

Vision and Mission–Part 2: Christ, Spirituality, and the Emerging Remnant Church

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This is the second article in a series of two. Realizing that the danger of disunity challenges Adventism and its mission we embarked on a journey seeking for answers that might help the emerging Remnant Church to achieve theological and spiritual unity and fulfill her God given mission. In the first article we traced the main cause threatening theological and spiritual unity to the eclipse of Scripture in the mind and life of Adventist leaders and members. A brief survey of our history showed Adventism originated as its formative pioneers discovered the biblical vision that led them to recognize and articulate the harmonious theological system of biblical truth. After sketching the contents and function of the vision and surveying its role historically we realized that an increasing superficiality and disregard in Bible study slowly led Adventism to lose it, thereby fragmenting its unity and weakening its mission. This analysis suggested a going back to Scripture may reverse this situation.

In this article we continue our journey exploring the direct connection that exists between vision and everyday life by (1) considering what it means to live out the vision spiritually and the difference its various interpretations have on the spiritual and missionary life of the church. After (2) exploring the oft-forgotten vision-spirituality-church-mission connection operating within the

church, we will (3) survey the way in which it relates to the neutralization of Scripture. Finally, we will (4) seek ways to maximize the church's rich human resources to overcome the neutralization of Scripture and unleash the power of God's Word on a personal, institutional and global level.

1. Living the Vision

To understand how the vision guides and shapes our everyday lives, we must grasp the understanding of spirituality that the vision grounds. Thus, before we can explore the vision, we need to better understand the human heart (or inner spirit), which guides our choices and thus leads our everyday lives, because in Christianity, as in Adventism, our spirituality provides the only real ground for the existence and unity of the Church.

a. What is spirituality?

A cursory glance at newsstands or popular TV shows indicates that spirituality is a hot topic. There is a form of spirituality tailored to suit almost everyone—agnostic, atheist or religious. Clearly, the definition of spirituality remains broad and ambiguous¹ meaning different things to different people. The dictionary states that spirituality is “the quality or state of being spiritual.” “Spiritual,” in turn, means something “relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit: incorporeal relating to supernatural beings or phenomena.”² With this definition in mind we can identify the basic components necessary to experience spirituality as phenomenon (event in our lives). You can visualize them in figure 1, below.

¹ Bruce Manners, “Developing an Adventist Concept of Spirituality,” *Ministry* (April 2008), 16.

² *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913), edited by Noah Porter, electronic edition by Babylon 2008-2010.

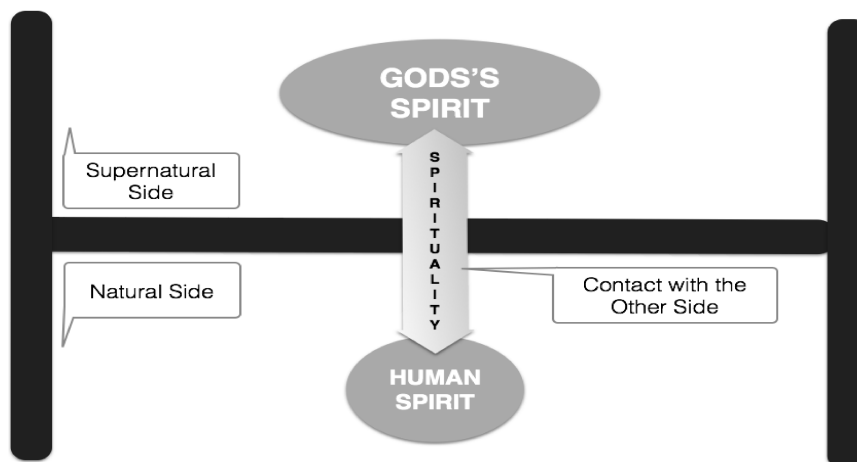


Figure 1: Phenomenon of Spirituality, Components

Although this graphic may be self-explanatory, let me walk you through it just to make sure we are on the same page. God and human beings (as spiritual realities) are connected by a spiritual link (spirituality). These components then appear within a wider framework represented by lines resembling a football goalpost. The sector above the horizontal post represents the supernatural side of reality we call heaven and the lower section the natural side we call the world. We need to keep in mind the obvious distinction between the natural and supernatural sides of reality involved in spirituality because it is critical to understanding the role of the Adventist hermeneutical vision in spirituality and the church. But before we do, let's first explore how the classical Christian vision (based on Greek philosophy and perpetuated by Christian tradition) operates in shaping Christian spirituality.

b. Classical Christian Vision and Spirituality

You are likely already aware of the well-known fact that early Christians habitually engaged in cultural accommodation. This is the process through which theologians and other church leaders adopted various pagan customs, temples, and rituals. A fact you may be less aware of is that they uncritically assumed a facile compatibility between Scripture and philosophy (the equivalent to our science) thereby

compromising the authority and role of Scripture as sole source of divine revelation. At first only a few philosophical ideas about the divine and human natures were adopted. Yet these accommodations, small though they may have seemed, played a decisive role in the interpretation of Scripture and construction of Christian theology.

1. Heaven and Earth

When Christ was born, the widely accepted scientific cosmology was Neoplatonism. As present-day evolutionism polished out Charles Darwin's seminal ideas, Neoplatonism worked out Plato's cosmic views in early Christianity. Likewise, as evolutionary cosmology determines what we accept as real or not, so in the first centuries AD Neoplatonism determined what Christians accepted as real. It is important to realize that what we accept as real has a leading role in our theological thought. For instance, if you accept evolutionary theory as true it will dictate what can be taken as real (factual) or not. For instance, let's take the first three chapters of Genesis, and let's pretend you hold an evolutionary worldview. Could you now accept that these chapters are speaking about reality, that is, about what really took place in space and time? The answer is no; you will either say it is fictional, or perhaps use a more euphemistic term such as *symbol* or *metaphor* to describe the reality value of the Genesis 1-3 narrative. In short, if you accept evolutionism as true, it dictates to you the parameters of what you may accept as real which in turn you must apply to the reading of the text to properly understand its meaning and value. In this way, evolutionism works as vision that guides its adherents in their understanding of all reality. Similarly, in the early church Neoplatonism was the accepted cosmology, and when Christians began to apply it as a vision (to determine what was real or not in Scripture) the Roman-Catholic church began to emerge.

Perhaps Figure 2 below may help you better understand the role of Neoplatonism in shaping the Christian understanding of spirituality. Like Figure 1, this diagram places heaven with God, above the horizontal line, and the world below it. Platonic cosmology taught that while heaven was eternal, unchanging and timeless, the everyday world around us was transitory, changing and temporal. Timeless reality was the true reality (or ultimate reality) and the temporal reality was simply

not really real (illusory reality).

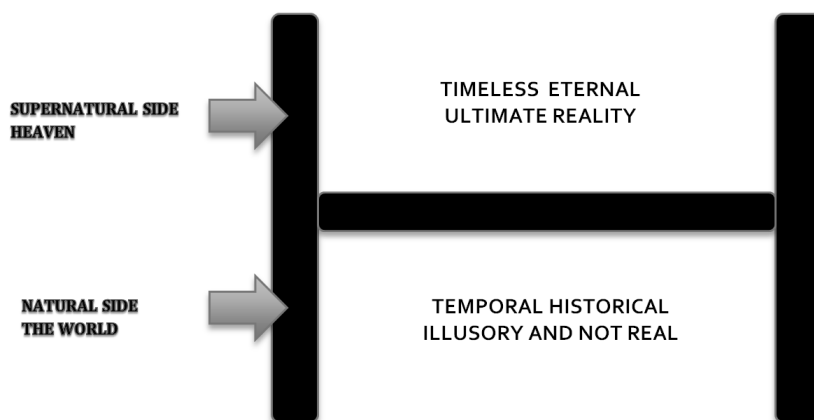


Figure 2: Plato's Two-World Cosmic Vision

The reasoning behind this view is simple, what has no time does not change, and what does not change cannot pass away. Consequently, since God cannot change, He cannot be temporal because time is the measure of change. So, timeless eternity and immutability define the kind of reality (Being) that God can be. In short, Plato's scientific conception of reality requires that anything real be changeless and timeless.

From this we can detect that Plato does not use the word "timeless" in the commonly accepted sense of "permanence through time" (duration). For Plato, timelessness means not having time, being void of time, not existing within the past-present-future flow of time. However, when, in common parlance, we say a piece of music or a painting is *timeless* we are not saying that it exists outside of time, but that its beauty extends for many generations and its artistic splendor continues to be appreciated with the passing of time. What Plato taught, then, was foreign to common understanding even in the Greek culture of his day. For how does one begin to visualize things "timelessly real"? Do you know of anyone or anything that does not exist in time? Could you even imagine it? The answer is no. The best philosophers could do was

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to say that only God can be timeless, and for that reason they placed Him under the rubric of *mystery*. This made little sense to common people, but they accepted the philosophers' conclusions assuming they must know what they were talking about. Furthermore, believing that Plato was divinely inspired, the early Church Fathers eagerly incorporated his and other philosophers' views into church doctrine.

Thus, the early church discarded the biblical and popular concept of reality as temporal-historical in order to embrace the Platonic interpretation of reality as timeless. This seemingly small change placed the vision of Christian tradition on a vastly different foundation from the one operating in Scripture. This fateful switch led to a progressive departure from Scripture and reinterpretation of its teachings.³ It wasn't long before Aquinas' observation was confirmed, "a small error at the outset can lead to great errors in the final conclusions."⁴ Could timelessness be a "small error" leading to "great errors"? How would it work out? Unfortunately, it has already worked out, we are not facing a possibility but an actual fact.

Let us return to the graphic in Figure 2 and place God above the horizontal line. If we embrace the Platonic vision of reality as timeless it will dictate what we can and cannot accept as real. For instance, when reading Exodus 25:8 where God declares: "let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (KJV), we will be forced to interpret it symbolically or metaphorically, because the Platonic vision requires supernatural things to exist timelessly, that is, outside of the flow of space and time. What exists in time can only be natural, not supernatural. Thus, from Christian tradition's perspective, Exodus 25:8 describes God's relation to believers symbolically rather than in actuality. Their guide, then, to understanding how God relates with humans is not Scripture but the Neoplatonic vision. Sadly, this is not an

³ This phenomenon is widely known and recognized by scholars who use different labels to refer to it, like for instance, "de-judaization" (J. Pelikan), and, "Hellenization." Seventh-day Adventists view this development as the beginning of the ongoing Apostasy already present in their own days and that will continue to grow until the Second Coming of Christ.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente Et Essentia*, trans. Robert T Miller (Internet Medieval Source Book, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/aquinas-esse.asp#f1>: Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, 1997).

isolated case, it recurs every time Christian tradition interprets a Bible passage about God or heaven. Briefly put, when Christianity embraces the Platonic vision, it cannot but interpret the entire biblical revelation of God as symbolic.

Let us consider another example related to the sanctuary doctrine. We are well aware that the Adventist vision builds on the conviction that on October 23, 1844 Christ *actually entered a real Heavenly Sanctuary* to engage a *new phase in the history* of redemption. From the viewpoint of the Platonic vision, however, *nothing could have happened in heaven because, according to it, “heaven” has neither space nor time*. For this reason Christian tradition sees the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary as childish fiction which confuses symbol with reality. This explains why, though Christians have long known the biblical teaching on the sanctuary, they have never embraced it as doctrine. Their Neoplatonic vision continues to hinder them from seeing, understanding and following the real God of Scripture, the One who in reality acts within spatiotemporal history.

Now let's take a look at how the Neoplatonic vision guides Roman Catholic and Protestant interpretations and practices of spirituality. My hope is that by visualizing this connection Adventists will better understand how a small error in our vision at the beginning will unavoidably result in large errors in doctrine, practice, missionary planning, and expenditures at the end. I also hope non-Adventist readers will better understand their thought origins and the reason Adventists cannot agree with them based on Scripture. And as these honest and committed persons reflect on this issue, I beg them to cast their faith upon Scripture rather than human tradition.

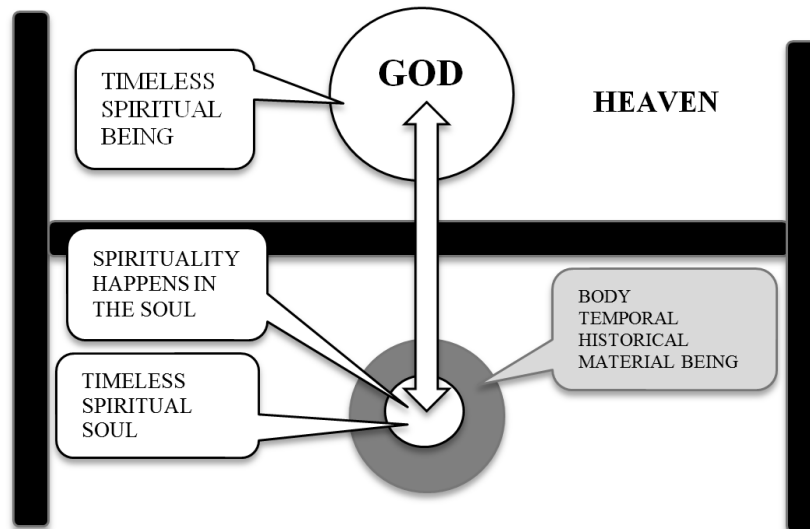
2. Spirituality

We are now prepared to consider and visualize how conservative Roman Catholic and Protestant believers have understood and practiced spirituality until the last century.

As we saw earlier, the term “spirituality” is commonly applied to the relation or contact that we as human beings can have with the other side, that is, with the supernatural. We also noted that since the first centuries AD Christians have adopted the Platonic worldview as their guiding vision. In Figure 3 below, we observe that this vision sees God as

consisting of a timeless unchangeable Spirit in heaven and human beings of a body (matter) and soul (timeless substance) on earth. According to this vision, spirituality—as the encounter between humans and God—can occur only in the soul (spirit) never in the body (space and time). Spirituality, then, is viewed as an otherworldly encounter with God we experience in our souls.

Figure 3: Classical Timeless Spirituality



What are the consequences of the Christian classical vision of spirituality for believers in the pew? Does this type of spirituality enhance or detract from biblical spirituality?

