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THINKING ABOUT THINKING: AN ASSESSMENT OF CERTAIN PRESUPPOSITIONS UNDERLY- ING SOME ADVENTIST LIFE- STYLE ISSUES

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You have probably heard some of these slogans or statements: "Don't drink and drive!" "Practice safe sex—use condoms!" "Abort defective fetuses!" "Must polygamists divorce?" "Competition is a fact of life." "A woman has the right to control her own body." "We live in a fallen, sinful world." "Sometimes you have to choose between two evils."

Besides being aware of these concepts, we are certainly conscious of the concomitant implications for lifestyle issues that these ideas suggest. Now, before getting into a consideration of some of these concepts, mention should be made of the fact that the last time some of the thinking patterns undergirding certain lifestyle issues were assessed, the ideas proposed were roundly attacked as being out of touch with the times,¹ asleep to the facts of reality,² completely irrelevant, abominably callous, pious, rigid, and condemnatory.³ Perhaps Harry Blamires was correct when he noted:

The thinker challenges current prejudices. He disturbs the complacent. He obstructs the busy pragmatists. He questions the very foundations of all about him, and in so doing throws doubt upon the aims, motives, and purposes which those who are running affairs have neither time nor patience to investigate. The thinker is a nuisance. He is a luxury that modern society cannot afford. It will therefore

naturally, and on its own terms justifiably, strive to keep him quiet, to restrict his influence, to ignore him. It will try to pretend that he does not exist.

Since the lot of the thinker in the secular world is so unattractive and frustrating, it is not surprising that we lack thinkers. But the Church cannot do without thinkers.⁴

The Indispensability of "Right Thinking"

The wise man Solomon indicates that thinking clearly influences action: "For as he thinks within himself, so is he" (Prov 23:7).⁵ In *The Making of a Christian Mind*, theologian and ethicist Arthur Holmes concurs by stating that "what we think and what we value guide what we do."⁶ Christian psychologist Gary Collins agrees, saying: "In large measure, how we think with our minds determines how we live."⁷ If, as Ellen White indicates, "right thinking lies at the foundation of right action,"⁸ it would be instructive to intentionally and intensively analyze the thinking that appears to undergird some of the current views on behavioral standards by Adventists. In addition to this evaluation, alternative approaches will be proposed for consideration.

Culturally-Conditioned Versus Biblically-Based Thinking

Any serious evaluation of current concerns in some Adventist lifestyle issues must of necessity take into account the views published and expressed by various persons or entities. Since these views are in the public domain and are intended for consumption or consideration, certain concepts and basic presuppositions of these views will need to be carefully analyzed. This assessment, however, is not to be misconstrued as either an attack on the various writers and thinkers whose views will be cited, or as an assault on those responsible for publishing them. On the contrary, what will be assessed here is the "thinking" and not the "thinker."

In Colossians 2:8 (NIV) Paul cautions: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Is it possible that, instead of depending on a fully Christ-centered philosophy, a certain amount of "deceptive philosophy" has been unwittingly filtering into the very manner in

which some lifestyle issues are now being considered? If this may be the case, then what possible viable alternatives could be considered as sound and biblically valid bases on which to construct one's thinking? Though not necessarily exhaustive, the following modes of thinking will serve to illustrate this concern.

Atomistic/Fragmented Thinking

What triggered the production of this paper was a remark once overheard in a conversation among students. One of them said to his friends: "You know, what we should do is discuss the handing out of condoms at the local high school." Apparently, the hallway discussion had been on AIDS prevention and how to combat the problem.

When one thinks about this statement it becomes evident that, whether the student was aware of it or not, certain basic presuppositions undergirded his suggestion, if it was meant to support such action. Is it possible that this comment was based on a fragmented view of humanity—on a perspective that suggests that problems can be addressed in isolation from other elements, and that so-called "solutions" can be arrived at irrespective of other factors?

Consider another example of this type of thinking: For those young people who choose to indulge in premarital sexual relationships, one Adventist family specialist suggests "double protection." She counsels:

If you insist on indulging in sex before marriage, please use birth control measures!

