

Groundbreaking Conference on Homosexuality Held

BY CLINTON WAHLEN

An interdisciplinary conference on the theme "Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church," sponsored by a number of church



institutions including the Biblical Research Institute,¹ was held at Andrews University on October 15 to

17, 2009. Bringing together experts in religious liberty and public affairs, theology and ethics, and psychology and pastoral care, the presentations addressed a wide swath of issues that have churned within the Adventist church and other Christian denominations for some time. Here is a summary of the conference.²

Scientific, Psychological, and Pastoral Approaches

Mark Yarhouse, professor of psychology and the Hughes Chair of Christian Thought in Mental Health Practice at Regent University, in the first of two presentations at the conference, squarely addressed the issue as to whether homosexuality is innate like skin color or results from a number of factors, including environmental influences. Yarhouse observed how some widely-cited studies supporting a biological determination for homosexuality have been seriously undermined by more recent investigations.³ One of the most interesting of these studies, from J. Michael Bailey, involved identical twins and employed an improved methodology compared with that used in work done by Bailey himself and Richard C. Pillard ten years earlier. The more recent study "did not provide statistically significant support for the importance of genetic factors' for homosexual orientation."⁴ A study published in 2008 concluded that environmental factors not

shared by twins was predominant in the development of same sex attraction.⁵ Yarhouse also pointed to other recent studies confirming that environmental influences play a larger role in homosexual orientation than previously allowed.

Perhaps most significant is the question of whether change in one's orientation is possible. Yarhouse, summarizing the results of a longitudinal study co-authored with Stanton L. Jones of homosexuals enrolled in change ministries,⁶ reported that at year six fully 53% of homosexuals seeking to move away from that lifestyle were successful to some degree while 25% experienced failure. Although these figures are not conclusive because only 64% of those studied remained participants through to the end, the study does demonstrate that "fluidity" can occur—significant change is possible for homosexuals.⁷ In fact, they found that men on the extreme end of the homosexual spectrum experienced the most significant degree of change in a heterosexual direction. Another interesting finding is that undergoing a change attempt did not cause participants more distress but, if anything, served to reduce their distress.



Yarhouse's second presentation was more practical, providing a paradigm for ministry to homosexuals. He argued that, since sexual identity is an act of "self-labeling," it is important to move beyond the dichotomy of gay versus straight to a three-tiered distinction (based on studies of the intensity of attraction):

1. Same Sex Attraction (experienced by 6.2% of men and 4.4% of women).
2. Homosexual Orientation (present in only 2% of men and 0.9% of women).
3. Gay Identity (attaching to a percentage too small to measure).

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EDITORIAL

“Don’t Do What We’ve Done”

So said Robert A. J. Gagnon of Pittsburg Theological Seminary when asked about his advice for Adventists. Gagnon is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), which voted in 2008 to rescind homosexual exclusion by eliminating the requirement that church officers and candidates for ministry adhere to “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” Though later overturned by a majority vote of the local presbyteries in 2009, the denomination’s leadership promised that “the PCUSA will continue to seek ways and means to see God’s blessing on alternative forms of covenant between two people.”¹



In an exclusive interview after the conference, Gagnon warned that dialogue is not always worthwhile because “the dialogue is never even-handed” and tends to detract from the centrality of Scripture by focusing on experience. “Each side says what they think Scripture means, they agree to disagree, and very quickly Scripture is neutralized. Dialogue fixates on heart-wrenching stories to show why homosexuals should not be discriminated against.” Adventists, he said, should choose a different path. “Jesus described love as taking up one’s cross, denying oneself, and losing one’s life.” Similarly, Ellen White counseled long ago:

Ministers of the gospel sometimes allow their forbearance toward the erring to degenerate into toleration of sins, and even participation in them. They excuse that which God condemns, and after a time, become so blinded as to commend the ones whom God commands them to reprove. He who has blunted his spiritual perceptions by sinful leniency toward those whom God condemns, will ere long commit a greater sin by severity and harshness toward those whom God approves.²

Interestingly, the more conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), affirmed in 1977 that “both the act and the desire” of homosexuality is sin and that “a practicing homosexual continuing in this sin would not be a fit candidate for ordination or membership in the PCA.” It went further in 1999, instructing its churches “to inform and warn the members of their congregations of dangers of the homosexual agenda in the schools.”³ This declaration was in response to gay and lesbian activist organizations in the United States that have successfully encouraged formation of more than 3,000 Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in middle schools (ages 12-14) and high schools (ages 15-18) and use of a video, aimed at even younger children, titled “It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School.”

The Adventist Church in an official statement has affirmed the Biblical position that “sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden.” It urges members to follow the example of Jesus in recognizing the value of every person to God and reaching out in caring ministry to all who are struggling with sin and who seek healing rather than mere approval for their chosen lifestyle.⁴ This

clear and balanced position should be reflected at all levels of the world church.

Clinton Wahlen, BRI

¹See Jerry L. Van Marter, “Amendment B is defeated,” Presbyterian News Service, April 27, 2009; cited November 16, 2009; online: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09339.htm>; John H. Adams, *The Layman*, “After dire warnings, GA backs off gay marriages,” June 28, 2008; cited November 16, 2009; online: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2009/09339.htm>.

²Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 504.

³The 1977 and 1999 statements are cited together in the *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly of the PCA*, 27-44, III, Recommendation #13, pp. 174-75; cited November 16, 2009; online: <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/27GA-Ov22.pdf>.

⁴http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat46.html.



Reflections

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Groundbreaking Conference on Homosexuality Held

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Western culture tends to confuse homosexual attraction with homosexual identity. Studies indicate that it can take up to fifteen years from the time a person becomes aware of homosexual attraction to the adoption of a homosexual identity. The most critical ages are the teen years. The typical progression begins with awareness, moves on to confusion, then to behavior, attribution, labeling and finally to a homosexual relationship. Homosexual advocates try to insist that a person's beliefs should change to conform to their homosexual behavior, a process of gay identification. A Christian approach, by contrast, moves the other way: encouraging behavior change to conform to the person's beliefs. Rather than the "discovery metaphor" (discover who you already are) employed by gay rights advocates, Yarhouse proposes an "integration metaphor" (choose to center your identity on aspects and experiences other than mere sexual attraction). Pastors should seek to protect those who experience same sex attraction from assumptions and labels imposed by others and should encourage them to explore the "weighted aspects" of their identity. In other words, like heterosexuals, the identity of a person who experiences same sex attraction derives from their physical gender, intentions, behavior, beliefs and values and not merely from the sexual inclinations they experience. It is up to each individual to assess the relative weight each of these aspects carries in forming their personal identity.