3. Spiritual Disciplines

We are now moving in familiar surroundings, after all, aren't we intentionally calling the church to engage in "Spiritual Disciplines" and "Spiritual Formation" as activities necessary to achieve the long-awaited revival and reformation? Many of us have felt free to uncritically "cut" from Evangelical sources anything relating to spirituality and then

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“paste” it into our congregational worship services or personal spiritual practices. We feel confident in doing so because we assume that, since Evangelicals accept Scripture, they must think and work from the same guiding vision we embrace. Here is where we are sadly and tragically mistaken. For Evangelicals have always thought, done theology, and lived assuming the Classical Vision of Christian tradition.⁵ However, in recent times, by embracing the Emerging Church movement, even conservative Evangelical leaders are leaving not only Scripture but also the Classical Vision to embrace the Postmodern Vision (1.c). This switch affects not only their conception of spiritual disciplines but also their theological, ministerial, and missiological practices. Let us consider the way in which the Classical Vision shapes spiritual disciplines (Spiritual Formation).

In Christianity, “spiritual disciplines” is the general term given to any number of repetitive actions done in order to facilitate the encounter or union with God. Adventists place the regular reading of Scripture and prayer at the center of the way in which they facilitate the encounter with God. As you may notice, we encourage the goal of spiritual disciplines as such. Let us consider, however, the Classical Vision and how it shapes the spiritual practice of Bible reading. By now we know the Classical Vision places spirituality in the realm of the “spirit” which supposedly exists outside space and time. Consequently, those who embrace this vision experience spirituality in their souls. And here is where we encounter a problem. Did you catch it? If you didn’t, let me show it to you. To experience Evangelical or Roman Catholic spirituality *you need to have a soul*. Adventists, however, do not *have* a soul, they *are* a soul. What is the difference?

Here, we discover a component of the Adventist Vision not yet addressed, namely, the nature of human beings. Scripture does not support the Platonic view that humans are made up of two substances, body (material, temporal, historical) and soul (immaterial, timeless, non-historical). According to Scripture we exist as bodily (material,

⁵ Since Luther’s and Calvin’s times, they explicitly assumed Christian Tradition and its Platonic Vision. See, for instance, Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), Canale, “Sola Scriptura and Hermeneutics: Toward a Critical Assessment of the Methodological Ground of the Protestant Reformation.”

temporal-historical) souls. How does this “pillar of Adventism” doctrine shape our understanding of spirituality in general and Bible reading (as spiritual discipline) in particular?

The Classical Vision demands that since God is spiritual, truth and experiences involving God should likewise be spiritual. That is correct, of course; the problem, however, lies not with what you see in this statement but what you do not see because it is assumed: the “spirituality” of God and “truth” are both *timeless*. Yet if all of Scripture is historical and spatiotemporal, how does the Classical Vision arrive at the dimension of the spirit? The answer of both the Classical and Postmodern Visions is the same: they arrive at the ahistorical timeless conception of the spirit through the allegorical (spiritual) interpretation of the biblical texts. The Classical Vision, then, can easily adjust to the historical criticism of modern and postmodern times by saying Scripture uses “symbolic,” “metaphorical,” “mythical,” or “narrative” language. For only when we realize that for Classical Christians the text points beyond space and time to the spiritual realm where God is we can properly understand the ultimate spiritual function of the text, and therefore the role of Bible reading as a spiritual discipline in Classical Christianity.

Thus, we see that while Evangelical and Catholic spirituality “have room” for Bible *reading* they believe Bible *study* should be avoided as an unnecessary distraction. After all, the meaning of the text is not really important because it speaks only about things relating to space and time (illusory, not real). Repetitive Bible *reading* of the same text (*lectio divina*)⁶ is necessary, but only as a stepping-stone⁷ to reach the next

⁶ “*Lectio divina* is a reading, on an individual or communal level, of a more or less lengthy passage of Scripture, received as the word of God and leading, at the prompting of the Spirit, to meditation, prayer and contemplation.” Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993): IV.C.2.

⁷ “Another, more contemplative method of interpretation practiced during the Middle Ages was *lectio divina*. This is the slow, prayerful, usually vocal reading of biblical texts—over and over again—until they penetrate the inner being of the worshiper. In the Middle Ages, monks daily celebrated the canonical hours, a series of six to eight liturgical services held every few hours throughout the day and the night. Thus, regular recitation of Scripture was interwoven into the everyday life of the monks. This led to a profound understanding of Scripture derived from continual meditation,

level: the spiritual timeless encounter with the other side (God).⁸ The historical truth spoken by God is not valued as actual content but only as the material sacramental vehicle used to communicate the spiritual timeless Word of God (presence of the eternal Being of God Himself) in liturgy.⁹ So, according to the Classical Christian Vision, we should meditate/pray/repeat the words of Scripture to enter into the very presence of God. It is precisely this repetitive action and chanting that produces a semi-hypnotic effect leading to the euphoric state interpreted to be union with the divine. “*Lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.”¹⁰ Correspondingly, Bible study for the purpose of understanding God’s being, will and teachings is considered irrelevant for spirituality and even counterproductive as it engages the mind instead of quieting it.

According to the Classical Christian Vision, *lectio divina* (Bible

prayer, and devotion focused on specific scriptural passages. The importance of mystical contemplation and meditation in medieval monasteries caused this form of interpretation to have a powerful impact on the life of medieval Christendom in the West.” Alan J. Hauser, John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, eds. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), sv. Biblical Interpretation, a Brief History of, *lectio divina*. “The Biblical Commission ... defines the spiritual sense as ‘the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it’ (II.B.2.i).” Peter Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: a Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, vol. 22, *Subsidia Biblica* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), 315.

⁸ “The person or group engaging in *lectio divina* expects the Holy Spirit to be present and active in the reading, and this spiritual reading ‘leads, at the prompting of the Spirit, to meditation, prayer and contemplation’ (IV.C.2.a). Here the Biblical Commission gives expression to the traditional teaching about the spiritual reading of Scripture which distinguishes three elements which follow the reading (*lectio*): *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. The Biblical Commission’s mention of the ‘prompting of the Spirit’ underscores that this is not merely a mechanical procedure.” Williamson, 316.

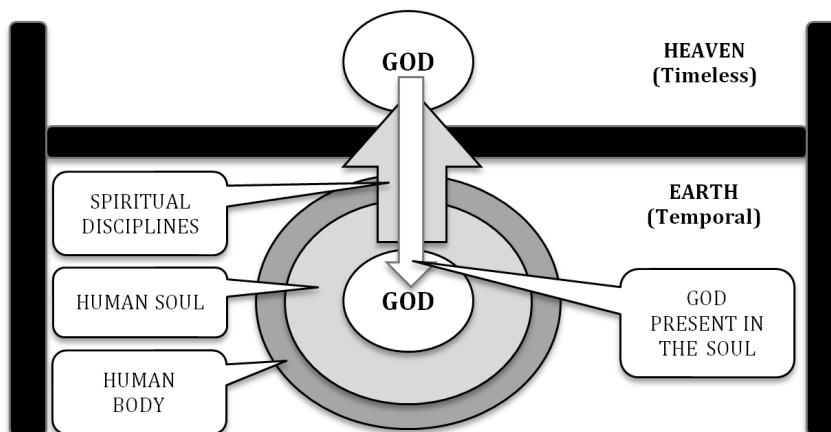
⁹ “According to *Sacrosanctam Concilium* §7, Christ is present in the Eucharistic celebration in the person of the sacramental minister, in the Eucharistic elements, and in the worshipping community (Mt 18:20), and ‘it is he himself who speaks when Sacred Scripture is read in Church. . . . Written text thus becomes living word’ (IV.C.1.b).” Williamson, 314.

¹⁰ Luke Dysinger O.S.B., “How to Practice *Lectio Divina*: A step-by-step guide to praying the Bible.” (@Belifnet: <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Catholic/2000/08/How-To-Practice-Lectio-Divina.aspx>).

reading) united with “contemplative” prayer are the vehicles to encounter the very Being of God in the deep timeless region of the soul. The goal of contemplative prayer then is to bring the actual Person of God Himself down to us, here and now. So through a few repetitive practices practitioners believe they can summon, the actual God of the Universe in substance.¹¹

Let us summarize, by means of Figure 4, how the Classical Christian Vision shapes the practice of spiritual disciplines in Christian tradition (Roman Catholicism, Protestant denominations and the Emerging Church).

Figure 4: Christian Tradition Vision: Spiritual Disciplines



Working within the Neoplatonic Vision, spirituality is defined as the

¹¹ “[T]he saints who have arrived at the summit perceive something of these very profound realities, which Saint John of the Cross calls ‘*je ne sais quoi*,’ but, he specifies, ‘it is of the night.’ A passage from the book, *I Want to see God*, gives a good description of this quite supernatural experience, not only of the love which God infuses into us, but of the very source of that love: the Holy Spirit, a friendly and acting presence, a presence which teaches and transforms, a presence to which our contemplative prayer aspires.” Louis Menvielle, “Divine Pedagogy in Prayer,” in *The Pedagogy of God: Its Centrality in Catechesis and Catechist Formation*, ed. Caroline Farey, Waltraud Linnig, and M. Johanna Paruch, trans. Anne John-Hall (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2011), 148.

personal encounter between the soul (timeless, spaceless, immaterial) and the Being of God (timeless, spaceless, immaterial). Spiritual disciplines are basically repetitive rituals intended to suppress thought and foment feeling in order to experience the real presence of the Being of God within the soul. Spiritual disciplines and worship then, are two ways leading to the same end: the experience of a timeless God within the soul, which leads to the divinization of the soul. Once the soul is divinized, it has essentially become one with the Godhead, with no degree of difference or separation between the human soul and God.¹² Thus, we see that the goal of spiritual disciplines and worship is to bridge the separation between creature and creator by completely eliminating space, time and history from the Christian experience.

Seventh-day Adventist leaders would be wise to remember that Evangelical spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation *assume the existence of the soul as a timeless spiritual substance* and the seat of the self, reason and spirituality. The first casualties in this concept of spirituality are Scripture and the incarnated and ascended Christ it presents. In this model, spirituality does not center on the incarnated Christ and His revelation to us in Scripture. Of course, both are integrated, but merely as symbols, signs and metaphors for

¹² “That which God here communicates to the soul in an instant is so great a secret, and so sublime a grace, and what she feels is such an excessive delight, that I know nothing to compare it to, except that our Lord is pleased at that moment to manifest to her the glory which is in heaven; and this He does in a more sublime way than by any vision or spiritual delight. More cannot be said (as far as can be understood) than that this soul becomes one with God. . . . He has vouchsafed to unite himself to a creature in such a way, that as in the marriage state husband and wife can no more be separated, so He will never be separated from her. Teresa de Avila goes on to illustrate this “more than union espousal” of the soul with God to be “. . . like water descending from heaven into a river or spring, where one is so mixed with the other, that it cannot be discovered which is the river-water, and which the rain-water.” Saint Teresa of Ávila and John Dalton, *The Interior Castle* (London: T. Jones, 1852), 179–180. As Teresa of Avila, Evangelical writer Dallas Willard works from within the Christian Vision when, in describing what takes place in the worship experience, he borrows words from Thomas Aquinas’ master, Albertus Magnus. Agreeing with Albertus, Willard explains that when we worship we “find God through God himself; that is, we pass by the Manhood into the Godhood, by the wounds of humanity into the depths of His divinity.” Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1988), 178.

ultimate-spiritual-timeless realities. Thus, in spiritual formation and worship Evangelicals and Catholics use Scripture and Christ in a functional-sacramental way.¹³ *This is a radical departure from the formative, spatiotemporal role of Christ and His Word presented in Scripture and embraced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

c. Postmodern Christian Vision and Spirituality

The Classical Christian Vision is currently in the process of being revised and improved. History shows how new scientific discoveries prompt the upgrading of previous visions. Thus, in earlier times Neoplatonism upgraded Platonism, and in modern times Neo-Darwinism polished Darwinism. Similarly, in modern times (17th century to the first half of the 20th century) science prompted theologians to polish the Classical Christian Vision. In our postmodern times (second half of the 20th century to the present time), new scientific insights motivate postmodern theologians (Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals) to revise and upgrade the Classical and Modern Christian Visions.

Evolutionary theory is the new idea behind the modern and postmodern upgrades to the Classical Christian Vision. Like Plato's cosmology, the consequences of evolution are broad and far-reaching. Challenging the supremacy of Platonism in the western world, modernity unleashed a deep criticism and polishing of the Classical Vision that still goes on unabated. Recently, Postmodernity has criticized and polished modernity. So we should not see postmodernity as the complete rejection of classicism or modernity but rather as their full mature achievement.

In short, the Postmodern Christian Vision emerged from the modern evolutionary polishing of the Classical Christian Vision. The Classical Christian Vision was not rejected, mind you, but upgraded in at least two significant areas: (1) the "Being" of God and (2) the revelatory source. The "Being" of God, which relates directly with the conception of heaven and earth, is now understood as panentheism. The revelatory source that relates directly to spirituality and the spiritual disciplines is now understood as divine human encounter. Let us now turn our attention to the macro-theological, spiritual and ecclesiological changes

¹³ See more on the sacraments below (5.c.3)

taking place in Christianity during our global ecumenical endtimes.

1. Heaven and Earth

Pantheism and the slightly broader panentheism provide the best way to fit evolutionary cosmology with the Classical Christian Vision. Literally, panentheism means “all is in God. All that exists has its being within the being of God, but God transcends the universe itself. God is not identical with the universe (as in pantheism) because God is more than the universe, but the universe is coeternal with God.”¹⁴ Since, according to panentheism, there is no ontological separation between God and creatures, heaven and earth are words that describe different aspects of the same divine reality. Oneness is real, while multiplicity and divisions are illusory. Heaven is everywhere because God is all and therefore “everywhere.” Consequently, the basic biblical notion of divine dwelling is meaningless, even analogically. Moreover, since God is all He cannot indwell Himself. Neither can He “die for us” or “come again.” In short, there is no “God and us” as different entities that could relate to each other. Only God exists. And thereby all humans are gods.

We must note that the Classical (theist) and Postmodern (panentheist) Christian Visions assume the same distinction between a timeless “heaven” and a temporal earth, thereby revealing a basic harmony undergirding both visions. This is the reason why the Postmodern Christian Vision embraces a “bipolar” view of God (Figure 5 below). Panentheism applies the Platonic anthropological dichotomy to God so that, like humans, God also has a temporal body (the universe, represented in Figure 5 as a grayed smaller oval), and a timeless soul (heaven, represented by the white larger oval). The major difference, then, is the relocation of heaven within the universe (God’s soul) not beyond it. For this reason we find heaven not outside of us (transcendence) but within our souls (immanence). However, we should never forget that in embracing the time-timeless dualistic view of reality, a deep undergirding agreement is forged between the Classical and Postmodern Christian Visions.

¹⁴ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 336.

