

Perspective Digest



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From the early days of the Second Advent Movement, Adventists were firm believers in the Creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3. This text provided a foundation for their conviction that Christians should observe the Sabbath day. As a matter of fact, Adventists regarded the Creation account as “the reason why he blessed and sanctified the seventh day, ‘Because that in it he had rested from all his work which GOD had created and made.’”¹

As the Second Advent Movement progressed and its believers worked to spread the message by various means, one particular publication became the official organ of the movement: *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. From August 15 to December 19 of 1854, despite concerns about not establishing any creed beyond the Bible, “a list of five leading doctrines was published in the masthead of the *Review and Herald*.”² Although a reference to the Law of God appeared in the list, there was no direct reference to the doctrine of Creation.

As Adventism grew, new biblical truths came to light. In 1872, a pamphlet was printed entitled “A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists.” It contained 25 unsigned propositions that provided a broader picture of what the church, as a body of believers, accepted as its doctrinal teachings. This was later published in the *Signs of the Times* on June 4, 1874, under the title “Fundamental Principles.” It placed more emphasis on God as the Creator of all things, but still made no explicit statement establishing the Creation doctrine as a fundamental principle of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This particular list was never printed in the *Yearbook* or the *Church Manual*.

“In the 1889 *Yearbook* of the denomination, which was a larger volume than usual, containing general information about the church and its activities, these ‘Fundamental Principles’ were included in a slightly revised and expanded form in twenty-eight sections (pp. 147–151). This was not continued in subsequent issues, but it was inserted again in the *Yearbook* in 1905 and continued to appear through 1914.”³ The same 28 statements appeared again in the *Review and Herald* in 1912 and remained as the official fundamental principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1931. Even in this expanded list of fundamental principles, no specific statement related to the doctrine of Creation appears, but in the first fundamental principle, which deals with God’s attributes, God is referred to as the Creator of all things.

The title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” appeared for the first time in the history of Adventism in the 1931 *Yearbook*, and in 1932 it was also printed in the *Church Manual*.

That version contained 22 articles “prepared by a committee of four, including the General Conference president and the editor of the *Review and Herald*.”⁴ In this version, the statement on the observance of the Sabbath—the seventh fundamental belief—included the words, “memorial of Creation,” making the concept of Creation more evident than in its previous versions. Nevertheless, that was as far as it went, and despite much controversy around the world over the issue of origins, no specific statement about Creation was added, and this version remained the official statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs until March 1980.

The First Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs and Their Origin

For almost 50 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church endorsed those 22 articles of fundamental beliefs, publishing them in the *Yearbook* and *Church Manual* with only minor revisions. Then, on April 25, 1980, the church's General Conference in session took a vote on what became known as the “Twenty-Seven Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs,” also referred to as “a summary of the principal features of Adventist beliefs.”⁵ (A 28th fundamental belief was added in 2005.)

This was the first formulated set of fundamental beliefs to include an explicit statement on Creation. It was inserted into the fundamental beliefs statement during major revisions that included the addition of seven new articles, including “paragraphs on angels, Creation and the fall, the church, unity in the body of Christ, the Lord’s supper, Christian marriage, and the Christian home and education.”⁶

The statement as it reads today on the General Conference Website and in the *Church Manual* is the result of an extensive rewriting process that completely transformed the original statement proposed by B. E. Seton, which was approved by the General Conference Ad Hoc Committee and then sent to Andrews University for input from a group of theologians.

The result of the work done by that group of theologians was published in an earlier version by the *Adventist Review* on February 21, 1980. There, the sixth fundamental belief reads: “That God, through Christ and by the power of His Spirit, is creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the only authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heavens and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was ‘very good,’ declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1–3; Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6-9; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17.)”⁷

The statement was “the first revised draft of the statement [which] was circulated among a group of theologians for their input.”⁸

Why a Statement on Creation?

The period in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged was one of extreme importance. The year 1844 entered the annals of world history not only as the year of the Great Disappointment, but also as the year when Charles Darwin published *The Origin*, also known as "the 1844 Sketch," which became in 1859 *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.

To understand the nuances of the Creation vs. evolution debate, one must take the Great Controversy as the most basic presupposition. When looked at through the frame of the Great Controversy, creation versus evolution can be seen as portraying two opposite ideals: the first as the work of God in history seeking to bring the human race back to the study and understanding of the Bible by the use of *sola, tota, and prima scriptura*, and the second as the work of another entity seeking to lead the human race away from the Bible and toward a humanistic understanding of all things. This is not linked exclusively to the works of Charles Darwin, but also to the works throughout history that served as a foundation for the development of Darwin's work on origins. Since that time, the biblical teaching of Creation has come under severe attack, leading many individuals and institutions to renounce their trust in the biblical chronicle of origins.

During the 136 years from 1844 until 1980, the very foundation of the Bible was under worldwide attack. Seventh-day Adventists were well aware of the discussions taking place in other institutions around the world, especially those in the educational realm, and they defended the biblical teachings on origins through the writings of Ellen G. White and many books and articles published by other authors.

Even more emphatic, perhaps, was the appeal of a retiring president of the General Conference, Robert Pierson, who was familiar with the growing issues related to origins among Seventh-day Adventists. In his speech presented to the Annual Council on October 12, 1978, Pierson stressed:

"Already, brethren and sisters, there are subtle forces that are beginning to stir. Regrettably there are those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy's short chronology of the age of the earth, and who subtly and not so subtly attack the Spirit of Prophecy. There are some who point to the reformers and contemporary theologians as a source and the norm for Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. There are those who allegedly are tired of the hackneyed phrases of Adventism. There are those who wish to forget the standards of the church we love. There are those who covet and would court the favor of the evangelicals; those who would throw off the mantle of a peculiar people; and those who would go the way of the secular, materialistic world.

"Fellow leaders, beloved brethren and sisters—don't let it happen! I appeal to you as earnestly as I know how this morning—don't let it happen! I appeal to Andrews University, to the Seminary, to Loma Linda University—don't let it happen! We are not Seventh-day Anglicans, not Seventh-day Lutherans—we are Seventh-day Adventists! This is God's last church with God's last message!"⁹

Pierson's statement complied with the history of Seventh-day Adventists and provided the ultimate reason for the formulation of a statement on Creation.

Standing in Defense of God

One of the first to raise his voice in defense of God's Word in the matter was Elder W. H. Littlejohn, who in 1884 published a small but significant article in the *Review and Herald* complimenting the faculty of Battle Creek College for their transparent and solid position regarding origins. Littlejohn stressed that "[f]ortunately, all of the professors of the College are not only professors of religion themselves, but they are also firm believers in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and interpret them in harmony with their most literal and obvious sense."¹⁰

Littlejohn also emphasized the contrast between the recently formed Seventh-day Adventist college and other educational institutions, where it became "confessedly true that the leaven of evolutionism ha[d] entered largely into the theories of many of the college professors of [that] time, and that many of them openly avow and publicly teach doctrines in harmony with what is styled the 'higher criticism.'"¹¹

Another record presenting Seventh-day Adventists as active participants in the creation versus evolution debate appeared in the *Review and Herald* in 1887. In that volume, an unsigned article quoted a "Prof. Virchow, of Germany, [speaking] before the congress of scientists at Wiesbaden," who categorically expressed his disapproval of the Darwinian theory by affirming that "the Darwinian doctrine of the transmutation of species and of mechanical evolution, the theories upon which it is now sought to construct so much science and a great deal of morality, and which it has become very unpopular, if not a sign of dense ignorance, to doubt, are fundamentally false, unscientific, and impossible; and that science can no longer afford to move along a line which seeks to construct its phenomena upon imaginary and impossible bases."¹²

A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner wrote extensively on the issue of evolution, making significant contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist body of work on the subject. Other key figures from the early 20th century include William W. Prescott, J. N. Andrews, and William H. Branson. None of them, however, despite their valuable contributions, would impact the Christian world as much as George McCready Price, who has been described as "the chief architect of the flood geology or scientific Creation."¹³

Who Was George McCready Price?

Born in New Brunswick, Canada, on August 26, 1870, the author and educator George McCready Price became a Seventh-day Adventist in his early years. Price was a dedicated member of the church and served initially as a colporteur, but became probably the most important writer on creationism until the mid-20th century. The author of many books and articles, Price dedicated his life to the literal interpretation of the Bible and the advancement of the so-called flood geology or scientific creationism. In the scholarly world, George McCready Price is viewed and quoted with the highest respect. Henry M. Morris, in *History of Modern Creationism*, stresses the importance of Price's "tremendous breadth of knowledge in science and Scripture, his careful logic, and his beautiful

writing style [which] made a profound impression on me when I first began studying these great themes."¹⁴

Although Price started his work without any formal education, he received a B.A. from Loma Linda College in 1912 and "carried membership in both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the California Academy of Science."¹⁵ During his long career as a professor at different Adventist colleges and an active advocate of scientific creationism, Price earned the respect of many scholars of his time. He made a major contribution to the cause of biblical literalism and to a clearer understanding of the Creation account and universal flood.

In his early 20s, Professor Price took charge of a school in the village of Tracadie and became acquainted with the evolutionary theory by reading many books on the subject. After a few years of incessant reading, Price had collected enough information to allow for a first publication, which was the beginning of his long crusade for creationism. He noted the impact of the work of Sir Charles Lyell, James Hutton, and Charles Darwin on the Christian academic world and how it caused Christians to try to harmonize the Bible with geological discoveries by adopting theories such as that of God's process of creation through the evolutionary process.

For Price, the biblical text was not to be modified or compromised to fit modern ideas. As Harold W. Clark puts it: "Price's *Outlines of Modern Science*, in contrast with all this, was an effort, as he put it, to get back to primitive Christian principles without any compromise. He said: 'A reform and a return to these primitive principles is the next thing in order for everyone who wishes to get his bearings toward the present day problems of either politics or science.'¹⁶ It is fair to suggest that "Price could well be called the father of the twentieth-century Creationist movement."¹⁷ Such affirmation comes as a reward for his loyalty to the Scripture, added to his knowledge of geology and the Spirit of Prophecy, which served as the foundation for his theology.

