

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (Isa 30:21).

And then we have another encouraging promise as we seek for a sanctified character:

When we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.¹⁹

Surely it behooves us, living in the final moments before our Lord's return, to strive, with God's help, to live in harmony with nature's laws, that our *health* might provide us with undimmed moral discernment to make our *salvation* sure.

Endnotes

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- 4 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs & Prophets*, p. 370.
- 5 J. S. Howlett, A. E. Hay, G. R. Shergold, and H. M. Ferres, "Workload and Fatigue In-Flight EEG Changes," *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Med* 49:1187-1202, 1978.
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- 11 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol 3, p. 507.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460.
- 13 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol 3, p. 324.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 102.
- 15 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol 2, p. 347.
- 16 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol 3, p. 50-51.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 18.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 138.
- 19 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 3/2 (1992):111-122.
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THE PILGRIMAGE OF A BELIEVER

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I will attempt to describe for you the intellectual journey I have experienced as a believer, reared and educated in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My parents were and continue to be dedicated and active members of the Church, and our family spent some time in the mission field. Upon their return to the United States, my parents continued to be active in the development of new churches in the community in which they lived. From grade school through graduate school, earning a seminary degree, my studies were exclusively in Adventist schools and under the tutelage of very dedicated teachers.

Introduction to the Role of Reason

Two basic principles stood out in my education: the absolute freedom of the individual and the necessity to pursue truth. The highest exercise of reason was the task of thinking for ourselves. Not only was it our privilege, but also our duty to follow truth—wherever it might be found, and wherever it might lead.

Thus students stood in the line of the Reformation. We were free from the domination of the church, the state, and the Bible to both think and know for ourselves. Freedom was absolute, it was self-existent. Freedom was a given. God, who operated in harmony with the laws of the universe, granted us freedom of thought, and submitted Himself to the laws of evidence. The free exercise of reason provided the key by which truth could be measured.

Truth was discovered when we exercised our reason to discover the basic data of the universe, the basic facts of the case. Then,

through our reasoning processes, we could integrate the basic facts into a whole, which process resulted in knowledge. If we came to an erroneous conclusion, it was not the fault of reason itself, but a fault in the use of the reasoning process. Such a fault could be remedied by further rational analysis of the problem. As students, we were taught to question every theory, philosophy, and idea in order to determine whether it stood up to the criteria of reason necessary for the determination of truth.

Ours was the age of science. Man could place himself on the moon. He could perform wonders on the operating table. Even unsolved problems were still in our control. It was simply a matter of time, money, and the skillful use of our senses through the means of the instrumentation which science had so ably invented, and solutions could be found to the unsolved problems of the day.

The same was also true on the social scene. By the use of humankind's creative ingenuity, and by careful analysis and application of the laws of sociology and psychology, given time, dedication, and talent, we could solve the problems of the social ills of society.

Through the means of history, archaeology, and geology, humankind could search back in time and determine what really happened in the history of the earth.

Reason and My Adventist Religion

Fortunately, for us as Christians, and particularly as Seventh-day Adventists, our brand of Christianity was the most rational way to live and think. We had only to share this knowledge with other individuals, who were sincerely seeking for truth, and they would also choose to be Seventh-day Adventists.

We were taught that Scripture and Ellen White also supported this view. God, it was agreed, never asks for our belief without giving us sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith.¹ God appeals to us to come and reason together (Isa 1:18)² And to confirm all of this, we were told that the book of Hebrews itself taught that faith is based upon evidence.³ Scripture and Ellen White thus gave a call for a rationally⁴ based religion. Biblical revelation was authoritative, because it was reasonable.

It was the task of the believer to gather the data, the evidence,

and bring it together in such a way as to make a coherent whole. Thus, the Christian arrived at knowledge. Then, based upon this data now brought together into a unit of knowledge, the believer could project (like a hypothesis) how the new data coming into the system would relate to what was already known. This projection was a faith statement into the unknown, based upon what was known. Thus, reason and science provided a model for the determination of the nature of faith.

Relations Between Nature, Bible, and Reason

What then was the relationship between data from the natural world, data from God's special revelation, the Bible, and reason? Since the natural world, Scripture and reason all came from God, they should be in harmony with one another. Nature brought limited truths about God. Revelation (the Bible) brought additional truths not discoverable by nature.