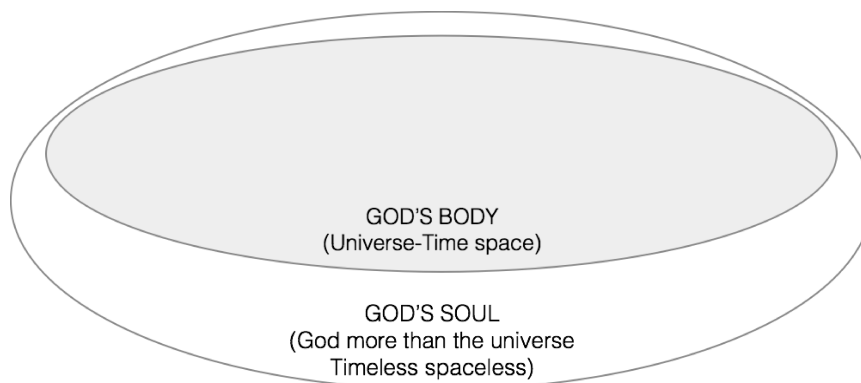


Figure 5: Postmodern Panentheist Bipolar Vision

Christians adopting the Panentheistic Vision cannot accept the existence of heaven as separated (transcendent) from the universe. Thus, they reinterpret the concept of heaven by bringing it “down to earth.” Human beings experience “Heaven” as the deep spiritual energy flowing from within their beings. Correspondingly, “the search for God” becomes “the search for the power of the inner life.” This brings us back to the issue of spirituality.

2. Spirituality: “Union” with “God”

We are now prepared to consider how today’s Christian postmoderns, Roman Catholics and Emerging Church Protestant believers understand and practice spirituality. In Figure 6 below we find a visual representation of the panentheistic worldview. In it we no longer see the clear distinction between heaven and earth accepted in the Classical Christian Vision represented in Figures 3-4, instead we see three ovals. The smaller one with a white circle on the left represents a human being. In it the white circle represents the human timeless soul and the oval the material-temporal human body. The smaller (human) oval is then contained within two larger ovals representing the panentheistic view of God.

As described earlier, “spirituality” continues to be a “contact with the other side” (1.a). The only difference now is that because we are gods, the “other side” is no longer “out there in heaven” (transcendent)

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but “within us” (immanent). Yet, the “other side within us” is still timeless and the source of life power just as it is in Classical Christianity “out there in heaven.” We should not be surprised, then, to find Christians advancing deep ecumenism not only between Christian denominations but also with all religions and even atheism.¹⁵

In short, postmodern spirituality is the contact with the “other side” that is “within me.” When this contact is established (see arrow in Figure 6) spirituality is achieved through an encounter with the deep, timeless, life-giving dimension of God (the one reality).

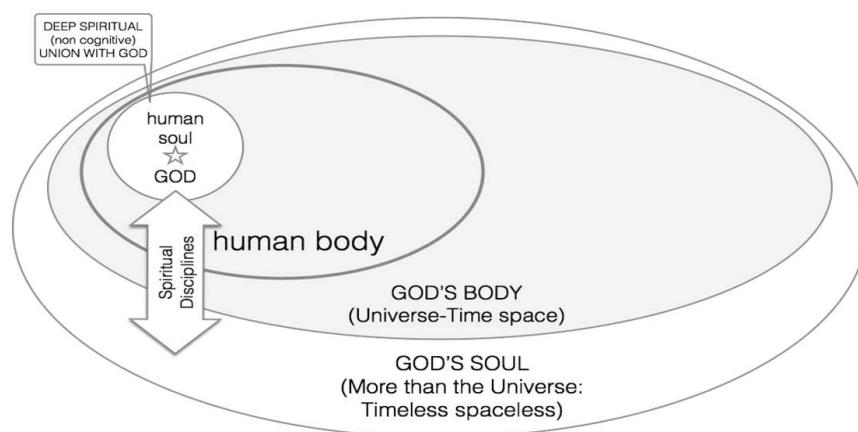


Figure 6: Postmodern Spirituality

Keeping in mind that the Theistic-Classical and Panentheistic-Postmodern Visions embrace the same bipolar interpretation of reality (Being), we can anticipate that both will understand and experience spirituality in a similar manner. In fact, both seek to experience union with God in the soul as a real but non-cognitive experience that goes beyond thoughts¹⁶ and words.¹⁷

¹⁵ Harvey D. Egan, “Rahner, Karl (1904–84),” ed. Trevor A. Hart, *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2000), 449.

¹⁶ Consider, for instance, the following passage by a Classical Christian writer describing loosely the need to cancel thoughts and even imagination to experience God. “Here, however, she is thoroughly awake to God, though fast asleep as to worldly things

This general conviction was reinforced by modern science which taught humans can only know spatiotemporal realities. Accepting this as true, Schleiermacher discovered that if we think of God as timeless (according to the classical conception of God's reality) and of human thinking as spatiotemporal (according to science), God cannot be knowable. Therefore, he thought, if humans cannot know God by spatiotemporal thinking, they could imagine Him with their minds and feel Him with their timeless souls. Consequently, Schleiermacher believed Christianity was not based on the knowledge of God (revelation/doctrine), but on the experience of God (encounter/spirituality).

The question that presents itself now to the Postmodern Vision is: How do humans experience the timeless, spaceless, unknowable, Spirit of God? Basically, the non-cognitive encounter between a timeless God and temporal human beings can initiate in one of two directions: from God to humans (predestination-justification by faith) or from humans to God (spirituality). Not surprisingly, the legal nature of the monergist¹⁸ interpretation of justification by faith advanced by the Protestant Reformation, has not satisfied the spiritual needs of human beings. To fill this spiritual vacuum Protestant and Evangelical believers are now seeking spiritual experiences borrowing from classical Roman Catholic

and to ourselves; for in truth, during the short time that this lasts, she is almost senseless and unable to think on anything, even if she wished. No art is necessary to suspend the imagination; indeed, if she loves, she does not understand *how* she loves, nor what it is she loves, nor what she wishes to have. In a word, she is like one entirely dead to the world, in order to live the more in God; and this is a pleasant death; a death, because it is a loosening of the soul from all the operations which it can exercise while in the body; it is a pleasant death, because though she be truly in the body, yet she seems to be separated from it, in order to abide the better in God; this is in such a manner, that I know not whether she have even life enough to breathe." Saint Teresa of Ávila and John Dalton, *The Interior Castle* (London: T. Jones, 1852), 65–66. Obviously, biblical thoughts are viewed only as preparatory instruments to cancel out all thought, even the simple flow of our consciousness and imagination.

¹⁷ World Evangelical Fellowship. Theological Commission, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 2, electronic ed. (1993): 212.

¹⁸ The word "Monergism" originates from the Greek words mono (one, alone) and ergon (work). In theology it labels the theory that God causes all and everything including Creation, Providence and Justification by Faith. Monergism rules out freedom and history as interaction between God and free agents.

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and Eastern meditation techniques. Before considering the postmodern Christian approach to spiritual disciplines, we need to examine the way in which a spiritual union with God may take place in a Postmodern Panentheist Vision of reality.

The Postmodern Vision believes God's thinking is done in His temporal pole by human beings. Human thinking is therefore divine thinking. Yet, in His timeless pole God is also an impersonal force that empowers humans from within. Humans are gods doing the divine thinking but also have within themselves the timeless non-cognitive impersonal divine presence providing "live energy" to be gods fully. In this vision, then, union with God takes place as a spiritual experience between human individuals and their inner divine "self" or "energy." In essence, Postmodern Christian, Classical (Roman Catholic, Protestant), Emerging Church, and New Age spiritualities are the same. For them, union with God takes place beyond human consciousness, that is to say, beyond space and time.

Apart from the conferral of divine spiritual energy (power), what are the consequences of this union for the Christian and the church? Let us consider this issue in reference to Figure 7 below. The union with God (encounter) facilitated by spiritual disciplines or worship produces a deep powerful "stirring" in the innermost depths of the soul. However, this stirring takes place in what they consider to be the timeless, spaceless, unconscious level of the soul, that is, in the supposed non-historical level of reality.

Nevertheless, postmodernism realizes that the soul still finds itself within the spatiotemporal level of the body. Although the soul is in the body, the encounter with the presence of God in the soul cannot connect with our temporal thinking, it does, however, indirectly reach the feelings. Even though we cannot communicate our feelings directly to other human beings (because by nature they are personal and incommunicable), we can share them indirectly through language by associating them with images present in our mind at the time of the encounter that generated them. So, postmodernism says that we choose words associated with those images to speak of the feelings awakened by the encounter. Figure 7 expresses this movement as taking place in our bodies (the brain) where feelings are produced, experienced and connected with thoughts and words in our imagination (consciousness).

By words and acts humans can express the thoughts and feelings awakened by the timeless union with God in the soul. These expressions originated what postmoderns consider to be the “myths” of Scripture which include Christ’s divine nature, doctrines, and our works. All of these are considered to be doxological (praise) expressions of worship, voicing the subjective feelings of timeless encounters.

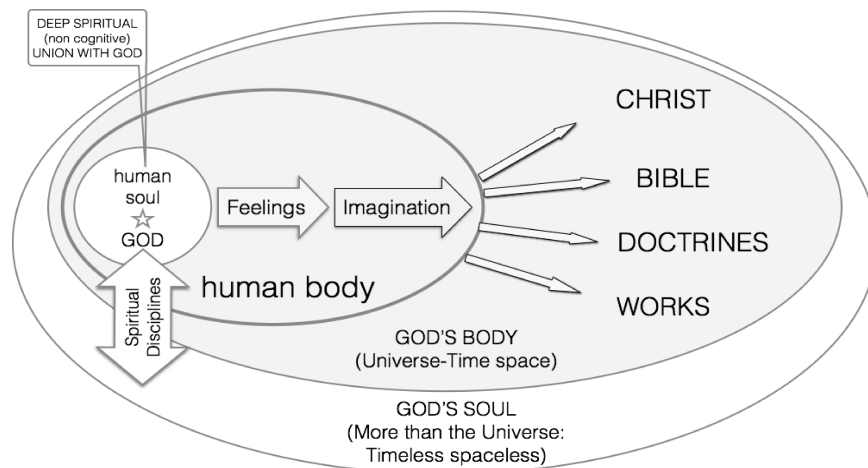


Figure 7: Postmodern Christian Spirituality

3. *Spiritual Disciplines*

According to the Postmodern Christian Vision, spiritual disciplines and postmodern worship styles are necessary to facilitate union with God that “brings”¹⁹ eternal life (experience of salvation). However, by making human beings gods (having God within) the panentheistic worldview denies any superior status to Jesus Christ. Christ is a human being like all of us. True, Christ is divine, but so are you and I. Consequently, postmodern Christianity sees Jesus as an important “spiritual leader,” just like Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, or Moses were in their times. They distinguished themselves because their strong

¹⁹ Since according to the Postmodern Vision humans are gods by nature their union with God “brings” eternal life only metaphorically, not actually or really. Salvation, then, means a different experience but not the granting of eternal life.

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spirituality and personal skills allowed them to communicate their feelings about the encounter with God persuasively. Similarly, postmodern Christianity and the Emerging Church²⁰ no longer consider the Bible to be a divine book. For them the Bible is a book of religious myths, written by human beings. In them we do not find God's words communicating knowledge but allegories, symbols and myths attempting to share the spiritual, non-cognitive encounter of their writers.

According to the Postmodern Christian Vision, spirituality and worship are two words describing the same liturgical phenomenon, namely, the rituals we need to perform to get in touch with the other side. Because God is literally *in all* and the difference between sacred and profane has disappeared, worship rituals are all-inclusive. To fit personal and cultural preferences, any ritual, ancient or modern, is accepted and included. Yet, as noted earlier, the belief that the other side is timeless, establishes a decisive continuity between the Classical and Postmodern Christian Visions. This continuity shows up in the postmodern embrace of Roman Catholic (ancient) sacramental worship and spirituality. Not surprisingly, many postmodern Evangelical leaders are making the Eucharistic celebration central to their worship. This takes place because their vision also requires a material-spiritual (temporal-timeless) bridge to reach the deeper spiritual (timeless) side of divine reality. They find this bridge in the classical sacramental liturgical structure of worship on which the Roman Catholic Church stands.²¹ Thus the sacraments, not Christ, are the necessary bridge to reach eternal life.²² Rituals, understood sacramentally, are the material means to reach the power of timeless divine grace and even union with God according to

²⁰ The reader must keep in mind that some Evangelical leaders presently using the "Emerging Church" label do still believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible.

²¹ On the dual ontological composition of the sacraments, see for instance, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Summa Theologica*, Complete English ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009): Supplementum q.34 a.5. ad 1.

²² This applies literally to the Postmodern Vision. Roman Catholics following the Classical Vision claim that the power in the sacrament originates from Christ's sufferings. Yet, they understand Christ "mediation" sacramentally. The human side of Christ is the necessary matter to communicate the timeless power of divine life to human beings.

both the Classical and the Postmodern Christian Visions. This basic ontological agreement calls for similar spiritual disciplines, spiritual life and facilitates deep global ecumenism.

The Classical Vision under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church reduced the number of sacraments to seven. The Postmodern Vision, however, opens the door for any number of spatiotemporal (material) realities to become sacraments through which we could reach the other side. Furthermore, in and after Vatican II, Roman Catholicism began to embrace salient tenets of the Postmodern Vision,²³ and is even becoming “Evangelical” in pastoral outreach and methodology.²⁴ Enticed by the success of Pentecostal-style worship in reaching secular culture, popular music has become the *de facto* “ecumenical sacrament” par excellence for Roman Catholics, Protestants and Evangelical alike. According to this vision, popular music is the instrument (sacrament) to bring all cultures into an euphoric experience of God’s presence.²⁵

Moreover, according to the Postmodern Vision, spiritual disciplines also play an important role helping seekers and believers to obtain a spiritual “experience” with the other side (spiritual energy). Ancient, Medieval, Eastern and New Age spiritual disciplines become instruments to leave behind the realm of history (everyday experiences, words, images, thoughts, concepts and consciousness) and enter the realm of “mystery” (the non-cognitive, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, non-historical Spiritual Energy that is called “God”).

Many Bible believing Christians are enticed to embrace spiritual disciplines because they include and encourage Bible readings and

²³ We can note the slow movement embracing postmodern tenets in the areas of the revelation-inspiration of Scripture and evolutionism.

²⁴ Evangelical Catholicism is the new post-Vatican-II friendly and missionary face of the Roman Catholic Church which now leads out global deep interreligious ecumenism. For an introduction to the “Evangelical” face of Roman Catholicism see, for instance, George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013).

²⁵ To see the way in which Vatican II opened the door to Pentecostal Charismatic use of popular music in worship, see, for instance, Catholic Church, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium,” in *Vatican II Documents* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011). VI, 111-121; III. B. 30.

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prayer. However, as in the Classical Vision (1.b.3), the use of Scripture is more chant-like than thoughtful study. Similarly, prayers are not communication of thoughts and feelings to God as in a dialogue with a friend, but “contemplative” mind-emptying techniques to enter the “silence,” such as visualization, breathing, and chanting mantras. Furthermore, Bible readings and prayer are only preliminary steps leading the seeker to the final destination, the realm of mystery that lies beyond words, thoughts, and consciousness. The goal is not to teach humans how to dialogue with and depend on the incarnated, ascended, ministering and soon-to-return Christ. In fact, an encounter with Christ is completely absent in the spiritual disciplines of Classical and Postmodern Christian Visions. Instead, their ultimate goal is to achieve ecstatic timeless encounters with the vague and mysterious other side, and unleash the power of the god within.

By applying the Classical and Postmodern Christian Visions to spirituality we have discovered a difference in the way they understand the foundation from where they operate. The source the Classical Christian Vision is the cognitive revelation of God in nature (which includes reason, tradition, and spiritual experiences) and Scripture; they are the ground on which it builds doctrines and practices. Conversely, the source or ground of the Postmodern Christian Vision is the non-cognitive union with God. In short, according to the Classical Christian Vision *knowledge and doctrine* precede and ground experience; according to the Postmodern Christian Vision *experience and feeling* precedes and grounds doctrine, including the Bible. In short, to experience God and find eternal life we no longer need to bother studying the Bible (Classical Vision). Instead, to achieve union with God and tap into the source of eternal life, we need only to practice spiritual disciplines (Postmodern Vision). The Postmodern Christian Vision, then, totally neutralizes Scripture.

Let us turn our attention now to the way in which the Adventist Vision shapes the understanding and practice of spirituality.

d. Adventist Vision and Spirituality

Obviously, Adventism cannot follow either vision without destroying its very essence as Christ’s Remnant Church founded on the *sola Scriptura* principle. As we have seen earlier in the first article of

this series (2.a.b,d.f), the Adventist Vision has already modified and replaced both the source and the vision of Classical and Postmodern Christianities. By recognizing from Scripture the actual historical presence of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and His continuous mediatorial work for our salvation, Adventist formative pioneers completed the paradigm shift begun by the Protestant Reformation. As we saw earlier in our journey in the first article (4.e), if the Seventh-day Adventist Church were to abandon her own original conception of whence she came (Scripture) and her formative sanctuary Vision, she would necessarily divide, stop growing or even cease to exist. The stakes before the church cannot be higher. With this in mind, let us explore how the Adventist Vision relates to spirituality.

In the first article (2.a) we identified the *Sola Scriptura* principle as the source from which Adventism was birthed and ground on which it builds. Additionally, we saw how formative Adventist thinkers discovered the integral role of the sanctuary as the macro-hermeneutical interpretive vision presented by Scripture (first article, 2.b). At this point we only need to add some additional details about its contents and function.

As the other visions, the Adventist Vision includes a worldview, that is, a broad concept of the nature of reality as a whole.²⁶ Such an all-inclusive view assumes and builds on an interpretation of the nature of reality (ontology), both natural (created) and supernatural (created and uncreated). In an earlier section (first article, 2.f) when introducing ourselves to the sanctuary doctrine as the Adventist Vision, we noted that the temporal-historical view of the nature of reality as a whole was an unavoidable and “unintended” consequence of the sanctuary. Any Bible reader is familiar with this fact. God interacts with His creation exclusively through time and space. That should have been inconsequential were not for the fact that Christian tradition as a whole (Classical and Postmodern Visions) have chosen to follow the timelessness of Eastern and Greek Philosophies. This historical fact places the Adventist Vision in a collision course with all Christian and Religious traditions of the world. Let us see how the temporal

²⁶ I am using here the term “worldview” within the realm of philosophy. In it “worldview” corresponds to the study of the world in general, not just human cultures. In this way, “worldview” is closely associated with ontology and metaphysics.

understanding of reality shapes the Adventist worldview.

1. Heaven and Earth

Since their beginnings Adventists have understood Christianity from the perspective of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. By thinking that Christ's actions in the Great Controversy are real historical events and not fictional myths Adventists have always implicitly assumed that God is in some way temporal. Of course, in doing so, they are not implying that God is limited in any way to our temporal and spatial finitude. Yet they clearly see God Himself acting in a temporal sequence of past-present-future real actions including creation, Christ's incarnation and sacrifice on the cross, His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and His second coming. Moreover, they also find in Scripture the teaching that God has no beginning (John 1:1) or end (Hebrews 7:3; Psalms 102:27, Luke 1:33) and experiences time in ways completely different from His creation (2 Peter 3:8). How, then, does the basic biblical conviction that God lives and acts in a temporal sequence²⁷ shape the Adventist Vision and its biblical worldview of heaven and earth?

Because (following Scripture) the Adventist Vision conceives of reality as temporal while Christian Visions (following Greek and Eastern philosophies) conceive of reality as timeless, they are not at all complementary but mutually exclusive. Thus we must choose between them. Christianity must choose between the *sola Scriptura* principle and tradition. This is the parting of the ways, the "continental divide" in Christian theology.

Figure 8 below outlines the overarching structure of the Adventist Vision. Because reality is temporal and not timeless we must read the graphic horizontally, from left (past) to right (future) rather than from top (timelessness-spirit) to bottom (temporality-matter) as we did with the Classical Vision, or from the outside to the inside as we did with the Postmodern Vision. Beginning at the far left, we find a large arrow with

²⁷ For an introduction to the biblical temporal conception of God and Being see for instance, Fernando Canale, "Exodus 3:14: Toward a Biblical Ontology" (Research Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Andrews University, 1981), Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason : Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, chapter 3.

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a head in each end, extending from top to bottom, indicating the infinite temporal life of the three divine Persons (Trinity) which always existed and will continue to exist without end, independently from creation (as illustrated by the top arrow that indicates the continuation of God's eternal temporal life).

Immediately after the first left arrow, we find to the right another arrow issuing from the eternal life of the trinity indicating the creation of the spatiotemporal universe. Then to the right there is a vertical black line showing the temporal starting point of creation and its limited spatiotemporal nature. From the top end of the vertical black line flows a horizontal black line pointing out the continuous existence of the temporal universe throughout created time. Above this horizontal black line there is a greyed arrow indicating the Creator-creature difference (transcendence) that exists since creation between God and the universe. Thus, the difference between the Creator and creature does not stand on the timelessness of God, but on the infinity of His temporal, creative, omnipotent Being. However, because God's existence is infinitely and analogically²⁸ temporal He can interact directly with created history (historically) at any time and in various and diverse ways within the limited sphere of created history. In fact, Scripture depicts Christ as playing the central role in creation history, in its origination, sustenance, coherence and direction.

²⁸ Analogical means similar. Similitude involves a combination of things that are the same (univocal) and different (equivocal).

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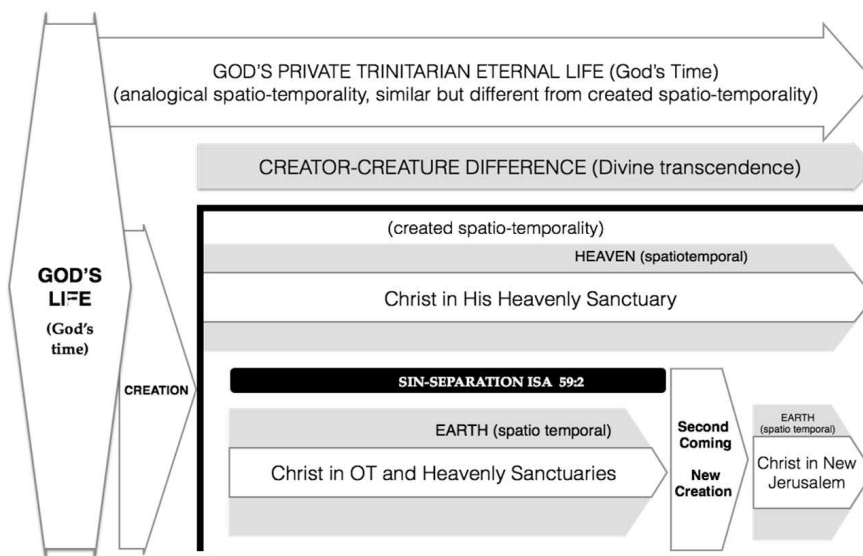


Figure 8: Adventist Vision (Biblical Worldview)

The top gray horizontal arrow immediately below the horizontal black line indicates heaven as a geographical region in the universe. This is where Christ now resides and rules over the angels in His heavenly sanctuary (white arrow within gray top arrow). Underneath, there is a horizontal black bar indicating sin as the dividing line between Christ and heaven, and the fallen planet earth. Just below, there is another gray horizontal arrow indicating the existence and history of our planet. And inside it, we find a white horizontal arrow indicating Christ's central presence and work of redemption. This presence was accomplished through several means, notably the Old Testament sanctuary, His bodily sanctuary (incarnation), His work from the heavenly sanctuary and through the earthly, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. These two arrows represent the entire range of earth's history from past creation to future divine events, the second coming of Christ, the eradication of sin, and the restoration of the original perfect order of creation through God's promised new creation. Unlike all the lines above them, the two concentric arrows at the bottom of Figure 9 and the black horizontal line indicate the end of sin with the second coming of Christ. Closely

following is the ensuing purification and restoration of the earth, with the New Jerusalem as the center for Christ's eternal kingdom and universal throne.

In our attempt to understand how vision shapes doctrine, life and even administrative church policies we have explored the macro-hermeneutical (central interpretive) role of vision (first article, 2.c), how it operates (first article, 2.d), its classical (1.b.1) and postmodern (1.c.1) interpretations and their respective approaches to spirituality (1.b.2-3; 1.c.2-3). Now that we've gained an overview of the historical scope of the Adventist Vision as viewed through the Great Controversy, we are better equipped to see how the Adventist interpretation of the vision shapes spirituality.

2. Spirituality

By now we know that spirituality is the close personal relation between God and human beings, theologically known as "union with God." Different traditions using different Visions of heaven and earth interpret and practice spiritual disciplines and union with God differently. At this point, we need to review the way in which the Adventist Vision of heaven and earth shapes the interpretation and practice of spirituality and union with God.

Since spirituality is the personal relation between God and human beings (union with God) it must take place within a realm where both can meet. When the Classical and Postmodern Visions interpret the spirit of God (heaven) and the spirit of human beings (earth) timelessly and spacelessly, union with God must take place outside of history. In this scenario, *spirituality exists timelessly and spacelessly outside the causal flow of history*. When the Adventist Vision interprets God (heaven) and human beings²⁹ (earth) temporally and spatially, union with God and *spirituality must exist temporally and spatially within the*

²⁹ Following Scripture, Adventism teaches as a foundational component of its Vision that human nature is simple. That is to say, human nature does not have many parts but one, the body which in its complexity harmoniously integrates many levels including mind, thinking, values, freedom, and spirituality (the capacity to relate to other free beings and God). Early formative Adventist thinkers included this conviction under the label "pillars" or "landmarks" of Adventism.

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*causal flow of history.*³⁰ I hope you are beginning to discover that mutually exclusive interpretations of vision unavoidably lead to mutually exclusive interpretations of spirituality (union with God) and spiritual disciplines.

But how can we, finite creatures, find and relate with the infinite God within the flow and limitations of created history? To relate to God we need to be in His presence. Historical spirituality, then, requires the historical presence of God within created human history. But how can the infinite Creator God dwell with finite creatures? As we learned previously, both Classical and Postmodern Visions believe a timeless God cannot dwell with temporal beings. Timelessness and temporality do not mix. Alternatively, the Adventist Vision embraces an infinitely and analogically temporal interpretation of God that easily allows God to accommodate His infinite Being to the finiteness of creation. As simple logic tells us, more can accommodate less, but not vice versa. In other words, according to the Adventist Vision God, being infinitely more than His creatures, chooses to limit and accommodate himself to the less of His creatures in order to relate with them. This, God did in Christ since the creation of the universe (see Figure 9).

Yet, even while existing in the very presence of Christ (union with God) Lucifer decided to rebel against Christ permanently and extended his domain to planet earth. That's when things got complicated. Sin as rebellion made union between the holy presence of Christ and human beings on planet earth impossible. A line of demarcation had to be drawn.

³⁰ Because Classical and Postmodern Visions assume a common timeless ontology they view the cause and effect flow of history closed to divine causal interventions. For them, human history becomes a *closed historical continuum*. However, because the Adventist Vision assumes a temporal ontology it allows for divine causal interventions within flow of history thereby replacing the “closed historical continuum” notion with the alternative “open historical continuum” interpretation.

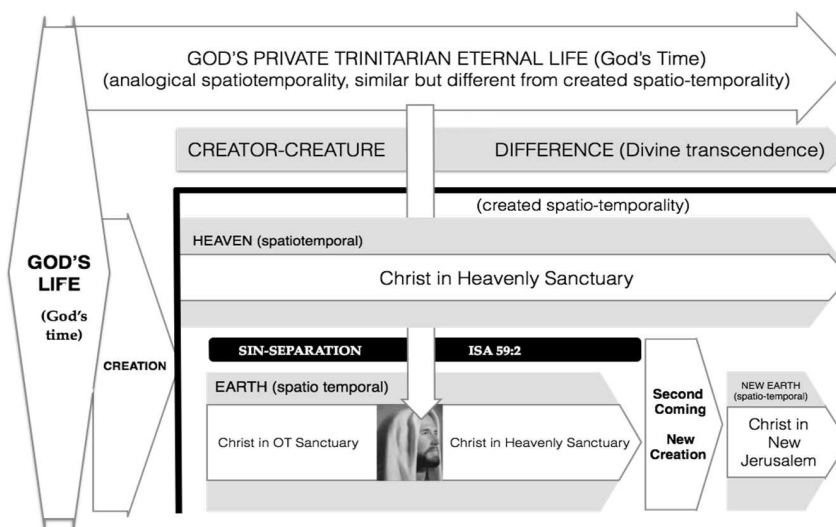


Figure 9: Adventist Vision and Spirituality

After Adam’s sin introduced the reign of Satan on earth, Christ became “invisible” not because He cannot be seen, but because the holiness of His presence would consume sinners. It was not God’s will, but *our sin that became the barrier* (Isaiah 59:2) preventing access to Christ’s visible presence directly in everyday life (see figure 9). In other words, what separates us from the visible presence of God is not His timeless nature (classical metaphysics) but our sins (Genesis 3:8). In short, *the invisibility of God does not flow from His timelessness but from our sinfulness*. For this reason, to achieve union with God human beings do not need to overcome their limited created natures (tap into their “timeless souls”) as both the Classical and Postmodern Visions teach. Instead, *they need overcome their sinful nature as the Scriptures teach* (Isaiah 59:2).

However, in order to overcome our sinful nature we must see Christ and commune with Him. Even after sin, access to the visible historical presence of Christ remains the only way to spirituality and union with God. To make spirituality possible, Christ had to bridge the sin barrier, which He did immediately after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:9). From then onwards, Christ made Himself present to a few chosen representatives (patriarchs, prophets, and Moses). To them He revealed

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His presence through words (audible presence) and theophanies (visible presence). Finally, Christ became visibly present by becoming a human being (John 1:14) in this sinful world (Romans 8:3). He gave Himself to the human race, forever to retain His human nature.

Thus, through the ministry of patriarchs, prophets, and Moses, the historical visible presence of Christ has been granted to certain human beings ever since the Garden of Eden and after Christ's incarnation through the visible face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). After His physical ascension we must follow Christ as He intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary and "see" (understand) Him, until He returns and we behold our Savior face to face. The centrality of Christ, then, places Adventist spirituality on a different footing and at odds with classical and postmodern Christian spiritualities. *Adventist Spirituality is union with the historical Christ* and thereby decidedly departs from the widely accepted notion that *Spirituality is union with God as a timeless non-historical Spirit*.

3. *Spiritual Disciplines*

As we proceed let us keep in mind that spiritual disciplines are repetitive actions performed to achieve union with God.³¹ The question now is how do we approach the presence of Christ and experience union with Him? These issues involve human nature and experience. Grounded in a spatiotemporal vision of God (heaven) and human beings (earth) Adventist spirituality seeks to experience the incarnated Christ historically. To achieve union with God, then, we need to know (1) where to find Christ today, (2) how to reach Him and (3) what to do to achieve union with Him.

³¹ As far as I know Adventists were not familiar with the term *spiritual formation* until the 70's and 80's [what term? At that time, Evangelical seminaries began to focus on spirituality and create courses on spiritual formation. Adventist theological schools, obviously interested in spirituality, saw an opportunity to include an emphasis in spirituality. Unfortunately, many teachers failed to perceive that Adventist Spirituality and Evangelical books on Spiritual Formation and the spiritual disciplines used are different at the level of their Vision (heaven and earth) and foundation (the presence of God). For an introduction to the original courses on spiritual formation in Evangelical schools of theology, see, for instance, Graham Cheesman, *A History of Spiritual Formation in Evangelical Theological Education* (<http://theologicaleducation.net/articles/view.htm?id=198>: Theological Education. net, 2012).

(1) Where do we find Christ today?

Invariably, a large portion of Christians will answer this question by stating that Christ is in heaven (Acts 1:9-11). However, because their respective visions interpret the nature of God and heaven differently they have slightly different views on this point. On the one hand, classical (conservative) Catholics and Protestants believe Christ is in heaven having a “spiritualized” (timeless) soul-like body. On the other hand, Postmodern (liberal) Christians believe Christ is in another more spiritually (timeless) evolved dimension of the universe having a spiritualized soul-like “body.” Notice that both views hold that in heaven Christ no longer is a material spatiotemporal body. For all practical purposes, then, they believe that after His ascension Christ assumes *the same divine existence He had “before” the incarnation*. Radically disagreeing with them both, the Adventist Vision adopts the biblical view that Christ is in heaven *with the same spatial limitations imposed by his human body* (1 John 4:2). In other words, after the ascension Christ continues to have *the same human body He had during the incarnation*. The spatial limitations of Christ body prompted Christ and the Father to send the Holy Spirit as Christ’s representative (John 14:16-17) to “dwell” with humans.³² We can see how, by determining the reality (ontology) of Christ, visions predetermine the nature of spirituality and spiritual disciplines required to enter into union with God.

While the Adventist Vision places a *spatial distance* between Christ and humanity the Classical and Postmodern Visions place an *ontological distance*. Spirituality and spiritual disciplines must “bridge” the distance. Correctly, Christian theologians have always spoken of Christ as “the highest revelation” of God’s being.³³ However, by denying that Christ

³² “The Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.” Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 669.

³³ See for instance, L. Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* (Grand

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has a material historical body in heaven they imply that such revelation is no longer necessary. They claim that now, after the incarnation and ascension of Jesus *there is a new and better spiritual way* to reach the very presence and being of God other than the incarnated historical Christ. This new way is through the sacraments and spiritual disciplines.³⁴ These Christians unfortunately forget that while Christ was ascending to heaven, angels reminded His disciples of *the promise* that “*this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11 ESV, emphasis mine).³⁵

With this in mind we can answer the question: where is Christ today? Christ is in heaven and soon will return to *dwell with us as He did with His disciples during His earthly incarnation* (John 14:3). Does this mean we must wait until Christ’s second coming to experience “union” with Him? Absolutely not! Because Christ was, and through all eternity will be, the highest and deepest revelation of God, believers must relate to Him by *remembering Him* as they meditate on all His words and actions. Christ instituted “holy communion” as a pointer that, until He comes back, *we must relate to Him by bringing back to mind what He has done taught and promised throughout the history of salvation, especially during His earthly ministry* (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Moreover, through the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit as Christ’s representative by our side we have all the advantages the Disciples had when Christ lived with them. Obviously we long to see Him face to face when at His second coming our spiritual journey will find eternal rest in Christ and His Kingdom.

This is the ground of Christian spirituality and the way we may

Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1932), 132. And, Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), 493.

³⁴ The inconsistency of this conviction extends to many foundational issues in the Classical and Postmodern systems of Catholic and Protestant theologies.

³⁵ Although ever since all Christians with access to Scripture lived and died with this “blessed hope” in their heart (Titus 2:13) the Classical and Postmodern Visions interpreted it as an allegory, metaphor or myth.

experience union with Christ. According to the Adventist Vision, then, christian spirituality is centered in the incarnated, ascended, ministering, and soon-to-return Universal King: Jesus Christ. In short, according to Christ, Christians must keep Him in their minds and reflect him in their lives (spirits), just as the disciples did through their personal historical everyday interaction with Christ. This “indwelling” of Christ is achieved through His Holy Spirit sent precisely to help us remember, understand and practice Christ’s teachings, works and promises (John 14:26) so that they may change us into His likeness.

(2) How do we reach Him?

But how could we, who never knew Christ personally, remember Him? We must do as the disciples and the Ephesians did, *by learning Christ* (Ephesians 4:20-21). We do this by taking in the Bread of Life, that is the words of life He spoke (John 6:35, 63). Those who partake of Christ must then teach Christ to other Christians who still need to learn of Him. Teaching, then, is the “ministry” of pastors, and study is the “spiritual discipline” of believers. Paul explained that Christians must be “taught in Him; as the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21 ESV).

Why do we need to learn of Christ? Because without faith we cannot draw near or please God (Hebrews 11:6). We need faith that “comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17 ESV). So our salvation, faith, and spirituality require Bible study leading to understanding of God, not just for our leaders, but for everyone. Study is necessary because we must feed on Christ Himself, the Bread of Life that came from heaven, to nourish and enliven us through His words (John 6: 57, 63).

Moreover, according to the Adventist Vision union with Christ does not mean participation in the eternal divine life of the Trinitarian Being of God,³⁶ but participation in Christ’s history, character and kingdom. More specifically, the union with God is not a union or identity of beings where God’s divine entity is actually within the human entity, or vice versa. On the contrary, in the union with God both God and humans remain separate entities, as in the case of oneness between husband and

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 127.

wife (Matthew 19:5). The union is real but only relationally, not ontologically. In the union with Christ He remains outside of us in the Heavenly Sanctuary (and the Father and Holy Spirit as well), and we remain outside of Him. The union is a real spiritual identity between the mind-character-feelings-will-purposes-mission (spirit) of God and the mind-character-feelings-will-purposes-mission (spirit) of human beings. When we experience this identity we partake in His nature (2 Peter 1:4). By faith in Christ's person and work and His ongoing ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, then, we are adopted (saved) into the family of God (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15) rather than divinized by partaking in the inner life of the transcendent Trinitarian Being.

(3) What do we do to achieve Union with Christ?

According to the Adventist Vision to “experience” God spiritually we do not need to leave the spatiotemporal realm of everyday history because God's analogical infinite temporality allows Him to exist as God within the limitations of created time. He accomplishes this in Christ. To achieve Christian spirituality then, we must relate to the incarnated Christ whose words and acts we find in Scripture. We do not need to abandon our consciousness or “enter the silence.” All to the contrary, we must use our minds because Christ became flesh with the precise intent of interacting with us within our limited spatiotemporality. For this reason, in Figure 10 below, the bottom arrow that in Figures 8 and 9 represented the entire sweep of human history, from creation to the new creation, now zooms in on the personal experience of one individual as type of all individuals throughout history.

In addressing this question we enter the realm of spiritual disciplines. We know that eternal life is to know the Father and Christ (John 17:3). Since we know both the Father and the Son through Christ (John 14:6-9), we should ask ourselves how do we know a historical person such as Jesus was. Let us reflect for a moment in the way in which we know persons that live around us. Mere looking at the physical appearance is not enough to know persons. We need to listen carefully what they say and contemplate attentively what they do. Yet, to know persons intimately we need more, right? Yes, we need to know their origin, life, and personal experiences (histories). When attempting to know Jesus we should do the same. We will not know Him by imagining

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His physical form or gaining some isolated biographical information. We need to know His history, hear Him talk, and watch Him act.

Yet, because according to the Adventist Vision the historical Person of Christ is presently in the heavenly sanctuary we should ask ourselves, how do we relate to a person that is far away? By phone, video, or emails, right? Then, to connect and relate to Christ we should do the same but with a more advanced and intimate technology: prayer. These are the basic Christian spiritual disciplines around which all others revolve. For this reason, Christ exhorted us to Bible study and prayer. Although all Christians embrace Bible reading and prayer, these “disciplines” play quite a different role in the Adventist Vision.

To begin, Scripture no longer provides icons, symbols or myths like in the classical and postmodern spiritual disciplines but the very words, thoughts, feelings and actions of God. That is why to know Christ we need to study the Bible. To behold Christ we need to individually dig deep (study, research, meditate) in Scripture. A simple reading from cover to cover will never suffice. For the sake of our eternal salvation we must study the Scriptures as if mining for gold, deeply and passionately. As we noted earlier, reading and studying are different. While reading is to look and understand the meaning of words, to study is to learn, educate oneself through research, examination, observation, and meditation. Adventist spirituality requires deep personal and congregational Bible study from the General Conference president to the most recent brother or sister baptized into the church. Studying Scripture we hear the words of God. We discover Christ’s history, words, and acts and thereby come to encounter Him. This side of eternity there is no other way. We study Scripture and its doctrines, then, not to gain head knowledge (trivia) but to know Christ, relate to Him, and become united with Him (heart knowledge).

When we study the Bible with the purpose of entering into union with God, we notice that it presents the history of Christ. In Scripture we hear His words and contemplate His actions. We look to the past, beholding Christ who created heavens and earth, gave the law, dwelt with and guided Israel and dwelt personally with the disciples. We look at the present beholding Him in the heavenly sanctuary continuously working out our Salvation (Hebrews 7:25). We look at the future and find hope beholding the promise of His soon return. For these reasons

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when we worship, pray and seek union with God we direct our minds to the heavenly sanctuary where Christ now is and in everyday spirituality our hearts anticipate His soon coming with sublime expectation. As we contemplate in our hearts the past, present and future events of Christ's life our daily spiritual life grows. And yet, knowing Christ's history is not enough to enter in union with Him.

The Bible is not Christ. Christ is not in the Bible. To achieve union with Christ we must relate to Christ's past *through His present existence in heaven and future promises*. Christ is as real today as He was in the past and will be in the future. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, ESV). We do not relate to God and experience union with Him through ecstatic feelings but through faith in Him who exists in heaven. Faith is the substance of *events* we do not see (past and present works of Christ) and *events* that are not yet (Christ second coming) (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is to trust with full conviction and certainty in the historical acts and promises of Christ. So it is that we achieve daily union with God by *faithful surrender* to the historical Christ who speaks to us through the words of Scripture (past) and applies them to our life (present) through His continual work in the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of His Spirit on earth.

We now understand that according to the Adventist Vision spirituality and union with God take place when by faith we behold in Scripture the face of Jesus Christ (incarnated Christ) and are transformed by Him into His likeness through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6). This is the nucleus of Christian spirituality.

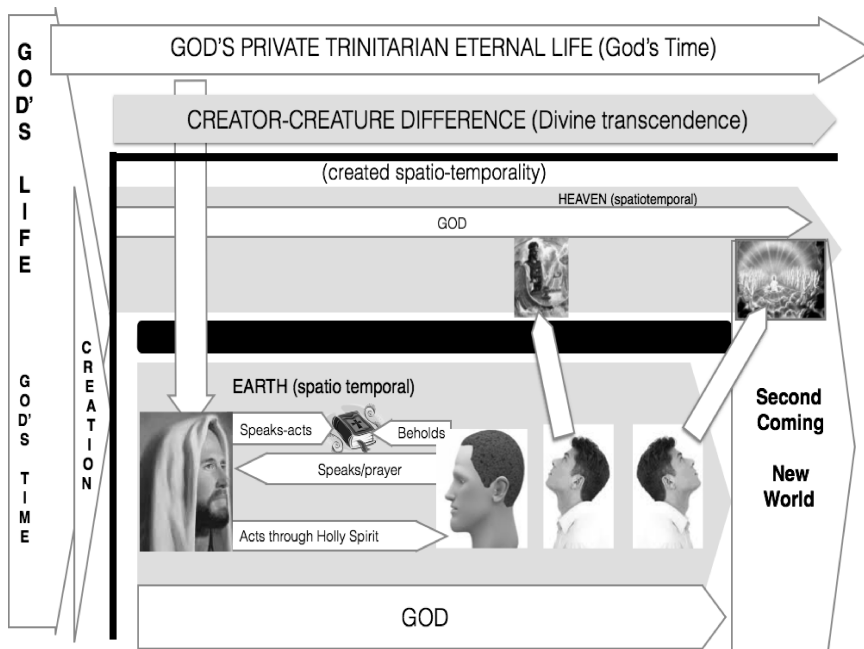


Figure 10: Adventist Vision and Spiritual Disciplines

However, union with God is a two-way street; it is a dialogue not a monologue. As God speaks with us through His Word, we must also talk to God in personal, private prayer. As God already has opened His heart, feelings and actions to us candidly in Scripture, He expects we will reciprocate in prayer. Scripture invites us to talk to God (pray) confessing our sins and opening the secret recesses of our hearts to Him imploring forgiveness and asking direction and help to face the challenges of daily life. For this reason we must not pray “contemplatively” to leave all actions and thoughts behind or hear God’s audible voice inside our heads or in the silence of the ecstatic (mystical) encounter. In Scripture God prescribes prayer not as a form of contemplation designed to help us exit our thoughts to achieve and ecstatic (mystical) experience of the timeless mystery of God (Classical and Postmodern spiritual disciplines, 1.b.3 and 1.c.3). Instead, God instituted prayer as the divine technology that allows us to talk to Christ

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directly as to a friend.³⁷ When we pray we must actively communicate our thoughts, feelings and desires to Christ in the context of our daily experiences. Union with Christ, then, requires an ongoing dialogue between Christ and us (Bible study) and, we and Christ (prayer) through faith (the disciple's total surrender to Him). If we abide in this dialogue (John 8:31; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) we will experience union with Christ. Figure 10 above will help us as we consider some important points we should keep in mind when engaging in these disciplines.

Studying Scripture we also discover the Holy Spirit is actively involved in our dialogue-relation with Christ. As an *ever-present by our side* providential divine Teacher sent by Christ and the Father to continue Christ ministry on earth³⁸ the Holy Spirit helps us to understand God's Word and apply it to our lives. If we ask in faith and complete surrender of our will to His revealed will, Christ promised He would give us whatever we ask in His name (John 14:13). If we by faith follow His teachings, believe his promises and ask in His name according to His will, He is faithful in everyday life to respond to our prayers through the presence, providential guidance and care of His representative the Holy Spirit who is also involved in presenting and answering our prayers according to God's mercy and providence.

While Bible study, prayer, and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit are essential to achieve spirituality, union with God involves yet more: *commitment and service to Christ and the mission of His Church. Praying students of Scripture must become disciples (followers).* To

³⁷ Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 129-30.

³⁸ Ellen White and the pioneers were very aware of this grounding structural fact of Christian Spirituality. Christ is in heaven and His presence on earth is mediated on earth through the invisible yet simultaneous presence of the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high." White, *The Desire of Ages*, 669. We relate to the presence of the Holy Spirit who has the "face" and continues the teachings ministry of Christ.

become disciples we must connect with Christ by faith (total submission of the will). Surrender of the will to the incarnated, resurrected, ascended, ministering (in the Heavenly Sanctuary), and soon-returning Christ involves not only careful and continuous learning. Continual learning comes through disciplined Bible study but also an open heart willing to live according to all its words, teachings, commands and promises (the entire contents of OT and NT Scriptures) (Romans 2:13). Only when we connect with Christ in this way we become truly His disciples, achieving union with Him. Since Christ is God, spiritual union with Christ is union with God. Clearly, while classical and postmodern spiritualities are God centered, *Adventist spirituality is Christ centered*. According to the Adventist Sanctuary Vision, then, *Christ is all for the disciple*.

In summary, the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer and mission must be exercised continuously to enter by faith into union with God. As we are exhorted to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), so we must walk with God continually, as did Enoch, by keeping His Words and actions fresh in our minds and engaging in the mission of the Church. We achieve union with God, then, through the dynamic, continuous two-way relationship of full openness to the past, present and future actions of Christ our Savior, High Priest, Lord and King. Moreover, Union with God is to follow Christ wherever Christ leads and do whatever he commands. We are united with Christ when our thoughts, character, desires, feelings, will, purposes, actions and mission, and Christ's thoughts, character, desires, feelings, will, purposes, actions and mission are the same.

From the beginning, Adventist spirituality existed and was empowered and motivated by the expectation of the blessed hope of Christ's soon return, the renewal of all things, and the installation of His eternal kingdom on earth. Our greatest hope is to see the face of the One who died for and stayed by our side all the way. What a joy will it be to talk with Him and to know Him more fully! The second coming will complete the spiritual experience and union with God that we may enjoy now only partially and in expectation.

2. The Vision-Spirituality-Church-Mission Connection

Our bird's-eye survey of the Classical, Postmodern and Adventist

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interpretations of spirituality and spiritual disciplines have shown two diametrically opposed approaches to Christianity. Not surprisingly, the kind of Church and mission that necessarily flow from them is vastly different as well. This opposition is caused by the undergirding vision guiding each approach to Christianity. While we may ignore, we cannot deny the cause-and-effect (causal) connection that exists between vision, spirituality, church and mission.

All Christian churches accept the undisputable fact that the church is a spiritual community which gathers around Christ. Just as spirituality is union with God (Christ) on a personal level, *the church is union with God (Christ) on a social level.*³⁹ As such, *spirituality and ecclesiology belong together.* Yet, because Christians interpret Christ and spirituality using different non-biblical visions, they end up understanding Christ in diverse ways. This takes place because a causal connection exists between vision and spirituality. The vision has a causal role because it contains the ideas (cause) necessary to understand spirituality (effect). This causal relation means that different visions will not only generate different understandings of spirituality but consequently also different understandings of the church and her mission. Consequently, when we engage in mission we assume (consciously or not) an understanding of the church, spirituality and vision. As you can see, when Adventists say they are the remnant church much more is involved than the biblical marks of the eschatological remnant. The claim stands on a different understanding of Christian spirituality, and vision.⁴⁰

This connection explains why the mission of the church depends directly on the spiritual connection of each member with Christ and the

³⁹ Ellen White was very aware of this widely recognized ecclesiological fact. See for instance, “A union of believers with Christ will as a natural result lead to a union with one another, which bond of union is the most enduring upon earth. We are one in Christ, as Christ is one with the Father. . . . It is only by personal union with Christ, by communion with Him daily, hourly, that we can bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit. . . . Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness, all depend on our union with Christ and the degree of faith we exercise in Him.” Ellen White, *God’s Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1973), 211. She works on this idea in depth when dealing with Christ’s teaching on the vine and the branches, see for instance, White, *The Desire of Ages*, 675-6, White, *Christian Education*, 75.

⁴⁰ For further information about the reasons why Adventist are the true visible Remnant Church, see, for instance, Canale, “On Being the Remnant.”

consequent unity of all believers.⁴¹ Without spirituality the mission of the Church will never succeed nor the latter rain of the Holy Spirit will be poured on her no matter how much we may pray for it.

When, after Christ's resurrection Christ's disciples reached spiritual unity⁴² they received the power of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost.⁴³ The same spiritual unity empowered Adventist missions in their early stages.⁴⁴ However, more than a century later the same mission remains unfinished. We have made great strides in extending the Adventist presence around the world through well-organized institutions. And yet, large sectors of our planet have no Adventist presence, in other areas mission is stagnant, and even in areas where Adventism seems to be

⁴¹ "The *unity*, the harmony, that should exist among the disciples of Christ is described in these words: 'That they may be one, as we are.' . . . It is through this *unity* that we are to convince the world of the *mission* of Christ, and bear our divine credentials to the world." Ellen White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964), 172.

⁴² "To the early church had been entrusted a constantly enlarging work—that of establishing centers of light and blessing wherever there were honest souls willing to give themselves to the service of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel was to be world-wide in its extent, and the messengers of the cross could not hope to fulfill their important **mission** unless they should remain united in the bonds of Christian **unity**, and thus reveal to the world that they were one with Christ in God . . . spiritual life and power was dependent on a close connection with the One by whom they had been commissioned to preach the gospel. ———, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 90.

⁴³ "To those who in faith claimed this promise it was speedily fulfilled. [repeated phrase.] After Christ's ascension the disciples were gathered together of one accord in one place. Ten days they spent in heart-searching and self-examination, each taking his own case in hand; for it had to be an individual work. As the disciples made humble supplication to God, their differences were swept away. *They became of one mind. Then the way was prepared for the Holy Spirit to enter the cleansed, consecrated soul-temples. Every heart was filled with the Spirit, whose influence came with copiousness and power, as if it had been held in restraint for ages. What was the result?* Thousands were converted in a day. The sword of the Spirit seemed new-edged with power, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow. The idolatry that had been mingled with the worship of the people was overthrown. New territory was added to the church of God. Places that had been barren and desolate sounded forth His praise." Ellen White, Australasian Union Conference Record, (June 1, 1900), par. 25 emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ White, *The Early Years : 1827-1862*, 190-93.

flourishing the mission remains unfinished. Increasingly, missionary efforts seem to stem from dutiful obligation or selfish motives than from an inner passion for dying souls. Instead of being a natural outgrowth of every believer's total commitment to Christ, mission is becoming the task of a few "church growth" professionals.

Adventists have long been aware of their desperate need of the Holy Spirit's latter rain. Yet in practice they continue to hope that new methodologies will finish the mission or/and that God's eschatological intervention will generate some sort of financial or natural disaster that may unleash the latter rain.⁴⁵ However, what if the next move is not up to God but up to the church? What if, while we are waiting for God, God is waiting for us? Perhaps we are missing the simple point that mission depends on the unity of the church, the unity of the church on spirituality, and spirituality on vision (the mission-church-spirituality-vision connection). If this is the case, the finishing of the mission of the church, requires we should immediately start making plans for a denominational wide retrieval of the Adventist Vision and its application to the spiritual lives of every Adventist to achieve the unity of the church which is the condition to receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. The urgency of times requires we do this simultaneously at all levels of church life, institutions and administration. Is such a strategy doable? I think it is. Let us see how leaders and laity could make it happen. We have nothing to lose and so much to gain! However, before we explore how we might recover the vision, we should briefly review how we lost it in the first place.

3. Vision and the Neutralization of Scripture

a. Forgetting the Vision

Obviously, Adventism did not lose its vision overnight but through a period of time surprisingly short. The brief historical review of Adventism's formative years (1844-1850), the Minneapolis Conference (1888), and the Pantheism crisis (1903) we surveyed above (2.a-b, 4.b, 3.a) provides adequate historical markers as we attempt to draw a broad tentative picture of an otherwise very complex historical reality.

⁴⁵ Although for some these arguments are persuasive, they fail to answer the question about why God has not done it yet.

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As we saw, in a few formative years Adventists discovered their vision in Scripture and by applying it to Scripture as a whole (*sola Scriptura*) they discovered a complete system of truth. However, only thirty-eight years later at Minneapolis Ellen White was deeply disturbed by the presence of a worldly spirit in the church.⁴⁶ According to her, the cause of this worldly spirit was the wonderful laziness in personal Bible study (spiritual disciplines) of church members and leaders.

After the formative years, Adventists passionate about their discovery of a complete harmonious doctrinal system eagerly shared it with others. New members received the Adventist doctrine through preaching and Bible study. However, they *did not go through the process of discovery themselves*. They understood and believed in the sanctuary but they did not truly see how it works as vision shaping the Adventist system. Instead, the sanctuary was received by new generations of Adventists as *a doctrine among many others rather than as the vision opening to view a complete and harmonious system*. They were accepting Adventist doctrines as information (head knowledge) rather than as spiritual food (heart knowledge). Without understanding the sanctuary as vision they began to trust in information received from sources other than Scripture (the teachings of the leaders). Tradition was, ever so slightly, introducing its ugly head in the Adventist community.

Yet new converts pressed on to discover new truths (doctrines) in Scripture. The vision-spirituality-church-mission connection suggests that in doing so they implicitly used a vision. Most of them by default and the presence of the formative pioneers, notably Ellen White, continued to operate within the boundaries of the Adventist Vision. Others, reading other theological sources, began to use other visions. John H. Kellogg's bright mind led him to embrace and apply the Pantheist Vision to Adventism. We survived this alluring heresy only through God's direct supernatural intervention by means Ellen White, and because the leaders back then fully accepted her counsel. This was the greatest crisis ever to confront Adventist leaders, precisely because it sought to replace the sanctuary as Adventist vision and advance a

⁴⁶ According to Ellen White, Minneapolis was the worst conference the church had experienced to that point. She wanted to leave, but remained only because in a supernatural vision God told her to remain.

completely different vision, system of truth, spirituality, church and mission. While it was checked for the moment, Ellen White anticipated a future recurrence of some form of pantheism within the church. The sad fact is that, from her day to ours, Adventists have continued to communicate and receive doctrine paying no attention to the vision role of the sanctuary doctrine or the pillars of the Adventist faith.

“Use it or lose it,” so goes the saying. As successive generations of Adventist leaders no longer used the sanctuary and the pillars of Adventism as vision, they implicitly began to use other visions. In recent times, particularly with Adventist universities and scholarly research thriving in Adventism, the Classical and Postmodern Visions, implicitly or explicitly, have been at work guiding the thinking, spirituality, worship and mission of many Adventist leaders. To most Adventists, the doctrine of the sanctuary is no longer relevant.

b. The neutralization of Scripture

As new alternate visions operate in the minds of Adventist leaders Scripture is simultaneously used and neutralized. The neutralization does not eliminate the use of Scripture even as spiritual discipline but renders it ineffective to the life of the church. Let me explain by way of a personal experience.

During some recent studies I began to read Vatican II documents and noticed a surprisingly high use of Scripture accompanied by a surprisingly low use of philosophy. My first thought was, *they are becoming Adventists!* However, careful study of Roman-Catholic literature reveals something else. In their centuries-long quest to win Protestants back to their fold they discovered that using Scripture and certain Protestant phrases proved a most effective tool. The trick is that behind their usage of Scripture and Protestant phrases, they maintain the Classical Vision to interpret Scripture, thus rendering any biblical commitment ineffectual.

For instance, the Classical Vision perfectly fits the historical-critical method of interpretation that stands on the evolutionary assumption that religious truth evolves historically (Panentheistic Vision). In this context, Scripture is used but considered to be an allegory, myth or symbol. Thus they use exegetical research to dismantle the Protestant conception of Christianity. Interpreted in the context of the Classical

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Vision, texts are used selectively to support tradition. This leads to the more foundational neutralization of Scripture in spirituality and worship. The Bible is summarily read and combined with other sources and practices. Even in American Evangelicalism the Bible is no longer studied, preached, and believed, but rather ignored and replaced by an ever-increasing number of new spiritual and liturgical practices pasted together with the emerging new sacrament of popular-beat-intensive-dancing-style music.

The new and improved “Evangelical” version of Catholicism and the “Emerging Church” movement witness to the success of Vatican II policies. These events originated from the subtle and seemingly small change from the Biblical Sanctuary Vision to the Classical Neo-Platonic Vision that is shared in common by both Roman Catholics and Protestants. A shared vision (Classical or/and Postmodern) is the ultimate ground on which deep ecumenism stands. Adventism is not immune to these events. In the absence of a solid and global retrieval and application of the Adventist Vision through the pipeline of our organization and educational institutions, we run the risk of progressively and explicitly embracing the Classical and/or Panentheistic Visions as predicted by Ellen White.

Figure 11 below helps us to visualize the vision-spirituality-church-mission connection of the Classical, Postmodern and Adventist Visions by listing the way they affect the practice of spiritual disciplines, the identification of the visible church and the nature of her mission. The top row lists the visions and the left column lists five relevant spiritual categories (the nature of Scripture, the role of Scripture in spiritual disciplines, meditation, prayer, union with God), the identification of the visible church, and, her missionary strategy. The following columns—below the Classical, Postmodern and Adventist Vision headings—compare the way in which they affect the understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines, identification of the visible church and the nature of her mission. We have dealt with these issues at several points in our journey (1.b.2-3, 5.c.2-3, and 1.d.2-3).

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	CLASSICAL VISION	POSTMODERN VISION	ADVENTIST VISION
BIBLE	Non historical spiritual eternal TRUTH	No divine TRUTH just human MYTHS	Divine historical TRUTH (History of Salvation)
BIBLE'S ROLE IN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES	BIBLE READING included as EXTERNAL INSTRUMENT (icon) to enter SPIRITUALITY	BIBLE READING included as EXTERNAL INSTRUMENT (icon) to enter SPIRITUALITY	BIBLE STUDY (understanding and applying contents to life) and PRAYER are the ESSENCE AND CONTENT OF SPIRITUALITY
MEDITATION	Beyond knowledge and words	Beyond knowledge and words	Thought knowledge of Scripture
PRAYER	Beyond knowledge and words	Beyond knowledge and words	Thought knowledge and words
UNION WITH GOD	With the SPIRIT (non historical "person") in the SOUL	With non historical person or ENERGY (Spirit) in the soul	With the historical incarnated CHRIST in our historical minds and actions
VISIBLE CHURCH	Roman Catholic and Protestant	One Emerging Universal Church	The Remnant Church
MISSION	Christian Ecumenism	Deep all-inclusive ecumenism	Preaching Three Angels' Message

Figure 11: Effect of the Vision-Spirituality-Vision Connection by Vision

We are already witnessing these trends operating within Adventism to the neutralization of Scripture. Their strong proponents are in favor of old (classical) new (postmodern) worship styles and spiritual disciplines because these work harmoniously with their advocacy of the

historical-critical method and evolution. Implementation of these worship styles and spiritual disciplines in Adventist institutions indicate that the Classical and/or Postmodern Visions are already at play. Explicitly embracing and applying a new vision in place of the Adventist Sanctuary Vision will signal the end of the Adventist Church and her God-given mission. Make no mistake, if we do nothing at a global level in our institutions and churches this event will take place. Fortunately there is yet time and much we can do to avert such a turn of events.

4. Vision and Method: Maximizing Human Resources

Perhaps you agree that we cannot continue doing business as usual, and yet you find my proposal so far either impractical or unnecessary. At this point in our journey some may think I am pushing my “head knowledge” agenda on the church. I agree, more head knowledge will not change anything. Others, especially those in the General Conference administration, will correctly point out that this proposal is not new as they have already enacted excellent global initiatives on prayer, personal Bible study, spirituality and discipleship.⁴⁷ I agree and from the bottom of my heart thank them for taking decided steps to bring the denomination back to Scripture. Their efforts are moving the global church in the right direction. Yet, allow me to respectfully suggest that

⁴⁷For the global prayer 777 initiative, see, <http://www.revivalandreformation.org/777>. For a global personal study initiative, see, <http://revivedbyhisword.org>. For the emphasis on spirituality, see for instance, Mark Finley, “Biblical Spirituality Part 1: Rediscovering Our Biblical Roots, or Embracing the East?,” *Adventist Review*, August, 16 2012, 1: 204 par 2, ———, “Biblical Spirituality Part 2: Rediscovering Our Biblical Roots, or Embracing the East?,” *Adventist Review*, August, 23 2012, ———, “Seeking a Deeper Spiritual Experience: Enjoying the Benefits While Avoiding the Pitfalls,” *Adventist Review*, August, 11 2011, Eric Anderson, “What Is a Mystic? Seeking Companionship with Christ,” *Adventist Review Online*, www.adventistreview.org/2013-1501-16, John Jovan Markovic, “Lover or Seducer? Does ‘Spirituality’ Mean More Than One Thing?,” *Adventist Review*, www.adventistreview.org/2013-1518-p18, Bill Knott, “‘Formed in Christ’ What’s Behind the Debate About Spiritual Formation?,” *ibid.*, August, 11 2011, Mark A. Kellner, “At Andrews. Wilson Urges ‘Authentic’ Spirituality for Adventists,” *Adventist Review Online*, <http://archives.adventistreview.org/article/6248/archives/issue-2013-1511/11-cn-at-andrews-wilson-urges-authentic-spirituality-for-adventists>. For the emphasis on discipleship, see for instance, <http://ifollowdiscipleship.org/>, and, <http://www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com/>.

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there is much more the General Conference and the institutions of the global church can do to bring Adventism back to the Bible. Essentially, *they can lead the world church in recapturing and applying the Adventist vision.*

The way to overcome the neutralization of Scripture and finish the mission of the church is simple. We need to retrieve and apply the biblical vision globally, at all levels of church ministry and institutions. Although simple, this task is also huge. What makes this simple task so massive is its complexity and the possibility that at the present time the human resources of the church may find themselves unknowingly operating from a diversity of conflicting visions. Complexity means that both the task and the situation have many interlocking parts that together make up both task and our present situation. The hugeness of this task implies that no single person, committee or institution can accomplish or finish it. Furthermore, the accomplishment of this ongoing task requires the combined efforts of all Adventists around the world. Let us first consider the complexity of the situation.

a. Complex Situation

1. Institutions

Although the church is a spiritual community that gathers around Jesus Christ, its existence and operation requires material resources or institutions (ground zero, first article, 1.2.1, 3.b). Three different yet harmoniously coordinated types of institutions facilitate the work of the Adventist Church: church administration, educational and medical institutions, and local churches. In turn, these institutions require the existence of human resources (first article, 1.2.2) capable of performing the tasks necessary to reach their respective goals. The task of retrieving and applying the vision to the spiritual life and mission of the church properly belongs to the administration, educational institutions and local churches). However, since educational institutions shape the mindset of church leadership, the task of retrieving and applying the Adventist vision primarily falls within the scope of educational institutions, particularly Adventists universities. For as the educational system goes, so goes the church.

2. Pastors and Teachers

But churches and institutions go (think and do) as their pastors and teachers go, and all of them have, implicitly or explicitly, a vision that determines how they think and where they go. And from where do their visions come? They come from what they have experienced in their homes, communities, churches and schools (tradition). In the context of the loss of the Adventist vision, doctrinal illiteracy, and neutralization of Scripture reported earlier, we must suspect that several conflicting visions are presently operating in the mind of our educators (pastors and teachers) resulting in confusion among leaders and laity.

This situation affects the ministry of more than 26,000 pastors and nearly 90,000 primary, secondary and tertiary Adventist educators around the world. Among them, over 11,000 Seventh-day Adventist tertiary/university teachers around the world⁴⁸ play the more significant role because in their everyday ministries they are closer to the more subtle and technical aspects of the retrieval and application of visions in the community of faith.

3. *Sola Scriptura*

If several visions are operating within the church, how can we become of one mind and spirit and rally around the Adventist Vision? Since our embrace and use of any particular interpretation of vision is a matter of faith, we cannot and must not force the Adventist Vision on anyone, even Seventh-day Adventists leaders. Such a move will preempt the goal we are trying to reach: global spiritual unity and the fulfillment of the final mission of the Christian church to prepare the way for Jesus's soon return.

Scripture is the one thing that may hold us together because it is the only place where we find direct and detailed revelation of Christ's history of salvation. Adventists should go back to embrace the *sola Scriptura* principle (Fundamental Beliefs, 1). Because *sola Scriptura* affirms that Scripture (Old and New Testaments) interprets itself, embracing this principle automatically means the rejection of Christian tradition and of the Classical and Postmodern Visions.

⁴⁸ General Conference of Seventh day Adventists, 2011 Statistical Report, 9. (<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2013.pdf>)

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We know Scripture is a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). However, when the psalmist affirms “in your light do we see light” (Psalm 36:9) he recognizes that our vision of Scripture (light) must also originate in God (light) and therefore is implicitly affirming the *sola Scriptura* principle. Recognizing the fact we think and act implicitly or explicitly applying a vision (set of guiding interpretive principles) we should deal with this issue and resolve it in the light of Scripture. Those of us holding to extra-biblical visions, like the classical and postmodern, will come to see that they belong to other spiritual communities. After all, “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”⁴⁹

The process of deconstructing our own personal and institutional visions and placing them under the scrutiny of God’s Word is the first necessary step toward spiritual unity and the latter rain power for missionary global engagement.

4. Adventist Vision

The good news is that, in turning to Scripture we do not need to search for a vision. The pioneers already found it and applied it. *We know the Biblical Vision exists, and works!* The origination and success of the global Adventist church testifies to this fact. Moreover, we have—in the detailed and extensive writings of Ellen White—clear examples of how the vision functions when applied, for instance, to areas such as systematic theology, ministry, education, administration and mission. With brilliance of mind, clear understanding of complex theoretical and practical issues, coherent reasoning, and simple words her contributions started the huge deconstructive and constructive tasks made necessary by the discovery of the Adventist Vision, to establish Christianity upon its eternal basis.⁵⁰ We need only to expand, formulate and apply the Adventist vision both at the technical level of sophisticated academic scholarship and at the common level of every day life.

Let us turn our attention now to the complexity of the task before us.

⁴⁹ White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*, 595.

⁵⁰ White, *Selected Messages*, 3:407; Letter 1f, 1890. 1.

b. Complex Task

Adventism must now attempt to overcome the present neutralization of Scripture in its ranks at all levels of its multifaceted organization, institutions and ministries.

1. Levels of Operation

The church grows quantitatively and qualitatively. As Adventism grew in numbers and extended globally, a parallel and needed expansion and deepening of activities took place. Knowledge and quality of resources increased. By the second half of the 20th century this much needed and welcome growth generated specializations and the creation of new “areas” (institutions) and “departments” (specialties) of service. Adventism includes, at least, four major areas of work: administration, ministry, local churches, and educational institutions (ground zero, first article, 3.b). They facilitate the operation of various specialized disciplines of study and action such as administration, ministry, mission, exegesis, theology and history that stretch along three broad levels of reality involving life (action), theory (doctrines), and foundations (grounds for thinking and action) (Figure 12).

LEVELS	ACTIVITIES / DISCIPLINES
LIFE	MISSION MINISTRY ADMINISTRATION FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS
THEORY	DOCTRINES SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY EXEGESIS
FOUNDATIONS	METHOD HERMENEUTICS SOLA SCRIPTURA

Figure 12: Level and Activities in the Church

In turn, each discipline tailored its methods of operation to reach

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their own regional goals. In this way they became more efficient, yet isolation ensued as an unintended side effect. Unfortunately, isolation hinders communication, brews fragmentation and hampers growth. Because each area and discipline naturally connects and depends on each other, their separation hinders their development and contributions to the mission of the church.

This situation brings both good and bad news. The good news is that as a result of specialization, the church has developed many wonderful and needed resources that might facilitate her spiritual unity and mission. The bad news is that, comparatively, very few workers and members benefit from the contributions of each resource.

The solution to this ambivalent situation is not to stop dividing our workload into different areas (institutions) and departments (specialties) but to connect them in a way that may allow each one to work unitedly. This should be achieved not by costly or time-consuming external connections involving committee dialogue, but rather internally linking the methodology of each specialty to the Adventist Vision. However, forging a “built-in disciplinary connection” in each disciplinary methodology will not eliminate the external “interdisciplinary” connection through committee work but will greatly reduce the time usually required to get everyone working on the same page and maximize outcomes. In other words, by preventing unnecessary conflicts produced by the application of conflicting visions it will maximize the effectiveness of each department and save precious time and money in the work of interdisciplinary committees. In this way, each area and discipline will exponentially increase its own production and overall effectiveness for the global church.

To maximize the large denominational resources available to facilitate the mission of the church we *must secure the harmonious operation of each disciplinary methodology with the Vision of Adventism*. This task requires we must move into the field of method.

2. Vision and Method: Working on the Same Page on Ground Zero.

Basically, method is a *way to do something* that can be replicated by anyone anywhere. As we minister for the church we are constantly *doing something*, aren't we? So, method and life belong together. Think for a

minute, what do we do when we do something? We could say that when we do things we (1) engage in activity (method) in order to (2) achieve something (goal). Let's say, for instance, what you want to do is eat an apple or drive a car. Obviously, what you have to do to achieve each goal is different, right? Moreover, if you decide to bake a cake (goal) you need also flour, yeast, milk, oil etc., . . . (materials) and a recipe to guide you (vision). This simple example shows us that method (what we do) requires and is shaped by its goals, materials and vision.

Different goals require different methods. Method (activity), then, never exists in independence from other ideas but is conditioned and shaped by the goals, material and vision it implicitly or explicitly embraces. We can see, then, that there are three main conditions (issues) tied to the application of any method, (1) the goal we want to achieve, (2) the material required to achieve the goal, and (3) the framework (vision) to see (interpret) both the goal and the material ⁵¹ (see Figure 13).

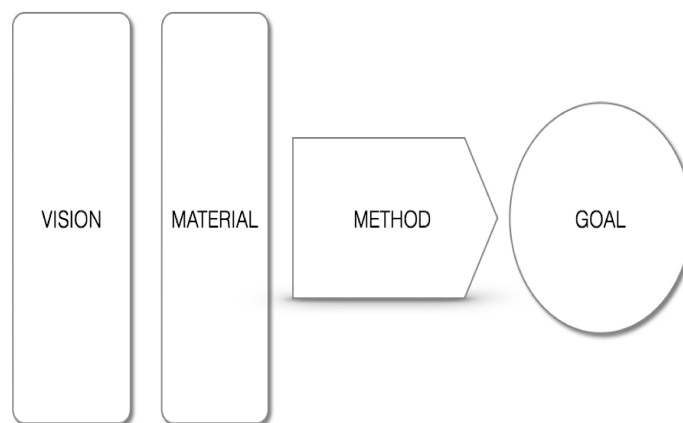


Figure 13: Components of Method

Since the material, vision and goal of the theological method have been interpreted in various ways by different Christian denominations,

⁵¹ For a more detailed account of method, see for instance, Fernando Canale, "Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43, no. 3 (2001).

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Adventists should never adopt existing methodologies without careful critical evaluation of the conditions attached to them.⁵² In the past we have taken for granted that we can safely draw from Evangelical sources and methodologies because they hold a high view of Scripture's authority as we do.⁵³ Although this could have been truth in the past with some Evangelical authors and denominations that is no longer valid in our days. The immense majority of Evangelical and Protestant seminaries work and write using methods flowing from the Classical or Postmodern Visions and do not apply the *sola Scriptura* principle. If we persist in adopting exegetical, theological, ministerial, missionary and worship methods taken from Evangelical and scholarly sources without critical evaluation, Adventists will intensify the process of neutralization of Scripture already present in the church. Figure 14 helps to visualize the main differences in the interpretation of the conditions of method that exist between all Christian denominations and tradition, and Adventism.

⁵² “Error cannot stand alone, and would soon become extinct if it did not fasten itself like a parasite upon the tree of truth. Error draws its life from the truth of God. The traditions of men, like floating germs, attach themselves to the truth of God, and men regard them as a part of the truth. Through false doctrines, Satan gains a foothold, and captivates the minds of men, causing them to hold theories that have no foundation in truth.” White, *Evangelism*, 589.

⁵³ Canale, “The Eclipse of Scripture and the Protestantization of the Adventist Mind: Part 1: The Assumed Compatibility of Adventism with Evangelical Theology and Ministerial Practices,” ———, “Sola Scriptura and Hermeneutics: Toward a Critical Assessment of the Methodological Ground of the Protestant Reformation.”

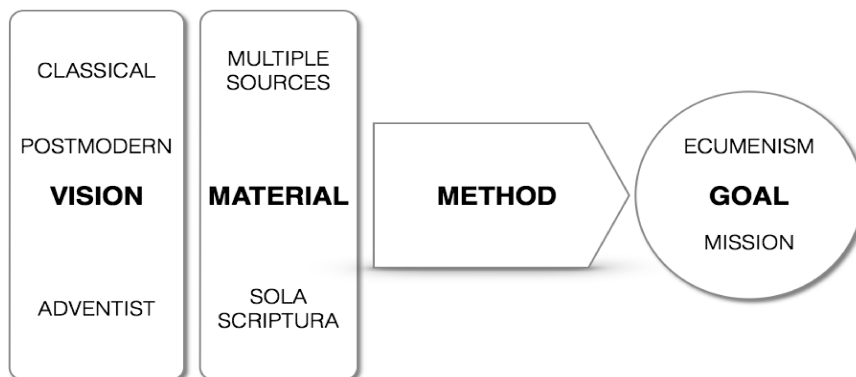


Figure 14: Main Interpretations of the Conditions of Theological Method

By borrowing scholarly and ministerial methodologies, the guiding ideas grounding these visions, like undetected viruses, are infiltrating the Adventist mind and action. In this way the Adventist Biblical Vision is displaced and replaced by new generations of scholars and students. Besides, grounded in tradition these methodologies embrace an ever-increasing multiplicity of sources rejecting the *sola Scriptura* principle. Under the sheer power of the Classical and Postmodern Visions deep ecumenism becomes the ultimate goal and mission of Christianity.⁵⁴ In this setting, the mission of the church is no longer conceived as a call to worship the true God in Christ Jesus but as the advancement of a global organization.

3. The Task Ahead

We have a vast task ahead of us. It involves all levels of church thinking and action described above (Foundations, Theory and Life, Figure 12). It calls for a critical assessment of all traditions and methodologies (including Adventist traditions and methodologies) in the light (vision) of Scripture. This critical assessment includes two major

⁵⁴ The expression “deep” ecumenism labels the global approach to ecumenism. With this goal in mind “deep” ecumenism attempts to unite in one visible church or religious movement all Christian denominations and religions, even atheists.

steps, (1) deconstruction⁵⁵ and (2) construction.

The accomplishment of this task requires the expansion and integration of the doctrine of the sanctuary and the pillars of the Adventist faith at ground zero level (our educational institutions) (first article, 3.b). Let me explain. So far in this work and my other writings, I have loosely connected the Biblical Vision to the doctrine of the sanctuary, as did Ellen White and the pioneers. Yet, in many respects the task before us differs from the task the pioneers and Ellen White faced in their time. Furthermore, not every aspect of the sanctuary doctrine and the pillars of Adventism plays a vision/hermeneutical role. Additionally, most probably, what you have received as “the sanctuary doctrine” is not what plays the role of vision necessary to engage in deconstructive and constructive work. For instance, many Adventists associate the sanctuary doctrine with 1844 and the Investigative Judgment. While this teaching belongs to the sanctuary doctrine it plays no role in the Adventist Vision. Meanwhile, the doctrine of man (a pillar of Adventism) though included in the Biblical Vision plays no salient role in the sanctuary doctrine.

Consequently, the task before us finds Adventism in need of doing pioneer “missionary” work in two areas as yet unconquered, Fundamental and Systematic Theologies.⁵⁶ This vacuum is perplexing because Adventism emerged as a new Fundamental Theology (Vision) generating a new Systematic Theology (complete and harmonious system of philosophy and theology) that propelled it in to existence and mission. Most likely this vacuum has played a large role in the neutralization of Scripture, loss of identity, and deceleration of missions.

⁵⁵ Fernando Canale, “Deconstrucción Y Teología: Una Propuesta Metodológica,” *Davar/Logos* 1, no. 1 (2002), ———, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006).

⁵⁶ Some initial writings on this area exist. Working in the light of the Classical and Postmodern Vision see, for instance, Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999). And, working in the light of the Adventist Vision see, for instance, Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), ———, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, and Salvation* (Berrien Springs MI: Andrews University Press, 2012).

Ministry and missions, worship, leadership and administration need special, urgent and creative attention due to the extensive “Evangelical dependence” in these areas. Could this unfortunate situation be revealing a sort of denominational “wonderful scholarly laziness” similar to the 1888 denominational “wonderful laziness” in personal Bible study?

Fortunately, the areas of biblical exegesis and studies, creationism, and archeology have continued to grow in the light of the Adventist Vision. While these areas still need to grow and expand, their present achievements provide a solid basis on which to build the task ahead. The secret of their success lies in their critical awareness of the conditions of method. This knowledge allowed scholars and pastors to avoid the viruses attached to the evolutionary and historical-critical methodologies prevalent in these fields and provide sound scholarly methodological alternatives. Undoubtedly, General Conference support plays an important role in their success. The same success story needs to be written in all areas of church scholarship, theology, ministry, mission and administration.

4. Working Together Globally

The task/challenge described in this essay is doable. As a matter of fact, a small group of representative, yet proportionally insignificant, Adventist scholars, pastors, missionaries, historians, administrators, and seminary students are presently starting work on it, critically addressing the foundational methodological issues in the light of the *sola Scriptura* principle and the Adventist Vision. Yet the danger waged to the unity, spirituality and mission of Adventism, springing from the neutralization of Scripture, requires immediate global action.

As viruses⁵⁷ the Classical and Postmodern Visions are attached to the methods of theology, ministry and mission we uncritically borrow

⁵⁷ Ellen White was very much aware of this phenomenon. “Error cannot stand alone, and would soon become extinct if it did not fasten itself like a parasite upon the tree of truth. Error draws its life from the truth of God. The traditions of men, like floating germs, attach themselves to the truth of God, and men regard them as a part of the truth. Through false doctrines, Satan gains a foothold, and captivates the minds of men, causing them to hold theories that have no foundation in truth. Men boldly teach for doctrines the commandments of men; and as traditions pass on, from age to age, they acquire a power over human mind.” White, *Evangelism*, 589.

from Evangelical traditions. Once we embrace them, we disseminate and perpetuate them through the Adventist educational and mass media systems. This process is slowly but certainly leading Adventism away from Scripture in an ecumenical direction. We are creating an “Adventist tradition” that stands in need of deconstruction. If Adventists wish to remain faithful to the *sola Scriptura* principle (Fundamental Belief, 1) inertia is not an option. We must remember, retrieve, embrace, expand, use and disseminate the Adventist Vision globally. This task can only be achieved with the support and leadership of the General Conference. An interdisciplinary group should draw a methodological template to help integrate all levels and areas of the church the Adventist Vision and missionary goal. The simultaneous global application of this template will help Adventism, from its universities to the local church and solitary missionaries in unentered territories, to critically deconstruct and reconstruct all disciplinary methodologies applied by all church ministries and services. The graphic in Figure 15 helps us to visualize the guiding unifying role that the Adventist Vision and the missionary goal of the church play in the formation of disciplinary and regional methodologies.

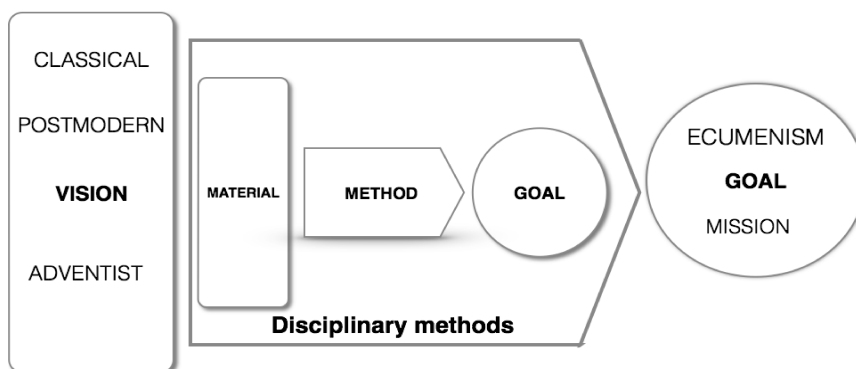


Figure 15: Methodological Temple for Disciplinary Methods

This grounding work will help all disciplines, ministries and missionary efforts to develop their own methodologies according to their specific goals and materials of study, ministry and mission. However,

they will not be guided by the Classical or Postmodern interpretations of the vision but by the Adventist Vision presented in Scripture. Likewise, their goal will be the one required by the Biblical Vision given to the eschatological remnant.

This reactivation of the vision-spirituality-church-mission connection will once again place Christ and Scripture back at the center of the highly complex spiritual life and mission of the church, facilitating her preparation to receive the latter rain, and preach the loud cry announcing the second coming of Christ.

5. Conclusion

We are back home and after a good night's sleep find ourselves ruminating over our recent experiences. Our journey has sought to explore the way in which we can all participate in bringing Christ and His Word back as the sole ground and living center of the life of the church. We found that way through the vision-spirituality-church-mission connection. As a denomination we were already familiar with the connection between mission and spirituality and have been working on it diligently for many years. However, we have not been successful because we forgot and neglected the connection of both to the Adventist Vision. For this reason our journey reviewed some chosen destinations including the vision's nature, mode of operation, and expected outcomes. We also surveyed its loss in Adventist history, the leading interpretations of vision operative in Christian tradition and the consequences each unleashes in the vision-spirituality-church-mission connection. While Christian Visions neutralize Scripture the Adventist Vision reverses this and prevents neutralization fostering its central spiritual role in the church. Finally, we considered ways to maximize Adventism's institutional and human resources to facilitate the remembering, retrieving, embracing, expanding, application and dissemination of the Adventist Vision by each Adventist leader and member globally. *Our mission is to share the vision.*

I pray our journey helped you grasp the nature and role of the Adventist Vision for the church and feel in your heart a strong desire to use it to illumine your own life and ministry. The Adventist Vision is the heart of Seventh-day Adventism. It allows Scripture, doctrines, spirituality, church and mission to work harmoniously together in an

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inseparable and dynamic unity generated and empowered by the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

To refuse to recapture the *Sola Scriptura* principle, which would lead us to recover and expand de Adventist Vision, is not an option. As we saw, inertia in this area leads back to Rome. While some Seventh-day Adventists may prefer to go in that direction, they should keep in mind they are committing denominational suicide. The destiny of Adventism and the fulfillment of God’s mission to the remnant are at risk. The stakes could not be higher.

Yet, there is no reason for inertia other than the “most wonderful laziness” in Bible study we have been experiencing ever since Minneapolis. The recovery of the Adventist Vision is doable—quickly and globally—without much financial investment. In spite of the neutralization of Scripture making inroads in the church, most Adventists are still strongly committed to Scripture. What they need is guidance from their pastors and leaders on why and how to study Scripture in depth to develop their spiritual connection with God and engage in mission. If administrators, educators, and pastors lead together in a worldwide denominational effort to recover, expand, and disseminate the Adventist Vision to the church and the world, the mission of *the church could be fulfilled in this generation*.

Just consider how timely the Adventist Vision is to help us present the gospel to postmodern minds. The elusive key that can open the postmodern mind to the gospel has already been given to the Adventist church in her vision. Unfortunately, in the process of forgetting their vision, Adventists simultaneously watered down the gospel message to embrace the emasculated version dictated by the Classical and Postmodern visions. The key, then, is not to wrap the same diluted message in whatever package is most attractive to postmodern culture (contextualization). The key is not in the package but in the message. We need to *rethink and reformulate the gospel in the light of the Adventist Vision*. Postmoderns long for ways to make sense of and heal their broken experiences caused by the relativism and materialism our age presses on them. Besides, they are open to spiritual solutions and love narratives. If you pay attention, it would appear as if God has prepared the world to hear the historical gospel narrative of the Great Controversy discovered by Adventists almost two centuries ago!

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Were Adventists to recover and expand the Adventist Vision and apply it to the gospel they would see and experience the true historical gospel as it is in Christ. Then, the mission of the remnant will flow naturally from every Adventist heart around the world. Adventists can do it in this generation if all our institutional and human resources are intentionally engaged in the task of recovering and expanding the Adventist Vision as the basis for all methodologies and spiritual experiences.

The Psalmist well knew that only in God's "light can we see light" (39:6). Only in Scripture can we find God's light illumining our eyes and guiding our steps (Psalm 119:105). Because Peter understood that God's prophetic light shines brighter as we move forward, he exhorted us to use it as "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star [Christ] rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19 ESV). The way to the Promised Land, then, requires we journey together back to Scripture to recapture the Adventist Vision that will show us the way forward. Then, united with Christ and His Holy Spirit, we will with one voice proclaim the full gospel message to prepare a people ready and eagerly awaiting our Lord and Savior's glorious return.

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