And this means that *both of you should use something*. Unmarried sex calls for *double protection*. Male contraception should consist of condoms. Female contraception may include vaginal jellies or foams, or a physician might recommend an IUD, a diaphragm, or the Pill. (Do not try to obtain or use these last three items without medical supervision.) The Pill is the most effective method of birth control (outside of abstinence), but still one to five users in every thousand get pregnant. You could be one of those. So please avoid pregnancy at all costs. Double protect yourselves.⁹

Does this so-called "solution" likewise adopt an atomistic way of thinking? As noted in the above statement, the primary concern

of the advice given was to "avoid pregnancy at all costs." And, in emphasizing this concern to the point where "double protection" was advised, this proposal suggests that premarital relations can be indulged in without any undesired results. Is it possible that this kind of thinking is actually affecting current sexual practices among Adventists, young and old alike? Does this theory, which says that as long as there are no "visible, physical results," subtly influence people to indulge in forbidden sexual activities?

Now it must be admitted, that it is true that there might not be any "physical" evidence of premarital sex if one uses "double protection." However, the type of thinking used in these two illustrations ignores the fact that people are wholistic creatures—that they are integrated beings. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.¹⁰ As G. C. Berkouwer confirms: "The Biblical view of man shows him to us in an impressive diversity, but. . . it never loses sight of the unity of the whole man."¹¹ Moreover, both medical and social sciences have confirmed that there is an integral relationship between mind and body.¹² In other words, each human being is an indivisible unity in which all parts "function in close cooperation, revealing an intensely sympathetic relationship between a person's spiritual, mental, and physical faculties."¹³ Also, since human beings are made in the image of God, they are to reflect that image in all that they do, including the compassionately given biblical mandate of abstinence from sexual relations outside of marriage. This wholistic, integrated approach will bring glory to the Creator, and result in the elevation of the Adventist belief and practice concerning sexual relationships, and other lifestyle issues.

Empirical/Pragmatic Thinking

Several years ago a Kinsey Institute study of homosexuals in the San Francisco Bay area concluded that gays involved in reciprocal, permanent, and sexually exclusive relationships tended to be the happiest, healthiest, and most successfully adjusted people of the entire group being analyzed. Based on this empirical evidence, an Adventist ethicist concluded: "Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form Closed-Coupled homosexual unions."¹⁴ Notice that

the reason given for this suggestion is the evidence from the study done on homosexuals themselves. In other words, this ethicist proposes that the practice of some persons be based on the conclusions of an empirical study.

A similar kind of reasoning may be apparent in a letter published in the *Lake Union Herald* in 1985. In this letter, the writer discussed the reasons for his change of mind concerning abortion—from an absolute anti-abortion position to a more “pro-choice” stand. One of the major factors that resulted in this changed perspective was the evidence from a 12-year study done by the author of the article, of pregnant unmarried Seventh-day Adventist women, aged 15-20. His findings showed that the women who had had an abortion were much more likely to finish their schooling, and to complete it at an Adventist academy; to form a lasting marriage; and to remain a member of the SDA church. The writer stated: “The thing that has influenced my change more than anything else has not been theoretical arguments, but experience. Too many women and children have been crippled or destroyed because of an unwanted birth.”¹⁵

It will be noticed that on this issue of abortion, as well as the above question of homosexuality, the primary basis on which thinking was based was the evidence from empirical studies. Furthermore, reasoning from a pragmatic point of view, these writers were able to draw the conclusions to which they came. Is it possible that this type of thinking has nudged some members to become more pro-abortion and more open to accepting the practice of homosexuality?

While it is obvious that Christians need to be warm and accepting of all people, this does not mean that certain practices should be condoned and tolerated merely because empirical/pragmatic thinking suggests that this is the “best” way to go. Irrespective of so-called “statistical” or “scientific” studies, one should reflect whether one could afford to base any thinking or action upon these concepts. On the contrary, the position taken on these and other lifestyle concerns must be based on the Bible itself.

Situational/Teleological Thinking

Over a decade ago an article appeared on the question of

truthtelling. The author maintained that, according to the Bible, it is wrong to tell lies. However, the writer went on to state there are situations in life when it is fully justifiable to tell a lie. It all depended on the situation.¹⁶ In other words, a lie is sometimes wrong, sometimes right. As Norman Geisler put it: A lie is “morally wrong—unless, of course, one is obeying a higher moral law in so doing.”¹⁷ And, how does one determine in which situation it is right to lie, and when it is wrong to lie? Well, that depends primarily, if not solely, on the projected consequences. In this discussion this is called “situational/teleological” thinking.