Although God's supernatural revelation brought additional information, it nonetheless was congruent with what was discovered to be true in the natural world. Therefore, the task of the believer was to synthesize God's revelation in nature with His special revelation in the Bible so they harmonized with one another.

It was exciting to me to think that there were in the natural world evidences that could be used to prove my faith. I wanted a rock bottom foundation upon which to base my acceptance of God and the validity of the Bible as His word. Such reasoning would use universal argumentation that would be acceptable to everyone. Since this argumentation would be in harmony with the nature of things, it would be acceptable to everyone who took their rationality seriously.

Thus, I sought evidences from the sciences and the humanities—from such diverse disciplines as medicine, biology, geology, archaeology, history and philosophy. With such a firm foundation provided by reason, I could surely prove the existence of a personal God and bring conviction to any rational being that the Bible was His Word. Thus, reason could provide a firm foundation for accepting the supernatural and for bringing about a synthesis between the natural and the supernatural.

An Illustration

Such theological thinking can take many directions. I will illustrate one example by focusing on a theology which derives its understanding of God from a particular notion of love. A key criterion in establishing the truth of this theological stance was my question, Does this idea coincide with my idea of a God of love?

If a theological concept was not worthy of my view of God, it had to be reinterpreted in such a way so as to make it acceptable. The concept of God was judged, and, therefore, formed according to my concept of love. Fortunately, for me, my concept of love was right. Such thinking brought about a neat rational explanation of the judgment. The judgment took place in the amphitheater of the universe. The universe looked on as *God* was brought into the court of judgment. The inhabitants of the universe were free to determine rationally whether God was a God of justice and love.

Within this context, the biblical God of justice had to be reinterpreted. The eradication of sinners was not God's act. It was simply the result of human beings separating themselves from the Lifegiver. Furthermore, Christ, by His death, did not take our sins upon Himself. Such a concept was contrary to rationality. What justice is there if one man dies in the place of another? The notion of a substitutionary atonement was pagan. The cross was explained only as a manifestation of the love of God that the universe might be won over by this expression of the Divine concern.

Such theological expression was exciting to my searching mind. I was relieved of the embarrassment of accepting God as He is represented in parts of the Old and New Testaments. The stumbling block of the cross was removed. I could now live with the God of the Bible in contemporary society.

The New Dimensions

During this time, I became acquainted with the application of the historical-critical method to the study of the Bible. The historical-critical method is basically the application of humanistic methods to the study of literature. Due to my rationalistic background, it was only natural for me to accept its validity for the study of the Bible. The historical-critical method was in harmony with the way my mind had been trained to operate. Furthermore, the method

itself could be used to defend the Bible against the attacks of the critics. The end surely justified the means.

When my educational pursuits transferred from the west coast to the mid-west, a new dimension came into play in my theological education. Neo-orthodoxy, and concepts closer to existentialism, began to take on more weight. The Bible was not the Word of God. It merely contained the Word of God. The subjectivity of human knowledge was emphasized. Truth tended to be relative to the individual. However tempting such positions might have been, they finally had little power, for I was well trained in the rationality of knowledge and of human thought.

By education, I was fully a twentieth century thinker. I lived in the age of man come of age. Man could think for himself. He could discover his own knowledge, determine his own criterion for truth. Truth could be discovered, known, and affirmed apart from any relation with God. Man had an independent standpoint in the universe from which he could determine even the truth regarding God and the Bible as His word. Only thus could man preserve his freedom and rationality, the key principles of this century. I had adopted a stance of an intellectual righteousness by works.

Questions and Surprises

Occasional voices declared the authority of Scripture. Sometimes, these voices confused me, because they were also spoken in the context of the finality of rationality. Nonetheless, the idea of the authority of Scripture was attractive, for it seemed to be in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist belief. Furthermore, it made sense. If the Bible was God's word, surely it must be authoritative.

Questions began to arise. Obviously, reason provided the final foundation and criterion for truth, but then, what was the authority of the Bible?

