

# From Sinai to Golgotha—1

God's law is more than ten commands chiseled in stone;  
it is the principle on which all life is based—love.

By ALDEN THOMPSON

*"For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest. . . . Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.' But you have come to Mount Zion, . . . and to Jesus" (Heb. 12:18-24, R.S.V.).*

This series of articles will tell the story of two mountains, the road between them, and the law of God. In parts 1 and 2 we shall focus our attention on Sinai and Golgotha, and then note how God has led His people from one mountain to the other, first as told in Scripture (part 3) and then as reflected in the life and writings of Ellen White (parts 4 and 5).

The Adventist understanding of the law of God is the foundation for the series. The reader will detect traces of my own experience as I relate how this concept has opened up for me fresh perspectives on Scripture, our Adventist heritage, and our experience as a community of believers today.

The story of the pilgrimage between Sinai and Golgotha is really the story of a journey from command to invitation, from fear to love. Such a pilgrimage has happened not just once, but many times. To a certain extent it is a journey that is necessary for all of us to travel.

The road from one mountain to the other is not an easy one. Even our attempts to understand what has happened raise uncomfortable questions, such as Why does the God of the Old Testament seem different from the God of the New? or Why is Sinai so different from Golgotha?

If we get even more specific and ask whether God's revelation at Sinai was friendly or frightful, we have a question that is particularly difficult for Adventists to answer, for two reasons.

First, since Sinai is so closely linked with the giving of God's law, we are reluctant to say anything that would further contribute to the demise of the law that we as Adventists have been called to defend. Privately we may admit that the thunder and smoke are a problem, but publicly we tell a different story. We are a bit like a little girl who complains at home about the antics of her brother, but who in public defends him to the hilt.

The second reason for our difficulty in facing up to the terrors of Sinai is not peculiarly Adventist, but puts us on

common ground with many Christians. It involves our desire to witness to the good things about God. When God has touched our lives, we know that He is good, even when we cannot fully understand some of His ways with the universe. Thus, and quite naturally so, we emphasize those parts of the Bible in which the goodness of God is most obvious. The more difficult portions we simply avoid or gently remodel in the telling to soften some of the features that may appear objectionable.

Our tendency to idealize and subconsciously "improve" the Biblical accounts was brought forcibly to my attention one day in my elementary Hebrew class. The assignment called for us to translate simple Hebrew sentences based on the Biblical story of Samuel. One sentence in simple and straightforward Hebrew should have been translated: "And Samuel cut off the head of the king." It was obvious, however, that several students had struggled unsuccessfully with the sentence. After we had worked it through in class, one student sheepishly admitted the problem: "We thought that was what it said," he remarked, "but we didn't think Samuel would do such a thing."

## What can we do about Samuel?

It was a solemn moment as we took our English Bibles and slowly read together 1 Samuel 15:33: "And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." The oft-told story of Samuel in the temple had led us to think of him as an innocent, obedient, and well-scrubbed little boy. But here he stood with human blood dripping from his sword.

We would be horrified if a Christian pastor today were to set about hewing a non-Christian neighbor in pieces before the Lord. But what can we do about Samuel? Lacking a better solution, we have often smoothed over or simply avoided some of the more violent aspects of the Biblical account. The result is a more gentle Samuel and a less troublesome example for our children. But we have thus taken a step away from the real Samuel.

Now, I think it is quite appropriate to filter Bible stories for small children. But children grow up and begin to read for themselves. As soon as possible, we need to bring them to the Bible itself. In our Adventist colleges we expect our students to read the Bible, not just stories about the Bible. In my college classes I am constantly dealing

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with good Christian young people who are actually shaken and perplexed by the raw data that they have read in scripture.

The fact that Adventist young people are reading their Bibles with open eyes is cause for rejoicing. But it means that we had better come to grips with the blood dripping from Samuel's sword—and with the thunder from Mount Sinai. And that is really the purpose of this series, for I am convinced that we need to recognize the difference between the way Samuel lived and the way we live, the difference between Sinai and Golgotha, and the difference between the early Adventist experience and ours.

The basis for this series is an understanding of the law of God that appears with remarkable clarity in the later writings of Ellen White, namely, that God's law is designed as an instrument of life rather than an instrument of death and condemnation. Because of sin we feel condemned by the law, but God's purpose is to lead us to an understanding of His law as good news, as the law of life.

When that process is complete, the content of the law comes to us in the form of invitation rather than command, and we respond to it out of love rather than out of fear.

The key to understanding the law of God in this positive way is to recognize that it is something much greater than ten commands chiseled in stone. It is actually the principle on which all life is based, the principle of love. Paul points us in the right direction when he says that love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10). Jesus described that law as involving love to God and love to man (Matt. 22:37-40). Ellen White often added the word *self-sacrificing* to define that love further.

The remarkable feature about the law of God when it is understood as the principle of self-sacrificing love is that in its ideal form it is not something written but a way of life growing out of a relationship with God. Thus Jeremiah can speak of a time when no one will give commands, for the law will be written on the heart and everyone will already know the Lord (Jer. 31:33, 34). Ellen White reflects this same concept of the law when she describes the situation in heaven at the time of Lucifer's rebellion: "The thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as something unthought of."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.

### Same principle at work today

We can see the same principle at work even in our sinful world today: when children are playing happily together, they are virtually unaware of rules; when husbands and wives love each other, no one thinks of demanding rights or throwing down commands, for the needs of both partners are communicated through a bond of love.

That is the kind of law—a law of love—that Adventists are defending. We are saying that we want to live in a world where that kind of law is supreme and that with God's help we will start to build that kind of world by loving the people with whom we come in contact.

But what happens to the law of love when people do not

want to love and refuse to be loved? Should we just keep on smiling and saying nice things, as though it made no difference whether one follows the law of love? That could be disastrous, for it makes a great deal of difference whether we follow God's law. Turning away from His law leads not only to self-destruction but, tragically, to the destruction of innocent people, as well.

If we recognize sin as the opposite of self-sacrificing love, then the essence of sin can be defined as selfishness. And what a ravenous beast this selfishness is—never satisfied with what it has, always grasping for more, and tenaciously defending its stores of ill-gotten gains. It is the enemy of peace and ultimately the end of life. How can the gentle law of love win against such a tyrant?

In a land where selfishness is king, love cannot win if it remains gentle. Sometimes it must shout, even get tough. But love's urgent goal is to show itself gentle again as soon as possible, for hard words are easily misunderstood. A couple of examples will illustrate the point.

### Sometimes love must be firm

First, what happens when children play in a busy street? Love knows that the danger is great, and for that very reason, if gentle words fail to work, stronger measures are in order. Sometimes even a spanking is appropriate, and all because of love. But surely the parents' goal is to help the children *understand*, so that in the future a simple gentle word will suffice. We all like gentle words better. Why not use them if they will get the job done? Hard words sometimes are necessary, but they can easily be misunderstood. What a task for parents—seeking to be gentle enough to win, yet firm enough to save. It is a task that calls constantly for divine help.

Our second example comes from Mount Sinai. God had delivered a people oppressed by slavery for generations. The lash of the whip and the slavemaster's curse had virtually choked out the language of love. Yet God had delivered His people, drowning their pursuers in the Red Sea.

It was clear, however, that simple deliverance was not enough. God must show His people how to live. But how could He possibly communicate His law of life to this unruly band of ex-slaves? Only through thunder and smoke, for that was the language they understood. So God put on such a display of power that they were terrified—but also convinced that here was a God they could trust (Ex. 20:18-20). Yet their memory was short. To save them from certain ruin, God had to return again and again with thunder and smoke and even with the sword. When children are playing in the street, the language of love sometimes has to be very firm. What a task for God—seeking to be gentle enough to win, yet firm enough to save.

In my own experience it was Ellen White who helped me to understand that whether God commands or invites, it is always an application of the law of love. Specific commands are simply explicit applications of the law of love to specific circumstances for the benefit of fallen



humanity. Thus she notes that the two great commands (Love God, and Love "thy neighbor") are commentary on the one law of love, and the Ten Commandments are commentary on the two commands (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305). But going a step further, she sees also the rigorous demands of the additional Mosaic legislation as a gracious accommodation to the needs of the people: "The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God's ten precepts. That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments."—*Ibid.*, p. 310.

In this same connection Ellen White makes some remarkable assertions about the conditional nature of God's activity. She declares that the circumcision given to Abraham, the slavery in Egypt, the giving of the law from Sinai, and the additional Mosaic legislation all would have been unnecessary if mankind had kept the law given to Adam and Eve after the Fall (*ibid.*, p. 364).

Thus a written law is clearly an emergency measure. And the further man falls from God, the more specific must the laws become to meet the need. Jesus made the point in His conversations with the Jewish leaders when He declared that the law of divorce was given only because of "your hardness of heart." But "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8, R.S.V.).

Now, mature people generally recognize that in a world of sin we will never outgrow the need for commands. But when we recognize God's gracious purpose, we can see even rigorous commands as good news. Moses, for example, was nothing short of enthusiastic about the laws that God had given Israel: "What great nation is there,

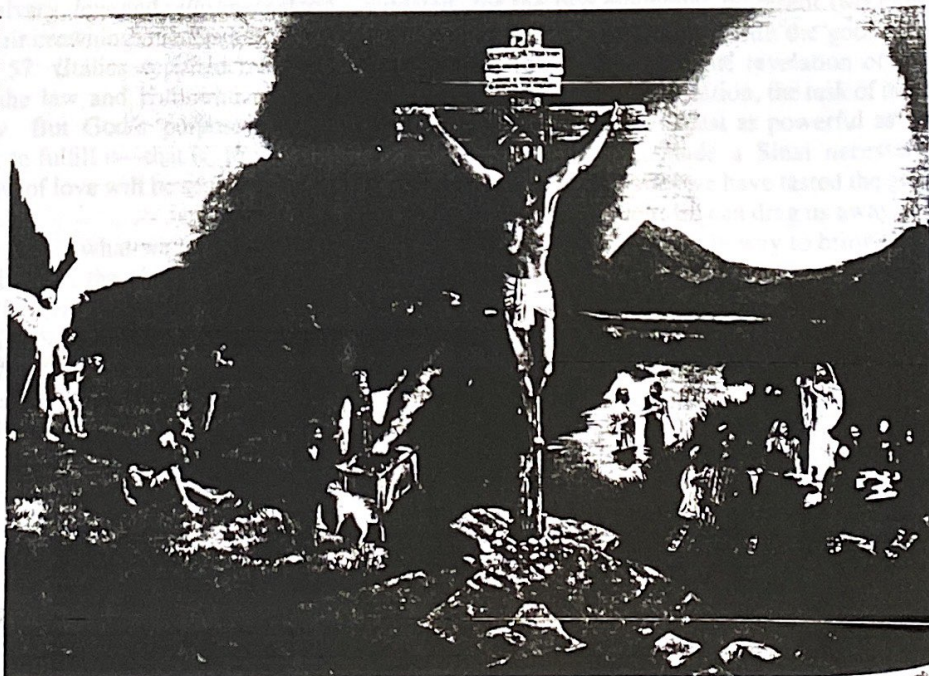
that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:8, R.S.V.). Ellen White also interprets the Mosaic legislation as gracious in purpose: "The object of all these regulations was stated: they proceeded from no exercise of mere arbitrary sovereignty; all were given for the good of Israel."—*Ibid.*, p. 311.