Appeal From a General Conference Official

When the stage was set and the Seventh-day Adventist Church was moving forward in preparing a statement on Creation to be incorporated into its fundamental beliefs, W. J. Hackett, vice president of the General Conference at that time, published a significant guest editorial in the *Review and Herald* stressing the importance of maintaining the course set for the church leaders by those who preceded them. Hackett was aware of the challenges faced by the church, and he advised: "Areas to be explored are those concerning the church's positions that have been challenged. Some fall in the area of science and include topics such as a literal, seven-day Creation, a universal Flood, and the age of life on the earth. A clear definition here will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church's position."¹⁸

Although the process of formulating the statement on Creation was democratic and well documented, did the final result achieve the clarity suggested by Hackett?

Formulating a Statement on Creation

Although some discussion may have taken place earlier, the concentrated effort to prepare a statement on Creation began officially on June 8, 1978, when the General Conference Committee voted to appoint an Ad Hoc Creation and Revelation Statements Editing Committee. The members of that committee were “W. Duncan Eva (Chairman); G. M. Hyde (Secretary), Milo Anderson, Roger Coon, Raoul Dederen, Richard Fearing, W. J. Hackett, Richard Hammill, Frank Holbrook, Warren H. Johns, Alf Lohne, James Londis, Robert W. Olson, Jack Provonsha, Ariel Roth, Cree Sandefur, William C. Scales, Jr., G. Ralph Thompson, Mervyn Warren, K. H. Wood, and E. E. Zinke.”¹⁹

The work of the Ad Hoc Committee was done mainly by correspondence. Over the next 10 months—from June 1978 until August 1979—the members of the committee exchanged numerous letters as they sought to prepare a statement on Creation that accurately reflected the Seventh-day Adventist position on a recent, literal, six-day Creation.

Based on denominational minutes dated September 8, 1978, it seems accurate to suggest that an initial document containing a tentative statement on Creation had been prepared and presented to the X-1535 Church Manual Committee prior to that date. On that occasion, “The chairman shared copies of B. E. Seton’s comments and suggestions regarding the Fundamental Beliefs section of the Church Manual. Members of the committee were urged to give careful study to the suggested revisions and to make notes.”²⁰ One of Seton’s comments pointed out the inadequacy of that very first statement on Creation. In February 1979, after about five months of work, a revision of the Fundamental Beliefs by B. E. Seton was brought to the X-1535 Committee, where the chairman of that committee “stressed the need for a clearer statement concerning Creation.”²¹

As a result of the concerns raised by Seton, in a more concentrated effort to develop the statement on Creation, the X-1535 Committee voted W. J. Hackett and Richard Hammill to form a subcommittee with Seton as secretary for the formulation of a statement on the doctrine of Creation. By the end of the next day, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee—Fundamental Beliefs had approved a tentative statement on Creation.

Although no biblical references were provided at that stage, it is important to note the appearance of some specific phrases in the statement, such as “reliable chronicle of the creation of the world,” “In six literal, consecutive days God created the world,” and “world-wide Noachian flood.” The concept of biblical literalism is clear in this statement, and although it would later undergo significant revisions, it reflected a response in the right direction to Hackett’s article urging church leaders of the day to preserve the landmarks of biblical historicity.

The subcommittee continued working to improve the statement on Creation so that it would be ready before the session of the General Conference in April 1980. On March 4, 1979, B. E. Seton provided the X-1535 Committee with new revisions to the statement, including some Bible texts. Some of the improvements in this last revision presented a more solid biblical foundation, as seen in the meeting of the X-1535 Committee on April 9 and 10 of 1979. They included an allusion to the Trinity, a specific reference to Satan as the originator of sin, and a reference to the Garden of Eden, indicating a literal interpretation of the Bible that was frequently observed by other Christian

denominations.²²

Satisfied with the progress achieved up to that point, on July 23, 1979, the X-1535 Church Manual Revision Committee—Fundamental Beliefs agreed that the chairman, W. Duncan Eva, should approach Andrews University with a view to arranging a meeting with members of the theological faculty to obtain their input on the revised fundamental beliefs as prepared by this committee. It was therefore suggested that W. Duncan Eva, W. J. Hackett, and Richard Hammill meet with theologians on a convenient date on the Andrews University campus.

After all the work put into the formulation of a Seventh-day Adventist statement of Creation, this single move would soon undermine W. J. Hackett's appeal to preserve the landmarks of biblical history.

With the important task ahead of having the final proposed statement of fundamental beliefs analyzed by the church's top theologians, the X-1535 Committee prepared a three-column document to be mailed to reviewers of the statement. The first column included the 22 articles that had been printed in the *Church Manual* since 1932; the second column showed all the alterations to that version and the new articles; and finally, the third column showed that revised fundamental belief statement, which had been revised. This last column did not include the articles being added to the statement. W. Duncan Eva mailed copies of this document to Andrews University and to a group of church leaders on August 10, 1979.²³

For many years, researchers tried to locate this three-column document without success. Those interested in locating it believed that the statement on Creation originally prepared by the X-1535 Committee was more specific from a biblical point of view and more clearly reflected the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Creation.

Searching for the Three-Column Document

In March 2010, the three-column document was found among materials on the fundamental beliefs in the General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics. It accompanied a cover letter stating its confidentiality and prohibiting its duplication. The differences between the 1980 statement on Creation and the one originally prepared by the X-1535 Committee are significant.

A parallel comparison of the Ad Hoc Committee's proposed X-1535 statement and the actual voted statement on creation in the April 25, 1980, at General Conference session reveals that the X-1535 statement underwent complete revision by the theologians at Andrews University.

X-1535 Proposal Statement on Creation Sent to Andrews University ²⁴	Statement on Creation Returned From Andrews University ²⁵
<p>“That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world, and that God [the Father], with Christ and the Holy Spirit, is Creator of all things. In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things upon it with their supporting environment. The Lord then established the seventh day as the Sabbath, a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. Man was originally created in the image of God, but his fall into sin in response to Satan’s temptation in the Garden of Eden resulted in the progressive defacement of that image. It also led to marring God’s handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. Through Christ, God will eradicate sin and its results from the universe and at the close of human history restore the pristine perfection of His Creation in a new heavens and a new earth (Gen 1:1-26; Ps 33:6-9; Gen 3:1-24; Exo 20:8-11; Gen 6-8; Rev 21:1-7).”</p>	<p>“God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was ‘very good,’ declaring the glory of God (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)”</p>

According to Fritz Guy, secretary of the committee of 12 scholars at Andrews University, Lawrence Geraty drafted the completely new statement on Creation.²⁶ As can be observed, some important words that were serving as agents of specificity were eliminated from the new formulated statement. For instance, the clause “That the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world” worked as an agent of specificity.

The use of the term *chronicle* clarifies that Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as historically trustworthy. Another agent of specificity was the clause “In six literal days the Lord made heaven and the earth and all living things.” The term *literal* indicates that Seventh-day Adventists accept the concept that each day—evening and morning—found in the Mosaic account of Creation, describes a period of 24 hours and therefore a historical day. This also provides solid support of their belief in the Sabbath day as the “perpetual memorial of His completed creative work.”²⁷

Finally, of extreme significance were the words, “It also led to marring God’s handiwork in Creation and to the worldwide flood in the days of Noah,” which would ultimately testify to the world that Seventh-day Adventists endorse the biblical version of the Creation events, including that short

chronology of the history of this planet and that a global flood necessarily links to these events.

Why were these agents of specificity left out of the new statement on Creation? Furthermore, is the current statement on Creation clearly representative of mainline Seventh-day Adventists regarding origins?

The Purpose of the Fundamental Belief Statement

It is crucial to understand the purpose of having a statement of fundamental beliefs. In the case of Seventh-day Adventists, the preamble reads: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the *church's understanding and expression* of the teaching of Scripture."²⁸ This indicates that the statement of fundamental beliefs exists to reflect the teachings and beliefs of the church, which are to be represented by its members. Thus, it implies that church members are to abide by those principles, rather than the church abiding by the beliefs of its members.

Nevertheless, in the minds of some Adventists, "there is no single 'Seventh-day Adventist Church position' regarding the history of life on Earth. Individual Adventists—scientists, theologians, pastors, and others—hold widely differing views regarding the age of the universe, of the planet Earth, and of life on Earth."²⁹ Such a declaration reveals a subjective understanding of ecclesiology, in which the church and its doctrines must be subject to the views of its members, and not to Scripture.

Guy, the secretary of the "committee of twelve," shares his assessment of the meaning of the newly worded Fundamental Belief No. 6 as follows: "The only 'official position' of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is stated in Fundamental Belief No. 6, where the language is deliberately Biblical, and broad enough to accommodate various views about Earth's natural history."³⁰ This means that Fundamental Belief No. 6, as it reads today, can be used to support multiple approaches to the biblical account of Creation, including progressive creationism, theistic evolution, etc.

The Creation Statement on the Floor of the 1980 GC Session

Going back to the GC Session of 1980 in Dallas, Texas, the day began with Neal C. Wilson addressing the delegates, emphasizing the importance of leaders refusing to be content with the status quo just because it was comfortable. He stated: "An organization is developed to achieve an objective. Organization should not continue simply to maintain itself. Unless there are clear targets, organization is meaningless."³¹ Unquestionably, revising the existing fundamental belief statement and inserting an official statement on Creation testifies to Seventh-day Adventist leaders' strong desire to honor God's Word and message. It is important to reflect on the method used and in the observations made on the floor that evening, many of which were simply left behind.

After J. W. Bothe had read the proposed statement on Creation, Leroy Moore, with the support of A. A. Roth, manifested his concern regarding the wording of Belief No. 6, which he believed should

leave some room for the Spirit of Prophecy to contribute to the biblical account.

