

The Eclipse of Scripture and the Protestantization of the Adventist Mind: Part 1: The Assumed Compatibility of Adventism with Evangelical Theology and Ministerial Practices

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1. Prologue

Articles do not normally have prologues. Yet, I am providing one to help readers understand why I am writing on the eclipse of Scripture and the protestantization of the Adventist mind. Early in January 2001, I received an invitation to participate in three International Conferences on Faith and Science organized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2002-2004). Through the meetings, I realized the deep theological divisions presently operating in the Adventist church will not disappear by inertia or administrative pronouncement. Instead, their existence will secularize the mind set of younger generations transforming Adventism into a postmodern evangelical denomination. The only way to avoid this outcome is through the theological development of faithfulness to Scripture. To foster such growth in the life, unity, and mission of the Church, I published a series of articles entitled “From Vision to System”

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

about five years ago.¹ In them, I outlined the contours of our theological divisions and suggested how Adventism may overcome them.

About four years ago, the Seminary Administration created a new course entitled “Theological Foundations of Spirituality and Discipleship.” I was one of the three instructors appointed to teach it. The assignment pushed me somewhat out of the area of my scholarly specialty, theology, into the unfamiliar waters, of the practice of ministry. Through my readings, I discovered that in order to keep and attract the young, Evangelical ministry and worship is becoming postmodern, ecumenical, progressively departing from Scripture, and drawing nearer to the Roman Catholic Church.

To my surprise, I realized biblical Adventists are following the same path.² Most probably, Adventists borrowing freely and uncritically their theological thinking and ministerial practices from the wells of Evangelical sources are building on non-biblical philosophical ideas that we can trace back to the Roman Catholic theological tradition.³ For this reason, current changes (“innovations,” “best practices”) in ministerial and liturgical practices achieve much more than attracting and retaining the young. They introduce in the thinking and life of the church the practical consequences that would follow from accepting the doctrine of evolution. To critically reject the doctrine of evolution on one hand, and, uncritically accept postmodern liturgical “innovations” on the other is inconsistent because systematically both belong together and stem from the same non-biblical

¹ Fernando Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 15, no. 2 (2004); ———, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part 2,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16, no. 1-2 (2005); ———, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 3 Sanctuary and Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17, no. 2 (2005). I have yet to write the fourth and final article in this series on Bible, Ministry, and Mission.

² Previously, I was aware that Evangelical and Biblical Adventist theological sectors were promoting these practices, Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 15, no. 2 (2004), 29-33.

³ This explains why some Adventists are changing their view of the eschatological role of Roman Catholicism because it has changed from a persecuting power to a peace fostering institution. Loren Seibold, “Letting Roman Catholics Off the Hook,” *Adventist Today*, Winter 2010, 22-23. This view opens the way for joining into the ecumenical movement.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

philosophical principles. Although these practices are incompatible with biblical thinking, Adventists are accepting and advancing them. The “unintended consequences” of this course of action are transforming Adventism into a secular non-biblical generic Charismatic denomination. The emergence of a new generation of Charismatic ecumenical Adventism is underway. Although using Scripture functionally, as a means to receive the Spirit, this generation will not think or act biblically.

Yet, I am convinced that most Adventists promoting innovations⁴ closely following the latest evangelical trends, are not aware they are changing the essence and nature of Adventism. Moreover, I believe that the immense majority of Adventist leaders and church members do not understand the assumptions and the unintended consequences of changes in the practice of ministry.

These brief reflections may help the reader to understand the context from which I am writing this article. One way to understand events and trends is by considering their causes. I will attempt to suggest that the situation we are facing in the ministry and liturgy of the Church involves the protestantization of the Adventist mind and the eclipse of Scripture. However, many and complex are the causes of any historical reality, more so when we attempt to understand current events. Consequently, my reflections will be partial and require further research.

My hope is to help start the conversation between Adventist theologians, ministers, and administrators to stimulate creative thinking in faithfulness to the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle. To overcome the protestantization and secularization of Adventism we must reach the postmodern mind and keep the young in the church with a combination of a critical evaluation of our own experience, a systematic understanding of biblical truths, and the application of the biblical ministerial and liturgical paradigms. Perhaps in this way we can overcome the secularization of Adventism, foster the unity of the Church, and finish the final mission of restoring Christianity to its eternal basis.

⁴ For an example of Adventists promoting Evangelical liturgy and the argumentation they follow, see for instance, Martin Weber, “Give Praise a Chance,” (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, 1995).

2. Introduction

Everything changes—so does Adventism. Not all changes have the same importance. Some are inconsequential other are momentous. Changes in foundations have far-reaching consequences for the entire community. Moreover, changes do not happen overnight. They take time and involve many and complex causes that, in turn, assume a ground or foundation from whence they came. Changes in the foundation of a building or community are momentous and have far-reaching consequences. The foundation from which Adventism came into existence and on which it stands is the Word of God present in Scripture. All positive changes come from understanding and following God's Word.

However, the crisis of identity⁵ and doctrinal divisions⁶ Adventism is experiencing early in the twenty first century reveal that a macro change at the level of the foundation from which changes should come is taking place: Culture is eclipsing Scripture. The eclipse of Scripture is the blocking, covering, obscuring, hiding, concealing, veiling, shrouding, darkening of the role and understanding of Scripture's contents in the life, worship, spirituality, thinking, and acting of Adventist believers. The eclipse of Scripture is always partial. It starts with the neglect of Bible study and proceeds to block the understanding of Scripture by the embrace of different cultural ways of thinking and interpreting Scripture.

For instance, the eclipse of Scripture and its impact in the thinking of Adventist leaders becomes apparent in recent liturgical changes centered in the use of popular and rock music for worship. The seismic proportions of the change in Adventist spirituality that recent liturgical changes reveal can be appreciated when one brings to mind that officially Adventists

⁵ Provonsha perceived the crisis of identity. Jack W Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1993), 7. Provonsha testified to the self-understanding of Adventism in some sectors of the Church. Adventists used to believe that God entrusted them with His final message for the world. "As preposterous as this idea may seem to some of us today, it was a pivotal factor in the truly enormous explosion of energy that sent Adventists all around the world during the past century and a half, actually changing the world in many ways, but in turn being changed by it." Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis*, 9.

⁶ See for instance, Ron Spear, *Adventism in Crisis!* (Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1987). See also, Fernando Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part I: Historical Review," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 15, no. 3 (2004).

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

maintain that “jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms” of music “will be shunned” in the home, in the social gathering, in the school, and in the church.⁷ The new liturgy, in turn, aids in the eclipse of Scripture in the spirituality and life of the church. Not surprisingly, the Sabbath School experience that is the “heart of the Church” becomes a casualty in the path of liturgical renewal.⁸ The eclipse of Scripture is also visible in the various reinterpretations of the Remnant Church’s nature in Adventism as it relates to Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.⁹

My general purpose in this and the next article is to trace some signposts of the eclipse of Scripture in recent Adventist experience. Slowly, throughout time, the eclipse of Scripture has been taking place not in the official statements of the church but in the minds and actions of leaders and believers. In every day practice, Adventist leaders¹⁰ continue to affirm the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle with their brains while Evangelical theologies and practices progressively shape their hearts and actions.¹¹ This growing ambiguity represents a stark turnabout from the

⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 180.

