judicial systems (9-10).

Mercado believes that negative terms such as "pagan," "primitive religion," "shamanism," "polytheism," "fetishism," and "animism" should never be used to designate TR. Expressions, such as "cosmic," "biocosmic" and "primal" (from *prima*, "first") should be used.

The heart of the chapter deals with the features of TR. These include: (1) a worldview that is transpersonal. The person "does not exert his individuality but rather his being part of a greater whole" (14); (2) communal ownership of ancestral lands. To take away their land is to annihilate both their spiritual and physical life; (3) a Supreme Being, sometimes male, other times with no gender, but always perceived as powerful and transcendent; (4) good spirits who are intermediaries between people and the Supreme Being. Bad spirits from the underworld also exist; (5) departed ancestors, who are interested in the continuation of their line; (6) shamans who mediate between the visible and invisible worlds, and (7) rituals, which are performed in order to get permission (to carry out certain activities like hunting) from the spirits.

Chapter 3, "Pagans" (23-59), traces how Catholics regarded adherents of TR as pagans. Mercado believes that despite changes in European society, effected by the Enlightenment and 19th century science (specifically Darwinism), IPs were seen as "culturally and religiously inferior and needed to be Christianized as well as Westinized" ([sic] 26). Using the Bible to forge a theology of supremacy over IPs, "the Church in general saw nothing positive in IP culture and their TR" (30). This of course urged the missionary "to transform the IPs according to his own image and likeness" (31). So when Spanish Catholic missionaries and explorers, fueled by both evangelical and pecuniary motives, landed in the Philippines, they enforced a Western-brand Christianity on the IP, proclaimed the sovereignty of Spain, and used coercion, slavery, and even murder, in a attempt to wipe out all traces of TR.

Mercado contends that the USA, like Spain, attempted "to mold the Filipinos according to their . . . own brand of Christianity" (50). Indeed, "their attitudes and missionary methods did not vary much from that of the Spaniards" (53). Further, by failing to understand and recognize the focal features of TR (see chap. 2), the USA marginalized the IPs.

How did the IPs deal with this new religion? Mercado points to three responses: (1) acceptance of Christianity and absorption of westernization; (2) total rejection, characterized either by flight or fight; and (3) compromise, externally

accepting Christianity with its symbols and feasts, but internally retaining traditional religion.

The development of inter-religious dialogue is at the heart of chap. 4, "Partners in Dialogue" (60-82). Mercado claims that Vatican II, with its advocacy of freedom of religion, brought a "watershed of change" (64). Following the initiative of reconciliation advocated by Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II "asked forgiveness for the past mistakes of the Church on harming the IPs and disregarding their religions" (68). Clearly, with a new thrust toward evangelism, inter-religious dialogue became important (70). It is characterized by freedom, respect, and the belief that "all religious traditions have positive aspects and express true religions experience . . ." (73).

In a series of inter-faith dialogues between 1991 and the present, IPs (and their TR) in the Philippines, transitioned from being "the church's special concerns" (74) to "dialogue partners" (75).

Chap 5, "Pagans and Partners in other Places" (83-91), discusses TR in places outside the Philippines. After briefly canvassing TR in the Americas, Australia, and Africa, Mercado says, "Respect for TR is still something new in other parts of the world" (88). However, in places where TR comes in contact with Christianity, the same threefold reaction is noted as in the Philippines: acceptance, rejection, and compromise.

In his "Concluding Remarks" (92-101), Mercado claims that "dialogue with TR is an example of the growth of understanding" (93). In the past, incorrect theology, coupled with aggressive missionary evangelization, "wrought havoc on the IPs" (95). But today there is a striking change in the church's "attitude toward other religions" (97). Mercado lauds Pope John Paul II for this change, asserting, "To Pope John Paul II belongs the credit of elevating TR to the role of the world's major religions" (97).

Despite some obstacles, Mercado believes that with on-going dialogue, education, the worldwide interest in shamanism, the New Age Movement, and the environment, that the future of TR looks good.

The book closes with two appendices (102-18), references (119-25), and a useful index (128-34).