This type of thinking can be recognized in the deliberations in the Seventh-day Adventist community concerning what to do with practicing polygamists who wish to join the church. Should the polygamist be required to set aside all of his additional “wives” prior to being baptized, or should he and his family be accepted into full and regular church membership just as they are? Several documents have been produced on this issue.¹⁸

A careful investigation of the position advocating baptism for the entire polygamous family indicates that a great concern exists for the welfare of the family. These authors point out that if the polygamist were required to become monogamous prior to baptism, this would work an incredible hardship on the members of his family who are being set aside—the “wives” would be without the care and protection of a husband; the children would be fatherless; and, in order to make a living, many of these women would probably become prostitutes. Therefore, it is suggested, that in order to avoid the projected trauma for the family, and so as to avert the problem of these women going into prostitution, it would be best to baptize them while permitting them to continue their practice of polygamy.

Now it must be admitted that all of these writers firmly believe that monogamy is God’s ideal for marriage. They also maintain that, if people are already SDA Christians, they may not become polygamous. Their dominant concern is the projected consequences. Therefore, they feel that, in this situation, it would be proper to baptize practicing polygamists.

While it is not possible to enter into a protracted examination of the biblical view of polygamy¹⁹ in this paper, the important issue to note here is the manner in which the decision to baptize the

polygamists is arrived at: essentially by means of "situational/teleological" thinking. Is it possible that this type of thinking may soon begin to undermine certain aspects of the Adventist perspective and position on the whole issue of marriage?

Another issue may confront Adventists. For example, what is the church to do when a gay couple, who have children by adoption, show an interest in joining the church? If, like the polygamists, they had gotten into this "less than ideal" marital union ignorant of the biblical view of marriage, should they be baptized as practicing homosexuals, so as to avoid the trauma of breaking up the family, or in order to prevent the discarded "spouse" from entering a life of crime and misery?

Clearly, for the Christian, the entire approach to such problems must be solidly based upon the mandates of the Word of God, rather than upon the so-called uniqueness of the situation or the projected results of one's actions. And, once these principles have been adequately determined, they should be compassionately and consistently applied in culturally-sensitive and locally-appropriate ways. Instead of depending on the altering opinions of people, and the changing customs of society, Adventists need to base their positions squarely on the Scriptures, since this alone will provide the universal moral norms by which their lives should be guided.

But what about those projected consequences? Erwin Lutzer put it well, when he stated: "We want to be like the most High, subject to none. But can we calculate the eternal results or the rightness of our actions? We cannot predict even the next five minutes, much less the future."²⁰ Discussing the issue of how results relate to decision-making Ellen White consistently held the following position: "True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences."²¹ In further detail she stated: "In deciding upon any course of action, we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God."²² "Christ's ambassadors have nothing to do with consequences. They must perform their duty and leave results with God."²³ In other words, "we should choose the right because it is right, and leave consequences with God."²⁴

Admittedly, this type of thinking runs counter to a culturally-

conditioned, results-oriented, rationalistic mind. The statements by Ellen White seem almost to suggest a kind of "blind faith." But this is not so! On the contrary, this is a clarion call for a complete commitment to the Creator of the universe. As those three Hebrew men attested when speaking to Nebuchadnezzar: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (Dan 3:17). Then they added: "But even if He does not, . . . we are not going to serve your gods" (Dan 3:18).²⁵ These were men whose thinking and action were based on divinely-given universal principles. They acted out of love for God, regardless of the consequences.

Chuck Colson is correct when he asserts in his book *Loving God*: "What God wants from His people is obedience, no matter what the circumstances, no matter how unknown the outcome."²⁶ As Ellen White put it: "We should look to the revealed will of God, and walk according to His definite commandment, no matter what circumstances may surround us. God will take care of the results."²⁷ This is the type of right thinking that will enable us to correctly address critical issues such as polygamy and homosexuality, as well as other lifestyle concerns in the Adventist church.