⁸ See for instance Andy Nash, “Riding the Grace Wave: Christ Advent Fellowship, Berthoud, Colorado,” *Adventist Review*, October 30 1997, 8.

⁹ On this point see, for instance, Frank Hasel, “The Remnant in Contemporary Adventist Theology,” in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Silver Spring MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009).

¹⁰ By “Adventist Leadership,” I mean thought leaders such as scholars, theologians, pastors, and administrators. I am not referring to the administration of the Church as a local or global community.

¹¹ “The legacy of Adventist evangelicalism proved to be experiential rather than doctrinal. The attention drawn to justification by faith allowed many Adventists to follow the spirit rather than the letter of the law. In consequence, the legalistic style of argumentation and behavior that had characterized Adventist fundamentalism eventually came to be confined to the self-defined-historical Adventists. For others, as Adventism moved into a fourth stage, there was a greater sense of spiritual freedom, often accompanied by a considerable relaxation of Adventist taboos and a more expressive style of worship.” Malcolm Bull, and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2 ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 106-07. The reader can observe the turnabout of the Adventist mind first hand by browsing through the last 20 years of the *Adventist Review*. As an example taken at random, check, for instance, Bobby Moore, “Making Space for God: Contemplation as Practice,” *Ministry*, August 2009, 6-9. In this article, we can see the presence of an incipient protestantization of the Adventist mind eclipsing Scripture. Authorities quoted approvingly are Roman Catholic mystics and

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

experience of early Adventist pioneers who, dissatisfied with traditional Protestant theologies, decided to devote themselves solely to a Biblical understanding of Christian truth and abandoned their evangelical denominations to become the emerging end time remnant anticipated in Biblical prophecy.¹²

The hypothesis explored in this series, is that the eclipse of Scripture results from the process of protestantization of the Adventist mind; which in turn, results from the generalized assumption that Evangelical theology is correct in every Christian doctrine but the Adventist distinctives. Finally, the conviction that Evangelical theology is correct assumes that it flows from the consistent application of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* (Scripture only, in all its parts, and first) principle.

What should Adventist leaders do? Should they continue to affirm and promote the protestantization of Adventism in spite of the eclipse of Scripture it produces? More specifically, should Adventist theological system and ministerial paradigm¹³ accommodate to Evangelical theologies and ministerial paradigms? Alternatively, should Adventist theology and ministerial paradigm stand alone over and against Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions?

My hope is that by becoming aware of the protestantization of the Adventist mind and the eclipse of Scripture, new generations of believers will be able to reject these trends by thinking in the light of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle.

Protestant pastors with the exception of one quotation from Ellen White. Some of the sources quoted, Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547), Thomas Merton a Trappist monk, (1915-1968), Kees Waaijman a Carmelite Friar, and Dallas Willard, advocate positions about Spirituality that are contrary to Scripture and Adventist views of theology and the Christian life. Quotations from Catholic sources result from the protestantization of Adventism because in recent times, Protestant Spirituality is merging with Roman Catholic spirituality. The eclipse of Scripture is also present when the author suggests pastors should use books written by Protestant authors for their devotional writings. Lastly, the author does not connect Bible study with experiencing the presence of God.

¹² Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Remnant and the Three Angels' Messages," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).

¹³ By "ministerial paradigm," I name the general methodological patterns and methods of ministry, liturgy, and mission followed in any Christian denomination.

3. Goal and Procedure

In this first article of the series, I will deal with some Adventist texts and events that may shed some light into the Adventist theological mind and experience from the perspective of the “history of effect.” In other words, I will select and analyze some events in Adventist history and their effects in present Adventist history.¹⁴ Since the historical scope is broad, I will limit myself to gathering a few ideas to stir dialogue on the theological and ministerial tasks facing the Adventist Church.

My goal is to explore briefly the nature, cause, and reach of the protestantization of the Adventist mind as an “historically effected” consciousness event¹⁵ that leads to the eclipse of Scripture. This is a pivotal issue in the conversation about the future of Adventist theology and ministerial practice.

The method I will follow is the phenomenological and analytical description of selected texts and events in Adventist and Evangelical history as they relate to the Protestant/Evangelical theological and ministerial paradigm from the epistemological perspective of theological methodology.

To achieve the goal and test our working hypothesis, I will (1) explain briefly the concept of method; (2) advance a working definition of Protestantism; and (3) frame the “protestantization of the Adventist mind” phenomenon from the viewpoint of theological methodology. From this perspective, I will analyze briefly (4) the origins of Adventist consciousness as they came out of Protestantism by embracing the Biblical system of theology; and, (5) the tendency of following generations to neglect theology for the sake of mission. With this background in mind, I will examine a few statements of *Questions on Doctrine*¹⁶ (*QOD*) and

¹⁴ Gadamer explains that according to the principle of the history of the effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) “historical interest is directed not only toward the historical phenomenon and the traditionary work but also, secondarily, toward their effect in history.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second, revised ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 1989), 300.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

¹⁶ Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

*Movement of Destiny*¹⁷ (MOD). In these representative texts, I will reflect on Adventism's move away from its early theological understanding of doctrinal statements, including (6) the evanescence of Adventist theology; (7) the abandonment of the hermeneutical role of the sanctuary doctrine; (8) the use of tradition as new hermeneutical key; and (9) the continuous affirmation of biblical ontology.

4. Method

Method is the activity we follow to reach a goal. Method requires a source of data to work with (cognitive condition), a pattern to process the data (hermeneutical condition), and an end to provide direction and purpose to the methodical activities (teleological condition). In theology, the cognitive condition of method corresponds to the issue of the sources of theology and the revelation-inspiration of Scripture. The hermeneutical condition of method corresponds to the presuppositions assumed in data processing. In addition, the teleological condition of method corresponds to the subject matter or goal theology and ministry seek to achieve. In short, from the perspective of Fundamental Theology there are three conditions of method: the cognitive, hermeneutical, and teleological conditions.¹⁸

We will use the cognitive and hermeneutical conditions of theological method to test the assumed compatibility of Adventist theology and ministerial paradigm with Evangelicalism in general and the Emergent Church in particular. This methodological comparison will help us to answer the questions before us.¹⁹

¹⁷ Leroy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1971).

¹⁸ Description taken from, Fernando Canale, "Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 43, no. 3 (2001): 373-74.

¹⁹ The Emerging Church "began with concerns about church growth and retention of young people in a postmodern culture." Larry D. Pettegrew, "Evangelicalism, Paradigms, and the Emerging Church," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 17, no. 2 (2006): 165. The Emerging Church is a broad eclectic, ecumenical, and experientially minded movement taking place in Postconservative American Evangelicalism. Richard L. Mayhue, "The Emerging Church: Generous Orthodoxy or General Obfuscation.," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 17, no. 2 (2006): 194-203. It seeks to preach the gospel by adapting it to the postmodern culture of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Emergent Church

5. Working Definition of Protestantism

The number of Protestant Churches is hard to calculate. Some estimate there may be over 30,000 Protestant denominations, 7 major blocs, and 156 ecclesiastical traditions.²⁰ Any attempt to describe such a multitude of faith confessions under the general labels “Protestantism” and “Evangelicalism” is incomplete. Recognizing the historical complexity of Protestant communities of faith, in these articles I will use the word “Protestantism” to name the theological system and ministerial paradigm of the segment of Christianity that since the sixteenth century broke away from the Roman Catholic Church.²¹ The issue under discussion is the doctrine of justification by faith based on the *sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and, *Sola Fide* principles. According to Luther, Protestantism centers on the doctrine of justification by faith, the article on which the Church stands or falls.²²

authors doubt Scripture and resist its authority. They follow and build Church traditions. For a very good introduction to the Emergent Church and its main leaders see Justin Taylor, “Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 17-32. For an introduction to the notion of “emerging” as integrating evolutionary process thought and tradition see Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional + Evangelical + Post / Protestant + Liberal / Conservative + Mystical / Poetic + Biblical + Charismatic / Contemplative + Fundamentalist + Calvinist + Anabaptist / Anglican + Methodist + Catholic + Green + Incarnational + Depressed - yet - Hopeful + Emergent + Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 275-88.