At this time, I began doctoral studies at Catholic University, Washington, D.C. One of my projects involved a paper on the history of method in theology. Among other themes the paper required an argumentation for the authority of Scripture from a rational perspective. (At the time, I did not realize that I was delineating an oxymoron).

In the course of a discussion with my professor, I attempted to

get down to the fundamentals of theology. I wanted to get in touch with the nature of things, with the basic data, with the truth which stood in the universe outside of me and could be objectively understood by my mind, with the basic nature of the universe. With such knowledge, I reasoned, I could get in touch with the nature of the universe and thereby develop a theology which would be in harmony with the way things are—with the truth.

God and the universe were so interrelated, that I could start with the natural world and use that as a foundation for speaking about Him. That same foundation could be used as a basis for integrating knowledge from nature and special revelation. From the standpoint of an understanding of the nature of the universe, I could argue for the existence of God and the authority of the Bible as His Word.

Imagine my surprise when the professor paused, looked at me from across the desk, and said, "Ed, you are a medieval theologian."⁶ I was stunned. I am not a Catholic medieval theologian. I am an Adventist, I said to myself.

A further surprise was the reaction of my peers to the paper on the authority of Scripture. The reaction from both my Catholic professor and some of my peers in the classroom was the same. The problem of subjectivity precludes the possibility of basing theology upon the authority of Scripture they argued. I attempted to answer their questions from a philosophical perspective without satisfaction. To my surprise, the answers which I could not find philosophically lay already within the Bible and Ellen G. White. That is a story itself.

Discovery: I Was a Humanist

For the next nine months I began both an intense search and an intense struggle. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 1 & 2 did not make sense to me. "Christ sent me not . . . to preach . . . with wisdom of words; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor 1:17; 2:5, KJV). "Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:5, KJV). Foolishness?

Saving faith is the gift of God, Paul said (Eph 2:8) that comes by hearing the Word (Rom 10:17). But how could I take such a step?

After all, wasn't I free? Wasn't my mind the foundation and measure of truth? Didn't I use rationality to build a rock-solid foundation for faith? Because of the fundamental nature of reason, knowledge had a firm and certain foundation.

The idea of giving up the autonomy of my reason was frightening. To accept something in its place as the foundation of faith and knowledge was something to be resisted with all of my will. It was horrible, it was sinful!

My education had taught me to question everything in the pursuit of truth. Everything, that is, except reason itself. Reason was sacrosanct; it was the unquestioned starting point for true knowledge; it was the obvious starting point from which any true human being would view the universe.

I had thought that I was a child of the Protestant Reformation, but now I began to realize that I was a child of the Enlightenment instead. The Reformation taught the subservience of man to the Bible as the foundation of faith, knowledge, and the exercise of reason. The Enlightenment freed man from an alleged bondage to Scripture. It demanded man's autonomy even in his decision regarding God and His Word. I began to realize that I was a humanist, that is, that I had placed faith in man's mind as the final arbiter of truth, and had made all else subject to man. Man was autonomous.

Upon reflection, I began to realize that I had accepted contemporary Western thought: its notions of freedom, truth, knowledge, and love—along with its political systems—as normative for describing the nature of God, and the way He operates within the arena of the universe. God wins His way in the universe in the same way in which the president wins his way in American politics, by the will of the people, so I had thought. The judgment is election time. The people make a rational decision regarding the righteousness and loveability of God. The task of the theologian was to construct a God who was likeable, who could win in the religious arena. I wanted a God who would bring about a "kinder gentler universe." I needed a God who could spell potato. Thus, by way of the notion of the God of love, the theologian could win the world to God.

Questions began to arise regarding the viability of such a system. What made the Western system of thought and politics the

norm for determining the nature and actions of God? Was there in the universe a set of principles by which God operated? Was this set of principles somehow available to man by means of rational thought, sense data, or existential experience? If such a set of principles were available, who would be God—the set of principles, or God? If such a set of principles were available to man, would he be capable of discerning and interpreting them in any universal manner? Or, would the notion of God and, thus the criteria for the Godhood vary with every generation, location, and finally with each individual? Finally, would such a God, derived by such a procedure, be representative of the God of the universe, or would He be simply an idol of man's philosophical making?