This book is useful both to the person who is informed on IP and TR as well as the one who wishes to be informed. With his excellent grasp, not only of Filipino history and culture, but also of world history, Mercado educated me about IP and the features of TR. I certainly feel a greater sense of respect for these people. Nevertheless, the book leaves me with a nagging question, "What is the role of the saving Christ in the lives of IPs?" If Jesus, as "the symbol of freedom," seems to be invalid for IPs (96) then what is the function of His salvific sacrifice in their lives? And corollary to this, how should Christians, given the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), respond to these people?

Mercado, Leonardo N., ed. *Old Cultures, Renewed Religions: The Search for Cultural Identity in a Changing World*. The Asia-Pacific Missiological Series No. 7. Manila: Logos Publications, 2001. 188 pp.

Leonardo N. Mercado, a Divine Word missionary, has done pioneering work in the study of Filipino Philosophy and theology. He is the executive secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Inter-religious dialogue, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. A prolific writer, his other works include *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Divine Word University Publications, 1992); and *Doing Filipino Theology* (Divine Word University Publications, 1997), to name a few. To date, he has edited or co-edited all the books in the Asia-Pacific Missiological series. The current volume is a collection eight essays originally presented at a symposium at Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan, September 21-27, 1997.

The book is divided into three sections. Following a concise introduction (1-7), Part I (11-88), focuses on Papua New Guinea. Franco Zocca, "Millennialism in Melanesia" (11-29) provides an overview of cargo cults—"a religious movements (sic) that is intense, short-lived, and relatively small scale" (14) which see the "arrival of cargo (any sort of manufactured goods) as sign and substance of the world to come" (ibid.). They believe that the ancestors have sent these goods. These cargo cults are millennialistic in the sense that they expect sudden changes for the better to come by supernatural force. While the "cargo mentality" has decreased in the last few decades, it is still expressed in some Christian denominations and in politics. While reactions to these cults have varied (25-26), Zocca contends that the pastoral response to new cargo cults or the revival of that mentality, must seriously consider, as proposed by social observers, that cargo cults were caused by "the sudden in-breaking of western civilization into traditional societies . . ." (27).

In his essay, "Cultural Resistance Movements in Papua New Guinea" (30-44), Patrick F. Gesch speaks from his personal encounters with the Mount Rurun and Lo Bos of Madang movements. He defines cultural resistance "as a rebellion against an undesired cultural hegemony" (31). As the modern world invades them, the people in these coastal villages "try to adjust to the new times by drawing their answers from traditional religious ways" (42).

Douglas W. Young's, "Chaos and Unpredictability" (46-61), provides a case study of cargo cultism in the Enga people of the highlands. He claims that "Millenarian Thinking . . . ('imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation') existed in Enga before the coming of the European" (47). This fact must be recognized so that the pastoral response would be characterized by humility (61).

Philip Gibbs, in "New Religious Group in Papua New Guinea" (65-88), describes three such groups: "churches" which compete with the mainline churches; "movements" within mainline churches (some come from outside while others are indigenous expressions of faith); and cargo cults (66-67). Coupled with

these new groups is the growing involvement of the mainline churches in politics. Two examples include the Catholic Bishops' Campaign in Preparation for the 1997 Election (68-69) and Operation Bru Kim Skru (72-75).

Part II (91-148), consists of two studies on the Philippines. Benigno P. Beltran, "The End is Nigh" (91-116), surveys militant revolutions in the Philippines as an expression of "religious rebellion" (100). He claims that the fuel of such revolutions was the syncretism caused by mixing "Christian eschatology and apocalyptic with shamanistic elements" (106). He elaborates on twelve such elements (106-9). Beltran concludes that with the fervor generated by the notion of the end, that disenfranchised people will "seek messianic leaders" (114) to help them escape "out of history into the peace and plenty of the millennium" (ibid.). Leonardo N. Mercado writes on "El Shaddai and Inculturation" (117-41). He discusses eight reasons for the tremendous popularity of this charismatic group (six to seven million): emphasis on the Holy Spirit; attractive liturgy; effective mass communication; charismatic leadership; the needs-oriented approach of the ministry; theology; empowerment of the laity; and the use of Filipino symbols (121-37).