²⁰ See for instance, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2nd edition). David Barrett, George Kurian and Todd Johnson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

²¹ I am defining Evangelicalism, then, as “classical evangelicalism” in distinction to “pietistic” or “fundamentalist” evangelicalism. “The first paradigm derives from the confessional and dissenting movements of the sixteenth-century Reformation I shall call classical evangelicalism, while taking care to distinguish between its Reformationist and post-Reformationist (scholastic) phases as well as between its confessional and Anabaptist forms. The second paradigm, pietistic evangelicalism, derives from the eighteenth-century German and English Pietist movements and, in the United States, from the Great Awakenings. The third paradigm, fundamentalist evangelicalism, derives from the modernist-fundamentalist conflict of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Pettegrew, “Evangelicalism, Paradigms, and the Emerging Church,” 162.

²² “Though Luther was not a theological systematizer in the manner of Melancthon or Calvin, he recognized that all aspects of evangelical theology were related to the one article of faith by which the church stands or falls. That is why he said in the preface to this disputation, ‘As you have often heard, most excellent brothers, because that one article concerning justification even by itself creates true theologians, therefore it is indispensable

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

The way in which Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jacobus Arminius understood these principles and their theological center has produced a theological system that differs slightly from the theological system of Roman Catholicism.²³ Yet, as Catholic leadership predicted,²⁴ the Protestant system of theology spun a multiplicity of incompatible theological projects (Denominationalism). Within this general context, I use the word “Evangelicalism” to refer to the coalition of American denominations that in spite of their doctrinal dissonances agree on the principles and center of the Magisterial Reformation,²⁵ and with the Roman Catholic interpretation of the ontological and metaphysical conditions of the hermeneutical principle of theological hermeneutics.

in the church and just as we must often recall it, so we must frequently work on it.” Martin Luther, vol. 34, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1960), 34:147.

²³ Describing the present ecumenical dialogue between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, Evangelical author Mark Noll bunches together in close proximity the theological views of salvation of Roman Catholicism, Lutheran and Calvinistic Augustinianism and Arminian Wesleyanism. “‘The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,’ now seems to fall somewhere between John Wesley’s Arminianism and the Augustinian positions maintained by Martin Luther and John Calvin. All of these depictions of salvation of grace through faith are closer to one another than to other positions commonly held by some evangelicals,” like for instance, Charles Finney and the imitation of Christ theologies of some Anabaptists. Mark A. and Carolyn Nynstrom Noll, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 232.

²⁴ Anthony Lane recognizes that Roman Catholics had a point when at the Diet of Worms Luther was warned that “the *sola Scriptura* principle would give birth to a thousand different interpretations of the Bible and a thousand different churches.” This rhetorical exaggeration has turned out to be an understatement. The price is high. But is it higher than having doctrines such as the recent Marian definitions accepted uncritically by all Christians. Anthony N. S. Lane, “Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

²⁵ “The “new evangelicals” who appeared on the scene at mid century possessed a clear sense of theological identity. Standing apart from fundamentalism in spirit and apart from liberal theology in substance, the young leadership sought to identify itself with the recovery of Christian orthodoxy in the tradition of the Reformers and their heirs.” Mohler, Jr., R. Albert, “‘Evangelical’: What’s in a Name?,” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996).

6. Protestantization of Adventism and Theological Method

The protestantization of Adventism is a phenomenon that springs from the theological methodology used by Adventist leaders. Theology seeks the “understanding of God.”²⁶ Theological method is the process through which one seeks to understand God. Method “requires a material to work with, a pattern to process the material, and an end to provide it with direction and purpose. In theological parlance, the material condition of method corresponds to the issue of revelation-inspiration. The formal condition of method corresponds to hermeneutics. And the final condition of method corresponds to the subject-matter [objective] of theology.”²⁷

The material condition refers to the revealed sources of theology. The material principle of Protestant and American Evangelical theological methodology (classical, modernist and postmodern) is not the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle but the multiplicity of revealed sources they uncritically received from the Roman Catholic theological system.²⁸

Emerging from the profound dissatisfaction of American believers with the conflicting doctrines of traditional Protestant denominations Seventh-day Adventist pioneers adopted the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura*

²⁶ Theology (Gk. θεολογία), is “the ‘science of God.’ Among the Greek Fathers, it comes to have two specific references: it can denote either the doctrine of the Trinity (i.e., of God’s being, as opposed to his dealings with the created order), or it can mean prayer (as it is only in prayer that God is truly known). Later, in the W. it came to mean the science of the divinely revealed religious truths. Its theme is the Being and Nature of God and His creatures and the whole complex of the Divine dispensation from the Fall of Adam to the Redemption through Christ and its mediation to men by His Church, including the so-called natural truths of God, the soul, the moral law, etc., which are accessible to mere reason. Its purpose is the investigation of the contents of belief by means of reason enlightened by faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*) and the promotion of its deeper understanding. In the course of time, theology has developed into several branches, among them dogmatic, historical, and practical theology. The methods of classification of the sub-disciplines, however, fluctuate in different theological systems.” F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1616.

²⁷ Canale, “Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal,” 373.

²⁸ See for instance, Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991). Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

principle²⁹ as the material principle of their theological methodology. Consequently, they were critical of tradition (deconstruction) and thought doctrine from Scriptural foundations. We should note that they inherited this belief (SDA Fundamental Belief 1) not from the Magisterial Reformers but from the English Connection.³⁰

In theological methodology, the formal condition stands next and depends on the material condition. The formal condition consists of the macro hermeneutical principles necessary to interpret Scripture and construct the system of Christian theology (ontology [God and human beings], cosmology, and, metaphysics (the whole of the one and the many)). Evangelicals never used Scripture to define their macro hermeneutical principles. Instead, they implicitly assumed the philosophical principles of Plato and Aristotle as retrieved by Augustine and Aquinas. Unbeknown to most Protestant and Evangelical believers, these ontological principles condition and permeate the Protestant-Evangelical system of theology. They determine the Evangelical understanding of the doctrines of justification, grace, and faith.³¹ For instance, analyzing the causes of the current Evangelical debate on justification, Brian McCormack, an

²⁹ The theological and doctrinal systems of Protestant Reformation does not stand on the *sola, tota*, and *prima Scriptura* principles but on the multiplicities of theological sources of revelation. See for instance, Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, 21-37. Adventists build on the rarely discussed *sola, tota*, and *prima Scriptura* principle. *Sola* (Scripture only) means that we recognize Scripture as the only specific cognitive revelation from God on which all our beliefs should be grounded and tested. *Tota* (Scripture as an indivisible whole) means Adventists see Old and New Testaments as an indivisible whole of divine revelation they need to understand God. Finally, *Prima* (Scripture first) means that the principles and doctrines we discover in the whole Scripture will be applied as hermeneutical presuppositions to judge human philosophy, science, politics, morals, worldviews, religions and actions.