Moral Dilemma/Sinful World Thinking

So often one hears the term "moral dilemma" being used. While this term can obviously be understood in a variety of ways, this concept will be used in its narrower meaning here: that is, as occasions where one is forced to choose between two morally evil options. Or, as Christian anthropologist and missionary Walter Trobisch put it: "Situations in life where we have the choice between two sins."²⁸ Theologian John Warwick Montgomery stated it more bluntly: "The individual is often at the point of violating a command of God, not because he wants to, but because he's damned if he does and damned if he doesn't."²⁹

The question is, how has this type of thinking affected Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle? Before answering that question, it should be noted that the idea of conflicting and clashing moral principles can, without much difficulty, be found in SDA publications. A classic example of this is in a recent book on the subject of

biblical interpretation. The author says: "In a sinful world, conflict is possible at every level below the one great command [to love God supremely]. For example, should one obey God or parents (first commandment versus fifth)? Should one preserve life or tell the truth (sixth commandment versus ninth)?"³⁰

The issue of "moral dilemmas" and life in a "sinful world" seems to surface in the recent "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion."³¹ Since guideline #7 states that "church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in light of the teaching of Scripture," it would not be inappropriate to examine part of the thinking that apparently undergirded some of the decisions made with regard to this volatile subject.

Notice the following statements: After expressing the fact that "prenatal life is a magnificent gift of God," guideline #1 posits: "However, decisions about life must be made in the context of a fallen world." Guideline #2 adds: "Abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness." It is guideline #4 that brings out the issue of "moral dilemmas" most clearly: "Women at times however, may face exceptional circumstances that present moral dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation."

When one critically examines the so-called "moral dilemmas" listed, not one of them appears to be a genuine moral dilemma, in the sense that if the woman does not abort the fetus she would be guilty of doing a moral wrong for which she would need to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Thus it would not be incorrect to suggest that the term "moral dilemma" is used in this document in a rather loose manner to encompass all difficult decisions to be made under the circumstances.

Is it possible that the term "moral dilemma" is being used more and more in order to make allowance for certain actions that would otherwise be considered wrong by Christians? And what about the statement that "abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human

fallenness?" Does this suggest that since life is lived in a sinful world abortions are inevitable? Does this type of thinking influence Christians to become more accepting of this and other practices that at one point in time would have been quite strongly rejected as being unbiblical?

Perhaps more than any other issue, this concept of "moral dilemma/sinful world" thinking needs to be critically investigated. Are there times in life when one is forced to choose between two moral evils? Because life is lived in a fallen, sinful world, are people ever faced with having to choose to violate any of God's eternal moral laws? Do occasions arise, as our author of the book on biblical interpretation suggests, when there is a conflict between two of the ten commandments and it is possible to keep only one command thereby breaking the other?

The basic question is: Do divinely-given, biblical moral requirements ever contradict or conflict?³² To question this almost universally-accepted notion of "moral dilemmas" might seem unreasonable and senseless. However, it must not be forgotten that it was the questioning of "obvious" facts that led to the "discovery" that the earth is a sphere and not flat.

The study of the existence of moral dilemmas in a sinful world needs to take into consideration the following factors:

1. The moral law is a transcript of God's character,³³ and therefore cannot contain any flaws or contradictions.

2. Whatever God requires people to do, He enables them to accomplish through His power (Phil 2:12, 13). "All His biddings are enablings."³⁴

3. God has promised to keep His children from falling (Jude 24), and to provide a way of escape when trials come (1 Cor 10:13).

4. Human beings were created as free moral agents (Gen 2:15-17); thus one "is never brought into such a position that yielding to evil becomes a matter of necessity."³⁵

5. There can only be a fair judgment if there is a clear standard that can be followed (Eccl 12:13, 14).

6. Though tempted in all points, Jesus was never forced to break a moral law (Heb 4:15); His disciples are to follow His example (1 Pet 2:21, 22).

7. In the cosmic controversy it is Satan who suggests that

God's word cannot be trusted (Gen 3:1-5), and that His law cannot be kept. Ellen White says: "From the first, the great controversy had been upon the law of God. Satan had sought to prove that God was unjust, that His law was faulty, and that the good of the universe required it to be changed."³⁶ She indicates that, "Satan had claimed that it was impossible to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts."³⁷

It is concepts such as these that provide evidence for the view that there is never a time when one is forced to violate a divine moral norm. In other words, it is impossible for moral dilemmas, as defined here, to force us to act against God's will! Indeed, a careful, comprehensive search of the biblical evidence reveals that an all-wise God graciously established coherent, non-conflicting moral obligations that can, by means of His power and to His glory, be consistently obeyed by all humanity in this sinful, fallen world. To suggest otherwise, appears to be tantamount to supporting "Satan's claim that the law is unjust and cannot be obeyed."³⁸

Admittedly, some have posited that the brokenness of this world and the tragedies of our existence may on occasion coerce us into less than optimal choices. At such times, it is said, the most "loving" thing to do in view of one's concern for the welfare of others might be to transgress a divine moral principle, because relationships take precedence over regulations. As a preacher once put it: "Need supercedes creed."