Another observation came from E. J. Humphrey, who inquired about the possibility of including the words "six literal days," which would clearly distinguish Seventh-day Adventists from many other denominations. In support of the latter, John V. Stevens stressed that one of the purposes for rewriting the fundamental beliefs and including a statement on Creation was to make what Seventh-day Adventists believe "more easily understood by those not of our faith"³²; thus, adding the words "six literal days" to that statement "would certainly let the world know what we believe."³³

Others like Humberto R. Treiyer pointed out the importance of including "something in relation to our position about the earth's chronology."³⁴ Neal C. Wilson responded with openness to these revisions; nevertheless, none of the attending delegates picked up on Wilson's openness. At that point, Lawrence Geraty brought up the fact that "Creation is far more extensive than just origins."³⁵ He further stated, "In a paragraph on Creation, I would like to testify to the world that God does not work, as deists believe, by getting things started and then allowing them to run their course. I would like to include creative activity that includes not only origins but much more."³⁶

This would be acceptable if by "origins" Geraty was referring to an absolute beginning, a time when "the earth was without form, and void" (Gen. 1:2, NKJV), and if by "Creation" he was referring to God's actions of giving form and bringing life to the planet He spoke into existence, and maintaining that life after its initial creation, which seems to be the case here. Unfortunately, Geraty's words could also be interpreted to support theistic evolution in that the latter position also requires God's continued "creative activity" after the initial creation by occasional divine intrusions into nature to help it overcome evolutionary "logjams." The divine intrusions that theistic evolution requires are much more extensive and involved than the divine ongoing maintenance understood by some Adventist creationists.

Indeed, such intrusions would make void the significance and quality of God's initial creation which is said to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31, NKJV). If one of the reasons for writing a statement on Creation is to let the world know what we believe, as John V. Stevens correctly stated, specificity and clarity are of major importance and are non-negotiable.³⁷

Despite the observations presented on the floor favoring a clearer wording for the statement on Creation, one that would reflect more accurately what mainline Seventh-day Adventists truly believe, the published discussion regarding the Creation statement ended shortly after Geraty's statement. The 27 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were voted into effect on the morning of April 25, 1980. How the statement on Creation would affect the church, and why those involved in preparing the statement worded it the way they did, only the future would clearly reveal.

The Fruits of the 1980 Statement on Creation

Despite the fact that the "committee of twelve" produced a statement of fundamental beliefs that raised many theological concerns and controversies among mainline Seventh-day Adventists, it is important to recognize their efforts and contributions. Geraty expressed his concerns regarding the

time allotted for such an important task, and the members of the committee suggested a more appropriate procedure for future revisions of the fundamental beliefs statement that would extend the time allocated for the process. They suggested that all “the results of [their] effort, if acceptable to Washington, D.C., be published in the *Adventist Review* with the invitation for comment and reaction by any concerned.”³⁸

On the other hand, Robert H. Pierson stressed the importance of Seventh-day Adventist leaders positioning themselves against “those in the church who belittle the inspiration of the total Bible, who scorn the first 11 chapters of Genesis, who question the Spirit of Prophecy’s short chronology of the age of the earth.”³⁹ Pierson’s words supported Hackett’s appeal that providing “a clear definition” on these issues “will enable teachers of science in our schools clearly to present to inquiring young minds the church’s position.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, sometime during the task of “revising” the statement on Creation, the notion of producing a document to represent clearly what Seventh-day Adventists believe was seeming lost for 30 years.

General Conference 2010 Action

Certainly unexpected by many was the motion brought to the floor by Ted N. C. Wilson, the newly elected president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the one hand, Wilson’s motion was in part a response to various requests to clarify the Fundamental Belief No. 6 as requested by some voices in the International Faith & Science Conferences of 2004, the Faith and Science Council, and the Michigan and Northern California conferences. On the other hand, his motion reflected his comprehensive vision for the church’s mission.

Wilson’s motion included a request to approve the statement “A Reaffirmation of Creation,” which more clearly stated the Adventist understanding regarding origins, based on the interpretation of Genesis 1–11. In addition, his motion included a request that the General Conference Administration initiate the process of integration of Fundamental Belief No. 6 and the statement “A Reaffirmation of Creation.”⁴¹ The motion was enthusiastically carried and strongly supported.

Looking Forward

As recorded in the annals of history, the doctrine of Creation has been enormously influenced by different lines of thinking, especially Greek philosophy, an influence that can be observed in the work of theologians such as Philo of Alexandria, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and others. Consequently, a great variety of approaches to the biblical Creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3 have resulted from attempts to reconcile the Bible with the discoveries of science instead of submitting those discoveries to Scripture.

Similarly, the Age of Enlightenment brought many challenges to the interpretation of Scripture, with its emphasis on reason and the empirical method. One reaction in favor of a conservative interpretation of Scripture was a movement known as Fundamentalism, which came to America accompanied by Evangelicalism. The former opposed the Enlightenment drastically, while the latter

tended to accommodate it, providing an adequate environment for a multiplicity of approaches to the doctrine of Creation.

It is a difficult task to cover in all the implications of the abandonment of the theological concept of *sola scriptura* for the biblical account of Creation. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that if such were not explored in light of the Great Controversy theme, it would hardly make any difference for those claiming to be followers of God.

It seems plausible to suggest that God's response to these events was the providential rise of the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Daniel 7-9; Rev. 14:6-12). Interestingly, besides providing guidance through the writings of Ellen G. White, God has also impressed others to stand up in defense of the biblical account of Creation and the worldwide flood. One such was George McCready Price, whose theological views firmly rested upon the literal truth and historicity of the Bible and its original text.

Seventh-day Adventists believe they have been chosen by God to lift up the truth of the Bible as His historical narrative of Creation, judgment, and salvation. Thus, the church's understanding of Scripture has continued to grow since 1854, and its doctrinal statements have improved accordingly. In exploring these improvements, it is odd that the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not release a statement on Creation until 1980, despite all the work done by people such as George McCready Price, the founder of scientific recent Creation studies. Thus, although in the early years of the Adventist movement, Seventh-day Adventists did not establish a specific statement on Creation, the concept of Creation was always implicit in their fundamental principles. This was evident either by their acceptance of God's attributes as Creator or by their recognition of the validity of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath.

Adventists believe that just as the undesirable powers of evil are constantly working to confuse and distract the human race, God is actively and constantly working to execute His plan of redemption. By allowing His servants to establish the differences between Godlike institutions and more human ones, God led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to seek a public and explicit position on origins.

Much hard work was put into the formulation of a statement on Creation that would testify accurately to the Seventh-day Adventists' high regard for the Bible. The statement initially produced by the X-1535 Ad Hoc Committee was a true attempt to preserve God's landmarks as suggested by W. J. Hackett.

Despite the need for minor editorial work, it clearly represented the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, the Fundamental Belief No. 6 voted during the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, because of its intended ambiguity, has led to more than 30 years of uncertainty in our educational institutions over the meaning of Creation. This current reality indicates that the uncertainty must not continue.

It is imperative to the survival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's reformation movement in the last days that a new statement on Creation be prepared and approved by the

General Conference as soon as possible. The new statement must clearly express the mainline Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins without leaving room for pluralistic interpretations.

It would be appropriate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to do the following:

1. Stand upon the theological concept of *sola, tota, and prima scriptura* and the conviction that the Bible is the revelation of God to humanity, containing an “inspired, reliable chronicle of the Creation of the world.”

2. Respond winsomely to those accusing mainline Adventists of using a “misguided Baconianism toward the Bible.”⁴² Though we should humbly admit that not all of the Bible’s content can be understood through empirical method, we can remind those who question the validity of the Bible that macroevolution also cannot be demonstrated by the same principles of empiricism.

It could be objected that theology and science cannot work together because of their incompatibilities. Nevertheless, while these fields serve different purposes, it is a matter of choice which field should govern the other. Thus, if science would consider the Bible to work as the starting point in matters of origins, both science and theology would have much to gain.

3. Proceed prayerfully in rewording the Fundamental Belief No. 6. Since the first positive action has already been taken, the administration must go forward without losing focus on the Great Controversy, for this is the key to understanding Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Seventh-day Adventists must press forward, always remembering that “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”⁴³

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Jesus Only

The Christian faith makes a claim that is increasingly unpopular in the 21st century.

Gerhard Pfandl

In 1779, the German writer and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote the play *Nathan the Wise*. Set in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade, it describes how the wise Jewish merchant Nathan, the enlightened sultan Saladin, and a young Christian Templar bridge the gaps between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The centerpiece of the work is the so-called ring parable, narrated by Nathan, who was asked by sultan Saladin which of the three religions (Islam, Judaism, or Christianity) was true. In the parable, an heirloom ring with the magical ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and humankind had been passed from father to the son he loved most. When it came to a father of three sons whom he loved equally, he promised it to each of them. Looking for a way to keep his promise, "He decided to have made two more rings, so exactly like the first that he was unable to distinguish among them, and gave one to each son."¹

But the sons fought among themselves, each claiming to have the original ring. This, Nathan points out, is just like the Jews, the Mohammedans, and the Christians who are arguing about their three faiths. The judge to whom the sons finally went told them: "If each of you received this ring straight from his father's hand, let each believe his own to be the true and genuine ring. Of this you may be sure: your father loved you all, and it was his ardent wish that all of you should love one another."²

Lessing's main point was that each of the three religions is equal in importance. It was up to the individual believer to live a life acceptable to God. When the play was published, the Catholic Church forbade the performance of the play during Lessing's lifetime.

In a sense Lessing was way ahead of his time. When he wrote the play, Christianity was still considered by most Christians to be the only true religion. This was the conviction of the many missionaries who left their homeland during the 19th century to go to the far reaches of the world to "convert the heathen." And what a job they did! During the 19th century, Christianity increased from 23 percent of the world population in the year 1800 to 34 percent in the year 1900.³ The century of mission, as the 19th century in church history is now called, increased the percentage of Christians in the world by more than one-third.

The Rise of Theological Liberalism

While men like John Williams, Robert Moffatt, and Hudson Taylor advanced the kingdom of God

here on earth significantly during the 19th century, the rise of theological liberalism and the onslaught of evolution in the same century changed the face of Christianity. Liberal theology's emphasis on the immanence of God in all human beings led to the belief that by an evolutionary process the indwelling Spirit brings human beings to a "moral and spiritual perfection within history."⁴ Therefore, all religions were seen as ways to God; they needed to cooperate and accept one another as equal partners.