³⁰ As a denomination, the English Connection was “peculiar in that the members subscribe to no creed but the unqualified Word of God. They reckon human creeds and formal statements of faith as mischievous, and tending to bigotry and disunion among God’s people. But no people are more orthodox in their adherence to the Bible as the ‘only infallible rule of faith and practice.’” L. J. Aldrich, “Christians: Christian Connection,” in *A Concise Cyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge: Biblical, Biographical, Geographical, Historical, Practical and Theological*, ed. Elias Benjamin Sanford (Hartford, CT: The S. S. Scranton Co., 1902).

³¹ For a rare example of a leading Evangelical theologian who openly recognizes the indebtedness of Evangelical Theology to classical philosophy see, Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991).

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

Evangelical theologian, recognizes that “the Reformers’ refusal to engage directly issues of theological ontology made them blind to the extent to which they continue to subscribe to ontological assumptions that could, logically, *only fund a Catholic ordering of regeneration and justification.*”³² The Evangelical conception of the Gospel, then, does not stand on biblical but philosophical Roman Catholic principles.

In the early formative years of Adventism (1844-1850),³³ pioneers

accepted the Bible—and the Bible only—as their rule of faith and duty; the law of God as immutable (including the binding obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath); the imminent personal Advent of Christ; the conditional immortality of the soul; and the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary after 1844 in the blotting out of sins. Furthermore, they gained impetus to spread these beliefs by reading the message of the third angel of Revelation 14 as descriptive of Sabbatarian Adventists to reestablish the Sabbath and prepare the remnant ready for Christ’s Second Coming.³⁴

Adventist leaders and Ellen White experienced the theological revolution of the early formative years in different ways. On the one side, although Adventist leadership felt they had “a harmonious system of truth to present,”³⁵ they were probably unaware their theological discoveries necessarily implied a radical departure from the Evangelical interpretation of the macro hermeneutical principles of theological methodology. Besides, the harmonious system they discovered was theologically underdeveloped and left unexplained methodologically. Consequently, the theological revolution of the early formative years slowly disappeared as a way of doing theology and remained frozen as “brain” “distinctive” doctrines.

³² Bruce McCormack, “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

³³ According to Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf Adventism’s “formative years” span from 1844 to 1888. Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2 ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), 11.

³⁴ Gary Land, ed. *Adventism in America: A History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 40-41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

On the other side, Ellen White understood the initial doctrinal agreement of the early formative years hermeneutically, as “the pillars of the faith.”³⁶ She thought that in various levels, and ways, the biblical pillars of the Adventist Faith should work as the hermeneutical conditions of Adventist theological methodology.³⁷ More specifically, she understood the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary Doctrine and consistently applied it while interpreting Scripture and constructing Christian teachings. For her, the sanctuary was not only “the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844,” but also the key that “opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.”³⁸ More specifically, “The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith.”³⁹

These simple observations on Evangelical and Adventist theological methodologies may help Adventists to understand two pivotal points

³⁶ “The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels’ messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, ‘The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.’ One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary.” Ellen White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 30-31.

³⁷ “As a people, we are to stand firm on the platform of eternal truth that has withstood test and trial. We are to hold to the sure pillars of our faith. The principles of truth that God has revealed to us are our only true foundation. They have made us what we are. The lapse of time has not lessened their value. It is the constant effort of the enemy to remove these truths from their setting, and to put in their place spurious theories. He will bring in everything that he possibly can to carry out his deceptive designs. But the Lord will raise up men of keen perception, who will give these truths their proper place in the plan of God,” Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols., Christian Home Library (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 1:201.

³⁸ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association., 1907), 423.

³⁹ Ellen White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991), 347.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

involved in their relations with Evangelicals. First, Luther's revolutionary insights on justification, Calvin's systematic construction, Arminius' slight modifications to Calvin's system (Divine foreknowledge and human free will), and (4) John Wesley's inclusion of sanctification still stand on the basis of Roman Catholic interpretation of the material and hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology. Second, Protestant theologians have never applied the *sola Scriptura* principle to the hermeneutical principles of their theological method. Consequently, Protestantism has never produced a *sola Scriptura* Systematic Theology.

7. Coming Out of Protestantism: From Traditions to the Biblical Theological System

Adventism originated as an ecumenical movement unified through Bible study and theological discovery.⁴⁰ They were disappointed with Protestant doctrines because they found them standing on traditions rather than Scripture.⁴¹ They realized denominational teachings divided Christians because the teachings stem from human traditions rather than from Biblical revelation. Coming out of various Protestant denominations Adventist pioneers united in the conviction that God's revelation in Scripture does not contradict itself. They were not the first nor the only ones to arrive at this conviction. For instance, Luther valiantly defied Roman Catholic traditional teachings on salvation with biblical teachings.

However, Adventist pioneers were more consistent in their rejection of tradition and embracement of Scripture. As a result, early Adventists discovered the ontological and metaphysical keys to the inner logic of biblical thinking in the Sanctuary and the historicist interpretation of Daniel's prophecies. We seldom realize that Adventism, as an ecumenical movement, came into existence because of this revolutionary hermeneutical discovery and its all-embracing theological and practical consequences.

⁴⁰ Gerard P. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 48-50.

⁴¹ After the early formative years during the 1850's, Sabbatarian Adventists who belonged to various Protestant denominations realized that because Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations followed the spirit and ideas of the world their doctrinal positions and spirit were corrupted. *Ibid.*, 179-84. Consequently, they came to the conviction they no longer belonged to them.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

On this basis, Adventists became God's eschatological remnant. His visible church on earth was to be the theological center and missionary agency preparing the world for Christ's second coming. The Adventist final warning message includes presenting the real Christ of Scripture to all Christians who belong to denominations that persist in constructing their understanding of Christ from tradition and culture.

For more than a century, Adventists understood that their God given mission (the teleological condition of theological method) included not only the world in general but also Christian believers in the Roman Catholic and Protestant /Evangelical Churches.⁴² The preaching of the gospel to the whole world in the context of the end time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation included helping other Christians to move from a tradition based understanding of Christianity to a fully Biblically grounded personal relation with Christ.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century a paradigm shift in Adventist theological methodology had already started. By overemphasizing the concrete achievement of the teleological condition of Adventist theology (the mission of the Church to the world), Adventist leaders unintentionally shifted from a theological to a practical mindset. As theological understanding became progressively less important, Adventists soon abandoned the critical deconstructive first methodological step early pioneers applied when reading theological materials. The conviction that

⁴² Ellen White explains, "Babylon is said to be 'the mother of harlots.' By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14, announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore, it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation God calls His people to come out of Babylon. According to this scripture, many of God's people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? . . . Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome's example of iniquitous connection with 'the kings of the earth'—the state churches, by their relation to secular governments; and other denominations, by seeking the favor of the world. And the term "Babylon"—confusion—may be appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories." White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*, 382-83.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

Evangelical theologians can be trusted simply because they claim they ground their doctrines firmly on Scripture replaced critical analysis of the Evangelical theological tradition.

