

COMMENTARY

THE INCARNATION IN THE FINAL CONFLICT

EDITORIAL

In conjunction with the report of the 1990 Annual Council in the Adventist Review (Nov. 1), the Editor, Dr. William G. Johnsson, wrote that it's time to press together in the North American Division." (p. 4) He observed that "the message God entrusted to us in this generation is the everlasting gospel in a judgment-hour setting." Then he defines this gospel:

This good news focuses on Jesus, the God-man, and our Saviour and Lord. It exalts His saving death - the world's only hope for deliverance from the bonds of sin - and His soon return.

All of this is true, but there is something lacking. While the atoning death of Christ did and does provide for our forgiveness, the mediation of that blood provides also for our cleansing. There can be no complete deliverance "from the bonds of sin" until the final atonement produces the "first fruits" of that deliverance which shall be when Jesus shall come the second time and breaks the power of death setting the "harvest" of captives free. It is this full message which was entrusted to the Church, but which has been betrayed.

Johnsson continues by stating - "We are a body, a family; we must have 'ground rules' for functioning. The 27 fundamental beliefs, voted by the General Conference in session in 1980, set out those ground rules for our common message and common mission." Here is where the problem begins for that voted statement signalled the culmination of 25 years of deviations and compromises which produced the present discord within the Adventist Community. While Johnsson indicates that the 27 fundamentals are not set in stone, he emphasizes that "no individual or group within the church has authority to define what Adventists believe. The church as a whole decides through its duly constituted delegates from around the world, who provide balances. We need each other!" (ibid., emphasis his) Then he cites as an example the doctrine of the Incarnation as it pertains to "the human nature of Jesus" - the very subject of this Commentary.

Johnsson gives his analysis of what the 27 fundamentals state on this point. He writes:

Our fundamental beliefs make clear that Jesus, God's eternal Son, became fully human, was tempted in all points, but remained sinless. But they do not attempt

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The first intimation of the nature that Christ would assume in the incarnation was given in a declaration of war which began the conflict on earth between Himself and Satan. As the guilty pair who had precipitated this conflict stood before the One who was to be their Redeemer, they heard Him respond to the unprovoked attack of Lucifer by cursing the serpent and promising - "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15) Gesenius translates this verse from the Hebrew as - "He shall crush thee as to the head, and thou shalt bruise Him as to the heel, by thy bite." It was to be a bruising conflict, but in the end, the head of the serpent would be crushed - and by Whom? The seed of the woman.

We might ask - was this spoken to the woman before she fell, or as she stood in her fallen state? The answer is obvious - the seed of the fallen woman would bruise the serpent's head. If she had not yielded to the serpent's suggestion and rejected the word of God, there would have been no need for this promise or declaration of war. The whole question and issue revolves around humanity in a fallen state. One who would come through the process of human birth would ~~destroy the~~ power, dominion, and kingdom of Satan. Thus was revealed the mystery of the ages, God was to be manifest in the flesh, and He accepted the only flesh available to Him in which to be manifest - the fallen!

The key actors when this first intimation of the nature of the incarnation was given in the Garden of Eden appear again in Revelation 12. We see the woman, the seed, and the serpent. Again there is war. The serpent stands before the woman "to devour her seed as soon as it was born." (v. 4) She brought forth a child, a man, This word for "man" is not anthropos, a man in the generic sense, nor anēr, a husband, but arsen, the male sex. Michael did not come into the world bereft of the forces and powers which drive and surge through mankind. To restore the kingdom of God, to crush the serpent's head, Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh," at the very fountainhead of its strength. (Rom. 8:3)

The prophecy of Daniel 7 reveals to us that in the final struggle of the conflict of the ages, the nature of the incarnation would be

projected to the forefront of the battle. In the vision given to Daniel, he is brought down through the dominions of earth represented by the lion, bear, leopard, past the non-descript beast with its little horn to the time when "the judgment was set, and the books were opened." (v. 10) This, Daniel was later shown to be when the sanctuary would be cleansed at the end of the 2300 prophetic days or 1844. (8:14) But as his vision in Daniel 7 continued, he "beheld then [after 1844] because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake." (v. 11) We, too often, have emphasized the words of the "little horn" during its medieval reign of 1260 years as the "great" words. (See v. 25) But the word "great" is supplied in the KJV and is not in the text. The great "words" came after 1844!