Because Christ was considered merely a human teacher who founded a new religion, He had no claim to uniqueness or superiority; He could be classed with all other religious leaders. Liberal theologians, therefore, began to shift their attention from proclaiming the kingdom of God, i.e., the message of salvation from sin, to the social gospel—the coming kingdom upon earth. Christians turned increasingly "from the expectation of heavenly bliss to the hope of a radical transformation of life upon earth."⁵ This led to a rethinking of the purpose of mission.

The Beginnings of the Inter-faith Movement

In 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago on the shore of Lake Michigan. In conjunction with it, a World Parliament of Religions convened to show the contribution of religion to humanity. The Parliament was dominated by English-speaking representatives from Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic churches, who delivered 152 of the 194 papers presented at this conference. "The opportunity for the leaders from other religious traditions was limited but significant; 12 speakers represented Buddhism, 11 Judaism, 8 Hinduism, 2 Islam, 2 [Parsism], 2 Shintoism, 2 Confucianism, 1 Taoism, and 1 Jainism."⁶ Nevertheless, it was the beginning of what is today called the inter-faith movement.

The three speeches of the Hindu delegate Swami Vivekananda drew the most attention from the American public. John Barrows recorded that when Vivekananda addressed the audience as "sisters and brothers of America," they went into rapture with "a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes."⁷ The archbishop of Canterbury, Edward White Benson, however, refused to attend on the grounds "that participation would compromise the uniqueness of Christianity and imply that other religions were its equal."⁸

As a result of the 1893 Parliament, the religious atmosphere in America changed considerably. R. H. Seager says that after the Parliament "there were many new ways to be religious. One could be saved or self-realized or grow in God consciousness or be self-emptied. And as America itself continued to pursue its messianic mission, it was a nation under a changed God . . . other deities had been tucked up in the nation's sacred canopy. . . America had gone into the Parliament claiming to be a cosmopolitan nation and had come out having to live up to the claim. There was no going back."⁹

Rethinking Mission

In the 1930s, the book *Re-thinking Missions* was published by the Laymen's Foreign Mission

Inquiry. It recognized that the missionaries in the 19th century had gone out believing that unless they brought the gospel to the millions of people who had never heard the name of Jesus they would all be lost. By 1931, however, the theological outlook had changed. The mode of creation, the descent of man, miracles, and the view of hell had changed to what the report called "happier conceptions of destiny."¹⁰

The report does not present Christianity as the final truth, but sees all religions as seeking the final truth. Jesus, therefore, belongs to the same category of individuals as Buddha or Mohammed. "The commission recognized the primary effect this changed concept would have on mission work. If men are saved by a sincere seeking for God in whatever religion they may be, then there is no longer need for urgent haste on part of the missionary or the Christian Church to proclaim a message of salvation to those who would be lost if they did not receive it."¹¹

In the 20th century, therefore, Christianity made no progress in evangelizing the world. At the beginning and at the end of the century, the percentage of Christians in the world was the same—about one-third of the world population.

The World Congress of Faiths

An important milestone in the inter-faith movement was the founding of the World Congress of Faiths by Sir Francis Younghusband, a British officer who spent many years in India and Tibet, where he fell under the spell of Oriental religions.

In 1951, the World Congress of Faiths published a brochure titled "The World Congress of Faiths—Its Objects, Message and Work," which says: "The object of the World Congress of Faiths is to promote the spirit of fellowship among mankind and to do so through religion. . . . We endeavor while maintaining our own faiths to learn what the worshippers of Brahma and Jehovah and Allah, what the followers of Zoroaster, Laotze, Confucius, Buddha and of Jesus were and are."¹²

A prominent member and its chairman from 1974-1978 was Bishop George Appleton, Anglican archbishop of Jerusalem, who concluded his address to the annual conference of the World Congress of Faiths in 1975 with the statement: "We are beginning to see Truth in all religions—even God in all. Every religion has a mission; when put together, they give an idea of the magnificence, the depth and joy of God's total creation."¹³

While in 1893 the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to participate in the World Parliament of Religions, almost a century later, in 1986, Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, delivered the Sir Francis Younghusband Memorial Lecture in which he stated that for Christians the life of Jesus would always remain the primary source of knowledge about God, but "other faiths reveal other aspects of God which may enrich and enlarge our Christian understanding."¹⁴

The inter-faith movement has become an important part of the modern religious world. In England, the annual Commonwealth Day is marked by a multi-faith service in Westminster Abbey in which Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic readings and prayers predominate. In 1993, the Second World Parliament of Religions, like the first in 1893, was held in Chicago. "It opened with a number of

'blessings' from a variety of religious sources. One of these was given by the High-Priestess of the Temple of Isis, 'in the name of the 10,000 names, the spirits, the birds, the reptiles and trees.'"¹⁵

The Inter-Faith Association of Edinburgh has called for a radical change of approach to mission: "The attempt to convert a committed member of another faith inevitably implies a judgment that the other faith is mistaken or, at the very least, inadequate by comparison with the missionary's own faith. It may consequently be experienced as a disrespectful dishonouring of what that faith holds most sacred and most dear."¹⁶

No wonder the Prince of Wales in a television interview in 1994 suggested that the British sovereign's title should be "Defender of the Divine" rather than "Defender of the Faith," which goes back to Henry VIII's defense of the Catholic faith against Martin Luther.

The Inter-faith Movement and the Roman Catholic Church

For most of its history, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that there is no salvation outside of the church. This concept goes back to Cyprian the bishop of Carthage in the third century, who wrote, "Outside of the church there is no salvation."¹⁷

This concept was held by the church at large for the next one thousand years. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared, "There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice."¹⁸ Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 stated, "Urged on by our faith, we are obliged to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. And we firmly believe and profess that outside of her there is no salvation and no remission of sins."¹⁹ A century later, Pope Eugene IV in 1441 proclaimed: "The Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that all those who are outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they are joined to the Church before the end of their lives."²⁰

Throughout the Middle Ages, it seems, non-Catholics were all considered lost. At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), however, a window was opened for non-Catholics to be saved. The decree of Trent on justification states: "By those words there is suggested a description of the justification of the sinner: how there is a transition from that state in which a person is born as a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and of adoption as children of God, through the agency of the second Adam, Jesus Christ our savior; indeed this transition, once the gospel has been promulgated, cannot take place without the waters of rebirth or the desire for them, as it is written: *Unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.*"²¹

According to this decree, the transition from the state of being lost to being saved takes place through "the waters of rebirth," that is baptism "or the desire for them," i.e., in some cases the desire itself for baptism is sufficient for justification. Philip O'Reilly explains the desire for baptism by saying, "The doctrine of the Baptism of Desire is one of many consoling proofs of God's love for men. It means simply that anyone with the use of reason who is deprived of sacramental baptism may

attain heaven by sorrow for sin and a desire to comply with God's will."²² Many people, it is believed, come to God in this way through non-Christian religions. Karl Rahner, one of the foremost Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, called these people in non-Christian religions "anonymous Christians."²³

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) made a very positive assessment of non-Christian religions: "There are those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his Church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace, try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience: these too can obtain eternal salvation."²⁴

Pope John Paul II organized the Day of Prayer for Peace on October 27, 1986 in Assisi. "In addition to Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, [Bahá'ís,] and Shintoists, representatives of primitive cults including snake worshippers from Togo were among the gathering."²⁵ The pope explained that the different religions were to pray separately, but that they would all be praying to the same God.

In 1991, he wrote that it is by sincerely practicing what is good in their own religious traditions and "by following the dictates of their own conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour."²⁶

This seems to be the view of most Protestants—including the majority of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Argument From Romans 2

The argument that if people follow their conscience they will be saved is based on Paul's statement in Romans 2:12-16: "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."²⁷

But does Romans 2:14 really teach that Gentiles have by nature an inner law (their conscience) which, if they follow it, will save them without any knowledge of the gospel? Some may point to John 1:9: "The true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" to support the view that every person in this world receives sufficient light for salvation, but is this supported by the rest of Scripture?

In this age of religious pluralism, in which the ecumenical movement reaches out to people beyond the borders of Christianity, the question is frequently raised whether upright adherents to the African traditional religions, as well as good Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists are really outside a salvific relationship with God? How can Christians, in this day and age, maintain their claim that salvation is

found only in Jesus Christ?

The Scriptural Evidence

That knowledge of the gospel is necessary for salvation is the general teaching of Scripture. Jesus not only declared that no one can come to the Father but through Him (John 14:6), but He also stated repeatedly that “‘He who does not believe will be condemned’ ” (Mark 16:16; John 3:18). And faith without some knowledge is impossible.

Paul in Romans 10 first states that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (10:13), but then he argues, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? . . . So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (vss. 14, 15, 17). The answer to each of Paul’s questions is “they cannot”—they cannot call on the Lord unless somebody is sent to tell them about the Lord. Somebody must go and preach the good news.

John Stott observes that “the essence of Paul’s argument is seen if we put his six verbs in the opposite order: Christ sends heralds; heralds preach; people hear; hearers believe; believers call; and those who call are saved.”²⁸ The opposite, of course, is also true: if nobody is sent to preach, people cannot hear, they cannot believe, hence they cannot call, and therefore they are lost.

The Apostle John wrote, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12), and Paul said, to be without Christ is to be without hope (Eph. 2:12). According to Peter, salvation was possible only through Jesus Christ: “‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:12), and “Peter does not appear to be referring to Jesus merely as the ontological ground of salvation—that is, as the sole source of atonement. Rather, he is indicating what must be acknowledged about Jesus before one can be saved.”²⁹ The general teaching of Scripture seems to be that unless people hear the gospel of Jesus Christ they are lost, but what about Romans 2? Does it show another possibility?

The Issue in Romans 2

The issue in Romans 2:11-16 is the accountability, not the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. The fact that God is no respecter of persons (vs. 11) is illustrated by what Paul says in verse 12: “As many as have sinned without law will also perish³⁰ without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.” Those “without law” are the Gentiles who do not have the written law, given to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. They will not perish, however, because they did not have the written law, they will perish because they are sinners.