We can trace the beginnings of this paradigm shift in theological methodology back, for instance, to Waggoner and Jones' views on justification, sanctification, and perfection. They borrowed from Wesley's theology probably unaware that Wesley's thought stood on non-Biblical Roman Catholic ontological teachings, the result being that they propagated a Wesleyan-type perfection similar to the Holiness movement.⁴³ Bull and Lockhart correctly point out that Ellen White did not share their assumed ontological presuppositions but worked from what they perceive to be "eschatological presuppositions."⁴⁴ The difference between Wesley and White, however, is not between ontology and eschatology as they suggest, but between different views of the ontology of God and human beings (hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology).

On one hand, by believing Wesley's theological positions were correct, Waggoner and Jones's views on salvation and perfection implicitly assumed Roman Catholic ontological views. On the other hand, by assuming that Scripture tells us the truth about reality (ontology) Ellen White's views on salvation and perfection sprung from biblical ontological teachings.

This example lends credence to Bull and Lockhart's affirmation that conservative evangelicalism has long been the "primary point of reference" for Adventism.⁴⁵ If they are right, then, the protestantization of Adventism has shaped the thinking, spirituality, and mission of the church for over a century.⁴⁶

The nature of the protestantization of Adventism is theological. In other words, it refers to the way in which Adventists think. Accordingly, it

⁴³ Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 91.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁶ Bull and Lockhart consider the Adventist dependence upon Evangelical thinking to have existed throughout its entire existence. "Adventist theology has rather developed in parallel with that of the mainstream. It was at its most distinctive during a period of great diversity; it became fundamentalist in the era of fundamentalism, softened with the raise of evangelicalism, and affirmed up again as society became conservative once more." *Ibid.*, 108.

generates and exists in the mind and spirit of concrete Adventist believers who give speeches and write articles and books. We need to have in mind that the concrete ways in which Adventists think on theological issues stems from the way in which they explicitly or implicitly define the various components of theological method, specially, its material and hermeneutical conditions (see above on page 136).

The goal of the following three sections is to sketch briefly the existence and nature of the protestantization of Adventism in Doctrines, Biblical theology, and ministerial paradigm.

8. Neglecting Theological Understanding to Finish the Mission of the Church

Sometime after the early formative years of Adventism, passion for missions progressively replaced the original spiritual passion for understanding God from Scripture.⁴⁷ Doctrines, as church theoretical statements, replaced the spiritual convictions that grew from studying the Bible as their creed. This subtle change did not happen overnight. Progressively, Adventists spent more time and money in theoretical exposition of their belief system to sharpen their chosen tool for Church growth (overemphasis on the teleological condition of theological methodology). They implicitly assumed that little Bible study was necessary for Church growth or Church unity. Gradually, they came to rely more on Ellen White's writings and less on their own personal theological understanding of Scripture.⁴⁸ A missionary doctrinarian tradition was in the making. Voided of a biblical theological understanding, Doctrines became empty shells that reached the brain but failed to touch and transform the

⁴⁷ Probably, this change of emphasis began to develop sometime during the formative years after the organization of Adventism as a Christian denomination (1863-1888). See, Schwarz, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 130-45.

⁴⁸ "By the late 1880s the Seventh-day Adventist leaders seemed to have forgotten the radical, biblical, *sola scriptura* roots of the founders of their message. After 40 years of denominational existence some of the leadership were more than willing to use sources of doctrinal authority that the founders of their message would have rejected." (Knight explains this as reliance in inner Adventist traditions not to the traditions of Protestantism.) George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 93.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

inner spirit.⁴⁹ Adventists continue to experience doctrines as “brain knowledge” in the twenty-first century.

Adventists became convinced they possessed the truth or at least enough truth to fulfill their God-given eschatological mission. Leaders believed the mission of the church does not require theological research because it detracts from missionary action. Instead of using and further developing the theological vision and system early pioneers discovered in Scripture, new generations of pastors became superficial communicators more interested in wining a debate than understanding God through Scripture.⁵⁰

Thus, theological and spiritual understanding became ever more superficial or nonexistent. Doctrines had replaced theology and spirituality. A macro shift in the Adventist mind had taken place. Adventists were ready to live parallel lives. On one hand, they would continue to preach the “orthodox” doctrines of the early pioneers without understanding them theologically or receiving their spiritual power. On the other, they were ready to gain theological understanding by retrieving teachings from the evangelical tradition. The general conviction that missions does not require theology led to the vanishing of Adventist theology.

⁴⁹ Consider the following honest confession of LeRoy Froom, the main leader behind *Questions on Doctrine*. “I had always been an ardent Adventist—unswerving in loyalty to our fundamental doctrines. I was fascinated with the sweep of Bible prophecy, and was always seeking to present the best possible case for Adventism before the world—but much, I fear, after the fashion of a lawyer presenting a case in the courtroom. I worked hard and profoundly believed in the certainty and soundness of the Advent Message and Movement. Theoretically, I believed in Righteousness by Faith—as a doctrine. Nevertheless, to me Adventism had been to a large degree allegiance to an impressive system of coordinated doctrinal truths. It was fidelity to a message. My Christianity was primarily a devoted mental assent to a beautiful, logical, Heaven-born body of abstract, largely detached Bible truths. To their proclamation I had given myself without reservation.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 396-97.

⁵⁰ “The assumption behind the scholarly achievements of Adventist fundamentalism was that, if only a topic were examined thoroughly enough, the Adventist position would be vindicated. It was this assumption that underlay the dialogue with evangelicals that led to *Questions on Doctrine*. But it was here that the church finally overreached itself, for *Questions on Doctrine* raised uncertainties about what Adventists actually believed that made the evangelical era that followed the most destabilizing in the church’s history.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 106.

**9. The Evanescence of Adventist Theology:
Questions on Doctrine**

Nevertheless, where do we find evidence of this phenomenon? Bull and Lockhart are aware of how difficult it is to find “Adventist theology.”⁵¹ In the absence of theology, Adventist historian George Knight helps us to find doctrines. He explains that although *QOD* was written, “to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism” . . . it became “the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.”⁵² I am aware of the limitations involved in comparing doctrines in the absence of their philosophical basis, theological understandings and exegetical contents. With these limitations in mind, we will explore the way in which a small group of General Conference leaders headed by distinguished scholar LeRoy Froom understood the relation of Adventist and Evangelical doctrines.

The leaders who wrote *QOD* had experienced, probably in different ways and to differing degrees, the macro shift in theological methodology described above. As Adventists communicated Scripture but did not seek to understand its contents, theologically and spiritually, they lost the hermeneutical vision that the early pioneers and Ellen White had found in the Sanctuary Doctrine. Let us consider briefly how *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), and its sequel by LeRoy Froom in *Movement of Destiny* (1971) lost sight of the sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical key to the Adventist system of theology and doctrines.

⁵¹ It is difficult “finding” Adventist Theology. “Is it composed of ideas preached from the pulpit, published by the press, or discussed among academic colleagues? Is it represented in authorized publication like *Questions on Doctrine* or the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*? Some beliefs such as the Sanctuary doctrine are officially promulgated but may be doubted by Adventists academics. Others, such as the complete inerrancy of the Scriptures, are probably believed by most church members but not officially endorsed. Many elements of the church’s eschatology are carefully taught to would-be converts but play no active part in the internal theological life of the church. There are, accordingly, discrepancies both between the beliefs emphasized in internal discussion and those expounded in outside evangelism, and between the ideas that circulate in various parts of the church’s organization.” Ibid., 99-100.