The first great word of "the little horn" after 1844 was in 1954, when it promulgated the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This Dogma stated:

We define that the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin.

Cardinal Gibbons in his book, The Faith of Our Fathers commented on this dogma as follows:

Unlike the rest of the children of Adam, the soul of Mary was never subject to sin, even in the first moment of its infusion into the body. She alone was exempt from the original taint. (p. 171, 88th edition)

The setting of the Judgment in the sanctuary above was paralleled with an announcement on earth that that hour had arrived. (Rev. 14:6-7) God raised up a movement on earth to give the Three Angels' Messages. To this movement, He restored the prophetic gift to guide in the final conflict. The first vision of the great controversy was given to Ellen G. White in 1848. This was repeated ten years later with instruction that it was to be written out. (Life Sketches, p. 162) The first book to appear in obedience to this instruction was Spiritual Gifts, Volume I. Chapter III was captioned "The Plan of Redemption." In this chapter, Jesus' conversation with the unfallen angels is noted as well as Satan's boast to his cohorts. Note carefully both and the indicated common point of reference. Ellen White wrote:

Jesus also told them [his angels] that they should have a part to act, to be with Him, and at different times strengthen Him. That He should take **man's fallen nature**, and His strength would not be even equal with theirs. (p. 25; emphasis supplied)

Satan again rejoiced with his angels that he could, by causing man's fall, pull down the Son of God from His exalted position. He told his angels that when Christ should take **fallen man's nature**, he could overpower Him, and hinder the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. (p. 27; emphasis supplied.)

Thus at the very beginning of the final conflict between truth and error, the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition, there was projected into the forefront of that conflict, the doctrine of the incarnation - the nature Christ assumed in His humanity. Now we must direct our attention to the struggle within God's final movement as the enemy has sought to introduce a false perception of the nature Christ assumed in the incarnation.

The Conflict Within the Movement

Those whom God called to bring the Message of Righteousness by Faith to His church in 1888, taught the Incarnation in harmony with the Biblical viewpoint as opposed to the religion of fable and tradition. Froom in his book, Movement of Destiny (p. 189), asserts that Waggoner's studies at Minneapolis in 1888 were recorded by shorthand, and published in 1890 as Christ and His Righteousness. The same church leadership which approved Froom's work in 1971 put their stamp of approval on a book written in preparation for the Centennial celebration in 1988 which contradicted Froom's assertion. However, Waggoner in his book, Christ and His Righteousness, unequivocally stated the Biblical position on the Incarnation in contrast to the Papal pronouncement. He wrote:

A little thought will be sufficient to show anybody that if Christ took upon Himself the likeness of man, in order that He might redeem man, it must have been sinful man that He was made like, for it was sinful man that He came to redeem. ... Moreover, the fact that Christ took upon Himself the flesh, not of a sinless being, but of sinful man, that is, that the flesh which He assumed had all the weaknesses and sinful tendencies to which fallen human nature is subject, is shown by the statement that He "was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh." David had all the passions of human nature. He says of himself, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (pp. 26-27, emphasis his)

As the time approached for the Centennial Celebration of the 1888 message, Dr. George R. Knight attempted to close in on A. T. Jones and "cut him down to size." In his book, From 1888 to Apostasy, he disassociated the doctrine of the Incarnation as taught by both Jones and Waggoner from the 1888 message. Claiming that recently discovered documents - "two booklets of notes that W. C. White took during the meetings" - reveal what Jones and Waggoner actually preached at the 1888 Minneapolis session. Commenting on these records, Knight wrote:

None of these records demonstrates that the divinity of Christ, the human nature of Christ, or "sinless living" were topics of emphasis or discussion at the 1888 meetings. Persons holding that these topics were central to the theology of the meetings generally read subsequent developments in Jones and Waggoner's treatment of righteousness by faith back into the 1888 meetings. (p. 37)

Subsequent to the celebration, a new book by Knight was published - Angry Saints - in which he modifies the position he took in 1987. Discussing the 1895 General Conference session, Knight now writes:

At this juncture we should note that the emphasis of Jones and Waggoner on the post-Adamic nature of Christ was a developing one. While being somewhat evident in Waggoner's theology as early as 1887, it gradually assumed more prominence in the early 1890s as their focus shifted. What was being preached, in terms of emphasis, in 1895 was not the emphasis in 1888 from what we can discover from the available records. To read that emphasis back into the Minneapolis meetings is not supported by the historical records. (p. 129)

Notice carefully Knight's way out of the corner he boxed himself into in his 1987 book. Having to admit what Waggoner believed in 1887, just what he wrote in 1890, he dismisses the

association of the doctrine of the Incarnation with the message of Christ's righteousness by the phrase, "in terms of emphasis." This is really "begging the question." When I conducted a series of evangelistic meetings - and I have conducted many in my ministry - I had in mind the whole of the message which I intended to present. However, I did not emphasize, nor even mention, the observance of the seventh day of the week, the first night of the meetings. Is this saying that because of not doing so, that I did not believe the Sabbath was a part of the whole message which the series of evangelistic meetings would convey, and that in my thinking it was a developing process? True it was a developing process in the minds of the non-Adventist hearers who would make a decision, but not in my mind as the evangelist. Other issues were in the forefront at 1888, and upon these the attention was focused. It is very probable that all present believed the Incarnation in the same way. It was not an issue, and thus not emphasized. In succeeding years, the doctrine was related to the message of Christ's righteousness.

In 1895, Jones made the doctrine of the Incarnation very clear in total opposition to the consequence envisioned in the Catholic Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. He stated:

One man is the source and head of all human nature. And the genealogy of Christ, as one of us, runs to Adam... All coming from one man according to the flesh, are all of one. Thus on the human side, Christ's nature is precisely our nature. (1895 GC Bulletin, p. 231)

In commenting on John 1:14, Jones asked a question - "Now what kind of flesh is it?" Then asking another, he amplifies the answer:

What kind of flesh alone is it that this world knows? Just such flesh as you and I have. This world does not know any other flesh of man, and has not known any other since the necessity of Christ's coming was created. Therefore, as this world knows only such flesh as we have, as it is now, it is certainly true that when "the Word was made flesh," He was made just such flesh as ours is. It cannot be otherwise. (ibid., p. 232)

In 1897, Jones became editor-in-chief of the Review. Two years later, the Holy Flesh Movement began in Indiana. A campmeeting in 1900 held in Muncie, Indiana, was attended by S. N. Haskell. On his return to Battle Creek, he wrote two letters to Ellen G. White the same day, September 25, and both in regard to what he saw and heard in Indiana. In the second letter, Haskell wrote:

Their point of theology in this particular respect [the incarnation] seems to be this: They believe that Christ took Adam's nature before he fell;...

Given Haskell's agitation over the matter, it is inconceivable that he rested the matter in just two letters to Ellen G. White, for in less than two months, Jones began a series of editorials captioned - "The Third Angel's Message" and subheaded, "The Faith of Jesus." In the Review and Herald, November 13, 1900, Jones announced, "Next week, we shall begin a study of the faith of Jesus as it is in Jesus himself, a study of God manifest in the flesh, as in Jesus himself." In the last article of the series, December 25, Jones wrote:

"We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." Therefore, as man is since

he became subject to death, this is what we see Jesus, in His place as man. Therefore, just as certainly as we see Jesus lower than the angels unto the suffering of death, so certainly it is by this demonstrated that as man, Jesus took His nature of man as he is since death entered; and not at all the nature of man as he was before he became subject to death. (p. 824)

The "Holy Flesh" Response

To the position of A. T. Jones, R. S. Donnell, president of the Indiana Conference and leader of the Holy Flesh Movement, took radical exception. He, at the time, was writing a series of articles in the Indiana Reporter. It was like a debate between himself and Jones. While Jones did not name him, Donnell did note Jones' last editorial by name. The series of articles by Donnell asked the question - "Did Christ Come in Sinful Flesh?" He later published these in 1907 in tract form with the title, What I Taught in Indiana. Noting the title he had given the articles originally, he commented in a preface:

Why I was charged with teaching "Holy Flesh" I know not, unless it was that in my article[s], as well as in the pulpit, I took the negative side of the question." (p. 1)

Following his resignation from the conference presidency in 1901, the incoming president wrote to Donnell and asked him a series of questions involving his teachings. On the subject of the nature Christ assumed in the Incarnation, Donnell responded:

Christ's nature was a divine human nature, a nature which prior to the new birth, has not been possessed by a single son or daughter of Adam since the fall. (ibid., p. 20)

The nature of Adam before the fall is here equated to the nature received in the "new birth." Christ took that nature; He came born, "born-again." This position on the Incarnation held by the men involved in the Holy Flesh Movement is again being taught and promoted in the community of Adventism. Elder Thomas Davis in his book, Was Jesus REALLY Like Us?, wrote - "Of Mary, Jesus was born, 'born-again.'" (p. 30) Ron Spear teaches the same "Holy Flesh" doctrine in his Waymarks of Adventism - "He [Jesus] was born with the nature that becomes ours when we are born again." (p. 39, original 2nd Printing)

[Spear goes even further and blasphemously injects a Mariology reflecting Romanism - "In the prenatal experience, while in her womb, Christ was inheriting Mary's love for God." (ibid.) Was not Jesus, God manifest in the flesh? Is not God, love? Why did He need to inherit love for God from Mary? But then Spear adds - "He [Jesus] saw God through His mother." As our Example, if this be so, do we have to go to God through Mary?]

Further in 1986, Dr. Colin Standish hosted a conference at Hartland Institute where this "holy flesh" teaching was promoted. And both Davis and Spear were present with Davis taking the leading role in the presentation.

From 1900 to 1950

The position set forth by A. T. Jones on the

Incarnation in his messages during the 1890s and as Editor of the Review was reflected in the Sabbath School lessons from 1902 through 1914. Here is a sample quote from the First Quarter's Lessons in 1913:

By assuming sinful flesh, and voluntarily making Himself dependent upon His Father to keep Him from sin while He was in the world, Jesus not only set the example for all Christians, but also made it possible for Him to minister to sinful flesh the gift of His own Spirit and power for obedience to the will of God. (p. 15)

Into this picture must come the 1914 edition of Bible Readings for the Home Circle, and this for two reasons. The chapter - "A Sinless Life" - went to the very heart of the purpose of the Incarnation. A note read:

God, in Christ, condemned sin, not by pronouncing against it merely as a judge sitting on the judgment seat, but by coming and living **in the flesh, in sinful flesh**, and yet without sinning. (p. 116; emphasis theirs)

The second reason is that From in Movement of Destiny dubbed this view of the Incarnation as an "erroneous minority position." (p. 428) He further sought to "smear" the concepts of this chapter in Bible Readings by assuming it was written by W. A. Colcord, whom From alleges lost faith in the teachings of the Church in 1914. This propaganda was used to justify the revision of Bible Readings in 1949 and alter the doctrine of the Incarnation as stated in the chapter, "The Sinless Life."

1950 and On

We come now to a very key time in the "great controversy" over the concept of the Incarnation - 1950. In 1948, Israel had become a nation; the World Council of Churches had been formed; coming events were casting their shadows before. The Incarnation truth had been altered in Bible Readings. A change had taken place in the leadership of the General Conference; W. H. Branson was elevated to the presidency. Two missionaries to Africa revived the message of 1888 in a documentary presented to the General Conference Committee. This document called not only for denominational repentance, but the doctrine of the Incarnation was clearly set forth, and the view held by the men of the "Holy Flesh" Movement in whatever guise it might be presented to be Baal worship. In the manuscript they wrote:

He [Jesus] took upon Him **sinful nature**, in which "dwells no good thing," and had to die to self just as His followers do in following Him. The "likeness" was not a mere **appearance**, but reality. (1888 Re-Examined, original edition, p. 157, emphasis theirs)

In answer to the challenge of Elders Wieland and Short over the 1888 Message of Righteousness by Faith, midway through his term in 1952, W. H. Branson convened a Bible Conference at the Sligo Park Seventh-day Adventist Church. Much historic Adventism was presented in this Bible Conference, but no study was given on the Incarnation. In reviewing the presentations as published in two volumes of Our Firm Foundation, I found one comment. H. L. Rudy, in his presentation on "The Mediatorial Ministry of Jesus Christ, stated:

As the Father's representative He must fulfill all righteousness. Every day of His humiliation in sinful flesh was a day of suffering. It was in the days of His flesh that He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." ... Not once did the

temptation to shed this body and return to His Father leave Him. (Vol. II, p. 17)

The confusion and conflict within Adventism today over the doctrine of the Incarnation which blunts their witness in the warfare against the great words of "the little horn" is the result of the compromises during the SDA-Evangelical Conferences in 1955-1956. Whether we place the "immaculate conception" in reference to Mary, or one generation later in relationship to Jesus, the end result is the same as to the nature Christ assumed in the Incarnation. The production of the SDA-Evangelical Conferences - Questions on Doctrine - teaches that Christ took fallen human nature "vicariously" even as he bore our sins, and not something "innately" His. (pp. 59-60) The book emphatically states - "Although born in the flesh, He was nevertheless God, and was **exempt** from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam." (p. 383; emphasis mine) The choice of the word, "exempt" was not an accident, but the very word used by Cardinal Gibbons in defining the immaculate conception - "She [Mary] alone was **exempt** from the original taint." (See p. 2, col. 1) This book has never been repudiated, and as late as 1983 was officially reaffirmed.

In the most current book on Adventist teaching, Seventh-day Adventists Believe..., a book which discusses each of the 27 Fundamental Statements of Belief as voted at Dallas, Texas, in 1980, the teachings of an Anglican preacher are hailed as "the orthodox doctrine" on the Incarnation. (Footnote #13, p. 57) His position is actually quoted in the body of the book itself. It reads:

Thus "Christ's humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor the fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it had never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin." (p. 47) [By "innocent infirmities, Melville, the Anglican clergyman meant, hunger, pain, and sorrow.]

Here is semantic verbage which leaves the doctrine of the Incarnation in the same state as given in Questions on Doctrine without the use of the strong word, "exempt." Even the Roman Church would accept that Mary also had the "innocent infirmities" as defined by Melville. No one holding the Biblical concept that Christ took upon Himself fallen human nature would teach that he descended into moral impurity, but that He did live a sinless life in that fallen nature.

In preparation for the 1988 Centennial of the 1888 Message, Wieland and Short published a revised edition of their original manuscript, 1888 Re-Examined. In this they toned down their original teaching on the Incarnation, omitting from the new edition the whole emphasis of the True Christ vs. The False Christ both in modern Babylonian teaching and in contemporary Seventh-day Adventist teaching. A book review in the special issue of Ministry for the Centennial Celebration said this concerning Wieland and Short's revised edition:

You may not agree with everything in it, but this book deals with an important topic. It is a crusading book. The original was almost too intense to read. But the new edition speaks lovingly of wayward brethren,

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to spell out His nature beyond this."

However, in this analysis, Johnsson does so define - Jesus "became fully human." He wrote too much for nowhere in the 27 fundamentals is it stated that Jesus "became fully human or man." It does say - He "became...truly man." If "fully human," Jesus became a sinner for this is the hallmark of all human beings in a world of sin.

The real problem is not what is said in Statement #4 - "The Son" - it is what is not said, that was said in previous statements of belief.

In all the published statements of belief from 1872 through 1914, the statement on Jesus Christ read in regard to the nature He assumed in the Incarnation - "He took on Him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of the fallen race." The Battle Creek Church statement of 1894 read - "He took on Him the nature of man, for the redemption of our fallen race." Even the 1931 Statement, appearing for the first time in the Yearbook for that year, and ratified at the 1946 General Conference session read - "While retaining His divine nature, He took upon Himself the nature of the human family." How is it that after 1950, we can no longer define the nature which Christ assumed in entering the realm of humanity?

It is the doctrinal statement that has changed, not the truth once held by the people to whom God committed the "everlasting gospel." Should one who really believes that God did commit the truth to the Church as it once was, be quiet and give lip-service to apostasy by omission? The Editor indicates that "for nearly 10 years" he has been burdened and troubled by the fragmentation of the church in North America." Evidently, he has not considered that he is a part of the problem, and offers no solution. Surely his denial of the basic sanctuary truth when he wrote his doctoral dissertation at Vanderbilt University was not a contributing factor to the health of the Church over which he now manifests distress.