On what basis can they be said to be sinners? They are sinners because they have transgressed against the law “written in their hearts, their conscience” (vs. 15). What is written in their hearts is not the new covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-34, but the deeds or conduct required by the law.

Jack Blanco's expanded paraphrase of verse 15 says, "They give evidence that the principles of the law are written in their hearts because their consciences are guided by God."³¹ Among the Gentiles, conscience performed the same function as the law performed among the Jews.

This passage, therefore, cannot be used to argue that the Gentiles who have never heard the gospel will be saved on the basis of their obedience to their conscience, because this would be salvation by works. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized once more that this passage is not speaking about salvation but about judgment (2: 16). Paul contrasts two groups of people, the privileged Jews who have the written law of God and the less-privileged Gentiles, who do not. How can God be fair to both and judge them impartially? Each, says Paul, will be judged by the method appropriate to their case. The Jews will be judged by the written law, and the Gentiles by the unwritten law of their conscience. Judged in this way, both groups will be found to be sinners. The Jews, it will be found, have sinned against the written law of God and the Gentiles against the unwritten law of their conscience. The outcome, therefore, is the same for both groups—they are sinners and they are all lost. Both can be saved only through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.

The statement that the Gentiles "do by nature the things in the law" refers to the fact that even pagans practice things stipulated by the law of God, "such as the pursuit of lawful vocations, the procreation of offspring, filial and natural affection, the care of the poor and sick, and numerous other natural virtues which are required by the law."³² In that sense they "are a law to themselves" (2: 14), i.e., they have a general knowledge of God's requirements for a virtuous life. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that even if a Gentile would live up to all the law his conscience reveals to him, this could not save him, otherwise it would be salvation by works, something Paul clearly denies. Throughout his writings he hammers home the truth that "a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (3: 28, etc.).

One of the purposes of the written law as well as of the law of conscience is to provide a basis for God's judgment. While the Gentiles have no explicit knowledge of the written law, God can still judge them "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men" (2: 16) because they have transgressed against their conscience-law. On judgment day no one will have an excuse, no one will be able to say, "Lord, how can you judge me, I did not know anything about your law." That day will reveal that all, Jews and Gentiles alike, have sinned because "'there is none righteous, no, not one'" (3: 10).

Thus, Romans 2 is in harmony with the general teaching of the rest of Scripture. There is only one way of salvation: Jesus Christ (John 14: 6). "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (17: 3). Paul therefore says, "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3: 8, NRSV).

Jesus' commission, "'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations'" (Matt. 28: 19) and the knowledge that there is only one way of salvation (Acts 12: 4) have been the driving force behind Christian mission. The conviction that people will be lost unless they hear the gospel has sent

thousands of missionaries into lands where the name of Christ was unknown. But does this mean that everyone who does not hear the gospel is therefore automatically lost?

The Inclusivist View

Inclusivists believe that because God is omnipresent, God's grace is also at work in some way among all people. They place great emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in reaching people who never hear the gospel preached.

"The world is the arena of God's presence, and the Spirit knocks on every human heart, preparing people for the coming of Christ; the Spirit is ever working to realize the saving thrust of God's promise for the world. From the Spirit flows that universal gracing that seeks to lead all people into the fuller light and love."³³

They see their biblical foundation in texts like John 1:9: "'The true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world'" and John 12:32: "'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'" Since God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), He must give everyone the opportunity to be saved. Paul therefore says, "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). God, they say, never leaves Himself without witness among all people (Acts 14:17), and Jesus spoke of "'other sheep I have which are not of this fold'" (John 10:16).

Inclusivists point to biblical examples such as Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-24) and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) to show that God was at work in pagan cultures, saving people who responded to the activities of the Holy Spirit. Clark Pinnock goes so far as to say, "I welcome the Saiva Siddhanta literature of Hinduism, which celebrates a personal God of love . . . I also respect the Buddha as a righteous man (Matt 10:41) and Mohammed as a prophetic figure in the style of the Old Testament."³⁴ At the same time, he is careful not to attribute salvific power to other religions. He recognizes that the Holy Spirit is the power unto salvation, not other religions. "God saves through faith, through a heart response not confined to a religious framework."³⁵

It is certainly true that the Holy Spirit's activities cannot be confined to the boundaries of Christian churches. At the same time, however, we must be careful not to see God at work in all religions just because they have some elements of truth. In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the latter may use many nuggets of truth to deceive people into thinking a particular religion or teaching is of God. Thus while inclusivism has some merit, it goes beyond what the biblical evidence permits. It is, however, widely accepted among supporters of the inter-faith movement.

The Work of the Holy Spirit Among Non-Christians

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have a high regard for the writings of Ellen G. White. On the topic under consideration, she has some very interesting observations. On the one hand she said that "The world will perish unless it be given a knowledge of God through His chosen agencies."³⁶ And "Multitudes perish for want of Christian teaching. Beside our own doors and in foreign lands the

heathen are untaught and unsaved."³⁷

On the other hand, she wrote: "Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God."³⁸

"In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education."³⁹

In each case, it is the Holy Spirit or the angels of God reaching out to these individuals and implanting the grace of God in their hearts. These heathens are not saved because they have done the works their conscience told them to do. (This would be salvation by works.) They are saved because the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts and revealed God's love to them.

Ellen White's comments regarding the salvation of the heathen fall into three categories: (1) The majority of her statements make it clear that God's general way of saving the heathens is through the church. (2) In some quotations, she indicates that God brings honest people among the heathen in contact with the gospel. (3) In some cases God, through the Holy Spirit, speaks to individuals in heathen lands and brings them the gospel without any human messengers.

God's usual way of saving the heathen is through the preaching of the gospel, but occasionally for reasons known only to Him, God reaches out to people who have never heard and never will hear the gospel and brings salvation to them. Such occasions, however, are not the rule but the exception.

Some will object to this teaching and argue that God's justice requires that every person receive an opportunity for salvation. While this seems perfectly logical, it is nevertheless unscriptural. Ezekiel 3:18 and 33:8 teach that the watchman is to warn the wicked so he can mend his ways. If he is not warned, God says, he will die in his sins, but the watchman is held responsible. Similarly, Romans 10 teaches that it is the responsibility of those who know the gospel to pass it on. If this is not done, people will be lost. We must never forget that the so-called holy books of non-Christian religions such as the Vedas of Hinduism, the Dharma of Buddhism, the Qur'an of the Muslims, and the Zend Avesta of the Zoroastrianism present salvation by works, whereas Christianity teaches salvation by faith.

Scripture teaches that there is only one name under heaven whereby human beings can be saved (Acts 4:12). Christianity is exclusive because only Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. None of the other great founders of religions, Buddha, Confucius, or Muhammad, did that. And only Christ lives today and ministers for humans in the heavenly sanctuary. None of the other religions has a post-resurrection ministry by their leaders, nor do they have a Holy Spirit to apply salvation.

For more than a hundred years, the inter-faith movement has promoted the concept that all

religions are equal, that Christians may have a shortcut to heaven, but all the others will get there as well. This idea is not in harmony with Scripture. It is based on human wisdom, not divine revelation.

Though in general God saves the people through the preaching of the gospel, there are occasions when He intervenes directly and through the Holy Spirit touches the hearts of people to bring salvation to them without any human agent. Why he does so in some cases and not in others, only He knows. However, knowing that billions of people have never even heard the name of Jesus should motivate every Christian to do all he or she can, to spread the good news worldwide.

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Perspective Digest - a publication of the Adventist Theological Society

Well Positioned

Adventist beliefs and practices provide unique bridges to Christ for people of other world faiths.

Emanuel Millen

The good news of salvation has reached far and wide. Christianity has a presence in almost every country of the world, but there are still vast numbers who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ, let alone the gospel. Yet Christ commissioned His followers to take the gospel to the entire world, for as the Apostle Peter affirmed, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12).¹

The "name" is a reference to Jesus Christ (vs. 10). This usage connotes identity and authority. Acts 4: 12 not only identifies Jesus Christ as the sole agent of salvation, but is also explicit in revealing that Jesus is the means of salvation for all humanity. The theme of the universality of salvation grows throughout the Book of Acts and is affirmed by the Epistles. It climaxes in the Book of Revelation with a final thrust of global evangelism. Acts 4: 12 sheds light on missiology and in particular how it relates to the end-time proclamation of the gospel.

The Significance of Imperative

In Acts 4: 12, the word for "be saved" carries a rich meaning. First, it is in passive form, emphasizing that humans do not cause their own salvation. It is something done for them. Second, it is in a form that means that salvation has the certainty of a definite, completed act. Something else that is noteworthy in this verse is the word before "be saved," which means "must; it is necessary." The author could have easily said, "by which we can be saved," or "by which we might be saved." The use of must is likely a deliberate insertion to denote special significance.

J. Bradley Chance notes that "Luke regularly uses [the Greek word for 'must/be necessary'] to denote divine necessity most especially with reference to events that happen on the plane of history so that the purposes of God can be accomplished."² *Divine necessity* is a term used also in the context of the existence of God as causally, logically, and metaphysically absolutely necessary. In this case, however, it is used not ontologically but to express the fulfillment of God's purpose in history. Out of the 40 times Luke uses the verb for "must/be necessary" in various tenses, at least 34 of them carry this divine necessity meaning. In Acts 4: 12, Luke connects the term "must/be necessary" to salvation. Close examination of its use to denote divine necessity throughout the New Testament reveals that it is almost always linked to God's salvific purposes. When it appears, it serves to not only highlight that something is explicitly part of God's plan, but in particular, it most often signifies

that it is part of God's plan of salvation.

Luke's first use of this term is after Jesus' visit to the Temple at age 12 during the Feast of Passover. Upon being discovered by Mary and Joseph, Jesus says, "'Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?'" (Luke 2: 49, NKJV). In using "must be," Luke reveals that Jesus' delay at the Temple fulfills a greater purpose in a salvation metanarrative. It is the primary clue that Jesus is not referring to Joseph and His carpentry business but also to His heavenly Father, with whom He is united in a work that transcends the mundane. The same theme is revealed in other uses of this word. For example, in Luke 4: 43, Jesus says, "'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent'" (NKJV). In Luke 24: 7, Jesus says, "'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again'" (NKJV). The use of "must be" confirms that the activity referred to in these passages is part of a God-ordained plan of salvation rather than incidental happenings.

Although Luke employed the word for "must be" more than any other New Testament writer, he was not the only biblical author to employ it. The Apostle John used it several times. John 3: 14 reads, "'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.'" Here John stresses that the crucifixion of Jesus is a necessary element of the divine plan of salvation.

Divine Necessity Fulfilled by Christ's Followers

The use of "must be" as a rhetorical device to signify God's plan of salvation is not limited to Christ's life on earth. As already seen in Acts 4: 12, Luke employed it after Christ's ascension. In Acts 23: 11, Luke uses it in relation to Paul's work: "The Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.'" In Acts 27: 24, Paul describes the angel of the God appearing to him, saying, "'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'"

Here we see that divine necessity is used in reference to the mission of Christ through His followers. This shows that the continuing activity of the Christian Church is related to God's work in and through Jesus Christ. God's plan continues to be realized through divine necessity in the obedient witness of the body of Christ throughout the history of the Christian Church.

Though divine necessity in Acts 4: 12 is used in terms of salvation, most of the time it is used with reference to events occurring in the lives of God's servants for the salvific purposes of others. Prior to His ascension, Christ declared, "'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come'" (Matt. 24: 14, NKJV). This prophecy of Jesus is a prediction of how God's salvific purposes will unfold up until the end of the world. The gospel will be preached to the whole world. The Book of Revelation adds further detail on God's purposes in extending salvation as present world history approaches its climax in the appearing of Jesus at His second advent.

Divine Necessity in Revelation

Divine necessity also emerges in the apocalyptic commission of Revelation 10:11: "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." This commission contains the verb *must*. The use of the Greek word carries the same significance of divine necessity that Acts 4:12 contains. Robert Mounce notes that there is a "divine compulsion in the charge."³ The proclamation of God's Word is part of God's salvific purposes, and it is global in scope. "It is the final act in the great drama of God's creative and redemptive activity. . . . [John's] prophecy is the culmination of all previous prophecies in that it leads to the final destruction of evil and the inauguration of the eternal state."⁴

There is an overarching connection between the declaration of Acts 4:12 with the eschatological preaching of Revelation 10:11. The preaching of the gospel as pictured in Acts and Revelation fulfills an intentional divine plan of salvation—that is, to exalt the name of Jesus on a universal scale. This is a task introduced by Jesus and continued throughout history in and through the church.

The context of the divine necessity ("must") of Revelation is the eating of an opened little book. John's vision parallels the one experienced by the prophet Daniel (see Daniel 12:4-7) with one major difference. Daniel is told to seal up his prophecy in a book until the time of the end, while John sees a book now opened and is told to consume it. "I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings'" (Rev. 10:10, 11).

This narrative falls between the sixth and seventh trumpets of Revelation, the seventh being the final victory of God. There are various interpretations as to the exact timing of this event and what the little book is. Common understandings regarding the identity of the little book include the Gospel, a specific instruction to John, the Book of Daniel, or the Word of God in general.

One understanding using the historicist method of prophetic interpretation is that Revelation 10 is descriptive of events toward the end of the 18th into the mid-19th century. Many Christians at this time placed a renewed emphasis on the time prophecies of Daniel, becoming convinced that they had arrived at the time of the end—the final era of earth's history. An idea was popularized that, based on the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Christ would return on October 22, 1844. It attracted great interest from various denominations, many of whom drew inspiration from the Baptist preacher William Miller. An estimated one million hearers embraced Miller's preaching. The bitter days following the failed prediction are now known as the Great Disappointment. In this case, the "eating" of the Book of Daniel had sparked a sweet excitement that turned into a bitter experience.

Two unique elements characterized this movement. First, it had a heterogeneous composition of various Christian traditions. Second, it experienced a crisis on the very thing that united them: the expectation of the Second Advent. These unique circumstances compelled the movement toward a fresh and rigorous search for truth that was free from the heavy influence of any one particular tradition. Among the various reactions was the determination never again to rely on unbiblical assumptions. Thus, a foundation was laid for a movement that epitomized the Protestant principle of

holding the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice.

The Word of God in Christian Witness

Both in his Gospel and in Revelation, John recognized Jesus Christ as the living word of God. Consuming and digesting the word has the eucharistic effect of purifying, nourishing, giving life, and identifying with Christ and His mission. According to Jesus, the communion bread is a symbol of His bodily sacrifice (Luke 22: 19). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stated that the breaking of the bread in communion “proclaim[s] the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26), which is the essence of the gospel. Paul also identified the transformed life of the believer as a public proclamation of the gospel. Belief in Christ removes the veil covering the meaning of the word of God when it is read (2 Cor. 3: 15). This results in the believer’s life becoming a living letter from Christ written by the Spirit of God on human hearts beholding the glory of God (vss. 3, 18). Based on these verses, feasting on the word of God, whether in the breaking of bread or through Bible study, has a gospel preaching effect.

Whereas divine necessity begins with God’s initiative, it does not finish with human action. Though humans are in the place to respond to God’s purpose, and under moral obligation to do so, they do not take control of it. Whether the divine necessity is used in terms of being born again, salvation, or responding to a call to action, humans are acting only in cooperation with God’s intent. God is involved in His purpose until it is accomplished. In Acts 4: 12, salvation is initiated and completed by God in the lives of the respondents. The apocalyptic commission in Revelation 10: 11 is given to a human representative, while its parallel in 14: 6 portrays the gospel as carried by a heavenly envoy. It is God who initiates the spreading of the gospel, and He will see it through until it meets the objective of covering the whole world.

John Stott noted, “Authentic Christian theology has an ultimately missiological purpose.”⁵ Jesus stated, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12: 32). In his letter to the Romans, Paul affirmed that it is God’s goodness that leads to repentance (Rom. 2: 4). This suggests that theology and mission are inextricably linked. Purity in one leads to success in the other.

As Jesus is the Word of God personified and a complete revelation of God’s character, John the Revelator is invited to model Jesus through feasting on words from God, symbolized by the eating of the little book. The words are digested and internalized by John. He then hears God’s voice call him to bear witness. (The pronoun *they* in Revelation 10: 11 can be seen as a divine plurality.) Throughout the narrative, the apostle displays humble submission, trust, and a willingness to participate in God’s activity. This attitude allows God’s word and calling to take effect in His life.

As Jesus Christ is presented before the world in the life of His followers, He attracts others to Himself (John 12: 32). His love breaks down prejudice and brings others into a salvific relationship with Him. Revealing the character of God is thus the thrust behind missiology. Success in meeting the universal witness mandate is based on the response to the call to consume the Word of God and hear His voice. The internalization of the Word of God depicts Jesus as a witness both in the individual and

corporate body. Christian mission thus lies in ever listening to, trusting, and cooperating with the divine will.

Divine Necessity and the Seventh-day Adventist Church

An essential characteristic of participants of the Revelation commission includes a position to preach the gospel to the whole world. The gospel “must” be spread to a wide-ranging global audience prior to the Second Coming. If the events surrounding the late 18th and mid-19th century are a fulfillment of Revelation 10, then these developments must have given rise to an evangelistic impetus to heed the call to spread the gospel globally.

The movement that arose as a response to deeper study of the Word of God, in particular the Book of Daniel, and experienced the bitterness described in Revelation 10:9, 10 survived as the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They became convinced that they had an obligation to spread the gospel to all the world in preparation for the second coming of Jesus. An examination of global Adventist witness will determine whether its rise is in accordance with the divine necessity of Revelation 10:11 to spread the gospel universally. The ability of Adventists to engage people of other religious and philosophical persuasions will further validate their existence and purpose.

Islam. Adventists and Muslims share convictions of submission to God, morality, clean diet, abstinence, giving of a fixed portion of income, and end-time judgment. Even the Sabbath is mentioned in the Qur’an as an example for everyone.⁶ Most important, though, Adventist eschatology is not antagonistic toward Muslim countries since it attaches a symbolic meaning to geography mentioned in end-time prophecy.

Indeed, one prominent sheikh made the following challenge: “Just like you Adventists believe, we Muslims also believe that Jesus’ second coming will bring peace, justice, and equality to the whole world. It is [the] greatest cataclysmic event to take place in this world. You Adventists have this truth as a nuclear power energy, but you are keeping it like a light bulb in your hand.”⁷

Another prominent sheikh claims to have had a dream that Adventists are the “true people of the Book”—a group of Bible-believing people who are faithful to God and accounted as righteous.⁸ In this dream he claims it was revealed to him that he must spend the rest of his life bringing an awareness of the Adventist movement to the Islamic world. He challenged, “Seventh-day Adventists have a responsibility before God to share your message with all the world, and if you don’t you will be judged by God.”⁹

These views and similar ones are expressed by several different Islamic leaders in various parts of the world. Even though they cannot be viewed as representative of the entire Muslim world, they do reveal a growing appreciation of Adventist Christians among Islam. This presents exceptional opportunities to build bridges to Christ with people of Islam.

Adventists share a similar history with the Bahá’í faith, which arose out of Shia Islam around the same as Adventism. Using the historicist method of interpretation, both faiths recognize 1844 as a significant year since it is believed by them to be the end of the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:13,

14. The Bahá'í faith holds that Miller's interpretation of signs and dates of the coming of Jesus were, for the most part, correct. This commonality places Adventists in an especially favorable position in their Christian witness to members of the Bahá'í faith.

Judaism. One hindrance to Jewish-Christian dialogue is the perception that Christians have no regard for the law. Christianity exacerbated its rift with Judaism by failing to observe the Sabbath and food laws.¹⁰ Early Christians did not see themselves as beginning a religion different from Judaism but viewed Christianity as a natural expansion of it.

Adventists uphold the Ten Commandments, including the fourth commandment, which says to keep the seventh day holy as the Sabbath. The appreciation of the Sabbath is an aspect of faith generally overlooked during the Protestant Reformation's push to return to pure biblical faith and practice. The Sabbath offers a rich starting point for discussing the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Furthermore, Adventists draw meaning from the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament and sanctuary services as aids to understanding God's grace and salvation. They have an appreciation of the Old Testament, its principles, and the observance of the dietary restrictions of clean meats. Adventists situated as they are between Judaism and majority Christianity can play an important role in strengthening Jewish-Christian relations and discussions about Jesus.

Secularism. The perception of God as a cruel tyrant is a primary reason that secularists are turned away from Him. Whether one reads, *Why I Am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell or *Why I Am an Agnostic* by Robert Ingersoll, they will see that the concept of people burning in hell forever is a major reason for their rejection of Him. As Feuerbach puts it, "To love, Hell is a horror; to reason, an absurdity."¹¹

In the wake of recent sexual-abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, the neo-atheist Richard Dawkins has asserted that the doctrine of hell is a far worse form of abuse than sexual abuse. It is interesting to note that Dawkins does not say that teaching children unscientific material about the existence of God is abusive. It appears that the issue of who God is aggravates Dawkins more than whether He exists in the first place.

The underlying reasons that people reject God are not based on science but most often on a reaction to a perceived evil character. According to LifeWay Research, 73 percent of unchurched 20- to 29-year-old Americans consider themselves "spiritual."¹² The postmodern reaction to the existential angst created by atheism is to believe in some sort of a higher power. Contrary to Nietzsche's assertion that God is dead, He is not dead in the minds of the unchurched but is growing in popularity as a loving higher power that works for the good of a universe that is free of hell fire. Like the Apostle Paul at Mars Hill, Adventists declare this ""unknown god"" (Acts 17:23) to people ignorant of Him.

The prominent Christian pastor Rob Bell bravely addresses the "misguided and toxic" issue of hell in his book, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*.¹³ Bell claims that the teaching of an eternal conscious torment, "ultimately subverts the

contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear."¹⁴ Unfortunately, in his attempt to exonerate the character of God, Bell rationalizes away biblical passages on hell.¹⁵

The Adventist movement maintains that the doctrine of hell crept into Christianity from pagan influences and has grossly marred the name of Christ and hampered Christian witness. The Adventist view on human nature and destiny does away with the common concept of hell without departing from a literal interpretation of the Bible. Adventist theology reveals a biblically authentic and attractive picture of God.

Furthermore, like secularists, Adventists promote the separation of church and state, preserving religious freedom for all people. The freedom of religion gave the nourishment for the Great Awakenings and consequently the rise of the Advent movement itself. For more than 100 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been an active advocate for freedom of religion. It sustains the oldest organization defending and promoting religious freedom that is non-sectarian and universal. This is a witness of the freedom Christianity brings to conscience, making Christ more attractive to secular society.

The Adventist Great Controversy worldview provides a rational reconciliation of the sovereignty of God, His character of love, and the present existence of evil. It explains when evil arose, the just and loving cosmic activity of God, and how evil will ultimately be abolished.

Reason can legitimately deal only with objects of phenomenal experience. Spiritual reality must appear in the physical world in order to appeal to reason. The transformed lives of believers are a perceptible manifestation of God that consequently attracts others to Him. The practical and palpable logic of Adventist theology combined with a visible manifestation of the character of a loving God engages diverse minds and presents a powerful argument for the existence of a loving and dependable God. Reason and experience link to present a powerful argument for the existence of God and the veracity of the biblical narrative.

Hinduism and Buddhism. The Hindu and Buddhist belief in reincarnation brings fears of regression similar to the fear of hell. Through the cycle of *samsara*, one could be born in a number of undesirable states, including the "Denizens of Hell." Buddhists have a vivid imagination of suffering, including this realm. "This vision of hell is not far from the Western visions . . . the hot, wicked place of endless torture."¹⁶

The Adventist understanding of hell not only depicts a more positive image of the Christian God but also brings welcome relief to anyone plagued by fears of intense suffering and torment. Ethnic religious folklore practiced in various forms around the world is mostly based on the fear and appeasement of evil spirits. The Adventist understanding of the state of the dead and the protection found in Jesus offers the peace and freedom from fear that is so desperately sought for.

The Adventist movement may be seen as more or less adhering to the Five Precepts or ethical requirements for living a basically good life of Buddhism and Taoism: Do not destroy life; do not steal, do not commit sexual misconduct, do not lie, do not take intoxicating drinks. The first precept

of not destroying life leads many Buddhists to vegetarianism. Although Adventists do not practice extreme ahimsa, they do promote vegetarianism, primarily for health reasons. The avoidance of the taking of life resonates with Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainists. An often overlooked sentiment is that of one of the founders of the Adventist movement, Ellen White, who advocated vegetarianism not only for reasons of physical and mental health, but for compassion as well.¹⁷ Compassionate living is integral to Buddhism, and Buddhists appreciate others who advocate it.

The fifth Buddhist precept prohibiting intoxicants can also include caffeine, tobacco, and other drugs that disturb mindful practice and consciousness. Like Buddhists, Adventists abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs, and advise against caffeine. They also promote a wholistic lifestyle of spiritual, mental, and physical health.

Adventists cease material pursuits and experience a special day of spiritual rejuvenation every seventh day of the week. They identify the Sabbath as being instituted during Creation week for all of humanity to preserve their relationship with God. In this view the Sabbath is a weekly "Earth Day" that appreciates nature and celebrates its Creator. The Adventist wholistic approach to health and appreciation of Creation provides a natural connection to Eastern religions and the New Age.

Witness Through Health Ministry

The Apostle Peter's testimony in Acts 4 came soon after the healing of a lame man. The Disciples' witness was often accompanied by healings. When Jesus sent out the 70 disciples, He gave them the mandate to "'Heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10: 9 NKJV). The Book of Acts records the continuation of the healing ministry of the church.

A healing experience captures the attention of the healed, often strengthening faith in God. This is not surprising when one considers the high value of good health. An acute event in one's wellbeing, whether positive or negative, cannot go unnoticed. Peter's testimony in Acts 3 and 4 reveals the biblical healing paradigm of meeting a physical need without neglect to the spiritual. The compassion shown was complete in demonstrating the divine interest in the whole person. In Acts 3, the healing of the lame man led to his familiarization with the community of Jesus, culminating in the "no other name" declaration of Acts 4: 12.

The people group of Revelation 10: 11 is given the mandate to preach the gospel globally. Undoubtedly, a health message would place them in a favorable position to lead others to Jesus. According to the biblical healing paradigm, this gift of healing provides a great advantage in connecting people with Christ. A person who has been helped physically is often more willing to consider the value of spiritual things.

Through the teaching ministry of Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church, Adventists have been given advanced health knowledge beyond 19th-century scientific knowledge. Probability research into White making health statements that are now scientifically verifiable reveals that it is astronomically against random chance.¹⁸ "It is impossible to exclude inspiration from Ellen

White's writings."¹⁹

This inspiration points to a supernatural origin and divine interposition. Studies today show that Seventh-day Adventists are among the healthiest and longest-lived people in the world.²⁰ Research articles flowing from the Adventist Health Study have broken ground for scientific understanding in areas such as vegetarianism, cancer prevention, coronary artery disease risk factors, and others.²¹ This, along with a wide-reaching system of hospitals and medical training institutions, has had significant impact on the world's health care.

The personal and relational aspect of Adventist health ministry is a natural builder of trust, opening a person to spiritual influence. Gary Martin, the managing director of Living Valley Springs, makes the following observation: "Most people that come here have a secular background. By the time they leave, to be conservative, I'd say that 80 percent make a decision for Christ at some level. We don't push religion, but at first guests shun any hint of it. By the end of their stay, they ask for us to pray with them at each treatment. I can name at least forty off the top of my head that have been baptized. They are the ones that I'm aware of, but I know there are a lot more."²²

The effectiveness and profound simplicity of the Adventist health message not only point to its divine origins but also make it palatable to a global audience. Optimal health is a universal desire. Adventists continue to expand their Christian witness to people of all backgrounds through the entering wedge of their health message.

The World Council of Churches recognizes the Adventist Church as "probably the most widespread Protestant denomination, with work in over 200 countries."²³ While growth rates and number of adherents alone are not an indication of truth, they do affirm one of the characteristics of God's last-day people, namely, participating in the global spread of the gospel. The Adventist movement's well-positioned status in Christian witness in a diverse world is in accordance with this. This challenges Adventists to engage other cultures without fear of association with other faith groups.

The Seventh-day Adventist movement identifies with the divine necessity of Acts 4:12 and Revelation 10:11 through its prophetic uprising and its positioning in fulfilling the salvific purposes of God in the end-time thrust of spreading the gospel to the whole world. Its emphasis on biblical purity has given rise to doctrines and practices that resonate with remnants of truth extant in the distorted belief systems of multiple different worldviews. This positions Adventists on the forefront of Christian witness. Combined with the revelation of Christ in the lives of believers, it attracts others to Him. This is a challenge for Adventists to fulfill the purpose of the global proclamation of Jesus by modeling Him with pronounced clarity through a close connection with His word.

At the time he wrote this article, Emanuel Millen, M.Div., was a teaching pastor at Forest Lake Church, Orlando, Florida. He is now in transition to serve in ministry in Australia.

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The Heavenly Sanctuary in the Book of Revelation

Literary study of this apocalyptic book must not overlook its theological significance.

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The Book of Revelation is a literary and theological masterpiece. This is evident in the mosaic of motifs intricately intertwined into its literary structure. One very good example of this is the Old Testament sanctuary motif. Just like some other major themes in the Book of Revelation¹ that can be traced throughout its literary structure, the sanctuary theme is no exception.