Salvation and Scripture: Gifts

In the particular climate of the Adventist church in which I was reared and educated, the subject of righteousness by faith was emphasized. Righteousness was the gift of God, rather than the creation of man. In his sinful and proud state, man sought independence from God. He relied upon his own resources as the basis for his righteousness. By contrast, the sinner had to accept his own sinful state and to acknowledge his need of a Savior.

The penitent must learn to do what was repugnant to our contemporary society. He must rely upon a righteousness that was not of his own making, but was the gift of God. To be willing to turn from personal righteousness to that of Jesus Christ required conversion: a totally new perspective on life and a willingness, by the grace of God, to accept and follow that perspective.

The renewed call within the Adventist church and within my own life to accept the righteousness of Christ as a gift was like a spring of living water to a thirsty soul. I then began to realize that God was calling not only for conversion of my heart, but also for conversion of my mind.

I saw that God asks not only that we view righteousness from His perspective, but also truth and knowledge. Furthermore, I saw that the gains brought about by a renewal in our understanding of righteousness by faith could be lost without a similar epistemological shift in the area of knowledge. That is to say, to declare man autonomous in the area of knowledge could be paralleled by a

renewed emphasis upon man's need to be in control of his own righteousness.

Christ had declared Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). But I had been trying to find truth apart from Him so that I could do Him the favor of pulling Him into the canon of truth. I had attempted to make reason and sense data the standpoint from which truth could be seen, measured and verified. Now it began to dawn on me that God had intended His Word to play that role. I had been looking for the rock-solid foundation that man by his ingenuity could create. Now I began to realize that the rock-solid foundation was the Word of God which came as the *gift* from God rather than a thought system of my own creation. Rather than founding the validity of Scripture upon man's thinking, man's thinking was to be founded upon the Bible, the Word of God. Righteousness and Scripture were both Divine gifts to man.

The Scriptures: Authority and Role

The significance of the Reformation to me had meant absolute freedom to determine my own truth. Now, I began to understand the meaning of *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone, the battle cry of the Reformation. The Bible was not to be founded upon the pope, church, philosophy, nature, reason, the structure of existence, or any other property of man or the world. The Bible, under the Spirit, did not rest upon any other authority. It was its own authority.

Furthermore, I saw that the Bible could not be interpreted from any other perspective, or philosophical system, no matter how ancient or modern. Thus, my world view for the study of Scripture must not come from Plato or Aristotle, nor from contemporary rationalism, empiricism, existentialism or any other kind of humanism. It was not simply a question of which brand of humanism best represented reality. Rather, it was a question of humanism versus the Word of God.

Sola Scriptura also meant that the Bible must not be interpreted from the standpoint of any external methods. The allegorical method of the first century must not be imposed upon it, nor must it be interpreted from the standpoint of some contemporary method, such as the historical-critical method. To do so, would

make Scripture vulnerable to the imposition of an alien culture upon its interpretation.

The Bible was to be its own interpreter. Under the Holy Spirit, the Bible provides its own foundation, philosophical context, method of interpretation, and general historical context for its understanding. The Bible, as a whole, is the final arbiter of its context and meaning.

This does not mean that God cannot speak through the church, nature, reason, sense, or human experience. But it did mean that Scripture rather than man was the norm by which we determine where else God spoke, and the meaning of that message.

Thus, for the Reformers, the standpoint from which the Christian was to view the universe and life did not reside within the believer, but within the Word of God. Because God had spoken, the human family could understand the world around them, the significance of their own life, and the way they should live.

Whereas, I had thought it was a human (Christian) responsibility to convince the world by superior wisdom, it now became apparent that I had been attempting to play the role of the Holy Spirit. It is the human (Christian) task to proclaim the message, but it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction. The power of the gospel lay not in the wisdom of humankind, but in the power of God. Furthermore, God is capable of taking care of His word. The Bible does not need to be defended. It is the Word of God. It is more awesome to come under the power of God, than it is to come into the wisdom of man.

My notion of freedom also changed. Without realizing it, I had thought that freedom was self-existent. By uncritically accepting the culture in which I lived, I had granted to freedom a property which belongs to God alone.