⁵² George R. Knight, “Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition,” in *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Question on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, ed. George Knight, Adventist Classical Library (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xiii.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

Contrary to the perceptions of many readers, the contents of *QOD* did not sell out Adventism to evangelical theology. George Knight correctly concludes that *QOD* “is almost entirely made up of clear restatements of traditional Adventist theology that are phrased in such a way that the book remained faithful to Adventist beliefs while at the same time speaking in the language that those outside of Adventism could understand more easily.”⁵³

However, we find traces of the ongoing protestantization of the Adventist mind in the answer to the first question: What doctrines do Adventists share with other Christians? The authors of *QOD* answered that, with the exception of few doctrinal points (the existence of the Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy, the Three Angel Messages, and the Seal of God and Mark of the Beast)⁵⁴ Adventists believe Evangelical doctrines⁵⁵ on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.⁵⁶ Later, Froom identified these doctrines as the “eternal

⁵³ Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders Bible Teachers and Editors, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, ed. George Knight, 2 ed., Adventist Classical Library (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xxix. “The one exception to that generalization is on the human nature of Christ, in which the treatment represents a substantial shift in understanding.” (Ibid.)

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

⁵⁵ “LeRoy Edwin Froom was the first to acknowledge and interpret the theological changes that have taken place within Adventism.” According to Froom, explain Bull and Lockhart, “the Adventist Church had gradually been led toward a complete understanding of the Christian gospel after a century in which the important truths, such as the Sabbath, had been accompanied by the misapprehension of the doctrine of Christ and his saving work. This process, had, Froom argued, achieved the alignment of Adventism with evangelical Christianity.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 103.

⁵⁶ The first question the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* answered inquires about the doctrines “Seventh-day Adventists hold in common with Christians in general, and in what aspects of Christian thought do they differ.” *Questions on Doctrine* affirms that Adventists hold in common with conservative Christians and the historical Protestant creeds twenty-one doctrinal points and differ in five. Adventists agree with Evangelicals in 19 doctrinal issues, such as the doctrines of God, the Trinity, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Revelation and Inspiration of Scripture, Atoning death of Christ, Justification, Regeneration, and Sanctification. Yet, because Evangelicals do not agree among themselves in all doctrinal points, Adventists can only agree with them by taking one side of 12 controversial doctrines like, for instance, Predestination and Free Will, The Decalogue as not changed or abolished, Baptism by immersion, Conditional Immortality, Annihilationism, The Seven-day Sabbath, Tithing, and

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

verities”⁵⁷ essential to the Christian gospel.⁵⁸ This answer reveals that the initial step in the protestantization of the Adventism had already taken place in the minds of Adventist leaders. From it, the far more advanced and explicit protestantization Adventism experiences at the beginning of the twenty first century grew.

Because the answer superficially enumerates similarities in doctrinal issues neglecting to address the actual divergent theological positions, systems, and theological methods embraced by Adventists and Protestant denominations, contemporary readers may arrive at incorrect conclusions. They may infer that Adventists and Evangelicals share the same theological understanding in all Doctrinal points with the exception of a few minor eschatological issues. Moreover, they may also deduce that these minor divergences do not affect the understanding of the “eternal verities,” that

Creation in six Weeks. The five distinctive Adventist doctrinal points are the existence of the Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy, the Three Angel Messages, and the Seal of God and Mark of the Beast. Editors, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, 21-24.

⁵⁷ “Verity means “truth”—in conformance with fact and reality. Eternal Verities are simply eternal truths, but of a specific character. They spring from God, not from man, in the context of this volume the expression refers to those ageless principles, provisions, and Divine Personalities that are the foundation and superstructure of the divine plan of redemption. They are the core and content of the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14:6.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 33.

⁵⁸ “The Eternal Verities embrace the basic principles and provisions for the salvation of man, as springing from and centering in the three persons of the Godhead, or Trinity. They are eternal because God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal. And eternal because the plan of redemption was devised back in eternity, before the creation of this world and the entrance of sin, with the Lamb of God slain in inviolable covenant, before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). The Eternal Verities embrace everything needful for carrying out that sacred compact—the Incarnation of the Son, His sinless life and vicarious, atoning death, triumphant resurrection and priestly mediation, and His glorious return to reclaim His own. Central in it all is His own spotless righteousness with which He clothes and transforms the repentant sinner...Component factors in the Eternal Verities embrace regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. And being filled, indwelt, kept, and enabled by the Holy Spirit. These are all rooted in God’s love, grace, compassion, and power. These are the conquering provisions and contravening measures to overcome sin, and ultimately to banish it from the universe. So the eternal Verities are simply the Everlasting Gospel in essence and operation.” *Ibid.*, 34 (emphasis added).

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

is, most of the content of Evangelical systematic theology.⁵⁹ From this simple answer to a complex question an increasing number of Adventists today assume their beliefs are Evangelical, notably, the central doctrines of Christianity. One can see why they feel free to use Evangelical books to learn their theology and ministerial paradigm.

In *MOD*, his sequel to *QOD* for Adventist readership, Froom explained that the “separative” doctrines were a “distinct handicap” of early Adventists (the “little flock” or Church of the Remnant). They made Adventists different from Evangelicals and kept them distant from them.⁶⁰

10. New Role of the Sanctuary Doctrine: From Hermeneutical Key to “Embracing Doctrinal System: and “Eschatological Consummation.”

Bull and Lockhart correctly identify Froom as the pivotal thinker in the new Adventist evangelicalism,⁶¹ and the fact that the protestantization of Adventism springs from a new view on the Sanctuary. However, they incorrectly think that Adventism becomes evangelical because *QOD* abandoned Christ’s work of atonement in the Heavenly Sanctuary siding, thereby, with the Protestant Evangelical view of a completed atonement at the cross. They base their incorrect representation on *QOD*’s affirmation that the heavenly ministry of Christ is the application of the benefits of the

⁵⁹ “While it is true that twenty-first-century differs from contemporary evangelicalism in only a few beliefs, such doctrine-by-doctrine comparison is not altogether helpful in establishing the character and historical position of Adventist theology. Within Christianity, otherwise diverse groups may share superficially similar theological positions for entirely fortuitous reasons, and many of the historical studies by Adventists have investigated parallels rather than connections.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 101.

⁶⁰ “We started out as a ‘Little Flock,’ or Church of the Remnant, under a distinct handicap. In our formative stage we as a people were clear and united on our special separative doctrines—the ‘testing truths’ that made and have kept us distinct from all other Christian bodies. This was because of our special ‘Present Truth’ message for the world today. These specific doctrinal truths of the Message were sound and true, and have never had to be materially altered. They are sound and abiding as regards their intrinsic verity and latter-day application.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 35 (emphasis added).

⁶¹ “Froom himself was the pivotal figure between the old fundamentalism and the new evangelicalism, the second and third stages of the church’s theological development.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 106.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

atonement at the cross.⁶² Bull and Lockhart further argue this point by noting that *QOD* “scrupulously avoids reference for Christ’s atoning work in the sanctuary.” They are reflecting the view of later Adventist authors that reject the Sanctuary doctrine. However, on this point *QOD* is clear and concise.

Thus the atoning sacrifice, having been completed on Calvary, must now be applied and appropriated to those who are heirs of salvation. Our Lord’s ministry [which takes place in the heavenly sanctuary] is thus involved in the great work of atonement. So as we think of the mighty sweep of the atonement, in its provisions and its efficacy, it is seen to be vastly more comprehensive than many have thought.⁶³

Yet, in *Movement of Destiny*, Froom singles out the doctrine of the Sanctuary as the most separative Adventist doctrine. According to him, neither the early Church nor the Reformation taught this doctrine.⁶⁴

⁶² “In *Questions on Doctrine*, this belief is reinterpreted. The authors advise that ‘when, therefore, one hears an Adventist say, or reads in Adventist literature—even in the writings of Ellen G. White—that Christ is making atonement now, it should be understood that we mean simply that Christ is now making application of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement he made on the cross’ [*Questions on Doctrine* 354-355]. The distinction is subtle. First, the atonement is made, then its benefits are mediated. Both elements are part of the work of salvation, but only the first, according to *Questions on Doctrine*, is in itself and act of atonement. In Adventist theology, the difference was far from trivial, for the doctrine of the Sanctuary had been developed by O. R. L. Cosier on the understanding that Christ ‘did not begin the work of making the atonement, whatever the nature of that work may be, till after this ascension, when by his own blood he entered his heavenly sanctuary for us.’ In order to show that October 22, 1844, marked a second phase of Christ’s heavenly ministry, Crosier argued that there were exact parallels between Christ’s work and that of the Old Testament priesthood. *Questions on Doctrine* made the analogy a great deal less exact. For although it refers to the period since 1844 as “the antitypical day of Atonement,” it scrupulously avoids reference for Christ’s atoning work in the sanctuary” *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶³ Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 351.

⁶⁴ “All other major doctrines that we hold and teach—seventh-day Sabbath, Conditional Immortality, Second Advent, Spirit of Prophecy, prophetic interpretation, premillennialism, Righteousness by Faith, immersion, tithing, et cetera—have all been held by others, one group or more, in whole or in part, either in the past or the present. But neither in the early church (when and while the apostolic teachings were still intact), nor in the Reformation church (when a large portion of the apostolic positions had been recovered and restored), was the Heavenly Sanctuary truth taught, *with its ministering Priest officiating in two distinct phases of that mediatorial service*, with the *second* phase comprising God’s great present Judgment Hour activities.” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 541 (emphasis in the

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

Nonetheless, he did not suggest Adventists should abandon their “separative” doctrine of the Sanctuary but sought to soften its divisiveness by ignoring its hermeneutical role. So, how did Froom deal with the separative doctrine of the Sanctuary?

He affirmed the doctrine but redefined its function. Froom believed that “any weakening or denial or submerging of the Sanctuary truth is not only a serious but a crucial matter. Any deviation or dereliction therefrom strikes at the heart of Adventism, and challenges its very integrity.”⁶⁵ Thus, he believed in the doctrine of the Sanctuary but no longer as the macro hermeneutical principle, that leads to the discovery of the Biblical system of truth. Instead, he argued that the Sanctuary was the light that illumined the precarious position after the Great Disappointment, and is “the all-encompassing essence of Adventism,”⁶⁶ the doctrine that “embraces” or contains the complete system of Adventist beliefs,⁶⁷ and, the broad outline of the great eschatological consummation.⁶⁸

In its new redefined role, the doctrine of the Sanctuary continues to have a “central place in our distinctive, identifying emphasis for this

original).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 542.

⁶⁶ According to Froom, the Sanctuary is the essence of Adventism. “It is consequently incumbent upon us clearly to understand and then to proclaim it [Sanctuary Doctrine] in and through our message to men. And for this very simple reason: It is the all-encompassing essence of Adventism.” *Ibid.*, 542 (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁷ According to Froom, Adventists “were raised up by God—and came into being in direct historical response—to emphasize this one all-embracing Present Truth, that in itself involves and constitutes ‘a complete system of truth’ (*GC*, 423). All other essential truths are actually embraced within it—the moral law, Sabbath, sacrificial Atonement, High-Priestly Mediation, Judgment, Justification and Sanctification, Righteousness by Faith, final rewards and punishments, Second Advent, and total destruction of the incorrigibly wicked.” *Ibid.*, 542. Note that even when Froom quotes from Ellen White’s statement about the Sanctuary “opening to view a complete system of truth connected and harmonious,” in this passage he redefines Ellen White’s view of the complete system of truth by identifying it with his concept of “all-embracing Present truth.”

⁶⁸ “As to the sanctuary light, this was clearly Bible truth that explained the very things that those who has passed through the Great Disappointment most needed to know. It revealed the nature of the mistake involved in their 1844 misconception. It likewise illumined their current precarious position. And in bold strokes it outlined the destined future events—on to the Great Consummation.” *Ibid.*, 80.

time,”⁶⁹ and it continues to define our “uniqueness” by being the reason that justifies our existence as a Christian denomination.⁷⁰ Consequently, we should proclaim the Investigative Judgment as “Present Truth.”⁷¹

Following *QOD*'s lead, Froom's subtle redefinition of the sanctuary doctrine's role from “hermeneutical key” to “distinctive doctrine” had far-reaching consequences in theological method, system, teachings, and ministerial praxis. From it, the progressive protestantization of Adventism builds and nourishes.

Although they did not properly identify the cause of Adventist protestantization, Bull and Lockhart understood that “*Questions on Doctrine* left the doctrine of the Sanctuary intact, but it began to erode its foundations. What was intended to be merely a cosmetic change ended up disturbing the equilibrium of the entire Adventist theological system.”⁷² In reality, *QOD* did not erode the foundations of the doctrine of the Sanctuary but its hermeneutical role in the construction of the Adventist theological system.

11. The Evangelical “Gospel” as New Hermeneutical Key

How did Adventism replace the Sanctuary and its hermeneutical role? What is the new implicit hermeneutical key in Adventism after *QOD*?

Froom was convinced that the Sanctuary doctrine fits perfectly within Christian doctrinal tradition. The Sanctuary doctrine, he explains, “is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith.” It seems that Froom was convinced that the Adventist system of Theology embraced in the

⁶⁹ According to Froom, the Sanctuary is the center of our identity. “It consequently behooves us not only truly to believe and teach the Sanctuary truth today but to give it central place in our distinctive, identifying emphasis of this time.” *Ibid.*, 542.

⁷⁰ Froom clarified this concept by saying that if there is no ministration of Christ in heaven “we have no justifiable place in the religious world, no distinctive denominational mission and message, no excuse for functioning as a separate church today.” *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Identifying the Sanctuary doctrine with the Pre Advent Investigative Judgment Froom declares: “We recognize and proclaim it [The Investigative Judgment in Heaven] not only as due for promulgation today but now as a present actuality, mandatory in today's heralding of the Everlasting Gospel in its last-day setting and emphasis. We rightly consider it a tremendous Present Truth Imperative.” *Ibid.*, 542.