One of the subsequent panel discussions also addressed the practical pastoral and counseling issues involved in dealing with same sex attraction. Carlos Fayard, associate professor of psychiatry at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, described the therapy, based on John 7:37-38, which he administered to a clergyman who had lived a double life for most of his ministry. This man, after being exposed and contracting HIV, ultimately discovered the presence of God in a moment of sincere prayer and chose celibacy. Peter Swanson, assistant professor of pastoral care and chair of the Christian ministry department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, observed that pastors are generally ill-equipped to deal with homosexual congregants. They not only have a duty to "call sin by its right name" but also to embrace sinners and to challenge the unchristian attitudes that church members often display toward homosexuals. The

panel concluded with the observations of Mark Yarhouse that, more important than understanding the causes of homosexuality (drawing an analogy to John 9:1-3), is the opportunity for ministry that those in the church struggling with same sex attraction represent. He listed five principles for this type of ministry:

1. Avoid an over-emphasis on change while still encouraging hope.
2. Uphold the value of both marriage and singleness.
3. Enable same-sex-attracted individuals to create a Christian "script" or self-identity.
4. Equip people with a concept of stewardship that embraces all believers.
5. Lead by example.

Religious Liberty and Public Affairs Issues

Several experts in religious liberty from across North America expressed the worrisome implications for the church and church-run institutions of permitting marriage to be redefined. Barry Bussey, Associate Director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference, chaired the panel. Drawing

on his experience arguing cases in Canada and legal journals, Bussey delineated the efforts underway to prevent any indoctrination in the church or at home that would hinder people from embracing homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. Gerald Chipeur, an Adventist lawyer working in Canada, used several legal cases to illustrate how his country's legal recognition of marriage be-

tween homosexuals has moved the debate from toleration to outright support, resulting in expensive litigation in order for religious institutions to maintain employment discrimination. According to Alan Reinach, "it is impossible to overstate the risks" of allowing a similar redefinition of marriage to occur in the United States, warning that if sexual orientation becomes established as a fundamental right it would trump the right of religious freedom.

The conventional wisdom that "Adventists should not get into politics" was challenged as overly simplistic by Bill Knott, editor of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines. Leading the audience on an enlightening walk through the pages of the *Review* at critical junctures of American history, he showed that, from the beginning, Adventists had become vigorously involved in social issues of sufficient moral gravity. For example, the *Review* took an unequivocal stand against slavery in the mid-1800s and lent energetic support to the temperance movement in the early years of the twen-

Some widely-cited studies supporting a biological determination for homosexuality have been seriously undermined by more recent investigations.

tieth century and, in the aftermath of World War I, to disarmament. In short, the church “saved moral weight and freight for issues that vitally affected its interests.” He noted sadly, however, a “conspicuous silence” on the imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

A second panel looked more closely at the religious implications of homosexual marriage. Scot Zentner, of California State University, San Bernadino, argued that, when it comes to marriage, we must distinguish between social and individual liberty. Homosexuality ignores common sense gender differences and undermines the system of natural law undergirding our modern legal code. Jason Hines, formerly a Philadelphia lawyer now studying religion in the Seminary at Andrews University, exposed the fallacious arguments sometimes employed for prohibiting gay marriage as a civil institution. Nick Miller, director of the International Religious Liberty Institute at Andrews, associate professor of church history of the Seminary at Andrews, and organizer of the conference, stated that when moral and legal concerns overlap the church has a duty to get involved, particularly as regards the two institutions surviving from Eden, the Sabbath and marriage—both of which will be under attack at the end. Pointing out that all human rights have a moral basis, he underscored the importance of natural law as “the only moral compass we have as a society” to define these rights.

Theology and Ethics

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburg Theological Seminary, emphasized many of the points made in published works.⁸ Understanding 2 Cor 4:7-10 to teach that not acting on natural impulses is necessary for a satisfying spiritual life, he considered what Jesus and Paul had to say about marriage and homosexuality. In Mark 10:1-12, Jesus quotes two key verses from the Genesis creation account (1:27; 2:24) in order to establish God’s original ideal for marriage: that it is between one male and one female and that these two complementary beings are to become one flesh. Homosexuality ignores the divine intention and the principle of complementarity. In examining Paul, Gagnon used a two-pronged approach: (1) careful exegesis showing that Rom 1:26-27 deals not with violent, coercive or abusive homosexual relationships but condemns in fact homosexual relationship based on mutuality and consent; (2) demonstration from classical texts and iconography that homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world tended to be like its modern counterpart: consensual, loving relationships between equals. In short, Paul’s unequivocal and categorical condemnation of homosexuality applies with just as much relevance to our day. Following the presentation, Pastor Dwight Nel-

IMPORTANT POINTS PRESENTED

1. Environmental influences play a larger role in homosexual orientation than previous studies allowed.
2. Significant change is possible for homosexuals and attempting change did not heighten their feelings of distress but seems to have reduced it.
3. A Christian identity derives from many factors including physical gender, intentions, behavior, beliefs and values, and should not be defined primarily in terms of sexual attraction.
4. Adventists have often become vigorously involved in social issues of sufficient moral gravity.
5. Legal efforts are necessary to prevent sexual orientation from becoming established as a fundamental right which would endanger the right to religious freedom.
6. Homosexuality ignores common sense gender differences and undermines the system of natural law undergirding our modern legal code.
7. While not all biblical laws can be directly applied today, the prohibition of homosexual relations in Leviticus 18 and 20 are timeless moral laws.
8. Jesus, in Mark 10:1-12, quotes two key verses from the Genesis creation account to establish God’s original ideal for marriage: that it is between one male and one female and that these two complementary beings are to become one flesh (Gen 1:27; 2:24).
9. Paul deals in Rom 1:26-27 not with violent, coercive or abusive homosexual relationships but in fact condemns same-sex relations which are based on mutuality and consent.
10. Five Important Principles for Ministry to Homosexuals:
 - a. Avoid over-emphasizing change while still encouraging hope.
 - b. Uphold the value of both marriage and singleness.
 - c. Enable same-sex attracted individuals to create a Christian self-identity.
 - d. Equip people with a concept of stewardship that embraces all believers.
 - e. Lead by example.

son chaired a panel discussion with Gagnon and other conference presenters in order to give the university students an opportunity to ask questions.

