

By John M. Fowler, M.A., M.S., Ed.D.  
Associate Director, Department of Education  
General Conference of SDA  
Silver Spring, MD

40<sup>th</sup> International Faith & Learning Conference  
Asia-Pacific International University  
Muak Lek, Thailand

July 2009

## The Adventist World-View: A Ground to Stand, A Life to Live

### Part II

The Adventist worldview is rooted in faith and is confessional in nature. A faith-base and a confessional focus are not necessarily antipathic to reason and logic, but they do make a crucial demand of those who accept such a world view. That demand consists of how far and how well we will let the Adventist worldview define and govern our life belief, life style and life structure. To the extent there is a congruency between that demand and our life, to that extent depends the existence and survival of Adventist world view amidst competing worldviews. The issue of that congruency expects us to answer three primary questions: To whom do we owe our allegiance? How do we relate to others? What is our purpose in life?

**Adventist world view and our ultimate allegiance.** The Adventist world view has its foundational premise in the biblical statement of origin: “In the beginning God created” (Genesis 1:1). Those five words were not an introduction to some ancient mythology of origins but rather they provide the key to our understanding of how we and the universe in which we live came into being—not by eons of evolutionary process or by some mysterious cosmological accident, but by a planned, focused, activity of *Elohim*, the self-existing God.

For a Christian worldview to satisfactorily answer the issues of ultimate allegiance in life, **it must begin at the beginning, with the recognition of the creator God.** The creative activity of God not only tells us that God is the cause and origin of all things, but that He is distinct from creation and at the same time related to creation. The point is crucial to the construction of an Adventist worldview. The twin temptation of identifying the Creator with creation (leading to pantheism common to most Eastern religions) or isolating Creator from creation (such as in Platonic metaphysics or secular humanism that attempt to explain nature and human potential without a personal God) can be avoided only by affirming a God who is a person and a creator.

So when the biblical perspective insists on a creation *ex nihilo*, the purpose is to show that the God of the Bible is transcendent over and independent of the material, and is truly free; at the same time this God is personal in that He is capable of relating to His creatures. In other words, God creates, but He is not dependent for His creation on any preexistent substance. He relates, but for His relation He is not dependent on any external motivating force. Both the will to create and the will to relate are internal to God. He is entirely the other, absolutely Himself. It is this exclusivity of God that leads the Adventist to deny any potentiality within the creature to become God. Any pretension to such potential is foreign to

an Adventist worldview, and hence Adventists are always called upon to reflect upon their limitations and at the same time be fearless of their finitude because of the power of grace available to them from God.

That the authenticity of God as creator and ultimate allegiance to Him should remain the center piece of the divine human story and the Christian world view is provided in the creation narrative itself. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gen. 2:1-3).

Adventists must be the first to grasp that it is not an accident that the Bible or its theology did not provide a place on earth to be the focus of our pilgrimage to God the creator. Instead, the creation story invites us to remember the Creator, worship the Creator, and celebrate the Creator through **the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath**. Thus, as Sabbath keepers, the Adventist world view provides us a foundational authenticity to celebrate the Creator God—regardless of where we are, defying geographic or historic limitations. As creatures who live and work within the parameters of time, we are called upon to remember—and never forget—the Sabbath, and by that the Sabbath-Giver, and by that Elohim the Creator.

With the celebration of creation each week, whose cycle of time is not in nature but in nature's Creator, we affirm His majesty as Creator of the universe and the maker of our lives, on the one hand, and on the other we affirm our freedom from the tyranny of time, a point that is crucial in the rest Sabbath promises. That celebration is a part of the Adventist world view. Hence the seriousness with which we take—or ought to take—the Sabbath, including its edges and its wholistic meaning. For the Sabbath is an "exodus from tension," "*a sanctuary in time*," "a palace in time with a kingdom for all," and its observance "the coronation of a day in the spiritual wonderland of time."<sup>1</sup>

The Sabbath is thus not merely a day of rest or a weekly ecstatic entry into the wonderland of time. It is an absolute acknowledgement that God is all in all. He is the creator. He is the liberator (Ex. 20:1-3, 8-11). He is the Redeemer (Eze. 20:20). He is the One who has assured us the restful delight of eternity (Heb. 4:11). While helping us to ever acknowledge that this earth is God's gifted home to us, Sabbath keeps us heaven-bound as ultimately that is the final milepost of a Christian world view.

**Adventist worldview and relationship.** A second significant implication of the Adventist worldview is how we relate to life on earth, to our surroundings as well as to our fellow human beings. Both have their foundation in creation. The Adventist commitment to the doctrine of creation, as part of its worldview, leads to an authentic understanding of ecology and history. Because God is the creator, the biblical revelation consistently maintains that in matter there is nothing intrinsically evil, and in nature there is nothing Aself-originating, self-operating, self-sustaining, or self-explanatory.<sup>2</sup> This is God=s world, not ours to treat as we wish without any regard to a higher norm other than our self-will and self-interest.