⁷² Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 85.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

Sanctuary is the logical and inevitable consummation of the historical Protestant Evangelical Faith.⁷³

Since historically Adventists understood the eternal verities of the Gospel in various ways, Froom called on them to accept Evangelical tradition and teachings on God, Christ, and the Gospel. In his own words, allegiance to the Eternal Verities of the gospel “. . . has been the heart of the true Church’s faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today.”⁷⁴

Thus, in many ways, Froom implicitly assumed the Gospel as the new hermeneutical principle in Adventism. As we have seen above, the sanctuary doctrine continues to be an important distinctive eschatological emphasis but leaders no longer conceived or used it as the hermeneutical key to understand all Christian doctrines including the Gospel. At least after *QOD* the Gospel as understood by the Evangelical theological tradition became by default the implicit hermeneutical key to interpret all doctrines including eschatology and the sanctuary.

This change in the understanding of the hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology requires a change in the material condition. Since Evangelical theology does not build on Scripture alone, progressively Adventists no longer developed their theological understanding from Scripture alone but from the multiplicity of theological source patterns used by Evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians.

⁷³ “Consequently, the Sanctuary truth is not a strange, peculiar, abnormal, distorted, indefensible doctrine—or simply and expedient to explain away the Disappointment episode of 1844, as some antagonists have contended. *It [the Sanctuary truth] is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith.*” Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 542-43 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁴ “*We were not at first united on certain of the saving provisions and Divine Persons of the Everlasting Gospel, in relation to the Third Angel’s Message in its final phase and culminating witness. There were variant views of the Godhead, the Deity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and on aspects of the Atonement, as well. Yet allegiance to these saving truths—the Eternal Verities—has been the heart of the true Church’s faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today.*” *Ibid.*, 35 (emphasis added).

12. Adventist Theology Facing the Ontological Divide

Yet, to their credit, Froom and some conservative Biblical Adventists did not surrender to Evangelical tradition all the way. They did not take their ontological assumptions from tradition but from Scripture. They rightly understood the reality of the Sanctuary from a biblical ontology. This means that they did not spiritualize the Sanctuary after the pattern of Platonic timelessness but affirmed the spatial-temporal reality of the Sanctuary and Christ's ministry in heaven.⁷⁵

Froom implicitly brings up the ontological foundations of Theology, "The conclusion is inescapable: Truly we have a real Christ, who made a real sacrifice, through a real death. In addition, after a real resurrection and ascension He became our real High Priest, ministering in a real Sanctuary (tabernacle, or temple), in a real heaven, effectuating a real redemption. And he is coming to gather us unto Himself in a real Second Advent. There is nothing more real in the universe than this inexorable sequence—every phase of it, including the Sanctuary."⁷⁶ Thus, we see Froom did not spiritualize the reality of God's acts and the heavenly sanctuary according to the timeless ontology of Christian tradition but rather reaffirms the biblical historical ontology. This reveals an inner inconsistency and tension in Froom's doctrinal view because the application of the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel as hermeneutical key requires the rejection of biblical ontology and the implicit or explicit adoption of ontological principles originating in Plato and interpreted by Augustine and Aquinas. When a Platonic ontology of God implicitly or explicitly replaces the biblical ontology of God, the protestantization of Adventism becomes complete and is ready to become modernist and ecumenical.

13. Conclusion of Part 1

In our quest to understand the progressive eclipse of Scripture in Adventist thinking and practice, we have discovered that the

⁷⁵ "The testimony of the Word—explains Froom—is that the Temple in heaven is a supernal reality, a divinely revealed actuality—as real as God Himself, or the New Jerusalem, or the Lamb of God who now, as Heavenly Priest, ministers therein—and with all redemptive activities springing therefore. *It is the established Command Center from whence all these sublime undertakings originate and are conducted.*" *Ibid.*, 544 (emphasis original).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 559.

CANALE: THE ECLIPSE OF SCRIPTURE

sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle is the ground on which Christ's Remnant Church stands or falls. The application of this principle requires that the Church should interpret Scripture from Scriptural presuppositions (Scripture interprets itself). Early Adventism stood on the *sola Scriptura* ground because they interpreted the whole of Scripture in the light of the Sanctuary doctrine. This marked the dawn of Scripture in the incipient discovery of an historical understanding of Christian theology, and led Adventists to come out of Protestantism.

Our brief review of some selected signposts in the Adventist experience half a century ago indicates that sometime along the way the eclipse of Scripture began. Fromm's views on Adventist doctrines reveal that by the middle of the twentieth century Adventist leadership at the General Conference had forgotten the hermeneutical methodological role that the Sanctuary Doctrine played in the minds of early Adventist pioneers. They no longer consistently used the doctrine of the Sanctuary as the hermeneutical "key" to biblical interpretation and theological reflection.⁷⁷ Instead, the Evangelical interpretation of the "Gospel" became by default the operative hermeneutical principle of Adventist thinking. Few realize that the Evangelical interpretation of the Gospel as the new hermeneutical key (hermeneutical condition of theological method) stands on tradition and implies the rejection of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle thereby eclipsing Scripture with culture and tradition.

This unintentional and imperceptible macro hermeneutical shift lies behind the progressive eclipse of Scripture in twenty first century Adventism. Yet, Adventist leadership remained nonetheless "conservative," "biblical" and "orthodox." However, by looking at the conservative contents of Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, many readers⁷⁸ may easily

⁷⁷ White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, 423.

⁷⁸ Dale Ratzlaff, editor of *Proclamation*, considers that the Adventist Church is recanting from the Evangelical position taken in *Questions on Doctrine*. According to Ratzlaff: "Most Evangelicals today have a very limited and often erroneous understanding of Adventist doctrine and practice. As you read this you may be thinking, 'Aren't Adventists just Evangelicals who worship on Saturday? Didn't Walter Martin conclude that Adventism was not a cult?' Few know that the documentation the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) leaders gave to Dr. Martin to convince him that Seventh-day Adventism was not a cult is now rejected by many in the SDA church. Many believe if Dr. Martin were alive today, his conclusion would be different." Dale Ratzlaff, "Lam Publications, Llc," <http://www.ratzlaf.com/>.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

arrive at the same incorrect conclusion Bull and Lockhart advanced. According to them, at the beginning of the twenty first century the official affirmation of the doctrine of the Sanctuary is gradually undermining the evangelical influence of *QOD*.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Bull and Lockhart fail to recognize their own observation that “the legacy of Adventist evangelicalism is experiential rather than doctrinal.” (See, note 11 above). In fact, the official reaffirmation of the doctrine of the Sanctuary (Froom’s doctrinal reinterpretation) only reaches the brain of Adventist believers falling short from shaping their hermeneutics, spirituality (way of thinking and acting), or mission.

In turn, this paradigm shift in Adventist hermeneutics and thinking strengthens the longstanding conviction of many believers that Adventism agrees with the Evangelical understanding of Christian doctrines with the exception of the Sabbath and a few details in eschatology. Under the influence of these ideas, we can understand why several generations of Adventists have not been able to see in what sense they could claim to be the “remnant” church—the only true visible church on earth. The generalized view that Adventism and all Evangelical denominations make up the visible church of God in our times detracts from the missionary passion that moved earlier generations to bring the remnant message around the world. Thus, the underdevelopment of Adventist theology and the paradigm shift in its theological hermeneutics opens the way for Adventists to merge with the Emerging Church movement intensifying the eclipsing of Scripture in Adventism.

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⁷⁹ “Just as *Questions on Doctrine* eventually unraveled the Sanctuary doctrine, so the reaffirmation of the Sanctuary doctrine gradually undermined *Questions on Doctrine*.” Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-Day Adventism and the American Dream*, 97.

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