Since Revelation is an apocalyptic book, it is not surprising that it is rich in Old Testament imagery, including that of the sanctuary sacrificial system. It is interesting to note that words, practices, features, and feasts that are associated with the Old Testament sanctuary can be found in the structure and content of the Book of Revelation. The Apocalypse is interspersed with words that are synonyms for the Old Testament sanctuary system. The words *tabernacle* or *sanctuary* are mentioned three times. *Temple* appears 16 times in its varied forms. In addition, different features of the Old Testament sanctuary appear in the structure of the Apocalypse as one progresses through the book. This is most notable in each introduction to John's apocalyptic visions.

Revelation 1, an introduction to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, reveals Jesus dressed and functioning as High Priest for His people (vss. 13-20). He is standing and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks in the Holy Place of the sanctuary.

In Revelation 4 and 5, which introduce the seven seals found in chapters 6 and 7, a door is opened in heaven. The seven lamps burning before the throne appear again (4:5) and the Lamb, the central animal for sanctuary sacrifice, is present (5:5, 6). There are golden bowls full of incense. In addition, the altar of burnt offering is mentioned in Revelation 6 under the fifth seal.

Revelation 8, which is an introduction to the seven trumpets of chapters 9-11, reveals more features of the sanctuary: the golden censers and golden altar of incense (vss. 3-5; 9:13). In Revelation 11:19, just before the central section of the book (Revelation 12-14), the ark of the covenant, which is usually in the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies) is revealed—the location of the Decalogue (Ex. 25:16, 21).

Revelation 15, an introduction to the seven last plagues and God's final judgments (Revelation 16-20), reveals the cessation of intercession in the Most Holy Place, since the smoke and glory of God fills the place. It is also important to note the role of angels whose movements, to and from heaven, are closely associated with sanctuary imagery (8:3-5).

The final sections of the Apocalypse (Revelation 21 and 22) describe the end of the Great Controversy and the absence of a sanctuary because God's dwelling is with humankind (21:3), and

God and the Lamb are the temple (vs. 22).

It is evident from the Old Testament sanctuary imagery in the Book of Revelation that this motif is essential for a deeper appreciation and understanding of the structure and content of the book. Behind these key literary features lie significant theological pillars of truth that are fundamental for Christian faith. Hence, the study of Revelation and the Bible must go beyond the literary to establish sound theology.

A Real Heavenly High Priest

The Book of Revelation confirms the reality of a heavenly sanctuary and a real heavenly high priestly ministry. The book begins with the revelation of the resurrected and glorified Jesus dressed as a High Priest (Rev. 1:13). This revelation comes about six decades after the events of the Book of Acts, which confirms and celebrates not only Christ's resurrection but also His ascension to the right hand of God. This also confirms Paul's celebration of Christ's High Priestly ministry in the Book of Hebrews. He stresses that we have a great High Priest, who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary and stands for us in the presence of God (Heb. 8:1-3).

While affirming the reality of Christ's heavenly High Priesthood, Paul also affirms the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. He does this by referring to it as "The true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands" (Heb. 8:2, NLT), as the original from which the earthly sanctuary was built. Moses' account confirms this as well (Ex. 25:8, 9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). Thus, John's testimony in Revelation confirms the accounts of Moses and Paul, which all testify to a real heavenly sanctuary.

The Apocalypse also testifies to the reality and centrality of Jesus to God's plan of salvation. He is the High Priest who was dead and rose again, lives and cares for His churches and dwells among them (Rev. 1:13-20). Among other names, He is the Lamb, which is His most common name in the Apocalypse. He is the Lamb who was slain and who has redeemed human beings by His blood (5:1-13). His righteousness rises as incense with the prayers of the saints (8:4) and makes our petitions worthy of acceptance before God the Father. Indeed, Revelation testifies of a real Savior and High Priest in a real heavenly sanctuary, who ever lives to make intercession, forever ministering for the saints.

Heaven's Control Room

The Book of Revelation confirms that the heavenly sanctuary is God's throne room, from where He reigns. It is the control room of heaven—the control center of the universe. After Jesus' final promise to the saints in Revelation 3:21, Revelation 4 speaks of a door "opened in heaven" (vs. 1, KJV), which begins the revelation of God's throne room.

The description in the Apocalypse of God's throne room in Revelation 4 shares similarities with the accounts of Isaiah (6:1-3) and Ezekiel (1:1-28; 10:1-22). It is also important to point out that the Bible presents a close connection between God's temple and His throne.² Mention of both the temple and the throne together in Revelation 16:17 seems to confirm the fact that they are both the same.

The word *throne* occurs 44 times in the Book of Revelation out of the 54 times the word appears in the whole New Testament. Its frequent recurrence is mostly associated with God's sovereignty and control in the Apocalypse, which is another key theme in this apocalyptic book.

Another significant and outstanding feature of the Book of Revelation is its scenes of worship around the throne. The beings in each worship scene praise and worship God around the throne for what He has done on earth. They worship Him as Creator, as Redeemer and as Judge.³ Since the throne is in the heavenly sanctuary, the worship scenes illustrate God's sovereignty. They demonstrate that "what happens on earth impacts heaven and what happens in heaven impacts earth."⁴ The Book of Revelation, through its affirmation of the heavenly sanctuary, testifies that God is aware and is in control of everything that happens on earth, especially as it relates to His saints.

The Lamb's redemption of humankind by His blood is one of the great themes of worship around the throne in the Apocalypse. The Lamb, Jesus Christ, is described as "in the midst" (Rev. 5:6, KJV) or "at the center of" (7:17, NIV) the throne of God. These scenes stress the exaltation of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, to the throne of God after His resurrection and ascension. He is presented in the Book of Revelation, not just as One who stands in the presence of God—at the "right hand" of the throne of God as High Priest, which is the testimony of the books of Acts and Hebrews, among other New Testament writings. Jesus the Lamb is also worshipped as One who is God, as Redeemer and King, as One who sits on the throne in heaven. The heavenly sanctuary motif in the Apocalypse also celebrates the unique Person and role of Jesus Christ in salvation history—One who overcame sin on earth as human and sits on the throne with God the Father as God (3:21). This revelation of Jesus Christ speaks comfort, encouragement, and hope to the saints. The One who is their Redeemer and High Priest is the same One who sits as God and Judge "on the throne" in the control room of the universe: the heavenly sanctuary.

The Book of Revelation also presents the heavenly sanctuary as the source and center of divine judgment. The heavenly angels are described as involved in activity within the sanctuary in heaven that result in divine judgments that fall on the earth. As earlier mentioned, the work of God in the heavenly sanctuary affects the earth. The question follows, Why is God sending judgments to the earth? A careful reading of the Apocalypse reveals that it addresses the persecution of God's people by cruel world powers. The cry of God's persecuted saints in the Apocalypse can be summarized in Revelation 6: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (vs. 10, NKJV). These judgments are God's divine response to the persecution of His saints. The Lamb, who sits on the throne, is also described as One who will be involved in the execution of divine wrath. Hence the sanctuary theme in Revelation captures and stresses the essence of divine judgment: the vindication and deliverance of the saints and the defeat and destruction of the enemies of God. Indeed, "what is done in the temple in heaven is done for the benefit of God's people on earth."⁵ This motif points out the good news that God is in control of earth's affairs and that He will not allow evil to continue to prevail. The theme of the heavenly sanctuary in Revelation unequivocally declares Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 32:35 in Romans

12:19: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord" (NKJV).

Complete At-one-ment

In the final chapters of the Apocalypse (Revelation 21 and 22), the features and characteristics of the Old Testament sanctuary are no longer present. This is because God "tabernacles" with His people (21:3). There is no temple because God Himself is their temple (vs. 22).

This points back to the whole essence of the earthly Old Testament sanctuary/temple. In the beginning in Eden, God was present, walking with humankind (Gen. 3:8). Sin, however, caused humanity's first parents to be driven out of God's presence. In the time of Moses and early Israel, the purpose of the sanctuary is stated: "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (25:8, NKJV). The continuation of the sanctuary services through time stressed the need for atonement between God and humankind. The essence of the atonement is captured in the covenant formula: "I will . . . be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev. 26:12, NKJV), which occurs several times in the Bible as God's desire.

The sanctuary motif in the Apocalypse closes by pointing out that God's desire for the sanctuary is ultimately fulfilled. There will be no need for the earthly physical building designated as a sanctuary. All that the earthly sanctuary symbolized has come to complete fulfillment: God and humankind are "at-one" and dwell together for all eternity.

An overview of the sanctuary motif in the Book of Revelation reveals a very interesting and significant movement across the book that parallels the antitype of the Old Testament feasts of the earthly sanctuary. It portrays the following:

- Christ as heavenly High Priest standing among His people (Revelation 1), which stresses His death and resurrection and fulfills Christ's role in the antitypical Passover;
- Christ as the Lamb on the throne (Revelation 4 and 5), which stresses His ascension and exaltation in heaven and points to Christ's role in the antitypical Pentecost;
- Christ as heavenly mediator for His saints in the midst of trumpet-judgments (Revelation 8–10), which corresponds to the antitypical Feast of Trumpets;
- Christ in the Most Holy Place phase of judgment where the Ark of the Covenant is (Revelation 11:19; 14:7), which fulfills the beginning of the antitypical Day of Atonement;
- Christ's completion of His high priestly ministry in heaven, which results in the cessation of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 15:8)—the completion of the antitypical Day of Atonement, resulting in the beginning of the final judgments on the earth (Revelation 16) and the close of human probation;
- Christ as the Divine Warrior and Bridegroom (Revelation 19), stepping out to the heavenly sanctuary to fight personally for and redeem/deliver His bride (the saints/the church), also part of the completion of the Antitypical Day of Atonement; and
- Christ as the Lamb, the temple of God dwelling with His people, fulfilling the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles. This movement through the sanctuary motif, from the beginning of the Book of

Revelation to the end, shows God's desire always to dwell with His people and the ultimate fulfillment of that desire.⁶

The sanctuary motif is a key theological theme that runs through the Apocalypse. Words, features, and imagery of the sanctuary can be found intricately interwoven in the literary structure of the Book of Revelation. However, beyond the literary is the theology. This motif in this book points to the reality of a heavenly sanctuary and a heavenly High Priest, to God's sovereignty and power to judge, and to the ultimate completion of at-one-ment between God and humankind.

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