Part III (151-181), consists of two studies on Japan. Peter Knecht, deals with "Religious Movements and the Search for National Identity" (151-64). As he admits, the title is vague because he deals only with Japan. Basically, he deals with Mahikari, a Japanese "Spirituality Movement" which aims to purity and ready people "for a new civilization of spirit" (158). Its founder, Okada Kotama (d. 1974), claimed that followers would have power to work miracles, cleanse physical and psychic impurities, and have salvation. These and other ideas have found root in "spiritual intellectuals" (160). Indeed, "human beings and other beings of nature . . . share the same life and spiritual force" (163). This is what helps to shape concepts of national identity" (ibid.).

Finally, Robert Kisala questions, "New Age Apocalypse? The Use of the Nostradamus Prophecies in Japanese Religions" (165-81). Following the poison gas attack by Aum Shinrikyō on the Tokyo subways in March 1995, many Japanese thought that he had been influenced by Christian apocalyptic literature. Kisala contends, however, that it may have been "the prophecies of Nostradamus and their popularization in Japan since the 1970s [which] may be the key to understanding the apocalyptic interest seen in Aum and other recent new religious movements" (165). Besides Aum, he examines Nostradamus' influence on Agonsho, Okawa Ryuhō, and Tenshōkyō (171-77).

This book has several good characteristics, among them: useful references at the end of each essay; a handy index; a wide representation of scholars (though they are all from the Society of the Divine Word order [SVD], having varying interests: systematic theology, sociology, missiology, conflict resolution, contextual theology and indigenous spirituality. There are also some useful tables and figures.

There are some shortfalls too. Firstly, the intent of the book is to illustrate how *new* religious or religious movements interpret *old* cultural values. However, each article does not clearly delineate how this is done. At times, the reader has to be

more than a little imaginative to see the nexus between these two factors. Secondly, some ideas are left inconclusive. For example, Mercado, following Harvey Cox (*Fire From Heaven*, Addison-Wesley, 1995) claims that the future of Christianity points toward Pentecostalism (121, 140). He does not fully flesh out this notion in the El Shaddai movement. Finally, for such a major publication this book has far too many grammatical, editorial, and spelling problems. Despite these, I think that the trained scholar, especially in missiology, will find this book useful.

Kenneth D. Mulzac

Van Voorst, Robert E. *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*. Studying the Historical Jesus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xiv + 248 pp.

Robert E. Van Voorst is professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. He has previously authored several other works, including what is no doubt his most widely used book, *Building Your Greek New Testament Vocabulary* (Eerdmans, 1990). In this work, Van Voorst contributes to the series Studying the Historical Jesus, which attempts to understand Jesus not so much theologically as historically. Questions of faith aside, what is the historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth, who was called the Christ? Van Voorst explores the evidence in the ancient noncanonical sources, both classical Greco-Roman and Jewish writings. He also discusses Jesus in the hypothetical, reconstructed sources of the canonical Gospels and in the post-NT Christian writings.

Van Voorst begins by acknowledging the work done before him, including arguments for the nonhistoricity of Jesus, concluding that “the theory of Jesus’ nonexistence is now effectively dead as a scholarly question” (14). In support of this conclusion, he summarizes the main arguments used against the nonexistence hypothesis as it has been articulated by George A. Wells.

Not only does Van Voorst quote (in English) the various sources which offer testimony concerning the historicity of Jesus, but he offers a careful scholarly evaluation of the credibility of each of these sources. This sober evaluation of the various sources is what makes this work especially valuable for students interested in the historicity of Jesus.

As one might expect, the different traditions reflect different portraits of Jesus. In the classical Greco-Roman sources, Jesus was primarily a *troublemaker* who was executed for His crimes (73-74). In the Jewish sources, He was primarily a *magician and deceiver* who “founded and led a movement that tried to lead Israel away from the one true God and his Torah” (134). In the hypothetical sources of the canonical Gospels, no single portrait can be found, but each reputed source has a unique picture of Jesus which is a subset of the portrait of Jesus found in the respective canonical Gospels from which the sources have been reconstructed (176-77). In the Christian writings after the NT, the evidence is too controversial

in many cases to be certain of the validity of the traditions they record, but these writings do point to the NT as the most authentic account of the history of Jesus.