The essential goodness of creation thus lays the foundation against dualism of nature, on the one hand, and meaninglessness of history, on the other. Niebuhr=s comment is quite forceful:

"History is not regarded [by Christianity] as evil or meaningless because it is involved in the flux of nature, and man is not regarded as evil because he is dependent upon a physical organism. The doctrine of creation escapes the error of the naturalists who, by regarding causality as the principle of meaning, can find no place for human freedom and are forced to reduce man to the level of nature. It escapes the error of the rationalists who make *nous* into the ultimate principle of meaning, and are thereby tempted to divide man into an essentially good reason, which participates in or is identified with the divine, and an essentially evil physical life."<sup>3</sup>

With a world view that affirms the goodness of creation and the essential meaningfulness of history, Adventists can relate to life on earth on a positive note. Even when evil strikes, we need not retreat into caves of nihilism, but rather look at each strike as part of that groaning of nature for its ultimate liberation from the hands of God (Rom. 8:21-23).

More than nature and environment, life on earth involves human relationship. In a world that is led astray by forces of evil, in a history torn asunder by wars of racial hatred, national pride, and ethnic divisions, and in communities shattered by walls of hostility, those who profess a worldview with a center piece of God's harmony of creative and redemptive process have a responsibility to transfer that world view from talk to walk so that the commonness of the human soul can erect the flag of human commonality.

That commonality is in both the creative and restorative aspects of the Adventist worldview. When you reflect on the creation story's foundation for human unity, one passage alone is enough: *Elohim's* assertion: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

We are the direct result of Trinity's will and purpose, and the crowning act of creation.<sup>4</sup> The image of God motif so central to the Genesis account is the most powerful expression of the dignity and the uniqueness of human beings. Herein lies the answer to one of the basic worldview questions: Who am I? Where did I come from?

What constitutes the image of God has been a subject of theological debate throughout history, and numerous identifications have been made: rationality, individuality, dominion, creativity, morality, personality, and so on. Without being distracted by these distinctions and disputes, it is necessary to point out that the phrase Image of God somehow places upon us a unique dignity and worth. We are matter, yet above matter; we are creatures, yet above other creatures; we bear the image of God, yet are not God; we are not only conscious, but conscious that we are conscious; we can stand at the center of existence and survey the past, the present, and the future; history, action, and hope are part of our movements.

When the Adventist worldview speaks of us made in the image of God, it gives notice to the world that it is not ready to accept any notion of the origin and nature of human being except the one that recognizes us as children of God. Such a declaration carries several implications.

**First, human being is a unity**, and cannot be broken up into compartments. We should be studied, related to, respected as wholistic persons. Our body, mind, spirit, health, economics, ecology cannot be treated independent of each other; they deserve a unified and integrated approach. **Second, we are individuals**, with freedom and creativity bestowed

upon us by our Creator. No Adventist worldview can sacrifice human individuality at the altar of any other notion, such as the collective good of the state or the corporate structure of an existential edifice. Human freedom is priceless and by affirming it we ensure creativity.

**Third, individuality does not confirm on us self-sufficiency.** As creatures, we are dependent on God, and responsible to God. So we are called upon to exercise faith in Him, love Him, worship Him, and obey Him. As individuals we may choose not to do this, and the consequences thereof are manifest in our spiritual alienation and insufficiency. Another aspect of human dependency is brought out in Genesis 1:29, where immediately after the Aimage of God@ phrase occurs, the Creator speaks: Amale and female created he them.@ The complementary nature of male and female is a symbolic pointer that we are not made to be creatures of self-sufficiency; indeed where that self claims sufficiency and makes itself the center and source of its own activities, to the detriment or the negation of other selves, we have the problem called sin. Therefore a worldview, to be Adventist, must take into account a relational structure in which a morally consistent value system, a fellowship with the other, a worship of the creator will be ensured, thereby letting the human spirit express itself in both its individuality and dependency.

**Fourth, the image of God concept in our world view does not permit the assertion of superiority of one over the other** in human relationships. The Genesis passage does not deny differences between people; indeed it affirms such differences, as obvious as male and female, in the pre-Fall situation. In the post-Fall situation sin has marred the image of God and imposed its own alienation not only between God and humans, but between humans. Sin accentuated negatively such differences as color, gender, caste, nationality, creed or tribe. But the challenge of the worldview that begins with God as creator is to reject these differences when they interfere with fellowship and to affirm the commonality of humanity in the image of God.