Sabbath morning began with brief presentations. Robert Gagnon rejected the idea that a “sexual same” person could be a kind of “sexual other,” calling it a form of sexual self-deception because it presumes that one needs a second person of the same sex in order to be a sexually whole person. Worse, he said, the absence of a true sexual complement does positive sexual harm because there is no moderation of a given gender’s extremes nor supplying of the gaps by the gender’s complement. Richard Davidson dwelt on the two most important OT contexts relevant to the subject of homosexuality: Gen 1-2 and Lev 18, 20. Homosexuals

cannot receive the blessing nor fulfill the command of Gen 1:27-28 to be fruitful and multiply. Gen 2:22-24 describes the first wedding “ceremony,” complete with vows (v. 23) and the divine command (v. 24) that marriage is to be between a male (*ish*) and a female (*ishah*) and that “this is what should happen from now on.” Lev 18:22 prohibits male homosexuality regardless of age, while 20:13 implicitly condemns not homosexual rape

Identity derives from physical gender, intentions, behavior, beliefs and values and not merely from the sexual inclinations we experience.

but consensual intercourse because both partners are subject to the death penalty. Significantly, homosexuality, among other sins, is labeled an abomination

(*to ‘ebah*), mean-

ing it is viewed with repugnance by God because of its evil and given as one of the reasons the Canaanites were vomited out of the land (18:24-28). These laws in Lev 17-18 are incumbent upon foreigners as well as Israelites and, for that reason, are reiterated in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:29 as binding on Gentiles.

Miroslav Kiš, professor of Christian ethics and chair of the Theology and Christian Philosophy department of the Seminary at Andrews University, explored the biblical concepts of innocence, guilt, and shame in relation to homosexual practices, which Paul labels “shameless acts” (Rom 1:27) for several reasons: first, because they set God aside, making no difference between right and wrong; second, because homosexual behavior is “unnatural”; and, third, because of “the almost universal experience of shame” by homosexuals prior to their “coming out.” Society has failed homosexuals by making “ought” what “is.” The church has often failed also by emphasizing the “ought” to the point that the “is” of homosexuality appears hopeless whereas in fact “God in His limitless love has the complete cure” (Heb 7:25) through confession and repentance.

Roy Gane, professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Languages of the Seminary at Andrews University, drawing on a recent article and his commentary on Leviticus,⁹ rebuts the assertion that a same-sex relationship that is loving, mutual, committed, and exclusive similar to a monogamous marriage between heterosexuals is acceptable to God. He dispenses with the arguments for this in turn: (1) although not all biblical laws have direct application today, the prohibition of homosexual relations in Lev 18 and 20 are “timeless moral laws” (like the prohibition of incest in these chapters, cf. 1 Cor 5); (2) although ceremonial impurity laws are

no longer in force, “the impurity of homosexual practice was not simply ceremonial, but moral” (rejecting also, in view of Lev 18:19, 29; 20:18; Eze 18:5-6; 22:10, the assertion that only a cultural basis exists for the prohibition of intercourse during menstruation). (3) against Jacob Milgrom’s assertion that the laws of Lev 18 and 20 only apply to inhabitants of the holy land, Gane points out that this limited scope, while present elsewhere in Leviticus (14:34; 19:23; 23:10; 25:2), does not figure into this legislation, which deals with *porneia* or sexual immorality also condemned in the NT (Acts 15:20, 29; homosexuality specifically in Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; and lesbianism in Rom 1:26); (4) even though these prohibitions helped distinguish Israel from the surrounding nations, this does not exhaust their purpose any more than Israel’s honoring of the Sabbath nullifies its ongoing validity—unlike circumcision, the Apostolic decree upheld the timeless moral character of the prohibitions against immorality; (5) although there were exploitive relationships in ancient times as there are today, Paul’s use of *arsenokoitēs* (“homosexual”) appears to be derived from the Septuagint terminology of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, supporting the ongoing validity of these prohibitions; (6) although Paul shares pre-Christian Jewish condemnation of these gentile vices, his argument is that since gentiles recognize homosexuality as unnatural even more so should Christians (and where discontinuity exists between Jewish norms and freedom in Christ Paul does not hesitate to point it out); (7) against the idea that God would not condemn people for living according to the way He made them, God does not limit the application of these laws in any way and the sinful tendencies of our fallen nature in no way justify our acting on them. Homosexuals also “can be redeemed, transformed, and experience full peace with God.”

The sermon by the senior pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church,

Dwight Nelson, “Sex in the Temple: What’s So Gay about That?”, focused on 1 Cor 6:9-20, noting several kinds of sexual

sins mentioned by Paul¹⁰ and emphasizing the hope represented in the words “such *were* some of you” (v. 11). What the Corinthians *were*, they no longer *are* because they have been transformed by grace, washed clean, justified, and sanctified. Since our bodies are a temple for the indwelling Holy Spirit, immorality is out of place (vv. 18-20).¹¹

The main presenter on Sabbath afternoon was Richard Davidson. Addressing what is at stake in this

From the beginning, Adventists have been vigorously involved in social issues of sufficient moral gravity.

debate, Davidson said the main issue centers on the authority of Scripture as superior to all human sources of knowing. When science conflicts with the Bible, the Bible must have the final say. The prohibition of homosexuality impinges on most, if not all, of our key doctrines. Also at stake is the power of Scripture to transform lives—of the homosexual as well as of those who hate homosexuals, pointing to the written testimony of a college classmate of his. In it, his friend “Jonathan” tells how he had been freed by God from Satan’s “Plan B” (homosexuality) and enabled to believe in God’s “Plan A” (His “original plan for your life”) which encompasses change, healing, restoration, recovery, “little daily miracles,” and “a real, believable friendship with Him.”

Testimonies

As important as the presentations on psychology, pastoral and legal issues, and theology and ethics were, it was the testimonies that made the meetings

Homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was like its modern counterpart: a consensual, loving relationship between equals.

“real”—hearing the stories of people like “Jonathan” (though he was only virtually present through his written testimony referred to by Davidson). Pastor Ron Woolsey recalled his conflicted feelings while studying theology. He ultimately became angry with God because, he felt, “God could help others but couldn’t help me.” Finally, after sixteen years of looking for love “in all the wrong places,” a turning point came: “When I stopped blaming [God] I started hearing” and “studied the word of God for my very life.” He said he found answers when he finally acknowledged homosexuality activity as a sin-issue. “I walked away. But not without a struggle.”

Another presenter, Wayne Blakely, unimpressed with SDAKinship as offering no real hope, found help through GLAdventist.org. Its founder, Inge Anderson, was also present. Her ministry focuses on helping people improve their relationship with Christ. Any change in orientation that might result is a bonus. She stressed that we need to love people where they are. According to Anderson, a person’s homosexual orientation (as distinct from practice) is not sin because it is part of a person’s inherited sinful nature. She was told, “I never knew Christians like you would care for a person like me.”

Overall, the conference marked a significant beginning in bringing together a wide range of people to

discuss at length from a biblical standpoint a topic that is seldom even mentioned let alone closely examined. For many of those in attendance, including myself, it was the first time to really hear directly from those who have struggled with same sex attraction as well as from those who have devoted a significant portion of their ministries to this issue. A book comprising papers from the conference should be out by this summer.

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¹The Andrews University International Religious Liberty Institute organized the conference in cooperation with Andrews, Oakwood, and Southern universities, The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, the General Conference’s Biblical Research Institute and the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, the North American Division Ministerial Department, the Church-State Council of the Pacific Union Conference, the North Pacific Union Conference and the Northwest Religious Liberty Association.

²In compiling this report, David Hamstra’s blog on the conference proved most helpful; cited 10 November 2009; online: <http://apokalupto.blogspot.com/2009/10/blogging-homosexuality-conference.html>.

³His presentation updates information found in Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000).

⁴Ibid., 78, citing J. Michael Bailey, Michael P. Dunne and Nicholas G. Martin, “Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and Its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (March 2000): 524-36 here 534.

⁵N. Langstrom, Q. Rahman, E. Carlstrom and P. Lichtenstein, “Genetic and Environmental Effects on Same-sex Sexual Behavior: A Population Study of Twins in Sweden,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2008). Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-008-9386-1>.

⁶Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007).

⁷See also L. M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁸Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001), 185-303. See also Daniel O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003), 68-88.

⁹Roy Gane, “Same-Sex Love in the ‘Body of Christ?’” in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* (ed. David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, and David Larson; Roseville, Calif.: Adventist Forum, 2008), Part 4:63-72; idem, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 325-30.

¹⁰Citing Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 389: “Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. Thus, on this issue, there is no synthetic problem for New Testament ethics. In

this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from matters such as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterposed witnesses. The biblical witness against homosexual practice is univocal.”

¹¹The sermon is available at: [http://media.pmchurch.org/mp3/Ser-](http://media.pmchurch.org/mp3/Sermon091017.mp3)

[mon091017.mp3](http://media.pmchurch.org/mp3/Sermon091017.mp3); and the study guide at: http://www.pmchurch.tv/site/1/docs/2009-10-17_Temple-7.pdf.

¹²The oral presentations and written materials are available from American Christian Ministries on 19 CDs: <http://www.american-christianministries.org/categories.cfm?categorydesc=CDs&subcategoryid=473&itemid=4657>.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Adventists and Homosexuality: The Central Issue in the Debate

BY ÁNGEL MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ

In its commitment and loyalty to the will of the Risen Lord as revealed in the Scriptures, the Adventist church has rejected homosexual behavior as a proper expression of human sexuality. This position is universally held by the church. A shift has occurred among some Adventists who argue that although homosexual behavior is generally to be rejected it is acceptable under a specific situation. The core issue in the discussion is not whether homosexual behavior is good or bad, but whether loving same-sex relationships within a permanent commitment to one partner should be accepted by the church. They argue that in such cases the church must support and accept homosexual behavior. In what follows I will summarize in broad strokes and comment on the reasoning behind that proposal.

1. Emotional Impact. Testimonies are collected and shared describing the deep emotional impact that some Adventists go through when realizing that they are homosexuals. Listening to them or reading about their experience is indeed emotionally painful. We also read about the traumatic experience their Adventist parents go through. They all love the Lord and yet they find themselves in a situation that they never anticipated. They look for the support of the “caring church,” but they only find rejection. As a result they have created their own support system at the margin of the church and have found spokespersons for this within Adventism.

We should not underestimate the deep emotional disturbance they experience. Church members, pastors, and leaders should lovingly minister to them. The caring church must stand by them. The church has done so by clearly distinguishing between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. The church would betray the will of the Lord by allowing sentimental sym-

pathy and loving understanding to become sentimental permissiveness. We all need divine wisdom to minister to such individuals and families without negotiating away biblical teachings, norms, and principles.

2. Scientific Evidence. In order to validate the case for a particular type of homosexuality, those supporting it use the results of studies made in the fields of biology, psychiatry, and sociology. The evidence is used to demonstrate that homosexuality is a natural type of sexual orientation within the human population; that it is *normal* to have between 5% to 10% of homosexuals in any society. Homosexual orientation is considered by the medical and scientific communities to be a normal human variant. It is then argued that it is incorrect to refer to homoeroticism as a perversion or as a sin.

The development of sexual identity is a complex issue. But it is scientifically unsound to argue that homosexuality is simply genetically determined. Many other elements should be taken into consideration.

Certainly some individuals have a homosexual orientation, but the factors that bring it about are far from clear. The church has recognized the statistical details (the orientation), but has not used them to determine its understanding of human sexuality or to legitimize a homoerotic lifestyle. Adventism is so firmly grounded in the Scriptures that it does not allow biology, psychiatry or sociology to define biblical doctrines.

3. Reinterpretation of Biblical Texts. Under the influence of sentimental permissiveness and the scientific communities, some Adventist theologians argue that the biblical texts addressing homosexuality need to be brought to the table for further analysis. Under the influence of postmodernism, they argue that the way we read the biblical text reflects our own perspective and not necessarily what the text says. The text itself does not have a final meaning. Therefore we need to recognize the insights of other believers as legitimate readings of the text. Based on these postulates they offer their own reading of the relevant texts. They argue that the OT passages deal with homosexual ceremonial impurity

Some Adventists argue that loving same-sex relationships within a permanent commitment to one partner should be accepted by the church.

associated with the practice of homosexual acts in pagan religions. The NT, they add, opens a way for the church to welcome homosexuality as a lifestyle because Jesus eliminated ceremonial uncleanness.

The biblical passages have been discussed elsewhere in this issue and in other resources from BRI. I will only make some general remarks. The approach used by the theologians supporting a homosexual lifestyle violates the principle of sola scriptura. It considers the texts to be culturally determined, that they do not address the issues that we face today. Besides this, their approach has allowed non-biblical sources to determine their reading and interpretation of the Bible. By violating the clear contextual, linguistic, and grammatical meaning of the text they provide a false sense of security to those practicing homosexuality.

4. Theological Arguments. In order to limit the practice of homosexual behavior to its expression in the context of a loving same-sex relationship in Christ, they attempt to transfer the biblical theology of human sexuality from a heterosexual understanding to a homosexual one. They are forced methodologically to argue in generalities about the legitimacy of same-sex love. The goodness of sex instituted by God, they say,

We need divine wisdom to minister to homosexual individuals and their families without negotiating away biblical teachings, norms, and principles.

is opened up to such intimacy. In the setting of love, primacy is given to relationships and not to the sexual deed. It is not a matter of whether the deed is right or wrong, but whether the relationship is good or bad. Love as affection, loyalty, and mutual respect can be expressed in the intimacy of homoeroticism.

Allow me two comments. First, the transfer of the sanctity of the biblical marriage to same-sex marriage is like transferring the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. What God has not explicitly sanctified cannot be sanctified by theologians in opposition to His will. Second, the idea that relationships are more important than deeds is an ethical statement that needs careful justification. It is offered as a fact when in reality it is a simple opinion. It is practically impossible to separate relationship from deeds. When love is defined outside the context of God's specific will for us it is corrupted. In spite of the efforts made by these theologians to justify homosexual behavior of a particular type, it remains biblically unjustifiable.

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Is God's Law Part of the "New Covenant"?

BY ROY GANE

Many Christians today believe and teach that when the "old covenant" of the Old Testament gave way to the "new covenant"/New Testament of Christianity, the entire "old covenant" law became obsolete.¹ Since the seventh-day Sabbath was part of that law, they argue that literal Sabbath observance is no longer relevant or required of Christians. This approach has been adopted by many, from those (especially evangelicals) who hold that Christians are not bound to keep any particular day² to others (including Pope John Paul II) who slide aspects of the Old Testament Sabbath over to Sunday in order to make it a Christian "Sabbath."³ However, this conclusion assumes such a sharp break between "Old" and "New" Testament religion that no continuity remains between the covenants they represent. This assumption also leads many Christians to reject the divine authority and value of much if not all of the Old Testament.⁴ However, as we shall see in this first part of a two-part series,

such a position fails to take all of the biblical evidence into account. A closer look at the law and the covenants reveals both continuity and discontinuity.

Unity of God's Covenant

In the Bible, the divine covenants are unified and function as phases in the cumulative development of God's overall plan.⁵ That is to say, they really form sub-covenants of one grand, overarching Covenant. It is clear that "each successive covenant builds on the previous relationship, continuing the basic emphasis which had been established earlier."⁶ For example, the covenant set up at Sinai fulfilled God's promises to Abraham regarding His Israelite descendants.⁷ At each covenant stage, the divine-human relationship could be summarized "I shall be your God, and you shall be my people."⁸

In the "new covenant" prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, all of God's covenant purposes—including preservation, promise, and law—climax in Jesus Christ,⁹ who is Priest (Heb 7-10; like Phinehas) and King (Rev 19:11-16; like David). Christ can pull everything together to reintegrate divine-human relationships (John 17:20-23) because He is Immanuel, "God is with us"

(Matt 1:23 quoting Isa 7:14), possessing both divine and human natures (e.g. Luke 1:35). To win the victory for us, He became a battleground in the Great Controversy between sin/selfishness and holiness/love (e.g. John 3:14-17; 2 Cor 5:21). He is the ultimate revelation of God's character (2 Cor 3). The "new covenant" established by the incarnate Christ, who is the Ladder between heaven and earth (John 1:51), is the ladder/bridge between the present sinful world and Eden restored (Rev 21-22).

While the Sinai covenant emphasized an externalized summation of God's will in the form of law as the condition for enjoyment of the covenant blessings, the "new covenant" emphasizes internalization of God's law on the basis of His forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34; compare Ezek 36:25-27). It is true that God offered His people an internalized, heart relationship with Him under the covenant with Israel at Sinai (Deut 6:5).¹⁰ But in the "new covenant" the overwhelming glory of God's love, as shown through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself (2 Cor 3; cf. John 17:4-5), breaks through the hardness of human hearts.¹¹ Forgiveness was also possible under the Sinai covenant through faith in divine mercy¹² and the realities foreshadowed by animal sacrifices (Lev 4-5, etc.), but now the Forgiver has come in human form (John 1:14) and has offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrificial Victim (Heb 9:28). Human beings can better relate to a Person and a completed historical event than to a prophetic ritual system using token animals.

Contrary to common misconception, the difference between the Old Testament covenant phases and the "new covenant" is not the difference between salvation through law in the former and salvation through grace in the latter.

It is not a distinction between two different dispensations.¹³ Both of these states could characterize people within the Old Testament *or* New Testament eras. The fact that Jesus summarized the law in terms of love does not mean that He did away with the law: "a summary does not abrogate or discount what it summarizes."¹⁴ Paul emphasizes that the law *equals* love (Rom 13:8-10), so a distinction between Old Testament law (= love) and New Testament love (= law) artificially introduces a false dichotomy. Paul's distinction between "under law" and "under grace" in Romans 6:14-15 has to do with states of persons who are "under condemnation by the law" or "freed from condemnation through Christ."¹⁵

Jesus' command to love one another was not new in the sense that God had never before required His people to love each other. What was new was the degree/quality of love that He called for His followers to show one another: "just as I have loved you..." By requiring love in this way, Jesus by no means lowered the standard.

Rather, He raised it to a remarkable level—that of His own example and life.

Covenants of Grace

Just as law is integral both to the Old Testament covenants and to the "new covenant," the same is true of grace: Like the "new covenant," the Old Testament covenants were based on grace rather than law. To begin with, God gave Adam and Eve a perfect world *before* He warned them not to eat the fruit of one tree (Gen 1-2). When they fell into sin, the Lord pointed out the dire consequences and promised the "seed" of the woman, rather than law, as the remedy (Gen 3). Before the great Flood, God promised Noah a covenant of deliverance (Gen 6:18). Then He delivered him, and only *after* Noah

and his family were saved did the Lord formalize/ratify the covenant, in the process of which He stated some stipulations/laws (Gen 8:20-9:17). So the laws were for people who were *already* saved by grace, after God had delivered on His promise.

God began the ratification of His covenant with Abram through a ritual (Gen 15:18) after reminding him, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you" (v. 1). This was a promise for the future, but it was based on what had happened in the previous chapter (Gen 14). To reinforce the idea that divine law is for saved people, the Lord introduced His Ten Commandments with the words, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:2; cf. 19:3-6). It is clear that ever since the Fall, the only way to salvation has been by grace through faith (Eph 2:8) in the "seed"/posterity of Eve (Gen. 3:15), i.e. Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). Christ has been at the center of all the covenants.¹⁶ The "new covenant" builds on the earlier covenant phases, but it does not supersede them in terms of introducing a different way of salvation. The "new covenant" is an everlasting covenant (compare Jer 50:5), but so were the earlier covenants, which continue, merge into, and are continued by the "new covenant" within one overall divine Covenant. A similar point is made by O. Palmer Robertson:

Essential to a full appreciation of the distinctiveness of the new covenant is an awareness of its everlasting character. Indeed, this characteristic had been assigned to previous divine administrations. The Abrahamic covenant is characterized as everlasting (Gen. 17:7; Ps. 105:10), as is the Mosaic (Exod. 40:15; Lev. 16:34; 24:8; Isa. 24:5) and Davidic (II Sam. 7:13, 16; Ps. 89:3, 4; 132:11, 12). But the ev-

The "new covenant" emphasizes internalization of God's law on the basis of His forgiveness.

erlasting character of the new covenant seems to imply an eschatological dimension. It is not only the new covenant; it is the last covenant. Because it shall bring to full fruition that which God intends in redemption, it never shall be superseded by a subsequent covenant.¹⁷

Forgiveness, which enables us to receive eternal life, comes only by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9). This does not mean that there is anything wrong with God's law (cf. Rom 3:31; 7:7-12). To the contrary, His law, especially the Ten Commandments, plays a crucial role in revealing the divine standard to which all are accountable. It thereby convicts people of sin and brings them to a realization of their need for salvation. However, it cannot achieve the purpose of justification from sin, for which it was never intended (3:19-20; Gal 3:19-25).¹⁸

Then what is the defective "old covenant" in Jeremiah 31, which must be replaced by a "new covenant"? It is true that Jeremiah connects the "old covenant" to the Israelites at Sinai, when the Lord "took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (v. 32), but the "old covenant" was not the relationship as God offered it. Rather, it was "'My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD." So although God did His part, His people were unfaithful and therefore the covenant relationship was faulty. As in a human marriage, it only takes failure on the part of one or the other partner to spoil a relationship. The spoiled relationship constituted the "old covenant," which God wanted to replace with the *new* covenant, i.e. really a *renewed* covenant of fresh commitment to the God of Sinai.¹⁹ The latter would restore the kind of internalized heart relationship He had offered at Sinai, but on an even stronger basis of forgiveness (v. 34).

Summary

We have found that the successive phases of the unified divine covenant that form the skeletal structure of the entire Bible are cumulative, building on earlier phases rather than nullifying them. True, there are differences of emphasis as salvation history progresses, but God has only ever offered salvation by grace through faith. So while the "new covenant" ratified by Christ's own blood culminates God's initiative to restore an intimate relationship with human beings, it fulfills God's long-range plan rather than radically repealing everything that had gone before. The "old covenant" involved a faulty response of faithlessness and disobedience that marred the divine-human relationship because it departed from

the internalized "new covenant" heart experience offered by God all along. Not only does the "new covenant" represent a covenant phase ratified by the only sacrifice that has offered real salvation to those living during all of the covenant phases; it also represents the only kind of divine-human dynamic through which human beings

under any covenant phase can be saved. So the "new covenant" is not only *a* covenant, one among several reaffirmations of the overall divine covenant; it is *the* covenant. Divine law is for the benefit and protection of all parties involved in relationships. It has never had the purpose of salvation by works, as shown by the

fact that the Bible always places it within the covenant framework of grace.

In the second part of this two-part series,²⁰ we will look at the modern categorization of biblical law and application of these categories within the context of Christianity, including the place of the Seventh-day Sabbath. We will also look at some objections that have been raised to the idea that keeping the weekly Sabbath is required of "new covenant" Christians.

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¹See e.g. the views of Wayne Strickland and Douglas Moo in a multi-authored volume: Greg Bahnsen, Walter Kaiser, Douglas Moo, Wayne Strickland, and Willem VanGemeren, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Counterpoints; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 276-9, 343, 375-6. I am grateful to Jan Sigvartsen, my research assistant, for these references and many others cited in the course of this paper.

²See e.g. Andrew Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 400, 403-4; Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 81; Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (rev. ed.; Glendale, Ariz.: Life Assurance Ministries, 1995).

³See e.g. Gary G. Cohen, "The Doctrine of the Sabbath in the Old and New Testaments," *Grace Journal* 6 (1965): 13-14; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Lord's Day," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:159; Pope John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Catholic Church on Keeping the Lord's Day Holy" (www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/july_5_1998).

⁴For Samuele Bacchiocchi's critique of the "New Covenant" theology published by Joseph Tkach, Jr., Pastor General of the World Council of Churches (*The Pastor General Report*, "The New Covenant and the Sabbath"), and by Dale Ratzlaff (*Sabbath*

in *Crisis*), see Bacchiocchi's *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments* (Biblical Perspectives 14; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 104-20.

⁵O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: P & R Publishing, 1980), 28; Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007).

⁶Robertson, 28.

⁷Ibid., 29.

⁸See e.g. Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 31:33; Ezek 36:28. Robertson calls this the "Immanuel" ("God is with us") principle of the covenant (45-6). The formula "I shall be your God, and you shall be my people" follows the pattern of an ancient declaration of marriage or parental acceptance (cf. Hos 2:16; 1:10; 2:23), the opposite of a formula of divorce or parental rejection (cf. 1:9).

⁹Robertson, 63.

¹⁰Cf. Fredrick Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change—Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 86: "'Heart religion' has always been at the center of Israelite faith."

¹¹Cf. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 204-5.

¹²Cf. Holmgren, 88-9.

¹³Against e.g. Cohen, 13-14, who is off target when he criticizes Seventh-day Adventists and others for claiming that Rom 6:14 "means that the believer is not *under* the ceremonial law but still *under* the moral law (i.e., the Decalogue including the Fourth Commandment—according to the Adventists)."

¹⁴Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 120.

¹⁵Cf. Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 199-201; J. H. Gerstner, "Law in the NT," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3:88 on John 1:17.

¹⁶As implied by Robertson's title: *The Christ of the Covenants*.

¹⁷Robertson, 277. God also gave Noah an everlasting covenant (Gen 9:16).

¹⁸On the law in Gal 3:19-25 as including especially the moral law, see Willmore Eva, "Why the Seventh Day? Part 2," *Ministry* (September, 1999): 5.

¹⁹Cf. Holmgren, 73-81, 86-95. Note that the Hebrew word *khdash*, "new" (as in "new covenant"; Jer 31:31) can also mean "renewed" (e.g. Lam 3:23; cf. the Hithp. verb of the same root *khds* in Ps 103:5).

²⁰This two-part series is condensed and updated from Roy Gane, "The Role of God's Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the 'New Covenant';" online: http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/Gane_Gods_moral_law.pdf.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

The Law and the Gospel

God's law is very concise, yet all-encompassing. The Ten Commandments as found in Exodus 20 contain about 320 words, depending on the translation, whereas a law of the European Community dealing with the import of caramel products contains 26,911 words. The problem today is with people's attitude toward the law. There are two extremes: rejection of the law or seeking salvation through keeping the law. Neither do justice to Scripture.

Different Laws

If studied carefully, biblical statements about the law, such as those that describe the law as being abolished or those confirming the validity of the law, are not contradictory. The term "law" is used in various ways, even by the same author and within the same document. The immediate context determines which law is dealt with. Notice how Paul uses the term:

Rom 3:19	The entire Old Testament
Rom 3:21	The five books of Moses (the Pentateuch)
Rom 7:7	The Ten Commandments (the Decalogue)
Rom 7:23	A principle
1 Cor 9:8-9	Mosaic commandments
Gal 5:3	The law in its entirety

Even Moses distinguishes the uniqueness of the moral law of Ten Commandments from other laws, such as those for Israel as a nation, the ceremonial laws pointing to the life and work of the Messiah that found their fulfillment in Jesus, and various other laws. Although all of these laws ultimately came from God, they differ in scope and duration (see appendix on p. 13).

The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

The New Testament upholds the continuing validity of the Decalogue.

Matt 5:17-19 While Jesus upheld the Ten Commandments, explaining more fully what it means not to kill (5:21-26) or commit adultery (5:27-30), he modified the commandment on the transient bill of divorce (5:31-32—returning to Gen 1 and 2), as well as the common understanding of taking oaths (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), and the unbiblical injunction to love one's neighbor and hate one's enemy (5:43-48).

Matt 22:37-40 The so-called Greatest Commandment does not abolish the Decalogue. God gave us the Ten Commandments because of our

ignorance so that we might understand what it means to love. If we fail to love as God intended us to and transgress His will, the Ten Commandments make us aware of our sin (Rom 7:7).

Paul makes several indirect statements, all of which presuppose a law which is still valid: bringing about “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5; 15:18; 16:26); obedience toward God (e.g. Rom 6:16); the existence of sin (Rom 3:20; 7:7); and the necessity of exhorting believers to live a moral life (e.g. Rom 12:17, 19, 21; 13). Besides these, Paul also makes more direct statements maintaining that the Ten Commandments remain valid:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Rom 2:21-23 | Although Jews emphasize the Decalogue, they have not kept it and therefore dishonor God. |
| Rom 3:31 | The law is not nullified but established. In the immediate context, this verse seems to refer to the moral law. |
| Rom 7:7, 12 | Quoting the Ten Commandments, Paul says it is this law that shows us what sin is and also that the law is holy, righteous, and good. |
| Rom 13:8-10 | Again quoting some of the Ten Commandments, all are summarized in the commandment to love. |
| 1 Cor 7:19 | Paul’s distinction between circumcision, which had become unnecessary, and the necessity of keeping God’s law points to the difference between the moral law and laws which were transitional. |
| Rom 10:4 | Several different interpretations of this verse have been proposed: (a) Christ is the termination of the law; (b) Christ is the goal (or aim) of the law; (c) Christ is the fulfillment of the law; or (d) Christ is the termination of the law as a means of salvation. In light of the immediately preceding verses (9:30-10:3), the last option is to be favored. Obviously Paul uses “law” in a general way (no definite article is being used) and affirms that justification is accepted by faith and not attained by keeping the law. Paul’s statements do not contradict each other. |
| Jas 2:10-13 | The Ten Commandments are “the law of liberty” and the standard in |

the judgment process.

Importance and Functions of the Law

The Ten Commandments must have existed prior to Sinai. Cain would not have been guilty of murder without a law prohibiting the killing of another. Abraham knew God’s law (Gen 26:5), as did Israel before God gave the tables of stone to Moses (Exod 16).

Christianity defends the validity of the moral law as prohibiting idolatry, murder, lying, adultery, etc. On the other hand, many Christians reject the fourth commandment and although keeping the other nine, when pressed, declare that the Ten Commandments or, at least, certain so-called “ceremonial” aspects of them, have been abolished. The major problem is the rejection of the fourth commandment, which leads to the rejection of the others. Some people regard the law as too inconvenient and idealistic. While some reject God’s law outright, others attempt to be saved by keeping the law and thus go to the opposite extreme of overemphasizing its importance. However, Jesus had to die because the law could not be abolished (Matt 5:17; Phil 2:8).

The law has several distinct functions:

1. The nature of God’s law is love. Like the lights on airport runways which allow the pilots to touch down safely, it wants to guide us on the right and good path. It is “the law of liberty” (Jas 2:12), and we keep it because we love God.

2. The law shows us our sinfulness and condemns us. Even this function has a positive effect, because we realize our need of salvation and that we need the help of Someone else.

3. The law leads us to Jesus who saves us. As Peter Elderveld has said, “Mount Calvary is only for those who have been to Mount Sinai.”¹

4. Jesus leads us to obey the law. Whoever has been led to Jesus by the law will, by Jesus, also be led to obedience to the law. Such people will express their gratitude for salvation by keeping God’s commandments (Ps 119:70; Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16-17). According to Matthew Simpson, “the law without Gospel is dark and hopeless; the Gospel without the law is inefficient and powerless.” And, as John Mackay pointed out: “Apart from the Law, the Gospel cannot be understood or be more than mere sentimentalism. Apart from the Gospel the Law cannot escape becoming pure moralism.”

Conclusion

Law and Gospel belong together. We need both. The problem is not God’s law; rather, oftentimes, it is the attitude of rebellious human beings towards the law.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

¹This quotation and the two which follow are taken from Don F. Neufeld,, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Student's*

Source Book, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), entries 981, 954, 955.

Appendix

Even the Reformers acknowledged that there are different laws and that some are still valid. For example, the distinction was already known to Melanchthon, colleague of Martin Luther, and is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Law of Ten Commandments

- Written by God – Exod 31:18; 32:16
- Written on stone – Exod 31:18
- Handed to Moses by God – Exod 31:18
- Placed inside the ark of the covenant – Deut 10:5
- Focuses on moral principles – Exod 20:1-17
- Reveals sin – Rom 7:7
- Is spiritual – Rom 7:14
- Established through faith – Rom 3:31
- Blessed by keeping this law of liberty Jas 1:25
- To be kept in its entirety – Jas 2:10
- To be judged by this law – Jas 2:12
- Violation of this law is sin – 1 John 3:4

The Mosaic Law

- Written by Moses – Exod 24:4; Deut 31:9
- Written in a book – Exod 24:4, 7
- Handed to the Levites by Moses – Deut 31:25-26
- Placed beside the ark of the covenant – Deut 31:26
- Focuses on ceremonial and ritual ordinances – e.g. Lev 8
- Describes sacrifices for sins – e.g. Lev 1-7
- Parts depend on physical descent – Heb 7:16
- Abolished by Christ – Eph 2:15
- Loss of freedom by keeping this law to be saved– Gal 5:1-2
- To keep this law now means nothing – 1 Cor 7:19
- Not to be judged by this law – Col 2:16
- Violation of this law is not sin as it is abolished – Eph 2:15

WORLDWIDE HIGHLIGHTS

BRI Visit to AIIAS

About 160 theologians, administrators, teachers and students participated in the 12th AIIAS Theological Forum held on the campus of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, from October 29-31, 2009. The general topic was “Current Trends in Adventist Theology.” Ángel M. Rodríguez, Ekkehardt Mueller, Clinton Wahlen, and Gerhard Pfandl from the Biblical Research Institute each presented three papers. Also contributing papers were David Tasker, the Dean of AIIAS Seminary, Woodrow Whidden, professor of systematic theology at AIIAS, and Eliezer Gonzalez, a visiting MA student from Australia. The presentations covered such topics as the “Trinity in Adventism,” “The Theology of the Last Generation,” “Laodicea

and Adventist Eschatology,” “Homosexuality in Scripture” and “The Deity of Christ.” Each lecture was followed by a question and answer period. In addition, on Sabbath afternoon a whole hour was set aside for questions and answers which proved to be as popular as the lectures themselves. Many participants expressed their appreciation for the candid way the theological pluralism in the church was addressed and several attendees remarked that this was the best Forum they had ever attended.

Following the Forum, Drs. Mueller and Pfandl stayed on for another two weeks to complete their intensive classes on Daniel and Revelation which had begun a few days prior to the Forum. Students were enthusiastic and grateful for the time they could spend on this in-depth study of these books. One student wrote, “From the bottom of my heart I thank God for this beautiful moment in my life in which I could learn so many things.” The administration of AIIAS expressed its appreciation for the contribution BRI made this year to the academic life of this tertiary General Conference institution in the Asia-Pacific region.



Hundreds Gather for Cress Memorial Service

Hundreds gathered from around the world on Sabbath afternoon, December 5, 2009 at the Sli-go Seventh-day Adventist Church to attend the memorial service for James A. Cress, who fell asleep in Jesus on November 26, 2009. Following the invocation and prayer of comfort, the ministerial association executive staff and their spouses recited a Scripture litany of hope. GC President Jan Paulsen and GC Vice President Gerry Karst shared tributes that came in from around the world. Among the sentiments expressed: “It is painful to accept that he is not with us” and “We shall miss his spiritual leadership.” Elder Paulsen also shared a number of personal reminiscences, including, “If we agreed we smiled. If we disagreed we could still smile.” Elder Karst recalled that “even when he was tired from travel, Jim somehow found energy to carry on with a smile on his face. He loved God and trained men to be good ambassadors of the Gospel and worked to provide opportunities for women to be involved in ministry.”

Charles Bradford, a long-time friend and mentor to Jim Cress and who gave the “Message of Hope,” focused on the assurance of eternal life found in 1 John 5:11-12, connecting it with John 10:28-29 and declaring: “We all die. But I know somebody who has won the battle! He has said ‘No, Jim, I won’t let you go. We may lay you in the ground but I won’t let you go.’ Mercy said no!” Bradford also quoted Ellen White’s comment on the passage in 1 John: “Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave,—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal” (DA 388).



The message was followed by a flute and piano rendition of “Great is Thy Faithfulness” by Geri Mueller and Rae Lee Cooper. One of the most moving moments came with the expressions of gratitude given by Jim’s brother John Cress and Sharon’s tribute to her husband, read by John’s wife Pamela. In the tribute, Sharon wrote that “Jim had big shoulders, and an even bigger, more generous heart. He was the greatest blessing God ever gave me.” The service ended with the congregation singing “For All the Saints,” one of Elder Cress’s favorite hymns. After the benediction, given by Karst, the dozens of ministers in attendance, holding open Bibles, formed an honor guard along the main aisle as the Cress family and friends left the sanctuary. For many who were there, the words of assurance quoted several times during the service, take on new meaning: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps 30:5).

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