If, however, we do not begin immediately to internalize the law so that it becomes written on the heart, then the constant repetition of commands can actually destroy respect for authority and distort moral development. The point is well illustrated in one of Ellen White's earliest counsels on education where she contrasts two types of classrooms. In one, all is completely regulated by commands, so that the pupils appear like "well-drilled soldiers." In the other, the teacher recognizes the responsibility to educate the pupils so that "they may see and feel that the power lies in themselves to make men and women of firm principle, qualified for any position in life." She notes that the "careless observers" may prefer the "well-drilled soldiers," but "the future lives of the pupils will show the fruits of the better plan of education."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 134.

Even more direct is a statement in the book *Education*. "It is better to request than to command; the one thus addressed has opportunity to prove himself loyal to right principles. His obedience is the result of choice rather than compulsion."—Page 290. Now, a given situation may be so drastic that we must begin with shades of Sinai, but we must shift from command to invitation as soon as possible, for only in so doing can we truly move from fear to love and to a relationship with our Lord that will last through eternity.

To be continued

In the story of the redemption of humanity, two mountains stand out—Sinai in the Old Testament and Golgotha in the New. To see these mountains in perspective is to understand God's plan of salvation.





From Sinai to Golgotha—2

## One law, two mountains

Sinai represents the law in command form. But how is Golgotha an invitation?

By ALDEN THOMPSON

For the Christian, Golgotha is a diamond with many facets. Seen from one perspective, it is God's ultimate judgment on sin; from another, it is His announcement of deliverance for sinners in which He Himself pays the penalty for our sin and proclaims victory in the battle against the evil one.

But that lonely mountain has another perspective, one that enables us to see it in a unique relationship to Sinai. The setting is the great controversy between Christ and Satan, and the focus of attention is the law of God, the law of love. It is in that setting that we hear the words of Ellen White: "At the cross of calvary, *love and selfishness* stood face to face. Here was their crowning manifestation."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 57. (Italics supplied.) Satan's purpose was to destroy the law and Him who was the embodiment of that law. But God's purpose was to establish the law forever, to fulfill it—that is, to fill it so full of meaning that the law of love will be secure through all eternity.

That fulfillment of the law is what we see in Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. His gift is the ultimate demonstration of the principle of self-sacrificing love. Not only was the Father willing to give His Son (John 3:16), but the Son Himself willingly laid aside His heavenly glory to live on earth and to die so that mankind might live (Phil. 2:5-8). Greater love is not possible, and that is what we see at Golgotha.

When we think of God's law only in its command form, the form in which God gave it at Sinai, then our understanding of both Sinai and Golgotha is likely to be distorted. One might even go so far as to think of Golgotha as the radical antithesis of Sinai, as the end of the law. To be sure, Golgotha signals the end of the law as basis of

salvation (Rom. 10:4) and the end of the law condemning master (chap. 6:14), but those were simply human distortions of law in any event. No, Golgotha is by no means the end of law, but its fulfillment.

Sharp contrasts do exist between Sinai and Golgotha, but understanding law as the principle of self-sacrificing love enables us to see the second mountain as the continuation of the first, the actual incarnation of that which God spoke at Sinai. Such a view enables us to speak of one law at both mountains and to maintain the continuity of God's saving activity while clearly recognizing the contrast between fear and love, command and invitation.

But how is it that Golgotha can be described as God's law in the form of invitation? That Sinai represents the law in command form is clear enough. But how is Golgotha an invitation?

The invitation is a silent one, and such the basis of appeal differs radically from that of Sinai. At Sinai God's presence was visible and audible. But at Golgotha the casual observer would hardly recognize God's presence, much less that this agonizing scene was His ultimate invitation to mankind. But it was and is an invitation, first, to accept love's victory over selfishness, and second, to follow in the footsteps of this Jesus of Nazareth and live the law of love. The invitation is not heard by the ear, but perceived by the heart. That is why its power has a mysterious way of growing and deepening until it so grips the recipient that he too is ready to die so that the law of love may live.

Because of the supreme nature of the Golgotha revelation, it is a common misconception that the Sinai revelation is outdated. It is overshadowed but not outdated, for the two mountains represent two radically different ways of reaching people with the good news of God's love. And even though the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation, the task of reaching people is never ended. Sin is just as powerful as it ever was, and the factors that made a Sinai necessary are constantly with us. Even after we have tasted the glorious joy of Golgotha's invitation, sin can drag us away. It may be that a touch of Sinai is the only way to bring us to our senses and to life.

### Preference for invitation

The complexity of our sinful human condition means that we must be fully aware of the dangers should we misapply the Sinai-to-Golgotha principle. When we as individuals stand under someone else's authority, we show a strong preference for invitation over command. On occasion I have asked church members to indicate their likes and dislikes from the following list covering the Sinai-Golgotha spectrum: prohibition, command, permission, recommendation, and invitation. Invitation has been a clear winner ever time. The least popular is prohibition, with command right behind.

Interestingly, the Ten Commandments—the Sinai edition of God's law—come to us as prohibitions.

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commands, the two least popular forms of the Sinai-Golgotha spectrum. Now, even though a committed Christian can visualize each command as an invitation, our human circumstances still make it difficult for us to appreciate commands, for human beings who exercise authority tend to overuse commands and prohibitions and even misuse them for selfish purposes. Thus we subconsciously tend to view all commands as arbitrary and undesirable. We resist, avoid, or ignore them. How many of us have been oblivious to No Parking signs and speed limits simply because we have been reasonably sure that we would not be caught? We easily forget that we are actually disregarding the rights of others and even jeopardizing life itself. But if we stand over the body of an innocent child, killed by a speeding car, we realize that commands are there to save life. Commands are clearly essential but also dangerous, for we tend to view them as arbitrary and thus expendable.

In terms of our relationship to God, another and more serious danger lurks in the Sinai approach, namely, the feeling that acceptance is the *result* of obedience. Children sometimes find it difficult to believe that their parents punish them out of love. In fact, during the act of punishment, it is often a struggle for children to believe that their parents love them at all. Thus the unfortunate tendency in the human environment is to think of love as a *result* of obedience: "My parents love me when I am nice, but not when I am naughty."

When we transfer this kind of thinking to our relationship with God, we tragically imagine that God loves us only when we obey. The Christian life thus becomes a desperate struggle to win acceptance and to earn the love of God. Very few Christians would actually

describe their theology in that way, but the Sinai approach, if it does not lead on to Golgotha, will certainly yield that kind of oppressive experience in which the sinner struggles to earn salvation through obedience.

Now, if we carefully relive both the Sinai and Golgotha revelations, we will discover that God has shown us quite a different picture. Far from being a God who demands obedience as the basis of His saving activity, He has revealed Himself as a God who loves us even when we do not deserve it. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, it was certainly not because of Israel's obedience. For Israel, the deliverance at the Red Sea came before Sinai, thus illustrating an important principle: grace comes before law, or, in other words, God saves before He commands.

In the New Testament, this principle of "grace before law" is portrayed beautifully by Paul: While we were still "sinners" and "enemies," Christ died for us (chap. 5:8-10). When we experience such grace, obedience flows from within as a response of love to God's graciousness.

Traditionally we have tended to see the law as prior to grace. That is, we have tended to see the law entering our experience first of all for the purpose of condemning. Grace then follows to bring us deliverance from condemnation. But to see grace simply as deliverance from condemnation is only part of the story. When we recognize that God's graciousness precedes His command, then we glimpse the love of God whenever He speaks—even when He commands. At times we may be uncomfortable, even frightened, by His command, but we will recognize His love.

Understanding the principle of "grace before law" as the basis of God's dealings with us also provides us with the example of how we are to relate to others: We are

## HEALTH CAPSULES

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# Master of your fate?

By MERVYN G. HARDINGE, M.D., Ph.D.  
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Good health is something we all want but it is not a matter of luck. For most of us it requires work, the constant effort of deciding in favor of reason rather than desire. While reason marshals the facts on which intelligent decisions are made, desire employs rationalization—aligning excuses to justify self-interest.

There are many situations in which we are exposed to potential risks to health about which we can do little. In technologically advanced societies, polluted air, the exposure to chemicals in virtually all our surroundings, and the dangers of our highways are illustrative. In less-developed regions others also face environmental problems—crowding, unsafe water, and infectious diseases such as malaria, dysentery, and typhoid. And then, although the cases are limited, a few people face hereditary problems.

Investigations of populations living self-chosen life styles have demonstrated clearly that certain habits and patterns of life either enhance health or encourage sickness and disease. In fact, most illnesses, with the exception of hereditary and infectious diseases, in both developed and developing nations, result from accepted or self-selected patterns of living.

But what of the preventable diseases that result from our own choices? Most of us know better than we do. Some have strong wills and appear to have little trouble doing the desirable and refraining from the undesirable. But such people are in the minority, human nature being what it is. In most of us inherited and cultivated tendencies sway our choices. In our own strength we are defeated. But herein lies the joy of the Christian, for God has promised unlimited power—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

As we prayerfully analyze our own life styles, seeking heavenly enlightenment as to wherein we may be failing, then, with the power of the Holy Spirit, uniting our wills with His infinite power, we can become masters of our fate.



called to love not only good people but also wicked ones. We love them as God's children so that they will want to live as God's children. Our task is not to condemn, but to love and to offer the gift of life.

As we seek to apply the Sinai-Golgotha principle in our families and within the church family, we also need to be aware of the dangers of emphasizing only part of the spectrum, that is, only invitations or only commands. On the one hand, if we choose to use only invitations because they are more pleasant, the result often will be what Ellen White described as a "cruel kindness" (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 141). In our weakness we sometimes need a firm hand; to be lax when we should be firm can be disastrous.

On the other hand, if we take Sinai instead of Golgotha to be the essence of God's relationship to mankind, we will tend to use commands even when an invitation would be more effective. Thus we risk portraying ourselves and our God as arbitrary. That too can have tragic results. As Ellen White once observed, "Arbitrary words and actions stir up the worst passions of the human heart."—*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 134.

### Relationship springing from love

When God seeks to lead His people from Sinai to Golgotha, He is seeking to lead them to life and to a relationship with Him that springs from love. He will invite, but He will also command. And when He rebukes, He will do so with tears in His voice, for He loves His children even when they disobey.