However, this idea of setting aside one of God's moral norms in view of a perceived human need seems to be a rather questionable position to hold. First, it assumes an almost superhuman ability to think clearly enough to correctly assess what is the most so-called "loving" thing to do in the distress of the situation. Second, it suggests a virtual prophetic foresight to predict that disobedience to God's laws in this specific case will bring about the "best" possible results. And third, it appears to imply the concept that the person setting aside any moral requirement is more wise and loving than God Himself!

The reality and truth is that all of God's moral creeds fully

meet human needs! And the very best way for any person to be truly loving in all relationships is to kindly and loyally obey every one of God's moral principles. Indeed, "our only safe course is to render obedience to all His requirements, at whatever cost."³⁹

Once this type of thinking is whole-heartedly accepted, it seems best and wisest to abstain from using "moral dilemma" arguments, or "sinful world" conditions as justifications for making certain lifestyle decisions. Rather, thinking and action will be entirely based on the firm premise that the Christian "can do all things through Christ" (Phil 4:13 KJV), and that, as Scripture indicates, "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12 KJV). Then, aware that "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3), the believer will be able to say with David: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Ps 40:8 KJV).

Obviously there are other kinds of thinking which have not been discussed here. For example, elitist/selectivist thinking, hedonistic, subjectivistic, materialistic, and relativistic thinking. Yet all of these kinds of thinking affect to a greater or lesser degree the presuppositions underlying lifestyle issues. These will have to be considered at some other time.

Summary and Conclusions

Is it possible that in some ways the thinking patterns of some Adventists have unwittingly been taken "captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ"? (Col 2:8 NIV). If atomistic/fragmented thinking, empirical/pragmatic thinking, situational/teleological thinking, and moral dilemma/sinful world thinking is permitted to influence the basis of methods of approaching Christian lifestyle issues, does the believer not follow human traditions rather than the Word of God?

Recognizing that "the Bible is the great standard of right and wrong, clearly defining sin and holiness,"⁴⁰ all Christians are called to base their thinking and action squarely on the principles derived from this guide to life (Ps 119:105). The apostle Paul makes this challenge: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2 NIV).

As Blamires said: "The Christian mind is the prerequisite of Christian thinking. And Christian thinking is the prerequisite of Christian action."⁴¹

Indeed, "right thinking lies at the foundation of right action."⁴²

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil 4:8 KJV).

Endnotes

- 1 Laurena Parris, "Everything in Our Power," *Student Movement*, 16 November 1987, p. 6.
- 2 Todd Gardner, "Education Is the Key," *Student Movement*, 16 November 1987, p. 5.
- 3 Laurie Wiss, "Completely Irrelevant," *Student Movement*, 16 November 1987, pp. 5, 6.
- 4 Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1963), p. 50.
- 5 Unless otherwise noted, all references are from the New American Standard Bible.
- 6 Arthur F. Holmes, "Toward a Christian View of Things," in *The Making of a Christian Mind*, ed. Arthur F. Holmes (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 17.
- 7 Gary R. Collins, *The Magnificent Mind* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 36.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), p. 248.
- 9 Nancy Van Pelt, *The Compleat Courtship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), p. 134 (emphasis original).
- 10 See, for example, Gen 2:7; 14:21; Num 5:6; Deut 10:22.
- 11 G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 200.
- 12 See, for example, David C. Nieman, *The Adventist Healthstyle* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992), pp. 75-80.
- 13 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 84.
- 14 David R. Larson, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics," *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984):16.
- 15 Mervin G. Hardinge, "Facts That Changed My Thinking," *Lake Union Herald*, 21 May 1985, p. 15.
- 16 Tom Dybdahl, "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie," *Insight*, 24 November 1981, pp. 5-8.