Paul spoke of this common human origin in his sermon in Athens: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). We cannot escape the significance of this statement made to a Gentile audience. It affirms that the Creator-God of the Christian is no local deity of a cult, but the Sovereign of the Universe. He has ordained that we share a common blood and a common origin, and "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Ellen White's comment leaves us with no excuse whatsoever to let social or racial differences harm the community of faith:

"In that age of caste, when the rights of men were often unrecognized, Paul set forth the great truth of human brotherhood, declaring that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.' In the sight of God all are on an equality; and to the Creator every human being owes supreme allegiance."<sup>5</sup>

True, God's ideal of oneness for humanity was marred by the entrance of sin. His question to Cain, "Where is your brother?" was indeed a projection that henceforth wherever sin reigns, so will division: between God and humans, and between people and people. But God did not leave humanity without an effective remedy for such divisiveness. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4,5).

The "we" of "we might receive adoption" cuts across all barriers and frontiers. The Son has come to make us all children, giving us the common privilege to approach God as "Abba, Father." In His life, teachings, and ministry, Jesus focused on the dignity and unity of human beings. The Holy Spirit has preserved for us in the gospels and in the rest of the New Testament instance after instance to stress that division within the human family is alien to Christian ethos. We observe this most importantly in the one and only sure foundation of His kingdom: the Cross.

The cross, as God's instrument of redemption and reconciliation, brings back what was lost in Eden: the restoration of the image of God with, among other things, the reality of human togetherness and unity. At the foot of the cross, the ground is level: the entire humanity stands as one in sin, and one in the possibility of redemption.

Through the cross, God "was reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Note this powerful comment:

"The Cross is God's best picture of himself; . . . it is the place where God comes to grips with the forces that violate his love; it becomes the place where he draws men into harmony with the love and the purposes that flow from it. . . . The reconciliation of man to man, through the reconciliation of man to God, releases the healing power of God into this anxious, broken, and bitter world. Only redeemed men can reconcile."<sup>6</sup>

The cross challenges us to a new perspective in life: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view" (2 Cor. 5:16). The cross initiated a new value system. The post-Fall factors of looking at a person from a human point of view--race, gender, color, language, caste, tribe, culture, money, position, or status--have been done away with at Calvary. The Christian enters into a new world of values that flow out of the cross to demand that every member of the community of faith to live by only one basic rule of interpersonal relationships: love. As Schaeffer so eloquently states,

"Love--and the unity it attests--is the mark which Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father."<sup>7</sup>

**Adventist worldview and our life purpose.** Finally, as advocates of a Christian worldview, Adventists must ask themselves the crucial question: What is our life purpose on earth? The question is particularly significant in view of the claims we make for our world view—that it is God centered, that it recognizes His creatorship and human unity, that it has a special revelation in Jesus Christ and the Bible, and that it affirms the possibility of full restoration.

The question is also critical because of biblical anthropology which teaches both human dignity and human depravity. Pain and death stare at us from every side. Alienation from God is at the root of distortion of perceptions, relationships, and values. As a result we stand in a chaotic, confused, and hopeless dilemma. Isaiah's horrific picture is never more true as it is now: AThe whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it@ (Isa. 1:5-7). The meaning is clear: the whole person--physical, mental, spiritual, emotional--is sin-polluted, and with us the entire creation

groans under the weight of evil (Rom. 8:22). Thus a depraved humanity, an estranged fellowship, a groaning nature seem to bear witness to the insightful words of C. S. Lewis: "There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan."<sup>8</sup>

Against such a background, known to us as the great controversy, the Adventist is called to live out his/her life mission and purpose. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible describes a continuing conflict between the powers of evil headed by the devil and the powers of good controlled by God. The Bible never underestimates the existence and role of Satan in the affairs of human history. Neither can we.

In this conflict of the kingdoms--the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the evil one—we must seize the vantage point of a never failing or oscillating faith in God and look at questions of life and its flow, and draw several lessons.

**First, Adventists should carefully study and understand the nature and seriousness of the great controversy.** We cannot take the issues for granted or bury them as intellectually invalid and experientially meaningless. Nothing delights Satan more than the denial of his existence. Every Seventh-day Adventist

“should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.”<sup>9</sup>

**Second, Adventists should live and share the positive of the great controversy theme that God’s activity in history is moving toward its inevitable triumph.** This is why the cyclic concept of history with its inherent meaninglessness is alien to the biblical worldview. The Bible looks at history as linear, meaningful, purposive, and directional--inexorably moving towards its finale. From creation to restoration teleology dominates history testifying that "God is the God history; history is His work, His will, His revelation."<sup>10</sup>

Viewed thus, history=s varied events--confusing and chaotic, evil prospering and righteous suffering, Nimrod and Hitler--will take on a new meaning. As the book of Revelation pictures, the goal of human history is to arrive at its teleological end: when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God, when God=s will and sovereignty, justice and love, are universally acknowledged, and when the original purposes of God=s creative order are ultimately established (Rev. 14:6, 7).

**Third, let the gospel of Jesus be the center and the circumference of your life.** The coming of Jesus constitutes not only the final form of God=s self-disclosure, but also God=s way of dealing with the problem of sin and the conflict between the kingdoms. The incarnation of Jesus is thus the ground on which an Adventist worldview can speak about the reality and meaning of life. For Christ provides both form and vitality to all existence.<sup>11</sup> History finds its commentary, continuation, and culmination in Him. He acts as the arbiter of human living. He is at once God, at once man, thereby both transcendent and immanent, above history and yet relevant to history. He is one among us, and the redeemer of all.

Jesus is the man of the Cross and the Lord of the resurrection, both the defier of death and the definer of life. In the act of that defiance and in the proclamation of that definition, Jesus exposed to the universe the true nature of evil--an interlude, an act of willful choice against God=s reality, finally crushed by God=s Son on a cruel Cross,--and the true meaning of life, born out of that Cross and confirmed by an empty tomb.

By the act of crucifixion and resurrection, God not only reconciled the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19) and redeemed us from the curse of sin (Gal. 4:4-6), but also vanquished the devil in the great controversy. The triumphant conquest of the devil, and his ultimate doom are prominent themes in the New Testament (John 12:31-33; 14:30; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14, 15; Rev.12:10, 11) and essential to an understanding of the teleological and redemptive nature of the Adventist worldview.

**Fourth, thus the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus adds new dimensions to the way the Adventist can look at life and the world:** (a) The concept of both reality and truth become Christocentric. The reality of God becomes immediate and incarnational--that is, Christ has identified Himself with the human situation in order that God may be known and experienced here and personally; and, further truth is able to relate the transcendence of knowing to the immanence of relating. (b) Redemptive experience makes it possible for us to have a transformed mind which can look at life and its environment from a perspective of holistic conformity with God=s original plan. (c) Ethical and aesthetic activities of the transformed person come under the redemptive and incarnational perspective. The former demands a lifestyle of love, as expressed in the Decalogue, the basis of God=s character and function. The latter expects the Adventist to extend incarnational identification in all human endeavors--that is to say, the reality of God and His care will permeate all human activities, situations, and relationships.

**Fifth, the Adventist lifestyle and witness will be governed by the urgency of mediating God's love here and now and the urgency of anticipating the arrival of the future.** The Adventist worldview looks at the present as an interim, and that it is not without hope or destiny. The consummative focus of biblical history is the Parousia. It is the Man Christ Jesus who will confront the present age and all that it represents. The one who brought the good news of grace would stand at the last day as the pronouncer of judgment on a fallen and rebellious order. The climatic moment in the history between good and evil would witness the unleashing of divine wrath against every expression of hostility toward God. The judgmental purge is described in terms of fire that will melt the elements and purify the earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Out of this apocalyptic purging will come forth the fulfillment of God=s promise: Behold I create new heavens and a new earth@ (Isa. 65:17). The emerging cosmos is not a creation *ex nihilo*, but a cosmos in harmony with God=s eternal purposes, prepared to be the home of the redeemed, without any sign or evidence of history marred by sin. In that new earth, human life will become theocentric: our existence will celebrate throughout eternity the love of God and the faithfulness of His promises.

The hope of that kind of restoration gives those who follow the Adventist worldview seriously both direction and purpose. The anticipation commands the Adventist to look beyond the present, to press for optimism in the midst of the opposite, to never despair when answers are not readily available here and now, and to cherish that the doors of learning would never close.

## Conclusion

An Adventist worldview is a construct--a perspectival construct about the make-up of life as it struggles with the questions of reality, truth, ethics, and history; a confessional construct that provides a point of departure, a sense of direction, a locus of destination, and a strategy for unity; and a purposive construct that meets the basic needs of human life and action.

Given that definition, Adventists in order to find meaning for our existence and destiny must be certain of our worldview. We need to have not only a theocentric certitude but also a faith-commitment to that worldview. Such a commitment need not be a source of either embarrassment or apology. Every worldview works on a basis not absolutely verifiable, and it is essential for Adventists to find our anchor in the surety of our faith commitment to Christ, in whom is revealed the basis for the biblical worldview.

---

<sup>1</sup>Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1975), pp. 29,21,18.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William Eerdmans, 1987), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), vol. 1, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1905), p. 415.

<sup>5</sup>-----, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 238.

<sup>6</sup>*The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1980) on Galatians 4:5.

<sup>7</sup>Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Glasgow: Collins, 1981), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 190.

<sup>10</sup>Ludwig Kohler, *Old Testament Theology*, tr. A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 94.

<sup>11</sup>Niebuhr, vol. 2, pp. 54-55.