When God spoke at Sinai, the thunder almost drowned out the tears in His voice; but in the awesome silence of Golgotha, the reverent observer cannot miss the tears. That is why the New Testament often sounds quite different from the Old. Yet that difference in emphasis is not simply one that exists between the Old Testament and the New. Each writer in Scripture gives a different emphasis, depending on the needs of the hour and the progress of his own pilgrimage along the Sinai-Golgotha road. Ellen White noted that the writers of the Bible "differed widely" in "mental and spiritual endowments," a variety reflected in their writings (*The Great Controversy*, p. vi.).

That principle of variety and the principle of growth along the Sinai-Golgotha road are two principles that are crucial not only for our understanding of Scripture but also for understanding our Adventist heritage and the experience of Ellen White, as well. As the remainder of this series will demonstrate, the growth from Sinai to Golgotha, from command to invitation, from fear to love, is a Biblical pattern (part 3) that is also reflected in the experience and theology of Ellen White (parts 4 and 5).

But regardless of where a believer or a prophet stands on the road to Golgotha, God never compromises His ethical demands. The law of God, the law of self-sacrificing love, remains constant. It appears in a variety of forms, but its goal is always that experience that finds its highest joy in obedience to the Lord of the universe. □

To be continued

### FOR THE YOUNGER SET

## "I'm sorry"

By NETTIE EDEN

"Here, hold these books while I tie my shoelace." Mark shoved his books toward Andy.

"Hold them yourself. I'm not going to get my hands cold. Why didn't you tie your shoe before you left home?" Andy answered irritably.

Mark was 7 years old and Andy 9. Each morning they had to walk a couple blocks to catch the school bus. There was no sidewalk, and rain had made puddles in the street.

Mark attempted to hand his books to Andy anyway. Andy let them fall. Even though Mark grabbed for them, they fell into the mud, and the sheets from his notebook fluttered in different directions. What a sorry mess!

Andy stood sullenly while Mark struggled to pick up his books and papers. His own hands were warm and snug inside his jacket pockets. But he didn't feel good about himself.

"Sorry, Mark," Andy tried to sound sympathetic.

"You're always saying 'I'm sor-ry-ry.' You don't mean it. Yesterday you said you were sorry when you let my homework get away. And you didn't try to help me catch him." Mark was angry.

Silently the boys climbed into the warm bus. When they were seated, Andy reached for Mark's books. With his clean handkerchief he wiped the slush from each sheet as best he could. Mark smiled at his older brother.

"I feel better inside now OK, Mark?" Andy apologized.

"Sure," Mark grinned. He put out his hand, and the boys solemnly shook hands. This was one of Dad's rules for ending a fuss. Then Mark and Andy began to laugh. The day suddenly seemed much brighter.





# The story of a pilgrimage

The revelation at Golgotha is better because it is supreme. It is God's ultimate gift to us.

By ALDEN THOMPSON

As Christians who take the entire Bible seriously, we have not always found it easy to reconcile the seemingly sharp contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. Although the picture has often been overdrawn, the God of Sinai does appear rather forbidding when compared with the approachable God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The writings of Ellen White present us with a strikingly similar contrast, one that can be fully as perplexing. On the one hand stands the "encouraging" God of *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*; on the other, the "discouraging" God of the *Testimonies*.

As a fourth-generation Adventist, I learned early in life to cherish the writings of Ellen White, but my own reaction was often mixed. Her works on the life of Christ I found immensely helpful, but the *Testimonies* were a struggle. Every time I started through them, I somehow managed to find an excuse for turning my energies elsewhere. That was troublesome, for I knew that every "good" Adventist should read the *Testimonies*. For a long time I had no answer, but kept the faith while continuing to be both blessed and perplexed by what God had done through Ellen White.

But then the light began to shine. From where? From Scripture, from Ellen White, and from Scotland. A curious mix, I know, but it worked. Here's how.

As American Adventists, my wife and I had never been confronted by a culture in which tradition is highly valued. Americans are on the move. If we have a problem, we tackle it. No sacred cows stand in the way. The challenges

of the frontier have vanquished the claims of tradition.

The work of the church reflects a similar pattern: Do we need a church school? Let's build one. In our evangelism we preach the truth and expect a decision. Now. Why should anything stand in the way? Away with tradition! That is typically American. But in Scotland we learned a thing or two about tradition.

Grocery shopping provides a good example. Americans like to buy in bulk, but the Scots prefer smaller daily purchases. Our desire to buy apples by the box dumbfounded the Scottish shopkeepers. And when we finally found one who would sell in bulk, the other customers were convinced we were running a boarding house. Numerous such experiences helped us understand tradition and its impact on the work of the church.

We had left a comfortable Adventist community in America with 6,000 Adventists among a local population of 40,000, where no one ever asks, "Seventh-day who?" By contrast, Scotland can claim no more than 400 Adventists among its 6 million inhabitants—everyone asks, "Seventh-day who?" We loved the land and its people, but the force of tradition made it extremely difficult to share our faith.

As I embarked on my doctoral program, that Scottish environment provided a unique setting for my long hours of study in the Old Testament and for an intense dialogue with Scripture and my Adventist heritage. The result was an exciting new world opening before my eyes.

First, I learned to read the Old Testament. That is, I actually heard the Old Testament itself speaking instead of Uncle Arthur! I was startled to learn that Jephthah really did sacrifice his daughter, that Esther's concept of virtue was quite different from mine, and that Elisha actually had given Naaman permission to enter the temple of a pagan deity with his master. (Judges 11:31, 39; Esther 2:14-17; 2 Kings 5:15-19). I also began to ponder the implications of the God-given laws that assumed slavery, bigamy, and blood vengeance (Ex. 21:1-11; Num. 35:16-21). A twentieth-century American God would have abolished such customs on the spot.

## I had probably been slighting the Bible

Second, I began to realize how creative Ellen White had been in interpreting the Old Testament. As I compared her interpretations in *Patriarchs and Prophets* with Scripture, I often found them much more understandable than the bare Old Testament narratives. For example, when Scripture tells the story of Israel's rebellion, God sends the snakes to punish the people (Num. 21:6). But as Ellen White tells the story, Israel turned away from God and thus had no protection from the snakes that were already there (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 429). I liked what Ellen White did, but upon reflection I decided that I had probably been slighting the Bible in favor of *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Even in my Bible reading I had been hearing *Patriarchs and Prophets* (and Uncle Arthur) instead of the Bible itself. I needed to learn to hear them both.

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Third, Ellen White helped me come to grips with some of the sharp contrasts between Bible writers. How could the psalmists be inspired and yet pray such frightful things about their enemies? (e.g., Ps. 69:21-29; 137:7-9). It was a far cry from Jesus' prayer on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). But Ellen White noted that Bible writers "differed widely" even in their "spiritual endowments" (*The Great Controversy*, p. vi). Yes, it was possible that even an inspired writer had not yet grasped the full meaning of forgiveness. Without support from Ellen White, I probably would not have been bold enough to suggest that.

Fourth, I discovered that two Bible writers could tell the same story but give quite different interpretations. According to 2 Samuel 24:1, when David ordered his ill-fated census, God was responsible. But a second and later inspired writer assigned the responsibility to Satan (1 Chron. 21:1). Here was the Biblical confirmation for the process of inspired reinterpretation that I had already discovered in the writings of Ellen White.

Fifth, I had to learn to be more tolerant of those who use a different method of interpreting Scripture. "Reading in context" had been drilled into me by my teachers, but the New Testament writers seemed to break all the rules when they quoted the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 2:15; Hosea 11:1; Heb. 11:27; Ex. 2:14). They often employed the Jewish practice of reading later events back into earlier passages.

Sixth, I finally was able to admit that the contrast that had puzzled me in the writings of Ellen White is thoroughly Biblical. If we let Scripture itself speak to us, the contrast between Sinai and Golgotha is unmistakable.

All these individual aspects were a necessary preparation for the day when the pieces of the puzzle would fall together. That day came when one of the professors urged me to attend a lecture he was giving to the theology students. Since I was focusing my attention on the problem of evil, his title was indeed of interest: "The Demonic Element in Yahweh."

Approaching the topic with evolutionary assumptions, the professor noted that because Satan is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament, both good and evil must come directly from the hand of God. To illustrate, he cited a string of "demonic" acts of God in the Old Testament: the destroying angel in Egypt, Uzzah's "electric" ark, and others (Ex. 12:23, 29; 2 Sam. 6:6-9; see also Ex. 4:24; Eze. 20:25, 26). His conclusion: the God of the Old Testament was a combination of a desert demon and a good deity.

The lecture brought no joy to the ministerial students, but it did do something for me. I was not interested in his evolutionary assumptions, but his observations about the absence of Satan in the Old Testament intrigued me. In fact, the great controversy story came together in such a way that I was almost tempted to preach a good Adventist sermon to those dejected ministerial students. If I had succumbed to the temptation, my sermon would have gone more or less as follows:

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The problem of evil had its roots in heaven when Lucifer rebelled against the law of God, claiming it to be arbitrary. But God declared that love freely chosen and given is the law of life. There is no other choice, for selfishness leads naturally to death. The rebel was clearly a threat to the universe, but to destroy him instantly would simply confirm his accusations. The very nature of God's law required that Lucifer have time to develop a "government" based on selfishness. This world became the primary theater where Satan has been seeking to establish the rule of selfishness and God has been seeking to establish love. Only when the universe clearly understands that selfishness destroys can God destroy selfishness.

This cosmic struggle between good and evil provides the key for interpreting the Biblical data.

When Adam and Eve chose selfishness, they opened the floodgates of misery. Genesis 3-11 describes the tragic results of Satan's success as one rebellion after another undermines the foundations of truth and love. By the time of Abraham, the truth about God had almost died out. Abraham himself told half-truths and took a second wife with no apparent qualms of conscience. (Gen. 12:10-20:16:1-7). Even his own family worshiped other gods (Joshua 24:2). Why did God allow such backsliding? Because Satan and selfishness must have their day in court.

### A bold plan

But with Abraham, God embarked on a bold plan to win back His world. How far can He take Abraham? Not very far at first, for Abraham has to choose to follow. God cannot coerce, for that would be contrary to the law of love. (It was precisely at this point that our experience in Scotland proved to be a help to me, for I had begun to realize that deep-seated customs and habits do not change easily. Not even God can change people instantaneously, for that would be contrary to His law.)

As we follow the story from Abraham to Moses, we see the flame of truth flicker and almost die. But then we come to the Red Sea and Sinai. With massive, bold strokes, God vanquished the gods of Egypt, served notice on the gods of Canaan, and won the hearts of a reluctant people. As Sinai thundered and shook, Israel was petrified but impressed. Here was a God they could trust, One who had opened paths through the sea and moved mountains.

And where was Satan? Right there, to be sure, but for a very good reason the Biblical account does not mention him.\* Israel had just come from Egypt, where the people worshiped a host of deities, beneficent and malevolent. Polytheism was thus a real threat for Israel. It would have been all too easy for them to worship Satan as a god, the god of evil. Rather than run that risk, God deliberately

\*Satan is mentioned by name only in three Old Testament contexts, all of which belong to books that were either written or canonized toward the end of the Old Testament period: 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1, 2. Job, significant for the Adventist "great controversy" story and generally attributed to Moses in Jewish tradition, was not accepted as canonical until the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings.



hose to assume full responsibility for evil. The larger picture of the battle between good and evil would have to wait.