The chapter on the hypothetical sources behind the canonical Gospels presents an interesting assessment of historicity. Given the fact that none of these documents actually exist but are mere hypothetical reconstructions based on a study of the Gospels, it is somewhat surprising to see them evaluated as noncanonical evidence for the historicity of Jesus that is independent from the witness of the Gospels. The results, however, are not so surprising, since the hypothetical sources are, *prima facie*, reconstructed based on certain selective characteristics which are assumed to distinguish them from the other Gospel materials. What kind of independent historical witness can these purported sources offer that cannot be found in the Gospels themselves, except to confirm the distorted, selective portraits created by the reconstruction process postulated by the critics? There is a strong element of circular reasoning involved in such a process.

The book is a valuable contribution to Jesus studies. The collection of the various sources in a readable English translation is helpful, but the scholarly evaluation and summary of the evidence makes this a most useful compendium of the ancient evidence for Jesus from outside the NT. For those who would like to add historical evidence to the faith testimony of the Gospels and other NT sources, I recommend this book.

Edwin E. Reynolds

Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. ix + 228 pp.

This work is the culmination of many years of guiding research and writing for Nancy Vyhmeister, recently retired from Andrews University, where she taught research and writing and served as editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. She also recently edited the book *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Andrews University Press, 1998).

Vyhmeister first compiled a guide for research writing in Spanish while teaching theology students in South America. Later she reworked it in English for the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, where it became the approved style guide for the seminary for a number of years. When Vyhmeister moved to Andrews University in Michigan and began teaching research for the seminary there, she determined to revise and update her research guide again. This book is the result. One can thus see this work as the product of extended experience and reassessment of the task and methodology of research and writing.

The book covers all the essential areas of research and writing for students of religion and theology, with examples given for each step in the research and writing process. It begins with a discussion of what research entails, then progresses in logical sequence through the various steps that are necessary in the process of

doing research and writing the paper. Special attention is given to matters that pertain to the field of religion, such as biblical exegesis, theological issues, and the special styles used for pastoral case studies and Doctor of Ministry projects.

It is evident that the book was specially written for seminary students at Andrews University, since the style guidelines follow those of Andrews University, which are based on Chicago style (Turabian) and tend to follow also the Society of Biblical Literature's style guidelines, and many of the examples are taken from the works of students and faculty at Andrews University. Nevertheless, the book is still useful for students in other schools. Not only is the general methodology broadly applicable to scholarly research and writing in the field of religion, but for those that use the American Psychological Association (APA) style, Vyhmeister provides appendix A, which shows appropriate APA style citations for the same examples given in Turabian style in chapter 9.

Although the predominant form of research covered is descriptive, or bibliographic, Vyhmeister also briefly covers program development, case studies, critical reviews, Doctor of Ministry projects, and the use of statistics from field research. She also has a special chapter on theses and dissertations, which includes how to do a review of literature, how to write a proposal, and even how to prepare for the oral defense of the work.

This book fills an important gap, addressing the special needs of the student doing research in religion and theology. It should be widely useful in a variety of academic contexts within the disciplines for which it was written. I highly recommend it, though individual schools may have special requirements in particular areas that may differ to some extent from the details specified for Andrews University students.

Edwin E. Reynolds

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies *Theological Seminary*



Programs of Study:

Master of Divinity
Master of Ministry
Master of Arts in Ministry
Master of Arts in Religion
Doctor of Ministry
Doctor of Philosophy in Religion

Departments:

Applied Theology
Biblical Studies
Theological/Historical Studies

- Phone: [63] (46) 414-4321
- Fax: [63] (46) 414-4310/4331
- E-mail: admissions@aiias.edu
- Website: <http://www.aiias.edu>



AIIAS

- OPPORTUNITY
- EXCELLENCE
- SERVICE