We can say, Let us "preach our fundamental beliefs - which center in Jesus" - but if we do not accept the fact that Jesus, as the Son of man, began at the Incarnation, how can we understand His death, and His victory, for both stemmed from that event at Bethlehem. If He had not laid aside aspects of the "form of God" He could not have died, thus providing the sacrificial atonement. If He had not "condemned sin in the flesh," then His life was but a pretence, and the victory cry that rang through Heaven - "Now is come salvation and strength" - would have had a hollow sound.

Yes, let us preach the "gospel of God," the gospel "concerning His Son... our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."

The 1901 General Conference session was not only the session when a major overhaul of the church structure was attempted, but also the session at which the "holy flesh" teaching was confronted, and the Messenger of the Lord put a period to the Movement in Indiana. Penetrating through the issues generated by this aberrant movement to its heart and core, one doctrine emerges - the doctrine of the Incarnation. This movement was the first attempt by the enemy

to alter the trust committed to the Advent Movement and open the way for the Church to be moved toward Rome.

On the evening of April 16, 1901, Dr. E. J. Waggoner was scheduled to preach. He chose as his text, a key text of the leaders of the Holy Flesh Movement - Hebrews 10:4-10 - "A body hast thou prepared Me." After reading the Scripture, he indicated a question had been given him to answer. It read - "Was the holy thing which was born of the virgin Mary born in sinful flesh, and did that flesh have the same evil tendencies to contend with that ours does?" Waggoner told the delegates that in the very question itself was the idea of the Immaculate Conception. Then he stated:

We need to settle, every one of us, whether we are out of the Church of Rome or not. There are a great many that have got the marks yet... Do you not see that the idea that the flesh of Jesus was not like ours (because we know ours is inful) necessarily involves the idea of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary? Mind you, in Him was no sin, but the mystery of God manifest in the flesh, ... is the perfect manifestation of the life of God in its spotless purity in the midst of sinful flesh." (1901 GC Bulletin, p. 403)

That there would be no question as to what he was talking about, he plainly stated - "the idea of sinless flesh [in] mankind is the deification of the devil." Then he continued:

The flesh will be opposed to the Spirit of God so long as we have it, but when the time comes that mortality is swallowed up of life, then the conflict will cease. Then we shall no longer have to fight against the flesh, but that sinless life which we laid hold of by faith and which was manifest in our sinful bodies, will then by simple faith be continued throughout all eternity in a sinless body. That is to say, when God has given this witness to the world of His power to save to the uttermost, to save sinful beings, and to live a perfect life in sinful flesh, then He will remove the disabilities and give us better circumstances in which to live.

Dr. Waggoner concluded his sermon by warning - "We must not be presumptuous. We can never get so much of the life of God that we can dispense with it, and live by ourselves alone. Now and in all eternity we do live only by the faith of the Son of God."

Almost a half century passed before a frontal attack was again made on the Church's teaching in regard to the Incarnation. The second time, it was the altering of the book - Bible Readings in 1949. But once the breach was made in Adventist theology through the altering of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the inroads of apostasy have been rapid, and the drift toward Rome prominent. In forty years - a Biblical generation - we have moved from the historic Adventist teaching on the nature Christ assumed in humanity to the point where the leadership of the Church made request to the Vatican itself for an observer to be sent to the General Conference session in Indianapolis.

Not only is this drift toward Rome apparent in the teachings and action of the Maryland based Church, but also the voices on the periphery of Adventism who have adopted and sponsored the "holy flesh" concept - Jesus came "born, born-again" - echo the teachings of Rome mingled with their theological presentations. This can be documented from the publication of Our Firm Foundation, and in public lectures given on the "New Birth" based on John 3.

hopefully of an erring church, and thankfully of God's invitations to repent.

Mercifully, no mention is made of "corporate repentance" and very little of the "sinful nature of Christ," terms that have been stumbling blocks to many erstwhile Wieland and Short admirers. (Feb., 1988, p. 63)

The Apostle Paul realized that the gospel he preached was "unto the Jews a stumblingblock" (I Cor. 1:23), but at no time did he tone down that gospel to accommodate some erstwhile admirers he might still have had among his kinsmen. When we so crave the acceptance of men rather than that acceptance which comes from God only (John 5:44), we place our feet in slippery paths and thus lead others down a wrong pathway into a fatal delusion.

Biblical Teaching - Old Testament

In the dream given to Jacob as he was enroute to the home of his mother's people, God not only revealed the nature of the promised Incarnation, but also the results which it would provide. Jacob "dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." (Gen. 28:12) This ladder represented "the Son of man." (John 1:51) Through the Incarnation - "set up on the earth" - communication between God and man is restored. The Lord "stood above" the visionary ladder, and spoke to Jacob in blessing and promise. When he awakened, Jacob was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (28:17) Truly in the Incarnation, we find the house of God, for "the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us." (John 1:14 Greek) Further, as Jesus stated, "no man cometh unto the Father" except by Him. (John 14:6) He is the Gate to heaven.

To remove that ladder by so much as a rung from the earth is to deny to the children of dust access to the Father and shut to fallen, sinful and sorrowing humanity the gate of Heaven. This is exactly what the leadership of the Church has done in the compromises of the SDA-Evangelical Conferences while still professing to be the voice of God to the people. A false christ has been created, no longer "set up on the earth" but one "exempt" from the soil of earth contaminated by sin. The connecting point between God and man in a restored relationship was to be through "the seed of the woman." The Church of Rome "exempts" the woman, removing the ladder from the earth; the Adventist Church now "exempts" the "Seed" removing the ladder from the earth.

Moses, in reviewing for the children of Israel God's leading and instruction, reminded them that God would "raise up unto [them] a Prophet from the midst of [them] of [their] brethren, like unto [him]." (Deut. 18:15) He re-emphasized it quoting the words of God directly - "I will raise up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee." (v. 18) The coming prophet was to be their flesh and blood, their brother. He was to be like Moses, sharing a common humanity with him.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God revealed that the nature of the Coming One was to be so identified with humanity that those proclaiming the good news would ask - "Who hath believed our doctrine?" (53:1 margin) "For He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a

dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. (v. 2) A "root out of a dry ground," yet "a tender plant" - the mystic ladder was set up on the earth. "Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin." (YI, Dec. 20, 1900: 4BC:1147)

Biblical Teaching - New Testament

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of the promised Seed, Prophet, and Messiah, she asked, "How shall this be?" (Luke 1:34) The answer given by Gabriel has been the source of much discussion and used to give a wrong perception of the Incarnation. The Greek text reads literally - "And answering, the angel said unto her, a Spirit holy shall come over thee, a power most high shall cover thee: wherefore also the holy [spirit] being born [of thee] shall be called, Son of God." The problem arises as to what word is to be supplied where I have inserted, "spirit." Since the word, "holy" in the Greek is a neuter adjective, the KJV supplied the word, "thing" to be the noun which "holy" modified. But the adjective, hagion, is the same adjective as used to modify the noun, "Spirit," which would "come over" Mary, being likewise in the neuter, because in the Greek, "spirit" is a neuter noun. If a different identity had been desired, the word, "holy," when used to describe the one born could have been, hagios, the masculine form inasmuch as "son" (huios) is masculine. No, the promised Messiah "united humanity with divinity: a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh. He united Himself to the temple." (YI, op.cit., emphasis supplied.)

Further, the definite Greek article is omitted before "Son of God." Yes, Jesus was the Son of God, but in the same way that He became the Son of man, so also we as sons of men may become sons of God. We receive "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba [that is], Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:15-16) God acted "in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) And when was that suffering? "In the days of His flesh... He suffered." (Heb. 5:7-8) As stated at the 1952 Bible Conference by H. L. Rudy, "Every day of His humiliation in sinful flesh was a day of suffering." (See p. 4, col. 1) The identification of Jesus with human flesh was so close and complete that He, though called the Son of God, was a Son of man.

The Incarnation cannot be dismissed lightly and the nature that Christ assumed in that Incarnation brushed aside as unnecessary controversy because Paul declared the very nature Christ took to be a part of the gospel of God. He wrote:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God... concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Rom. 1:1, 3)

This cannot be dismissed with the suggestion that Paul in this text was merely writing about Christ's royal descent, because the contrast is made with His character as "the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness." The "spirit of holiness" is the thought in opposition to "the flesh." There is no one who

has the audacity to assert that David had the nature of Adam before the fall! That only which David was able to transmit was a part of the "temple of flesh" to which Christ united Himself in becoming Jesus. This is declared to be a part of "the gospel of God." Paul wrote to the Galatians - "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8) Today, a fallen angel from heaven is verily through leading instrumentalities of the Adventist Church and on the periphery of Adventism preaching a perverted gospel concerning the Incarnation.

Paul as he continued his exposition of the gospel of God to the Church at Rome declared that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." (Rom. 8:3) Jesus Christ came not only in the flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. If Paul had intended to convey that Jesus took the nature of Adam before the fall, he would not have used the word, "sinful," for not until after the fall was there any such flesh or nature. Paul couples this coming of Christ in "the likeness of sinful flesh" with the fact that Jesus concerning sin "condemned sin in the flesh," the very flesh He took in becoming man. The "flesh" Christ took contained all the potential to sin, but while such a flesh in us breaks forth into acts of sin, in Him, there was no response. He maintained His eternal integrity.

There are some who would argue over the word, "likeness," having us believe that what Christ took only appeared as in the fallen state, having the innocent infirmities, but was not the fallen nature in reality. The word, "likeness" in the Greek is homoiōmati. This same word is used by Paul in Philippians 2:7 - "in the likeness (homoiōmati) of men." Would we say that Jesus only appeared to be man, but was not really so? Even as He was in the "likeness" of men, so also was He in the "likeness" of a flesh of sin.

Consider next the complete text in Philippians 2:5-7 - "Christ Jesus who in the form of God subsisting, not robbery He considered it to be equal with God, but Himself He emptied, the form of a slave taking, in the likeness of men becoming." (Literal translation) Here Paul in proclaiming "the gospel of God" declared that Christ Jesus changed from the "form of God" to the "form of a slave" when He came "in the likeness of men." God did not create Adam a "slave form" but one after His own image. Adam perverted his created form into a slave form when he sinned. This form, Adam passed on to his descendants; and after four thousand years, Christ entered humanity accepting the working of the great law of heredity. Emptying Himself, He accepted the only form of man that existed when born of Mary - a slave form.

With this metamorphosis from "the form (morphē) of God" to "the form (morphē) of a slave," called "the mystery of godliness" (I Tim. 3:16), Paul invites us to consider another "mystery." He wrote, "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." (I Cor. 15:51) The "slave body" of our present existence will not be the body of the resurrection or translation. Our "vile body" will be fashioned like unto His glorious body." (Phil. 3:21) However, our identity will not be destroyed, we will merely change the form in which we will function and subsist. Likewise,

Christ whose preexistence was in "the form of God" stepped out of that form, and accepted "the slave form" of man, ever retaining and preserving in that slave form His holy and undefiled Identity.

"The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." (I Timothy 3:16; 4:1)

From a Reader:

"First of all, let me both commend and thank you for the Commentary on "Contemporary" Adventism. I think you have given a clear, penetrating assessment of a major - if not THE major - problem within the church today. "Contemporary" Adventism accepts and promotes theological pluralism on righteousness by faith, Christology, the heavenly sanctuary, and prophecy, to name only a few areas. A major result of this theological pluralism has been a progressively closer relationship with the ecumenical movement (the ultimate example and expression of theological pluralism). The acceptance of theological pluralism at many levels within the church has also resulted in the church being divided into four camps: (1) evangelical, (2) liberal, (3) celebration, and (4) traditional. A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Hagerstown, MD

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NOTE

In 1991, the Commentary will be issued every six months - two regular issues. However, if material of special interest to concerned Adventists is more than we can publish in the monthly "Thought Paper" - WWN - we will run up to two "special" issues of Commentary.

Starting January 1, when a paper is returned to us because of a change of address, the name will be removed from the computer. Unless a notification of that change has come from the reader prior to the return by the Postal Service, a \$1.00 fee will be charged to reenter the name.

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