Since our Scriptures were written first for Israel, their first task was to meet Israel's needs. Had God told the story for us *instead of* for them, they could not have understood. Hence, in the five books of Moses and in much of the Old Testament, *everything* comes directly from the hand of God: the serpent in Genesis 3:1 is simply the most subtle creature "which the Lord God had made"; even in the book of Job, Satan makes only a limited appearance. God tells him: "'You moved *me* against him [Job], to destroy him without cause'" (Job. 2:3, R.S.V.). Job himself never once recognized the presence of Satan. As far as he was concerned, *God* was his tormentor (cf. chap. 16:7-14).

Another result of Israel's long years in slavery was the further development of customs that we find troublesome: slavery, polygamy, and blood vengeance. But if God were to win these people, some customs would have to be temporarily controlled rather than abolished immediately (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 515). God will not take His people faster than they can follow.

In that connection we face an important question: On what basis do we judge certain customs in the Old Testament to be "troublesome," even wrong? Is it not in the light of the cross? Polygamy as such is nowhere condemned in the Old Testament and nowhere in the entire Bible is slavery condemned. But as Christians we judge such practices to be out of keeping with God's law. Such a conclusion is possible only under the guidance of the Spirit as we meditate on the cross of Christ. The cross is supreme, but our understanding of it will ever deepen.

From my own experience, however, I know that we as Adventists have sometimes found that admission difficult. I think we need to overcome our shyness and admit that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the clearest revelation of God. Our attachment to Sinai is understandable. But if the New Testament can clearly see Golgotha as *better* than Sinai (Heb. 12:18-24), then we can too.

That word *better* could cause us to stumble, however, for two quite different emphases are possible: *better* in contrast with *worse*, or *better* as the next step up from *good*. For example, when someone in the family is sick, we automatically think in terms of "worse-better." But when it comes to the replacement of a much-used Bible with a new and "better" one, every one of us thinks in terms of "good-better," for the old Bible has served us well and has been very good.

As applied to Sinai and Golgotha, the word *better* suggests a certain ambiguity. Because of the terrors of Sinai, our feelings point toward the "worse-better" contrast, and that could lead to the rejection of Sinai. But from the standpoint of God's purpose, the "good-better" sequence is clearly to be preferred. Sinai was not bad; it was precisely what those people needed, and was good. Even today it still has its place to meet emergencies caused by sin. But the revelation at Golgotha is indeed better

## FOR THE YOUNGER SET

# The Christmas that wasn't

By RUTH PETERSON WATTS

Christmas was the most exciting time of the year as far as Connie was concerned. The bustle of shopping, the baking of extra-special treats, and the smell of the pine tree were wonderful!

Just a few days before, she had seen a big wooden dollhouse in Conley's department store. She wanted one.

At worship that night, Daddy finished praying, then, instead of saying, "It's bedtime," he said, "I have something I'd like to talk to you about."

Everyone waited expectantly.

"There are many refugees coming to our country right now. They have no jobs, homes, or any of the things we have that make us comfortable. Mother and I have been talking about what we could do to help them. We wondered if maybe you children would like to share your Christmas."

Puzzled, Connie asked, "But how, Daddy?"

"Well," her father answered, "we decided we could send the money that we would spend for gifts to each other to the General Conference to help buy food and clothing for the refugees. The question is, would you be willing to give up your presents this one year and send that money?"

There was silence as the two children thought about what Daddy had said.

John said slowly, "I'd like to do that, Dad. I had wanted a new bike, but I don't really need one; my old one is fine."

Smiling approval, Dad looked at Connie, who was still thinking about the dollhouse. How badly she wanted it! But with a nod of her head, she, too, agreed to the plan.

When Dad had written the check, John addressed the envelope, and Connie pasted on a stamp. There goes my dollhouse, she thought with a sigh.

Mother watched Connie as she walked to her bedroom. Picking up her Bible, Mother followed.

"Connie, I want to show you something that Jesus told His disciples. He was telling them about doing good deeds to others. Listen, 'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"

"You mean that I gave the money to Jesus?"

Smiling, Mother nodded, "That is exactly what Jesus said."

Connie returned the smile and hopped into bed. "This is going to be the best Christmas that wasn't!" she said.



Connie wanted a dollhouse for Christmas. Mother explained that by giving the money to refugees instead, the family would be giving the money to Jesus.



because it is supreme. It is God's ultimate gift to mankind.

But having recognized the validity of both revelations, we must know why one is better, and here the choice is clear: on the one hand we find fear and command; on the other, love and invitation. God can and will use commands and even appeal to fear, but only in emergencies. A lasting bond can be built only on love and in response to a gracious invitation. That is what is much clearer at Golgotha than at Sinai. God was obvious and impressive at Sinai, but Golgotha seemed God-forsaken.

God-forsaken? Yes, at least to the ordinary eye. To be sure, the thief and the Roman centurion sensed the presence of God, but for the disciples, for Mary, and even for Jesus Himself, the words of the psalmist were painfully real: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1). Love had died, hope had gone, and Satan had won—apparently.

But the resurrection changed all that, and the cross

began to etch a new pattern of life on the souls of the disciples. They began to realize that Golgotha was the essence of God's gracious invitation to man. God was indeed present on that lonely mountain. He uttered no threats; He gave no commands, but offered instead compelling invitation to life. The active presence of God's holiness threatened no one on Golgotha, for God did not come to kill, but to take our place. He gave no clarion call for the destruction of the wicked, but offered a prayer for the forgiveness of His enemies and showed the tenderest regard for a heartbroken mother. Here was the seal of God's promise that He would write His law on the hearts of men.

And so it is that Golgotha has become the symbol of the God who is willing to go to the cross so that we may live. That is the message that lies at the end of the Sinai-Golgotha road.

*To be continued*

#### FOR THIS GENERATION BY MIRIAM WOOD

## The fragile thread

ONE SUMMER DAY'S  
CRUISE ON THE BAY  
ENDS IN TRAGEDY.

This sad headline captured my attention in the *Washington Post* of August 3, 1981. The simple outlines of the story were these: The head of a large business firm had taken a group of his employees for a sail on Chesapeake Bay. All in the group were much impressed by the 41-foot yacht, the latter being one of the great success symbols in modern society. The sky was blue, the clouds white, the air sparkling, the sun warm, the waves gentle, the spirits of the group exuberant. One of the guests, a 29-year-old assistant office manager, was a young woman only five feet one inch tall, who weighed exactly 105 pounds. Full of sparkle and vivacity, she was a favorite with everyone. Though accomplished in many areas, somehow she had never learned to swim.

No one knows exactly what happened, and perhaps no one ever will know, even after the case has come to trial. Her

husband insists that it was made clear to all that Theo could not swim, and in view of that assertion, it is appalling to realize that late in the afternoon her employer, the host and yacht owner, picked her up "as a joke" and threw her overboard. Was liquor involved? One wonders, because she was on the bottom of the bay (at that point ten feet deep) for five or six minutes before someone dived down and brought her up. By then she was so far gone that a helicopter was called to rush her to the shock-trauma unit of a Baltimore hospital. But it was too late. Now her medical-student husband is alone with their 5-year-old daughter. The courts will eventually come to some sort of decision about the case; we need not carry it further or speculate.

In thinking about this tragedy, I felt, as I have felt so often, that many people seem totally unaware of the fragile thread by which life hangs. Does that seem to you an unduly pessimistic thought? Perhaps it would be if we spent every waking moment

dreading the idea that the next heartbeat might be our last or that our lungs might cease to function after the next breath. Fortunately, God has constructed our natures so that we seldom (under normal circumstances) contemplate for long the fact that life can be so fleeting. We have the ability to enjoy the sunshine, the love of those who are dear, the joy of accomplishment—everything that is good and wonderful about living.

Nonetheless, the irrefutable fact remains that the human body is, in many respects, extremely fragile. While it is amazing how much the body can endure and still live, it is horrifying to realize that its life can be taken instantly. When we are young and fearless and life seems so good we tend to think of ourselves as immortal, and to take chances of all sorts. This was not what killed the young woman in this newspaper article, she not being the architect of her death, but all too often the mutability of life is not considered as it should be.

Let us consider the question of dares. When a group of young people get together, quite frequently when a number of males are present, the situation turns into a contest of dares. Just as an illustration, if one person can climb to the top of a three-story building,

clinging precariously to the outside of the structure, then certainly the next fellow can do it—with one hand tied behind him. One slip and the climber could be either dead or maimed for life. But nothing matters except the dare.

Perhaps the most flagrant example of disregarding the fragility of life comes with drinking and then driving. A young friend of mine told me recently that he spends every Saturday night drinking beer and liquor for hours, and then he drives home in his new truck. He still is in one piece. But for how long? And how about the people he may take with him in a blinding moment of twisted steel, shattered glass, and mangled flesh? The human body is no match for an automobile in a one-to-one situation with speed and liquor thrown in.

Life is a precious gift from God. It comes only from Him, and it cannot be replaced by a repentant person who has taken another's life in a careless moment. Every day is a blessing, every moment a privilege. I'm not suggesting that you worry about the fragile thread by which life hangs, but that you live sensibly and show good stewardship in protecting your time on this earth in order to serve God and bring joy to others for as long as possible.



# Ellen White's Pilgrimage to Golgotha

The writings of the Lord's messenger reveal her deepening joy as her understanding of God's love enlarged.

By ALDEN THOMPSON

The preceding article in this series described how the great controversy setting enables us to resolve some of the difficulties that arise when we read the Old Testament. Recognizing the implications of the struggle between good and evil also helps us understand why Sinai and Golgotha are so different and why it took Israel so long to travel from one mountain to the other.

Having established certain principles in connection with the Biblical material, I will apply these principles as a means of understanding the experience and theology of Ellen White. In general, the point that I wish to establish is that Ellen White experienced a remarkable spiritual growth in the course of her life, one that led from Sinai to Golgotha. In 1906 she herself referred to this process of growth: "For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things, and in reference to the way in which God is constantly working to bring souls from the error of their ways to the light in God's light."—*This Day With God*, p. 76. (Italics supplied.) The present article focuses on the development in Ellen White's experience; the next one (the last in the series) will demonstrate how the growth in Ellen White's experience resulted in a remarkable shift of emphasis in the telling of the great controversy story.

In her early years, Ellen White stood very much in the shadow of Sinai. She had come to picture God as a "stern tyrant compelling men to a blind obedience" (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 31). But as she matured in her experience with the Lord, the shadows of Sinai receded.

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More and more she experienced God as a "kind and tender parent" (*ibid.*). Instead of uncomfortable commands, she heard ever more clearly God's gracious invitation. Her later writings reveal that, step by step, love had vanquished fear as a primary motivating force in her relationship with God.

Before we proceed, however, we need to focus more specifically on two key terms that are significant for both the current discussions in the church and the material presented here: inspiration and development. In this series it should be evident that in both areas I depart from the more traditional position of the so-called "fundamentalists" and "evangelicals." Adventists share many things in common with our friends in the conservative Christian world, but we must not overlook the significant differences.

I feel it is important to emphasize that the Adventist view of inspiration differs from that of many conservative Christians, for in spite of excellent articles in denominational papers, including the *Adventist Review* (see "Are Adventists Fundamentalists?" Jan. 8, 1981), a fundamentalist view of inspiration still lurks in some Adventist circles. One of the primary concerns of a fundamentalist view is defending the unity and divine authority of Scripture, a goal that is indeed commendable. But an emphasis on unity runs the risk of overlooking instances of diversity that provide important clues as to how God deals with His children. Furthermore, it can be dangerous spiritually to spend too much time defending and proving Scripture when our primary task is witnessing to its power in our lives.

## No attempt to prove inspiration

It should be clear that I am not attempting to prove the inspiration either of Scripture or of Ellen White. For me that question has been settled. My interest is to ask *what* God has said and *why*. Having answered the question of *whether* with a Yes, I believe we can profit a great deal by placing Sinai and Golgotha side by side, taking note of the differences and then asking *Why*? Also we can recognize the differences between *Steps to Christ* and the *Testimonies* and ask *Why*?

Largely because of the ministry of Ellen White, we Adventists not only are in an excellent position to be realistic in our understanding of inspiration; we are also able to recognize that a person's understanding of truth is something that grows and develops and that truth in a fresh perspective may become "present truth." That is what Ellen White meant when she used the phrase "present truth" during the 1888 crisis: "That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time."—Manuscript 8a, 1888.

Now when we Adventists use the term *development*, we are not talking about some evolutionary process that leaves God out of consideration, but rather a process of spiritual growth that is directly under the guiding hand of God.



## FOR THE YOUNGER SET

### Winter thrills

By GLADYS LIANE NEWMYER

Klara pressed her nose against the windowpane, trying to peek through the frost to see the yard and the mounds of newly fallen snow. Turning to her little brother, Tony, she sighed and said, "I can't see much through these scratches in the frost, but I'm sure Dad is working on the snow slide. He said he would."

Klara and Tony could not participate in many of the winter sports the older children in the family enjoyed. But they looked forward to the slide their father made where the wind blew snow into high peaks behind the grain bins. When the weather was bitter cold Mr. Morris sprayed water over the huge snowbank, letting it freeze into an icy, slippery hill.

When Mr. Morris came into the kitchen Klara asked excitedly, "Is it done yet? Did you spray the water over the snow hill?"

"Hey, hold it a minute. Let me catch my breath!" he answered good-naturedly. Taking off his coat, he turned to the children and looked into their eager faces. "Yes, it's done. I just have to chop steps into the side of the hill, and it'll be ready for you to slide on."

"Whee!" Tony cried.

"Will we get to slide today? We have school tomorrow, Dad," Klara reminded her father.

"It'll be ready by the time dinner is over. The wind is very cold, so wrap up well."

"We will, Dad," the children answered.

When Klara finished helping Mother with the dinner dishes, she and Tony bundled up and hurried outside. Their father gave each of them an old dishpan to use for a toboggan. He held onto the handle as Klara sat down; then, as she grasped the sides of the big pan, he gently shoved her to the edge and she went down the hill, whirling

and sliding. The pan carried her all the way down the slide, across the pond, and into the pasture.

Tony went next, squealing with laughter as he swirled down the hill. They played for hours, stopping only to talk about the fun they were having.

Finally Mother called, asking them to come in. They begged for "just one more ride." Mother agreed. Then they left the pans on the hill and hurried into the house.

"Oh, Mom, Dad, we had such fun," Klara cried as she was pulling off her wraps. "We forgot about the cold, 'cause we were having so much fun! I just love winter. May we go again tomorrow after school?"

"As soon as your chores are done. Just remember, chores come first," Mother answered.

Klara had a naughty thought: Wouldn't it be great to slide without having to do chores first! Then she felt guilty. Dad went to the trouble of getting the slide ready for us, so the least we can do is to work willingly—and we will, she determined.



To understand the concept of development from a Christian perspective, I find two principles to be particularly important. The first is the *principle of variety*, which simply means that God uses a wide variety of means so that He can meet the needs of people at each level of growth. The second may be called the *principle of growth* (and degeneration), perhaps best illustrated by the popular phrase "By beholding we become changed." It is a law of the mind that we become like that which we behold (see *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 355; *Education*, p. 192; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 91, 459).

Applied as a law of growth, the possibilities are virtually unlimited: as we focus the thoughts on Christ, the mind is renewed, which enables us to see Him more clearly, which leads to a further renewal that makes possible an even clearer perception. It is an ever-continuing process. As created beings we will never reach a complete understanding of truth. There is always more beyond. That is why Ellen White can say with confidence that we will continue to grow throughout eternity (see *Education*, p. 307; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 677, 678).

This law applies to every moral creature, prophet included. As applied to the growth of Ellen White, it has two important implications, which will be illustrated further below. First, as Ellen White's spiritual capabilities grew (as a result of prayer, Bible study, dreams, and visions), her theological understanding grew. Most notable were significant refinements in her view of God's law, and sin.

#### As Ellen White grew, the concepts grew

Second, the visions that God sent Ellen White were always designed to be understandable to her at her level of growth at the moment of reception. That means that as Ellen White grew, the concepts given her in vision grew also, under God's direction, and were designed to meet her new capabilities. To put the matter more bluntly, God was constantly "editing" the great controversy visions He gave to Ellen White. As she became capable of seeing more, God showed her more. That was why she did not tell the great controversy story just once in 1858 but kept retelling the story throughout her life and making some significant changes along the way. In short, because of the way the principle of growth works, we probably should consider visions to be more like pen sketches illustrating truths rather than photographs portraying reality, or animated illustrations rather than as exact videotape reproductions. The visions of Daniel, Ezekiel, and John the revelator provide us with good Biblical examples.

As an introduction to the study of Ellen White's theological development, I find the early *Testimonies* to be extremely illuminating.<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, reading the *Testimonies* had been a struggle for me. The strong words and the references to the frown of Christ, especially volume 1, always managed to sidetrack my good intentions. But when it fell my lot to teach denomination history, I decided the time had come, strong words and frowns notwithstanding.



But by this time I had already worked through many hard words in Scripture and had begun to formulate certain principles of how God leads His people, including prophets, from Sinai to Golgotha. With those principles in mind, I was not only amazed at what I found but greatly blessed as I observed God at work in the experience of Ellen White.

In Ellen White's autobiographical sketch in *Testimonies*, volume 1, I was impressed with young Ellen's great fear of God. She was an extremely sensitive person, oppressed by thoughts of an eternally burning hell and of a God who would save only the sanctified. She was deeply religious, so much so that she still wanted to be saved even though she actually considered God to be "cruel and tyrannical" (pp. 21-25). When she discovered the truth about the nonimmortality of the soul and came to the conviction that there was no eternally burning hell, a great burden rolled off her young shoulders.

Nevertheless, even though the burden of an eternal hell was gone, Ellen was still not entirely comfortable with God. She did not enjoy her prophetic ministry, but was driven on by the fear that failure to fulfill her duties would bring a "dreadful frown" to the face of her precious Lord (p. 74). How much like Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Moses, who longed to escape their prophetic ministry but could not! After her young son became ill, Ellen feared that God would take him away from her if she allowed the child to hinder her from fulfilling her duty (p. 87). She suffered months of depression (p. 93), and even longed to die (p. 93). Should not such an experience leave its mark on her writings? Of course. And that is what I discovered in the *Testimonies*.

As I read, I noted her early struggles to find peace with God, a God who seemed quick to punish and reluctant to save. The Biblical pattern of the Sinai-Golgotha road was proving to be a real blessing as I saw God at work in her experience. But still I was surprised at some of the things

she said. For example: "God will have a people separate and distinct from the world. And as soon as any have a desire to imitate the fashions of the world, that they do not immediately subdue, just so soon God ceases to acknowledge them as His children."—Page 137. I recognized that in context she is pointing up the danger of love of the world and the need for absolute commitment to Christ, that she is speaking more of a basic attitude than a fleeting thought. But to me this expression sounded severe, more a reflection of the mood of Sinai than of Golgotha.

### A startling passage

In this same connection, I was startled when I came to a passage from the early 1870s. James White had been working too hard at the *Review* office and had begun to run short of patience. He was getting shrill with the employees, and they were responding in kind. Ellen was concerned about the deteriorating situation and wrote specifically of the need for everyone to be forgiving, as God is forgiving. To illustrate the point, she told the story of the prodigal son. The thrust of the story is clear enough: God forgives. But I was quite unprepared for her description of the prodigal's return: "While the son was at a distance from his home, his father saw the wanderer, and his first thought was of that rebellious son who had left him years before to follow a course of unrestrained sin."—*Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 101, 102. She then describes how the father's heart was touched and he received the son home. But I sensed that something was missing. The homecoming seemed quite ordinary and the father almost hesitant. Where was the heartbroken father longing for the return of his son?

I quickly picked up *Christ's Object Lessons* and checked the parallel passage written almost thirty years later (1900). There I read the more familiar lines that had always been such a blessing to me. I read of the love of God, which "sets in operation influences" to bring the sinner home (p. 202). I read of the "ache and longing" in the father's heart, of the continual watching for his son's return, and the instant response of love to the form of the returning boy (p. 203).

Ellen's pilgrimage to Golgotha is complete. She no longer sees God as reluctant, but as eagerly longing for the return of the sinner and doing all He can to restore the one who has wandered away.

As Ellen journeyed from Sinai to Golgotha, she never rejected her earlier experience. Her deepening joy is clear for all to see, but she realized that God had been leading her every step of the way, even when she had been afraid of Him. After all, God was there at Mount Sinai, as well.

To be concluded

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Cited in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory, 1888-1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Since the *Testimonies* in the nine volumes appear in chronological order, they provide an excellent source for studying the development of Ellen White's experience from 1855 to 1909.

## A royal birth

By PAT ANDREWS

Brilliance  
shone  
into the manger-bed,  
transforming  
the dusky stable-shed  
with holy  
luminescence.  
Royalty  
lay

on the golden straw.  
Son  
of righteousness  
came to die  
humbly  
as He began,  
His  
kingly crown  
a thorny diadem,  
Redeemer,  
Saviour,  
Son of man,  
born in the hills  
of Bethlehem.



# The theology of Ellen White: The great controversy story

By ALDEN THOMPSON

The material discussed thus far in this series provides essential background for the proper understanding of Ellen White's theological growth as presented in this article. The first two articles compared and contrasted the command form of God's law, Sinai, with the invitation form, Golgotha, noting that the Sinai revelation was an emergency form of God's law necessitated by sin. We then illustrated from Scripture (part 3) and from the experience of Ellen White (part 4) how God has led His people from the commands of Sinai to the invitation of Golgotha, enabling His children to respond out of love instead of from fear.

We now turn to the theology of Ellen White and show how the transition from fear to love in her experience resulted in a remarkable shift of emphasis in the way she told the great controversy story itself. In fact, without the insights that she provides in her later writings, there would have been no catalyst for these articles, for it was Ellen White's understanding of the great controversy as described primarily in the Conflict of the Ages Series and the book *Education* that opened my eyes to the Sinai-Golgotha principle.

Having learned of the Sinai-Golgotha principle through the writings of Ellen White and having discovered its value for the interpretation of Scripture, it was a natural step to apply that same principle to her own writings, as well. The present article is the result of comparisons I have made in successive editions of her published works.

As the basis of my study I have taken the first four chapters of *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890) and compared them with the first and second printed editions of the great controversy story: *Spiritual Gifts*, volume I (1858) and *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume I (1870).<sup>1</sup> In general, *Spiritual Gifts* gives a simple narrative; *The Spirit of Prophecy* expands it; *Patriarchs and Prophets* transforms it.

The greatest surprise for me as I compared the successive retellings of the story was that those elements that I had considered to be essential to the Great Controversy narrative do not appear clearly until the final telling of the story in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, namely, that the whole controversy has to do with freedom of

choice and the service of love.<sup>2</sup> The following aspects represent the most significant differences:

1. *Role of the love of God in the great rebellion.* Of the three editions, only *Patriarchs and Prophets* describes the role of love in the controversy. The beautiful two-page introduction in the first chapter (pp. 33, 34) is entirely absent from the earlier accounts. *Spiritual Gifts* and *The Spirit of Prophecy* simply narrate the facts of Lucifer's rebellion, emphasizing the frightful consequences when one resists the will of the all-powerful God.

2. *Relationship of free will and the law to the character of God.* From the beginning *Patriarchs and Prophets* focuses on the character of God as the key issue in the controversy: the law reflects God's character and thus can seek only the service of love. "Law of Love," "service of love," "freedom of will," and "voluntary service" are all key phrases (p. 34).

By contrast, in *Spiritual Gifts*, the issue of an unchangeable law is not clearly raised until the discussion of the change of the Sabbath (pp. 108-113), and there the issue is not the character of God and the service of love, but rather obedience to law (that is, keeping the right Sabbath) as the qualification for heaven. If Lucifer was excluded forever because God's law was unalterable, then every transgressor of God's law must also perish (pp. 110, 111).

*Spirit of Prophecy* does integrate the law into the discussion quite early, but significantly it is not the law of God, but laws (i.e., commands) that are eternal: God had made "laws" and "exalted them equal to Himself" (pp. 22, 23).

In short, the earlier accounts describe the controversy as a personal struggle between Christ and Satan. By contrast, *Patriarchs and Prophets* sees the conflict as the confrontation between two opposing principles, love and selfishness.

3. *The possibility of restoration for Lucifer.* All three accounts indicate that there was a point of no return for Lucifer and his fellow rebels, but in contrast with the two earlier accounts, which indicate that Lucifer's fate was sealed from the moment he first sinned, *Patriarchs and Prophets* reveals that Lucifer and his cohorts had ample opportunity to be restored after they had broken heaven's harmony. In keeping with His great mercy God "bore long with Lucifer," attempting to convince him of the tragic result of "persisting in revolt." If he had simply

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agreed that God's law was good and just, he could have "saved himself and many angels." And even though "he had left his position as covering cherub" he could have been "reinstated in his office" (p. 39).

In this same connection, it is noteworthy that *Spiritual Gifts* reveals absolutely no sympathy for the plight of the heavenly rebels, either on God's part or on the part of the angels (pp. 18, 19). In *The Spirit of Prophecy*, traces of sympathy begin to appear as the loyal angels attempt to persuade Lucifer to submit (p. 20). Christ also weeps at Lucifer's fate, but the Father remains unmoved (pp. 29-31). Only in *Patriarchs and Prophets* does all heaven seek to win back the rebels (pp. 38-43).

4. *Eternal nature of Christ.* Both *Spiritual Gifts* and *The Spirit of Prophecy* reflect the tendency of some early Adventists to see Christ as a created being who was exalted to equality with the Father.<sup>1</sup> But in *Patriarchs and Prophets* the statement of Christ's eternal relationship with the Father is clear and unmistakable. The earlier accounts describe Satan's animosity as the result of Christ's exaltation (cf. *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. I, p. 18; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. I, pp. 17, 18). But *Patriarchs and Prophets* reverses the cause-effect sequence, stating that it was only as a result of Lucifer's claim to equality with Christ that a statement of Christ's authority had become necessary. There had been "no change in the position of authority of Christ"; "this had been the same from the beginning."—Page 38.

5. *The love of the Father for sinners.* In the first two accounts, Christ is clearly the friend of sinners, but the wrath of the Father still burns. Thus Jesus explains that He is willing to "stand between the wrath of His Father and guilty man" (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. I, 23; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. I, 46; italics supplied). Only in *Patriarchs and Prophets* does Ellen White integrate John 3:16 into the story, thus emphasizing the love not only of the Son but of the Father, as well. Accordingly, instead of describing Christ's role as shielding the sinner from the wrath of His Father, *Patriarchs and Prophets* states that Christ was willing to "stand between the sinner and the penalty of sin" (p. 64; italics supplied). Sin loses none of its offensiveness, however, for it must still "separate the Father and His Son" (p. 63.). But the important thing is that the sinner can now see the friendly face of God not only in the Son but also in the Father.

6. *The cross as an illustration of divine self-sacrifice.* Perhaps the most far-reaching implication in the transformation of the great controversy story has to do with the relationship between the death of Christ and the law and character of God. In the earlier accounts both God and the law are described in arbitrary, authoritarian terms. If man is to be saved, then Christ must die, for an arbitrary God and an arbitrary law demand death for sin. Furthermore the distance between "guilty man" and the Father means that Christ's death is seen as a reluctant concession to this "race of rebels" (cf. *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. I, pp. 22-26; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. I, pp. 45-51).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, however, the purpose of

the death of Christ is seen in quite another light, namely, as the final answer to Satan's attacks against God. Satan had claimed that "God was not just in imposing laws upon the angels; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself" (p. 42; italics supplied). Against the background of that attack, the death of Christ "answered the question whether the Father and the Son had sufficient love for man to exercise self-denial and a spirit of sacrifice" (p. 70; italics supplied). In other words, the cross demonstrated that God acts in harmony with His law of love, for He was willing to give the ultimate sacrifice to demonstrate the supremacy of that law: He was willing to take our place.

As I write this material for our church paper, I do so with mixed feelings, for I know that some will find it both helpful and disturbing. Many in the church have a strong and warm attachment to the vivid and personal descriptions in the earlier writings of Ellen White. But I have also observed that many who have such an attachment also struggle to see the friendly face of God. Deep in our subconscious minds we are inclined to believe that God really should be reluctant to save sinners like us. Thus we turn to those writings that match our deepest feelings.

We do the same when we read Scripture. We think that somehow God is not God unless He stands apart from sinners. To bridge the gulf, God has been willing to "edit" His revelations, His visions to humanity, so that we will not turn away completely and worship other gods. He wants to meet us where we are and to help us grow. That is why Sinai is so different from Golgotha—and it took 1,400 years to make the journey from one mountain to the other.

Ellen White was almost 60 years old when the bright rays of light from Calvary finally dispelled the last shadows of Sinai. That seems like a long time. And it is. But the impact of generations of sin is great, even on good people—even on prophets. Is that not what the law of God has said all along?

How long will it take us to make the journey? That depends on how seriously we take the Word of God and the messages that He has sent us through Ellen White. We have a precious heritage. May God give us the grace to cherish it and to share it. □

Concluded

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> For details of the three-stage development of the Conflict Series, see Arthur White, *Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1954), pp. 55-61. I am indebted to Diane Forsythe, associate pastor of the Walla Walla College church, for assistance with the basic research that led to the conclusions stated in the text.

<sup>2</sup> In the interests of precision, the conclusions in this article are based on the three parallel texts that narrate the beginning of the great controversy story (1858, 1870, and 1890). Further research based on all of Ellen White's published materials would enable us to pinpoint more exactly particular aspects in her development of the great controversy story. For example, the chapter entitled "Origin of Evil" in the 1858 edition of *The Great Controversy* already includes two key elements of the story as it appears in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890): the offer of forgiveness to Lucifer and the law of love as the setting for the great controversy. The earlier parallel chapter by the same title in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume IV (1884) describes the offer of forgiveness to Lucifer, but the idea of a law of love is absent. We could thus conclude that the concept of the law of love as the setting for the great controversy crystallized in Ellen White's thinking between 1844 and 1888.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard Schwarz, *Lightbearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979), pp. 167, 168. Also the article "Christology" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, revised edition, pp. 286-288.



# EVEN THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT CAN BE GOOD NEWS

By Alden Thompson

In a world of sin, the spectre of judgment raises both our hopes and our fears. Scripture portrays the human family as playing several roles within the framework of the judgment concept: the role of the plaintiff, who cries out against oppression, injustice, and the suffering of innocent people; the role of the accused, who stands before the divine tribunal as one guilty of contributing to the agony and pain in the world; and the role of the witness, who has experienced salvation and speaks on behalf of the goodness of God and His law. An adequate doctrine of judgment should account for all three elements.

In the Adventist community, recent discussion has centered on the concept of the investigative judgment — its biblical foundation and its impact on Christian experience. A complicating factor is the variety of ways in which the imagery of the heavenly courtroom can be interpreted. Some interpret the symbols very literally, while others tend to think in more abstract terms. The result is a certain tension that the Adventist community simply must learn to live with.

As is the case with many Christian doctrines, the biblical foundation of the Adventist doctrine of judgment is not found complete in a single context, but requires a synthesis of biblical data in the light of the Adventist experience. Furthermore, the community's understanding of the doctrine has been a growing one, revealing shifts in emphasis and the integration of new elements. Leviticus 16, Daniel 7 to 9, Zechariah 3, and Revelation 14 are key passages. The book of Job also contributes to the larger picture, providing the cosmic setting and highlighting the motives of the adversary.

But of paramount importance in Adventism is the way in which the believer has experienced judgment. If God is seen as both distant and reluctant, we may feel overwhelmed by the sense of our own unworthiness. The gulf between God and the sinner may seem too deep to bridge and God may be viewed as throwing down impossible demands.

If we find ourselves trembling and shaking before a reluctant God, we are hardly in a position to witness joyfully and confidently to His goodness. Yet, that is the ultimate goal of the judgment. In the words of Ellen White: "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God" (Isaiah 43:12) — witnesses that He is good and that goodness is supreme" (Education, 154).

The only time that I could conceive of going to court gladly would be to witness for a good friend, one that I know and trust. In the context of the investigative judgment, that friend is God. To see the investigative judgment culminating in such a witness does not detract from the seriousness of the judgment for human beings, but rather enables us to look through the process of judgment to its goal and to sing the praises of the God who has redeemed us.

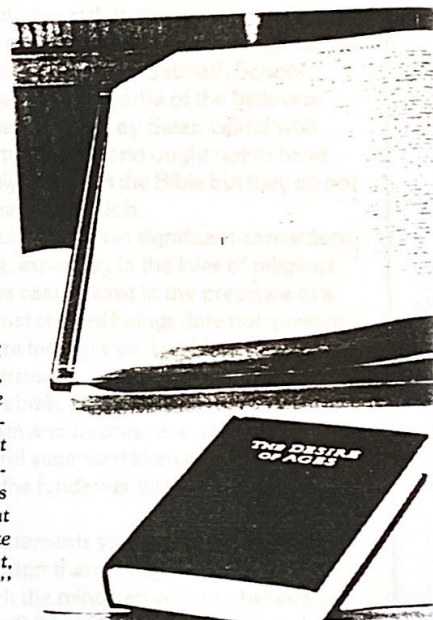
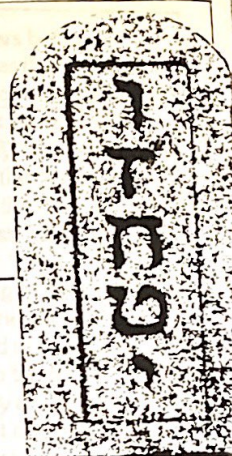
*Editor's note: WESTWIND is pleased to publish this exclusive article on the relationship of Ellen G. White to the investigative judgment by Alden Thompson, professor of theology. Originally, the article was part of a series exploring the human side of revelation and inspiration for the Adventist Review. The five other articles in the series were recently published in the December 1981 editions of the Review, and this article should be read in that context. This past fall Thompson returned to WWC from Darmstadt, Germany where he served as a visiting professor at Marienhoehe Seminary. He feels "it's time to be upbeat about Ellen White and still be honest, open and frank."*

But, is it really possible to envision a joyful conclusion within the framework of the investigative judgment? If we take seriously Ellen White's growing experience — we can indeed. In the course of her experience, she travelled the road from fear to love, from command to invitation, from Sinai to Golgotha. Such a shift in emphasis in no way lessens the ethical demands of God's law. A response out of love actually intensifies our sense of responsibility because it flows from within.

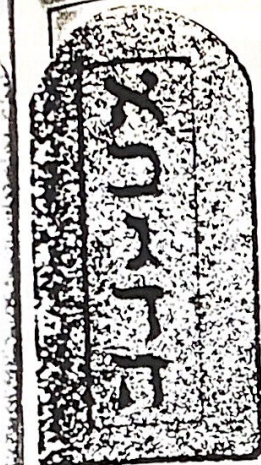
This article describes the shift in emphasis in the concept of the investigative judgment that is reflected in the writings of Ellen White, a shift which enables the believer to live in the assurance that God is both willing and able to save those who come to him.

Perhaps a quick synopsis of the two different emphases would provide a helpful clarification before we proceed. It involves a simple comparison between the Sinai and Golgotha views of the investigative judgment.

From a Sinai perspective, the judgment accentuates the

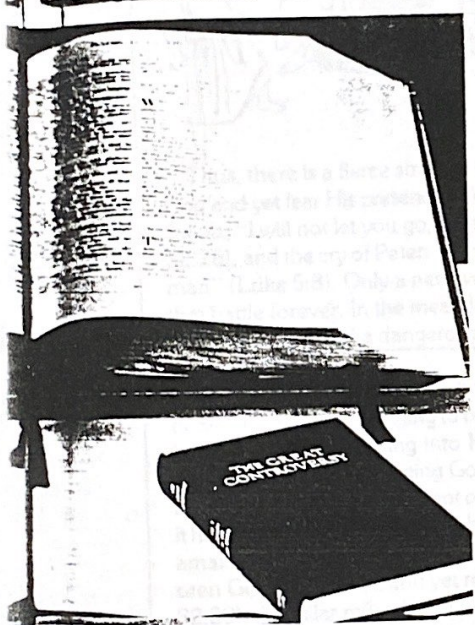






Accordingly, he has been conducting seminars in the College Church on "Scripture and the Writings of Ellen White" for the community. Although conceding that the Adventist Church at large has been somewhat startled and troubled by the

literary borrowing controversy, Thompson feels the church may actually be in a position to help other conservative Christian churches like the Southern Baptist Convention and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod which are battling over the Bible itself, to understand the true nature of inspiration.



gulf between a holy God and a sinful people. The thought of standing in the presence of a holy God without a mediator brings terror just as it did for ancient Israel (cf. Exodus 20:18, 19).

By contrast, a Golgotha perspective emphasizes the union between God and the believer. The believer has fully recognized his own status as a sinner, but has also fully accepted the sacrifice of Christ on his behalf. As a result, the believer no longer sees God simply as Judge, but as Father; he no longer trembles in God's presence as the accused, for he stands acquitted in Christ Jesus. The fear of judgment is gone. God has claimed him as His own.

No longer preoccupied with his own survival, the believer now recognizes that judgment has a much greater purpose, namely, the vindication of God and His law against the attacks of Satan. Confidently, the believer now stands in court as a witness to the goodness of God and His law.

In Ellen White's experience, the roots of that more positive view of judgment go back to a vision of 1880. Its fruit appeared in mature form in *Prophets and Kings* (1915). We

shall look at the details shortly, but the 35 years between point to a significant question, namely, why was the "better" explanation so long in coming? My own conviction is that the early Adventists never would have believed it. I would use a similar argument in explaining the long "delay" before God sent his Son. Among the ex-slaves at Sinai, the gentle man from Nazareth would have been trampled in the dust. Sinai had to come before Golgotha; the impact of sin made it necessary.

But a shift in emphasis in the understanding of the investigative judgment also requires a willingness to see God in a particular way, as a God who is not afraid to allow the universe to put His law and His government to the test. Now for some reason, I have had no great difficulty accepting the idea of God putting His law and government on trial before the universe. Yet, I have occasionally wondered why some Adventists, and very loyal ones at that, simply did not get very excited about the idea. I caught a clearer glimpse into that kind of thinking in connection with the Sabbath School lessons on Job a few quarters ago. Some of the believers were very uncomfortable with the way Satan talked with God.<sup>1</sup> Such talk was inappropriate and ought not to have been allowed! They firmly believe in the Bible but they do not know what to do with the book of Job.

Behind that kind of thinking lie two significant convictions that play a powerful role, especially in the lives of religious people: First, that sinners cannot exist in the presence of a holy God, and second, that created beings dare not question God. Both statements are terribly true, terribly dangerous, and very easily misunderstood.

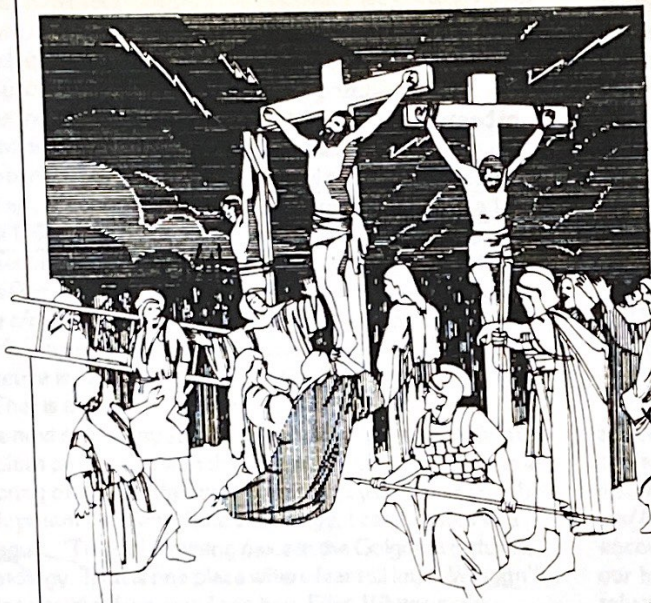
The first statement has biblical support,<sup>2</sup> and expresses the fundamental truth that sin and holiness are ultimately incompatible. The second statement likewise has biblical support<sup>3</sup> and expresses the fundamental truth that God is the ultimate authority.

Why then are such statements so dangerous? Because a guilty conscience can distort them, imagining horrible things about God, things which the mind can come to believe as true. Thus, the incompatibility of holiness and sin can be exaggerated to the point where God is seen as angry and disgusted with this race of rebels, annoyed that he has to have any contact with sinners at all, and demanding that every sin be fully punished.

As for God's ultimate authority, an over-emphasis can lead to the total exclusion of human freedom. Thus God becomes, at best, a benevolent dictator; at worst, a cruel despot.

The natural results of sin tend to encourage both exaggerations. That is precisely why sin is so sinister and devastating. We see the first clear example in the experience of Adam and Eve where their own sense of guilt drove them to hide from God and even to blame Him for their failure, though there had been no display of "divine wrath."<sup>4</sup> Even fully repentant sinners have difficulty believing that God wishes full restoration as the cry of the prodigal so poignantly reveals: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19). Most assuredly, sonship does not depend on worthiness, yet the adversary plays on the guilt feelings which naturally follow sin, tempting us to believe that God has turned His back on us in anger.





Thus, there is a fierce struggle within as we long to be with God and yet fear His presence. We are torn between the cry of Jacob: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26), and the cry of Peter: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Only a new world and a new heart will still that battle forever. In the meantime, God seeks to convince us that sin is indeed a dangerous enemy, but that He loves us even when we sin.

In Scripture, we find interesting traces of that tension between the human longing to be reunited with God and the human horror of coming into His presence at all. Some passages suggest that seeing God is not possible,<sup>2</sup> while others clearly demonstrate not only that it is possible, but that it has already happened, though the human participants were amazed that they had survived. Jacob exclaimed: "I have seen God face to face and yet my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30). A similar reflection appears in that fascinating passage describing the meeting between God and the elders of Israel: "They saw the God of Israel . . . and He did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank" (Exodus 24:10, 11). The biblical passage hints that by all rights He should have laid hands on them. But no, "they beheld God, and ate and drank."

One way of resolving the tension between these two feelings is to emphasize the role of the mediator as our protection against the wrath of God. In Jesus Christ we find peace with God, for He paid the price of our sin. The wrath of God which we deserve has been poured out on our substitute. Thus, we keep our distance from God the Father, but find in Jesus Christ the friendly face of God. Such a view emphasizes the sovereignty and authority of God and is often attractive to those who keenly sense the gulf between God and man.

The emphasis on the sovereignty of God finds its most thorough development in John Calvin's doctrine of predestination, a teaching which Adventists clearly reject. We believe it is our privilege to serve God out of love and by our free choice.

A typical Calvinist would not be very enthusiastic about the Great Controversy story, at least not in the way Ellen White told it in her later years, for God is much too approachable and much too willing to put Himself and His law on trial before the universe. Interestingly enough, early Adventists would have sided very easily with the Calvinists when it came to their view of God. God, as they saw Him, would never open Himself to scrutiny; He is to be obeyed, not questioned.

But I am convinced that God was preparing Adventists to reach quite another audience than the Calvinists, namely, modern skeptics who cannot believe that a good God has willed all the strife and trouble in this world. Adventists have been called to stand in that noble tradition of believing skeptics who are concerned about God's reputation and are not afraid to say so, even to God Himself. Like Abraham, for example: "You can't do that. You are the judge of all the earth!" (Genesis 18:25). Or like Moses: "If you do that, what will the Egyptians say?" (Exodus 32:12). To be able to talk with God like that, however, one has to be on very good terms with Him. God must be known to be friendly, fair, and open. But that is exactly what our forefathers had difficulty believing. It would take time before they could see the friendly face of God and even then, the possibility for confusion would not entirely disappear.

And that brings us to our modern problem as we attempt to resolve the tension between a reluctant God and a friendly one. In my own experience, the tension focused on the first chapter in *Steps to Christ* and the one on the investigative judgment in the book *Great Controversy* (pp. 479-90). In *Steps to Christ*, I learned that the view of God as a "severe judge" was a deception of satanic origin. It was Satan who "pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men" (SC 10-11).

But when I turned to the book *Great Controversy* and read about the investigative judgment, I was in trouble again. I was tempted to believe that God was, after all, looking for a way to keep me out of His kingdom, rather than trying to get me in: every word and deed is recorded with "terrible exactness" (*Great Controversy* 482); every case is closely investigated and when any are found with a sin unrepentant of, "their names will be blotted out of the book of life" (*Great Controversy* 483); even things that we have forgotten "bear their testimony to justify or to condemn" (*Great Controversy* 487). The impression that one can get from these passages is that even diligent effort in seeking forgiveness can all be for naught if we happen to "forget" sin that we have committed at some point in our life. Now I know that the passages cited do not actually say that, but they do give that impression. I now recognize that these passages refer to *cherished* sins, an emphasis that puts quite a different complexion on the whole matter. But even then, whenever we think of the investigative judgment as the last hurdle before we can be saved, uncertainty can still haunt us.

An important first step for resolving the difficulty in my experience came while I was a seminary student at Andrews University. I decided I must settle in my own mind the matter of the mediator: Why did I need one if God loved me? The answer came from John 14-17 where I discovered that the purpose of the mediator was to introduce us to a friendly



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God, not to protect us from a reluctant one. As Jesus put it: "If you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). But perhaps even more significant in the Adventist context is John 16:26-27, where I found a fresh possibility for interpreting Ellen White's statement that "we must stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator" (*Great Controversy* 425): "In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you." In the context of Ellen White's original statement I still detect a trace of fear, but on the basis of John's Gospel I would say that fear is unnecessary. As long as we are afraid, the mediator is there, for God knows the powerful impact of sin and guilt. But the goal of Christian experience is to live once again in God's presence without fear. That is a promise, not a threat.

The next step in my search for a solution to the experiential difficulties connected with the investigative judgment came in the spring of 1980. After preparing a study document on the development of Ellen White's theology, I commented to a colleague: "The only missing piece in the Golgotha picture is eschatology. That is one place where fear still lurks. Wouldn't it be interesting if we could see how Ellen White would re-write the book *Great Controversy* again if she had the chance?" I suspected how Ellen White would have told the story, but was concerned how far we could go without prophetic authority.

And then I found it — with the aid of a student who wrongly quoted a passage from *Prophets and Kings*. In checking his quotation I suddenly realized that here was an entire chapter dealing with the investigative judgment: "Joshua and the Angel" (pp. 582-592). With great eagerness I read it through, looking for traces of the reluctant God. I found none. The whole chapter is the story of the investigative judgment written from the perspective of a loving God who wants to save sinners. Further research revealed some fascinating background.

The seed that was to bear such rich fruit was apparently sown in 1880. As told in *Life Sketches*, Ellen White inquired in vision, "Where is the security for the people of God in these days of peril?" In response, God referred her to Zechariah 3:1-2 and declared that Jesus was our security against Satan. "Jesus will lead all who are willing to be led" (*Life Sketches*, 324). Prior to this vision Ellen White apparently had not realized the relevance of Zechariah 3:1-2 for the Great Controversy story.<sup>6</sup> But now God had sown the seed; it would be only a matter of time until it would germinate and bear fruit.

The *Index to the Writings of E. G. White* lists four passages where Ellen White comments significantly on Zechariah 3:1, 2; 5 *Testimonies* 467-476 (1885), *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 116, 117 (1896), *Christ's Object Lessons* 166-170 (1900), and *Prophets and Kings* 582-592 (1917). All four of the contexts discuss the text in the setting of the Great Controversy. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 117 states that Satan accuses us, not in some obscure courtroom, but "before the universe." *Christ's Object Lessons* 168 indicates that, not only is Satan accusing the believers, but God himself. Furthermore, when Christ speaks for his people, he confesses them, not before a reluctant Father, but

"before the universe" (*Christ's Object Lessons* 170). Clearly the Father and the Son are united in their love for man and in their desire to rebuke the adversary.

But what I find most fascinating about Ellen White's use of Zechariah 3:1-2 is the way she takes the 5 *Testimonies* article and further refines it 30 years later for use in *Prophets and Kings*. In effect, she softens those aspects that could discourage and expands on those which encourage. The result is a masterful integration of the investigative judgment into the picture of a loving God. And it happens in her very last book.

When compared with the 5 *Testimonies* article, the account in *Prophets and Kings* reveals one addition and one deletion that are particularly significant. The addition is found in *Prophets and Kings* 589 as part of the Lord's rebuke of the adversary. After claiming His people as His own, the Lord declares: "They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them." What an encouragement! We may slip and fall, but if we have given our hearts to God, He will rebuke the adversary. No reluctance here to save those who are still suffering growing pains; their hearts are with God and He claims them as His.

The significant deletion is a more delicate matter, for it is terribly true — but if seen from the viewpoint of Mt. Sinai it could so easily be misunderstood. *Prophets and Kings* omits two paragraphs from pages 471-72 of 5 *Testimonies*. Both paragraphs admonish the Christian to strive to overcome every defect. That, of course, should be the goal of every Christian. But the one sentence that could cause problems runs as follows: "No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white" (p. 472). If that statement is seen as describing the Christian's deep desire to obey Christ, then all is well. But if it is linked with a view of God which sees Him looking for excuses to catch sinners, then the Christian who slips and falls will flee in terror. So even though the statement is certainly true, no doubt Ellen White's heightened concern for struggling sinners led her to delete it when she was preparing the material for *Prophets and Kings*.

Once we recognize that God has justified us in Christ, then we can joyfully go into judgment prepared to witness for God and His law. That joy, I have found, is the strongest motivation possible for obedience, for now I want to obey because He has saved me. It is no longer a matter of earning salvation or of simply avoiding punishment. Obedience is the fruit of salvation.

Now whenever I find someone struggling with the investigative judgment, I recommend without hesitation the chapter on "Joshua and the Angel" in *Prophets and Kings*. The Great Controversy story has come a long way since it was first published in 1858, but what a testimony it is to God's care for His people. He was preparing the way for His people, not only to find acceptance in Him, but also to demonstrate the goodness of God and His law to a skeptical world. God would have liked to have given the full message right at the beginning, but the beams of truth had to come gradually or His people would have turned away from light.

Because of man's fallen condition God has been willing to

(Continued on page 11)



**types of "evil influence" on our campuses as you would on a secular one. How do you respond to this criticism?**

**Lake:** First of all, as I mention to people who say this, or who ask us if we're still trying to maintain certain standards, I tell them yes, but we don't just give a command, we also explain the underlying principles involved. I also remind them that we feel responsible, because of our evangelistic approach, to accept pretty much a cross-section of the church, as young people come to us from academies or high schools.

We naturally try to be selective, but we must rely on the recommendations we receive. A number of our young people have not responded fully to the church standards, and to the church program in general. As a result, we do have some on campus that haven't put their spiritual life together yet.

There are problems here, and the only way we could eliminate them would be to adopt the acceptance policy of the schools of the prophets, which required all students to be studious, intelligent and pious. By doing that, we would have to leave out a lot of young people who ought to be here under the influence of our fine faculty, and with the many students who have already put together a growing spiritual lifestyle. Students sometimes take advantage of us when we try to operate on the basis of love with firmness instead of fear, yet I think fear is the wrong tactic; therefore, I suspect we'll always be criticized for certain procedures.

Anyone who would take the time to compare secular campuses and our campus would recognize a vast difference. I would like to indicate that our skin is not thick when we're

criticized. We're really interested in receiving suggestions on how we can do our work more effectively.

**WESTWIND:** Another question about "evil influences." Not only are jewelry and chapel skips problems on our campus; drinking, drugs and sexual misconduct also exist, even if they are not as visible. How does your office deal with problems in these areas?


**Lake:** We would like to say we do not have these problems, but occasionally we do, and each situation is different.

Sometimes we have to say to individuals: "Your lifestyle is not compatible with what we prefer, and at this moment, it is best for you to withdraw." For others, if the circumstances might be such that we feel there are some redeemable factors that we can salvage through some kind of assistance, the committee may recommend discipline with a prescribed program of support.


But, we never feel good about someone who has an influence that is damaging to others. This student is usually asked to withdraw from school.

Now, I believe Christ may have purposefully made Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home an important place to Him as an example for us to follow, partially because of the lifestyle Mary had led at one time. He wanted to let us know that people who have made serious mistakes are still important and are still to be loved and treated as friends.

This does not rule out discipline; however, the discipline must be rendered from a motive of Christian love.

With Christ as our example and helper, we strive to maintain a loving Christian atmosphere coupled with high standards at WWC. 

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use both commands and invitations, fear and love; but there is no question as to which He prefers. He has shown us His love "that we may have confidence in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17). "Perfect love casts out fear" (verse 18). In the sunshine of that love, even the investigative judgment is good news, for we stand no longer accused, but acquitted in Christ Jesus. Before the universe we are witnesses to the goodness of God. 

#### REFERENCES

1. Cf. Job 1:9-12; 2:3-6.
2. E.g. Exodus 33:21-23; Deuteronomy 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:16; cf. Revelation 6:17.
3. Esp. Romans 9:9-23; cf. Isaiah 45:9-11.
4. Cf. Genesis 3:8-13.
5. Of the five books in the Conflict series, *Great Controversy* was the only one that was not written or totally re-written after 1888. The standard edition today (1911) differs only slightly from the 1888 edition, i.e., some historical quotations were changed and references were added. See Arthur White, *Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant*, Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1954, p. 58.
6. The *Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* lists no occurrences of the text before 1880.



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