17 Norman L. Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 91 (footnote).

18 See, for example, John A. Kisaka, "The Adventist Church's Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1979); Jean-Jacques Boiut, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1981); Russell Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" *Spectrum* 13 (September 1982):44-53; Robert C. Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce, and . . .* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987); Josephat R. Siron, "Polygamy: An Enduring Problem," *Ministry*, April 1991, pp. 23-24.

19 For a biblical perspective on polygamy see Ronald A. G. du Preez, "Polygamy in the Bible with Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership" (D.Min. project dissertation, Andrews University, 1993).

20 Erwin Lutzer, *The Necessity of Ethical Absolutes*, Christian Free University Curriculum Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 75.

21 Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1937), p. 39.

22 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 634.

23 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1939), pp. 609-610.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 460.

25 The story of Peter's release from prison is an illustration of how to act when one's obedience to God threatens the lives of others. When Peter had been jailed the guards had been expressly warned that their lives would be required for the life of their prisoner if he escaped. As can be seen in other New Testament stories this was quite normal. Nevertheless, God rescued Peter from prison. As a result, when Peter could not be found in the morning, Herod ordered the execution of the 16 guards. God, the angel who released Peter, and Peter, all did what was right, even though it resulted in the loss of 16 lives. See Acts 12:1-19; Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), pp. 143-154.

26 Chuck Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 36.

27 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 622.

28 Walter A. Trobisch, "Congregational Responsibility for the Christian Individual," *Practical Anthropology* 13 (September-October 1966):211.

29 Joseph Fletcher and John Warwick Montgomery, *Situation Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), p. 64.

30 Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991), p. 117. See also, Bouit, pp. 102-103; Gerald Winslow, "Abortion and Christian Principles," *Liberty*, March/April 1989, pp. 10-13; Beverly Rumble, "Letters," *Ministry*, March 1993, pp. 2, 23; Keith W. Johanson, "Letters," *Ministry*, March 1993, p. 23.

31 See "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion," *Insight*, 24 November 1992, pp. 7, 15.

32 The question has sometimes arisen concerning Paul's statement that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). Does this mean that a Christian is justified in breaking the letter of the law as long as the spirit of the command

is upheld? Careful study of this passage indicates that Paul is not depreciating the decalogue or the Old Testament. Rather, what he is emphasizing is that what God requires is not simply right action, but right action as the product and evidence of a right relationship with Him. In other words, the "spirit" of the law does not abolish its "letter;" instead, it is complementary to its "letter" and tends to magnify it.

³³ See Ps 19:7, 8; Rom 7:12; White, *The Great Controversy*, 434; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 803.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), p. 333.

³⁵ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 331-332.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁷ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 314. In another place White stated that Jesus Christ "came to demonstrate the fact that humanity, allied by living faith to divinity, can keep all the commandments of God." (*Review and Herald*, 11/15/98, p. 730).

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), p. 309.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing, 1948), 5:365.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), p. 422.

⁴¹ Blamires, p. 43.

⁴² White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 248.

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CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE: A CLASH OF WORLDVIEWS

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Introduction

Definition of Terms: In this paper, I will adopt J. H. Bavinck's definition of culture and, therefore, define contemporary culture as society's "common attitude of life, its style of living and thinking, rooted in its apprehension of reality."¹ By Christian lifestyle, I will be referring to the manner of life or way of life which agrees with and expresses the principles of Biblical faith. In the New Testament, the word which frequently expresses this concept is *anastrophē*, and it is often qualified as "holy" (2 Pet 3:11), "pure" (1 Pet 3:2), or "good" (1 Pet 3:16, James 3:13), to suggest that the fruit of such a life is godliness or piety.² Thus, without the adjectival qualifiers, the two terms—culture and lifestyle—may be used synonymously, to mean the typical way of life of an individual or group of people, based upon their perception of reality. This is the manner in which I am going to employ the terms.

The challenge of the topic arises from the fact that Christians hold dual citizenships in the world and in the kingdom of God. This naturally raises questions about the relationship of Christians to their respective cultures. How can they be in the world, yet, not be of the world? The specific question evoked by the topic—"Contemporary Culture and Christian Lifestyle"—is: Are there aspects of the Christian lifestyle that may be regarded as supra-cultural within our modern context of cultural diversity? In other words, are there some basic principles of attitude and behavior which apply to