Now I began to realize that freedom is the gift of God, rather than a right inherent in the universe to which God was Himself subject. The choice was not one of autonomy, nor was it to become autonomous, but rather to live either in the service of God or Satan.

I began to understand that I had been a conservative humanist. The dividing line for me had been between those who accept or reject such things as a six day creation, a short chronology, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and a literal, visible Second Coming.

Now I began to realize that these doctrines are conclusions that come at the end of the path—that what determines the conclusion is the path taken by the theologian years earlier. The dividing line was now seen to be the way in which the theologian thought. Did he intend to establish his thinking upon the foundation of the Word of God, the Bible, or did he choose some other foundation as his starting point and guide to his theological method.

Eventually, I came to see that conservative humanism was the seed bed of liberalism. A conservative humanist already accepts the epistemology, the method of thinking, of his contemporaries. But when he accepts as normative the contemporary method of thinking, he places himself in a position independent of God. He embarks upon a path whose destination is not the illumination of the Word of God, but rather the imposition of the contemporary culture upon the Bible. Thus, the dividing line between the biblically based and the non-biblically based theologian is not doctrine, but their respective attitudes toward the authority of the Bible.

In the wilderness, Christ was confronted with a philosophical option: a God of love would not leave His Son in the wilderness without food and companionship, would He? He was also tempted with an empirical option: I will prove My divinity by turning stone into bread. Instead He chose to live by "It is written."

The Word of God is powerful. It brought worlds into existence. It gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the lifeless. When we read the Bible, we are not contemplating dead words on a page. It is the living Word of God! It is as if God Himself were in the room speaking with us. God's Word is powerful. It is capable under the Holy Spirit of making its own way into the human heart. It is self-authenticating, and all-sufficient, and able to instruct sinners in the way of salvation.

Endnotes

¹ Although my teachers always emphasized the importance of context for the interpretation of a particular document, unfortunately they never referred me to the context of this passage. Rather, they took it out of context and interpreted it from a rationalistic context.

² Again, the context was disregarded.

³ I was so ingrained in a rationalist interpretation of this passage, that it took continual reading over a period of time to see that the passage states that faith is itself the evidence.

⁴ I am using the word rationalism loosely. Although many of my professors seemed to see reason as the foundation for viewing the universe, and the criteria for determining truth, they were probably more properly classified in this age of science as empiricists. For the data collected by the sciences and the humanities, rather than the deductions of pure reason seemed to be the foundation of their decisions. I suspect that most of my professors did not recognize themselves as humanists. They probably saw themselves as representing the way things are.

⁵ Note that although I was using metaphysical type thinking, I had also gone far beyond the medieval theologian, for I had affirmed the autonomy of the mind from pope, church, state, and the Bible. Man was free to found and determine his own truth apart from any external authority. Man had come of age. The rightful appreciation that Seventh-day Adventists have of God as seen through nature seems to have been taken in directions that are inappropriate. Rather than seeing appreciation of God through nature as the result of biblical theology where divine revelation in Scripture is the foundation, the revelation in nature independent of Scripture has become the foundation. The latter is a serious distortion of a proper understanding of revelation from "the book of nature." Divine revelation as identified with Scripture has priority and must function as the foundation of all knowledge, even revelation found in nature.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 3/2 (1992):123-138.
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PAULINE COSMOLOGY: RELIC OR RELEVANT?

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Terry Arries writes: "The cosmology of an individual or nation is the foundation of all further religious, judicial and political thought because all these beliefs are founded upon this elemental concept."¹ The importance of the subject of cosmology can be readily illustrated by the rich witness of the Scripture concerning it. The book of Genesis begins with it, and the book of Revelation ends with it.² However, in our time, the term cosmology has been widely interpreted. Because of this, we begin our study by attempting to define it.

Defining Cosmology

Cosmology, a term of rather recent origin, is defined as the understanding of our universe.³ In our scientific era many have limited its meaning strictly to the study of the physical world.⁴ For the purposes of the present study this definition cannot be accepted because it confines the study of cosmology solely to the intellectual realm. Observation, however, demonstrates that every person, whether he or she can articulate it or not, operates with a world view that enables him or her to cope with the forces that seem to lie beyond human experience and control. The broadness of our definition of cosmology is best summed up by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. He writes: