

The Eclipse of Scripture and the Protestantization of the Adventist Mind: Part 2: From the Evangelical Gospel to Culture

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1. Introduction

Adventism is changing and experiencing a crisis of identity and deep theological divisions. Although there are undoubtedly many causes behind the present situation, in this series of two articles, we have chosen to explore one: The eclipse of Scripture in the mind and action of the Church. The eclipse of Scripture is the blocking, covering, obscuring, hiding, concealing, veiling, shrouding, and darkening of the role and understanding of Scripture's contents in the life, worship, spirituality, thinking, and acting of Adventist believers. The eclipse of Scripture is always partial. It starts with neglect of Bible study and proceeds to block the understanding of Scripture by the embrace of different cultural ways of thinking and interpreting Scripture.

The hypothesis we are exploring in this series, is that the eclipse of Scripture in Adventism stems, among other causes, from the process of protestantization of the Adventist mind. This process, in turn, stems from the conviction that Evangelical theology is correct because it flows from a consistent application of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* (Scripture only, in all its parts, and first). Consequently, Adventists feel free to adopt Evangelical theologies and ministerial practices in everything but in what relates to Adventist distinctives.

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To support this hypothesis, we considered in the first article selected statements from *Questions on Doctrines*¹ and *Movement of Destiny*² that reveal how some influential Adventist leaders came to think of Adventism as an Evangelical denomination holding most Evangelical doctrines and differing only in a few Eschatological details. These Adventist leaders still held to the Sanctuary doctrine as the essential distinctive of Adventist uniqueness. However, they implicitly began to use the Gospel as the macro hermeneutical role for biblical interpretation, theological construction, and ministerial methodologies. This subtle and implicit shift in the macro hermeneutics of Adventist theological methodology becomes the basis of the protestantization of Adventism we experience in the twenty first century.

Slowly, the Evangelical theological understanding of the doctrine of Justification by Faith (the doctrine on which the Protestant Church stands or falls) replaced the doctrine of the Sanctuary as the macro hermeneutical vision from which early Adventists interpreted Scripture and thought theologically. This paradigm change at the very ground on which the Remnant Church stands or falls represents a stark turnabout from the experience of early Adventist pioneers who, dissatisfied with traditional Protestant theologies, decided to follow their own understanding of Scriptural truth, abandoning their evangelical denominations to become the remnant Church.

Officially as an institution, Adventist leaders continue to affirm biblical doctrines with their brains while Evangelical theologies and practices progressively shape their hearts and actions.³

¹ Bible Teachers and Editors, Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 35.

² Leroy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971).

³ “The legacy of Adventist evangelicalism proved to be experiential rather than doctrinal. The attention drawn to justification by faith allowed many Adventists to follow the spirit rather than the letter of the law. In consequence, the legalistic style of argumentation and behavior that had characterized Adventist fundamentalism eventually came to be confined to the self-defined-historical Adventists. For others, as Adventism moved into a fourth stage, there was a greater sense of spiritual freedom, often accompanied by a considerable relaxation of Adventist taboos and a more expressive style of worship.” Malcolm Bull, and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the*

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In this article, I will explore the further protestantization of the Adventist mind at the scholarly and ministerial levels. I will look at (1) the Adventist engagement with scholarly research; and, (2) the ensuing move from doctrine to exegesis. Then, I will explore the protestantization of the Adventist mind at the ministerial level, by considering (3) the move from exegesis to the Evangelical ministerial paradigm.

2. Engaging the Scholarly World of Christian Tradition

When Adventists ventured in the halls of secular Universities and Evangelical Seminaries during the 1960's, their Adventist experience and self understanding was strongly influenced by the emerging protestantization of Adventism nurtured by *QOD*. As they faced millennia of unfamiliar theological thinking with their “brain” doctrines and evangelical minds, a sense of bewilderment overcame many young Adventists. For instance, in the early 70's Jerry Gladson, then a Seventh-day Adventist believer, went to Vanderbilt University to pursue graduate studies in Old Testament. Like the ten faithless Israelites Moses sent to spy on the land of Canaan, Gladson understood Vanderbilt was a land of “theological” giants. He was not sure his “backwoods theology would be sufficient to slay the giant intellects” that inhabited Vanderbilt University. Unlike the ten spies, Gladson was ready to fight. “I saw in each professor a formidable adversary. In order to survive, I thought, I must be able intellectually to impale him upon the logic of my theological position.”⁴ Unfortunately, his theological background was not strong enough to stand against the historical critical method of exegesis. In the end, he became an ordained Evangelical minister in the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. Seemingly, Gladson left Adventism because he lost an intellectual battle. Many in the church have lost the same battle or simply capitulated without fighting. They feel ill equipped to fight the intellectual giants of the land.

In earlier days, Adventist intellectuals concentrated their efforts in Chronological studies in order to provide a solid foundation for the

American Dream, 2 ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 106-07. The reader can observe turnabout of the Adventist mind first hand by browsing through the last 20 years of the *Adventist Review*.

⁴ Jerry Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants,” *Spectrum*, April 1988, 19.

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historical interpretation of Daniel's prophecies. When Adventists moved to the secular universities and faced Christian scholarly traditions, they purposely concentrated in exegesis and biblical studies, avoiding Systematic Theology because of its obvious non-biblical philosophical foundations. However, like Gladson, many found the historical critical method attractive and convincing, and employed it to find the meaning and truth of biblical texts.

In response to this trend, Adventism declared officially that Bible teachers should not use the historical critical method because of its naturalistic presuppositions.⁵ However, because Adventist scholars have not been able to replace the naturalistic assumptions they are supposed to avoid, the debate on the scholarly method of biblical exegesis stills goes on unabated, and many Adventist Bible teachers continue to use it as their tool of choice.

The historical critical method stands on the same multiplicity of sources interpretation of the material condition of theological method on which Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologies stand. Consequently, Adventists applying the historical critical method go a step further than *QOD* and *MOD*. While the latter did not change their unexpressed historical temporal ontological assumption,⁶ historical critical theologians implicitly assume the timeless non-historical ontological assumption on which Roman Catholic and Evangelical doctrines stand.⁷ As a result of the

⁵ The data in biblical exegesis are the texts of the Old and New Testaments. The goal is to understand them. However, where do the hermeneutical conditions or presuppositions come from? Some years ago, an official statement of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council addressing the issue of Bible study identified some of the presuppositions we carry to the task of biblical interpretation and that therefore form part of our method of biblical studies. This document affirms that (1) the divine inspiration of Scripture, 2) its authority over reason, and (3) the role of the Holy Spirit are necessary presuppositions arising from the claims of Scripture. The document only enumerates and outlines the content of these basic presuppositions without explaining how we get to know they are in fact presuppositions and arrive at their contents. General Conference Committee Annual Council, "Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles and Methods," (Rio de Janeiro: Biblical Research Institute, 1986).

⁶ See the first article of this series, section 11.

⁷ Raúl Kerbs, "El Método Histórico-Crítico En Teología: En Búsqueda De Su Estructura Básica Y De Las Interpretaciones Filosóficas Subyacentes (Parte 1)," *DavarLogos* 1, no. 2 (2002); _____, "El Método Histórico-Crítico En Teología: En Busca De Su Estructura Básica Y De Las Interpretaciones Filosóficas Subyacentes)Parte Ii," *DavarLogos* 2, no. 1

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application of the historical critical method of exegesis to the study of Scripture, the already experienced “brainy” and theoretical statements of Adventist distinctive doctrines found themselves without biblical foundations and exegetical support.

In some sectors of the Church, the combination of the *QOD/MOD* switch from the Sanctuary to the Evangelical Gospel with the progressive utilization of historical critical methodology led to the intensification of the protestantization of the Adventist mind and lifestyle. Desmond Ford revealed the consequences of this methodological combination. According to him, justification by faith and historical critical methodology leaves the Sanctuary doctrine groundless.⁸ Moreover, the application of the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel as the hermeneutical principle of theological method finds that the Sanctuary doctrine contradicts the view of a complete atonement in Christ.⁹ On this basis, Ford and many after him believe Adventists should recognize their error and reject the Sanctuary doctrine and the historical interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.

As many Adventists become convinced that the Gospel and the historical critical method show the doctrinal distinctives of their church to

(2003).

⁸ Consider how Desmond Ford clearly embraced the Protestant concept of justification by faith and how it does contradict the Sanctuary doctrine. “He who accepts Christ the Saviour has God’s ultimate verdict concerning his destiny. Despite his sins, weaknesses, failures, he is without condemnation, accepted in the beloved, complete in Him, translated into the heavenly kingdom, and sealed with Christ in heavenly places. None can condemn him. None can take eternal life from him. Provided he trust wholly in Christ’s imputed merits, he cannot perish.” Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14 the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgement* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980), 411. We can see here Ford falling into Evangelical self-contradiction. While the Gospel is God’s ultimate verdict concerning the believer’s destiny. This implies God will not change His verdict. Yet, Ford makes it conditional to continuous trust. If it is conditional, then it is not final. If it is final, then, it cannot be conditional. Finally, the reader should notice that according to Ford continuous trust is placed on Christ’s imputed merits, not on Christ Himself as divine person.

⁹ “Because we, as with all other Christians, have been entrusted with ‘the everlasting gospel,’ it is essential that nothing in our doctrinal presentation should compete or clash with that gospel. To even infer that Christ’s atoning work at Calvary was not complete but required another phase;. . . is to imperil the blessed gospel, forget the warning of Jude 3 RSV, and invite the curse of Gal. 1:8.” Ibid., i.

be “erroneous” they can no longer accept Adventism as the remnant true visible church. For them, such a claim is groundless and a sign of institutional arrogance. They believe that Adventists are only one of many Evangelical denominations that make up the visible body of Christ, the Church.¹⁰

3. Responding to Ford’s Challenge from *QOD*’s Perspective

Since Desmond Ford’s explicit denial of the Adventist view of the Sanctuary as a biblical doctrine,¹¹ the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference and many scholars have given exegetical support to the biblical doctrine of the Sanctuary that now stands on a stronger biblical foundation and exegetical detail.¹² Yet, in the area of theological understanding and spiritual experience, Adventist leadership has not advanced far beyond *QOD* and *MOD*. Their efforts have shown that the Adventist doctrine of the Sanctuary is biblical. Yet, *QOD*’s challenge to the hermeneutical role of the sanctuary doctrine remains unanswered.

George Knight, a widely read and influential historian of Adventism, helps us to understand the way in which *QOD* and *MOD* continues to shape the theological thinking of conservative biblical Adventist thought leaders at the beginning of the twenty first century. Knight correctly reports that during the late 1840s Adventist thought “*was a theology rather than a list*

¹⁰ Jack W. Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1993), 43-48.

¹¹ Ford, *Daniel 8:14 the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgement*. See also Fernando Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 2 (2004): 17-19.

¹² Frank Holbrook, ed. *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); _____, ed. *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986). Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999); _____, “Re-Opening Katapetasma (‘Veil’) in Hebrews 6:19,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000); _____, *Leviticus, Numbers, Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004); _____, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005). Alberto R. Treiyer, *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment: From the Pentateuch to Revelation* (Siloam Springs, AR: Creation Enterprises International, 1992); Alberto Treiyer, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary* (Benton Harbor, MI: Alberto Treiyer, 2008).

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of discrete doctrines [as *QOD* popularized].”¹³ Thus, Knight, implicitly recognizes the fact that Adventism originated from a systematic understanding of biblical theology. Yet, as *QOD* and *MOD* before him, Knight fails to observe and apply the macro hermeneutical role that the Sanctuary doctrine plays in the interpretation of Scripture and the construction of a *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* Systematic theology.

As *QOD* and *MOD*, Knight reports that Adventist doctrines divide into two clusters. In the first cluster, we find the “central pillar doctrines developed in the early years of Adventism”¹⁴ which loosely corresponds to Froom’s “separative doctrines.”¹⁵ “The second absolutely central cluster in Adventist theology consists of a number of beliefs that Adventism shares with other Christians, such as the Godhead; the divine inspiration of the Bible; the problem of sin; the life, substitutionary death, and resurrection of Jesus; and the plan of salvation. The Minneapolis era began to highlight those truths.”¹⁶ The close similarity to *QOD* and *MOD* is clear perhaps because Knight is reporting historical facts. Yet, since he presents these ideas in the last two pages of his book under the heading: “*Lessons on Theological Essentials*” one may understand the similarity between

¹³ George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 86; Richard M. Davidson, “Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson’s ‘Incarnational’ Model,” in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank and Leo Van Dolson Holbrook (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

¹⁴ “Adventist history demonstrates two essential clusters of truth that define what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. The first are the central pillar doctrines developed in the early years of Adventism: the seventh-day Sabbath, the Second Advent, the two-phase ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, conditional immortality, and the perpetuity of spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy) until the end of time. Those truths defined Sabbatarian Adventism and subsequently Seventh-day Adventism over against other Adventists and other Christians groups.” Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, 203. See also George R. Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008), 13. While Knight views Adventism as an evangelical denomination with a prophetic message, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*, 28; he does not endorse what I have called Evangelical Adventism. See, ———, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*, 10; Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review.”

¹⁵ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 35.

¹⁶ Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, 203.

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Knight's report and *QOD* to represent his personal theological position and the position he believes Adventists should embrace.

Be that as it may, Knight still seems to follow *QOD* and *MOD* when he suggests that "the genius of *Seventh-day Adventism* does not lie so much in those doctrines that make it distinctive or in those beliefs that it shares with other Christians. *Rather it is a combination of both sets of understandings within the framework of the great controversy theme found in the apocalyptic core of the book of Revelation running from Revelation 11:19 through the end of chapter 14.*"¹⁷ Knight maintains, then, that Adventists teach Christian doctrines and the Gospel they share with Evangelicals (protestantization of Adventism) within the eschatological framework of the last days of earth history. Hence, an eschatological insight (the great controversy theology first worked out by Bates in the mid-1840s) is the doctrine "that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other Adventists, other sabbatarians, and all other Christians."¹⁸ Knight correctly observes that this eschatological understanding has driven Adventist missions around the world. "*When that vision is lost, Seventh-day Adventism will have lost its genius. It will have become merely another somewhat harmless denomination with some rather peculiar doctrines instead of being a dynamic movement of prophecy.*"¹⁹ Knight seems to agree and provide the doctrinal base for Provonsha's proposal that Adventism is a "prophetic minority" within the visible church composed by all Evangelical denominations.²⁰

Although Knight is aware that early Adventists "found the unifying focal point of their [systematic] theology in the apocalyptic core of the

¹⁷ Ibid., 203-04 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸ "It is that prophetic insight [Revelation 11:19-14] that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other Adventists, other sabbatarians, and all other Christians. The great controversy theology (first worked out by Bates in the mid-1840s) has led Seventh-day Adventism to see itself as a prophetic people. That understanding has driven Adventists to the far corners of the earth as they have sought to sound the messages of the three angels before the great harvest day. When that vision is lost, Seventh-day Adventism will have lost its genius. It will have become merely another somewhat harmless denomination with some rather peculiar doctrines instead of being a dynamic movement of prophecy." Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis*, 49-60.

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book of Revelation,”²¹ he suggests Adventists doctrines center around the cross of Christ.²² This suggestion seems to imply that in his mind the Evangelical interpretation of the Gospel (“eternal verities of Froom”) has implicitly replaced the sanctuary Doctrine as the macro hermeneutical condition of the Adventist theological method. Working from this implicit macro hermeneutics, some Adventists go a step further and believe with Ford that the interpretation of the Sanctuary and apocalyptic prophecies no longer is the key to interpret the Gospel, but rather, that the Gospel is the key to interpret apocalyptic prophecies.²³ This shows how the protestantization of the Adventist mind continues to evolve in spite of doctrinal orthodoxy and the exegetical reaffirmation of the sanctuary doctrine by Adventist leaders and scholars.²⁴

²¹ According to Knight, early Adventists “found the unifying focal point of their [systematic] theology in the apocalyptic core of the book of Revelation. The passage running from Revelation 11:19 through 14:20 intertwined the Second Advent with an understanding of the opening of the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and the eschatological importance of the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath. The various aspects of that theology did not exist as *isola-tota-prima-tes* units. To the contrary, it was a united whole with each aspect related to the others. The placement of their theology in the framework of the last great conflict between good and evil set forth in the heart of the book of Revelation gave it an urgency that eventually set the Sabbatarians upon an ever-expanding mission of warning the world.” Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, 86.

²² George Knight, “Twenty-Seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology,” *Ministry* 74, no. 2 (2001): 5-7.

²³ “The good news of the Gospel finds its meaning in Jesus Christ and provides the key to understanding biblical eschatology.” Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland, OR: Better Living Publishers, 1993), 171.

²⁴ Recently, a small representative group of Adventist leaders met with representatives of the World Evangelical Alliance. Following the pattern advanced by *QOD* and *MOD*, Adventists leaders agreed with Evangelicals on all major Christian doctrines. Differences revolve around our “distinctive doctrines”: the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Spirit of Prophecy doctrines. “The participants were pleased to be able to ascertain an extensive commonality of belief and spirituality. Adventists can subscribe to the WEA Statement of Faith. (Document attached below). They fully accept the authority and supremacy of the Word of God, the Trinity, the divine and human natures of Christ, salvation by faith in Christ alone, the importance of prayer, personal conversion, and sanctification, and hold dear the blessed hope in the imminent Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. There was agreement that there should never be any date-setting regarding the Second Advent.” This statement corroborates the protestantization of the Adventist mind in present worldwide Adventist leadership. World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Joint

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The full protestantization of Adventism is taking place where “progressive Adventists” embrace modernity and its postmodern cultural relativism. This sector experiences the full Protestantization of Adventism as the way back from Scripture to Evangelical and Scientific traditions. From there, the way back to Rome is only a matter of time.

4. Facing Evangelical Ministry: From Exegesis to Praxis (1980)

The original theological vision of the pioneers was never finished by succeeding generations of Adventists.²⁵ With the passing of time, an early pragmatic missionary mind set in church leadership replaced the original theological drive of the first pioneers.²⁶ The strong drive for theological understanding of the early pioneers and Ellen White seems to have withered after their deaths. A determination to baptize new converts replaced a passion for understanding God’s word. As a result, progressively new generations of Adventists received and transmitted a theoretical disconnected summary of denominationally sanctioned doctrines, a “head knowledge tradition” without the spirit of theological understanding on which Christianity stands.

Statement of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” World Evangelical Alliance Web Site (<http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/news/WEAAdventistDialogue20070809d.pdf>).

²⁵ Fernando Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part 1: Historical Review”; Fernando Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies–Part 2,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16, no. 1-2 (2005); _____, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology–Part 3, Sanctuary and Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 2 (2005).

²⁶ This does not mean that doctrines or Bible study have disappeared from the Church. Since I am speaking about a “mind set” it is difficult, maybe even impossible, to prove this point with factual evidence. Moreover, we should not expect the “Adventist mind set” to be uniform around the world. Besides, the practical mind set will function differently in different levels of church activities (administration, ministry, education etc. . .). My contention flows mostly from about half a century of church experience. In my experience, I have found leaders discouraging in various ways Bible study and understanding, and promoting practical undertakings. As a pastor, I was encouraged to seek the Holy Spirit rather than biblical knowledge, in order to baptize as many as possible. In educational institutions, I found the notion that we should instruct seminary students more in practical than in biblical matters widely accepted. Very few feel the need to give attention to the theological development of the Church. Readers should judge this claim from the experiences and facts available to them.

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The protestantization of the Adventist mind produced by the forgetfulness of the Sanctuary doctrine as a hermeneutical key to the Biblical system of Christian teachings (hermeneutical condition of method) led the denomination to further neglecting theological reflection and to work with general doctrinal statements (the Fundamental Beliefs).

The move from pastoral and administrative handling of Church doctrines to the study of their exegetical foundations at the scholarly level of research intensified the implicit and unspoken replacement of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle (material condition of theological method) with the multiplicity of sources.

Some may think these “theoretical” occurrences do not affect the unity and the mission of the Church. Although many leaders are aware of the issues we are dealing with in these articles, they seem to assume that theological problems do not affect sound ministerial practices. On the contrary, I suggest that the macro-hermeneutical moving away from the sanctuary doctrine and the ensuing eclipse of Scripture is changing the ministerial and missionary paradigm of Adventism around the world (teleological condition of theological methodology).²⁷ Changes in the conditions of theological methodology necessarily bring changes in the thinking, lifestyle, administration, and mission of the Church. Briefly put, if with *QOD* and *MOD* administrators, teachers, and pastors believe that Evangelical and Adventist theologies are the same with the exception of a few “distinctives,” there is no reason why they will not freely borrow also their ministerial and missionary practices. I suggest to the reader that such borrowing is transforming the ministerial practices of the Church from a Biblical to a Charismatic paradigm.²⁸ This change is currently intensifying

²⁷ In this article, I use the word “paradigm” in the sense of a broad constellation of principles operative in the life (thinking and action) of a community. The paradigm applies primarily to the community not to the individual in the sense that we will not find the members of the community internalizing these principles completely and in the same way. However, all share, in various ways, in its general principles.

²⁸ I have no data about how extensive the borrowing from Evangelical ministerial and missionary paradigms is among Adventist leaders. I see the results of the borrowing in the practices of many local churches I visit. Frequently, I hear reports about leaders and pastors visiting mega churches to learn “successful” ministerial methods. Pastors who do the borrowing have the naïve conviction that “methods” are theologically neutral. That is, borrowing Evangelical conservative or modernistic ministerial methods do not involve theological convictions. That is rarely the case. Most of the time as viruses, non-biblical

and disseminating the protestantization of Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture.

5. The Charismatic Ministerial Paradigm

At the beginning of the twenty first century, the Charismatic (supernatural power/praise) paradigm²⁹ of ministry Evangelical churches are using to face the challenges of modern thinking and society³⁰ is

presuppositions are attached to the methods and shape their outcome. In time, these presuppositions will distort the theological understanding and spiritual experience creating divisions in the church and skewing the gospel message. After all, “[t]he traditions of men, like floating germs, attach themselves to the truth of God, and men regard them as a part of the truth,” Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 589. Detecting traditions attached to Christian theologies and methodologies requires deep knowledge of Biblical truth. Theoretically, this characteristic should be common to all believers; in practice, however, it is rare even among Christian leaders.

²⁹ This paradigm is connected but not identical to the Pentecostal denominations. The latter do share with other denominations the Charismatic liturgical paradigm.

³⁰ The Charismatic paradigm conceives worship as a direct encounter with God through rituals. “In worship we are met by God himself, our thoughts and words turn to perceptions and experience of God, who is then really present to us in some degree of his greatness, beauty, and goodness. This will make for an immediate, dramatic change in our lives,” Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines : Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 178. In worship as in spirituality, the encounter of the believer with God is mystical. For an introduction to mysticism and its role in worship see Vanderlei Dorneles, *Cristãos Em Busca Do Êxtase: Para Compreender a Nova Liturgia E O Papel Da Música Na Adoração Contemporânea* (Engenheiro Coelho, SP: UNASPRESS, 2005). In this model, for instance, repetition of God’s worthiness (praise) is important. As we repeat our praise of divine worthiness “the good we adore enters our minds and hearts to increase our faith and strengthen us to be as he is,” Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 178. Clearly, Charismatic worship not only eclipses but also replaces the words of God in Scripture. Charismatic Liturgy began to spread in American Evangelicalism with the introduction of popular Rock music in evangelical liturgy. In the early nineties, conservative Evangelicals recognized the existence of the “Celebration” style of worship and the “divergence” in worship it was producing; see Millard J. Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going: Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 41-42. “Celebration” worship evolved into “Praise Worship” a “music driven casual worship” that “has become the mark of the contemporary mega church and the symbol of what attracts and holds the young” Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 187; Herbert E. Douglass, *Truth Matters: An Analysis of the Purpose Driven Life Movement* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006),

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replacing the Word (Bible study/theological understanding) paradigm³¹ of ministry of earlier Adventists. As result of this mostly unchallenged phenomenon, the protestantization of Adventism is reaching the pews around the world. By adopting and promoting the Evangelical-Celebration-Charismatic ministerial paradigm,³² in spite of

17-18. Evangelical leaders have realized that the secularization and materialization of Western culture will soon empty American churches as they did in Europe, Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis, MN Fortress, 2010), 46. The use of popular music is central to the strategy to avoid the secularization of society which will empty the American churches as it did in Europe.

³¹ The Word paradigm of worship was revived by the Reformation, see, Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 98, 114. Adventism stands or falls on the Word/Spirit worship paradigm. Christ told us to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24 KJV). Later in His discourse on the “bread of life,” Christ clearly affirmed: “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

³² For instance, consider that at least 13 years ago “Adventists, both pastors and lay people, consistently make up one of the largest groups at Willow Creek’s half-dozen annual seminars—including church leadership conferences in May and October and a leadership summit in August” Andy Nash, “On Willow Creek,” *Adventist Review*, December 18 1997, 6. Adventist leaders also seem to hold Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church and Leadership seminars in high esteem. J. David Newman, “Hidden Heresy: Is Spiritualism Invading?,” *Adventist Today* 2005, 23. I personally think there is nothing wrong with visiting a church and getting some ideas I can use within the Biblical theological and ministerial paradigms. Yet, I do not think that is what is going on in Adventism because through the protestantization of the Adventist mind, Adventists are likely to have neither a theological nor a ministerial paradigm of their own. If this is the case, then, a large number of leaders may be incorporating in their ministries “Willow Creek principles” using the same criteria Andy Nash implicitly uses: Sabbath observance and Adventist distinctive beliefs, see Nash, “On Willow Creek,” 6. Clearly, Nash does not have either a theology or a ministerial paradigm from which to evaluate ministerial practices. Moreover, I wonder how the belief in being the Remnant Church factors in this phenomenon. Discussing this issue with a leader highly respected around the world, I was surprised to learn he considered Willow Creek and all Evangelical denominations to be the true visible Church of Christ on earth. Now, if that is the case, I can understand why Adventists are proactive in copying from other churches both theological and ministerial paradigms. At this point into our analysis, we are directed back to the theological foundations of Adventism and the progressive eclipse of Scripture that results from the protestantization of the Adventist mind. Hence, when visiting other churches or reading on ministry, chances are they will be importing not only *isola-tota-prima-tes* ideas but also the ministerial and theological paradigms on which they stand. See also, Martin Weber, “Give Praise a Chance,” (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, 1995).

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isolated opposition,³³ many leaders are intensifying the protestantization of Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture. Most Adventist leaders, however, including me, contribute to this process by allowing the Charismatic model to develop without serious Biblical theological evaluation. Without a solid biblical foundation, even statements decrying doctrines as “brain knowledge,” or speaking about the Gospel as the “essence” of Adventism may encourage the protestantization of Adventism.

According to the Charismatic ministerial paradigm, God grants salvation by His supernatural decision and power. Consequently, the ministerial method becomes the proclamation of the cross as complete atonement, justification, and the assurance of salvation.³⁴ As a result, Adventist ministers following the Charismatic paradigm no longer see the need for Bible studies as a condition for baptism, spirituality, or salvation.

Neither salvation nor baptism requires knowledge (doctrines), much less the theological understanding of biblical truth. The only requirement for baptism is faith in the Gospel proclamation that Christ saves without any conditions. When we see pastors baptizing people without expecting them to understand Biblical doctrines, to be disciples, or having any real ongoing personal spiritual experience with Christ, we can suspect they are implicitly assuming the Charismatic ministerial paradigm. If “saved” believers possessing an absolute “assurance” of salvation grow restless waiting for Christ’s Second Coming, pastors may encourage them to join a variety of optional church programs among them Discipleship and Spiritual formation.

The conviction that salvation and the Christian experience does not require Bible study, theological understanding of God’s person, revelation, acts, teachings, and will, does not spring only from “progressive” and “evangelical” Adventist circles but also from mainstream Adventism. This trend is reducing Adventist communities in America and Europe to social

³³ See for instance, Douglass, *Truth Matters: An Analysis of the Purpose Driven Life Movement*. And, Thomas Mostert, *Hidden Heresy? Is Spiritualism Invading Adventist Churches Today?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005).

³⁴ “God was our friend when He died for us, although we were His enemies. And that is the essence of our best method of evangelism and witness.” Bertil Wiklander, “The Essential Ingredient: It’s Not Our Preaching That Moves the Hearts of Unbelievers. It’s Not Our High Standards. Nor Is It the Correctness of Our Doctrine. Then What Is It?,” *Adventist Review*, July 12 2001.

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clubs that instead of engaging in evangelism, giving personal Bible studies, and engaging in missionary enterprises, prefer to satisfy the felt needs of their members.³⁵

The application of the Charismatic ministerial and missionary paradigm intensifies the protestantization of the Adventist mind and lifestyle to its highest level. As relics from the past, the orthodox formulation of Adventist fundamental doctrines passes from one generation of leaders to the next as theoretical statements empty of theological meaning and spiritual power. The adoption of this ministerial paradigm will produce the rapid abandonment of personal and communal search for biblical truth from Adventist ministry and experience.

Because the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel continues to play the macro-hermeneutical role in theological method, Adventists feel free to drink from Evangelical theological reflection and ministerial practices. In this way, Evangelical theologies and ministerial practices will shape Adventist thinking and lifestyle for years to come.

The Charismatic ministerial and missionary paradigms include a corresponding Charismatic liturgical paradigm. The Charismatic worship paradigm is an extension of the Roman Catholic sacramental worship paradigm that obviously assumes Roman Catholic traditions, theology, and ontological principles derived from Greek philosophy.

³⁵ Meeting “felt needs” rather than fostering the spiritual understanding and practice of Scripture seems to be guiding ministerial efforts. “The name: “Vervent” is synonymous with the NAD Church Resource Center. It reflects our service to local congregations. The name contains within it the combined elements of developing resources with “verve”—with energy and vitality—and which are appropriately “relevant,” in today’s environment. In the future, “Vervent” will become increasingly a brand name associated with a group of deliberately innovative products and services developed by the North American Division. Vervent represents resources that are both intentionally “cutting edge” and of broad benefit to congregations seeking to minister within the North American context. To be more specific, Vervent represents resources emerging in direct response to “felt needs,” expressed in various surveys, focus groups and other forms of research conducted with leaders of local congregations.” North American Division, “Vervent: NAD Church Resource Center,” North American Division, [http:// www.vervent.org/about](http://www.vervent.org/about). Perhaps we need to meet real spiritual needs by helping the church and the world understand the meaning and power of God’s Word.

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Sacraments are “signs”³⁶ that cause³⁷ God’s grace³⁸ and Christ’s presence (divinity and humanity)³⁹ in the soul of the believer in worship. Following the Aristotelian ontological pattern, Roman Catholics believe that sacraments have a divine invisible form and a created visible matter.⁴⁰ The material component of the sacrament/ritual (bread, wine, water, etc.) allows the divine spiritual content (grace and Christ’s presence) to reach the soul of human beings. Finally, only a divine institution⁴¹ can determine the material forms for worship.⁴²

Charismatic liturgy accepts these premises but it is less formal and willing to broaden the choices of material containers of divine grace and presence. Not only a divine institution but also cultural trends can determine the choice of material conduits of divine grace and presence. God, His grace and Christ’s presence continue to operate as in the Roman Catholic sacramental paradigm, only the choice of material components mediating divine grace and presence are broadened to engage more people in worship. Different material choices determine the existence of different “worship styles.” For instance, by its power of attraction, popular music has become a central “sacrament” (ritual) in Charismatic worship. “The Reformers moved the presence of God from the Eucharist [Sacramental

³⁶ “[P]roperly speaking a sacrament, as considered by us now, is defined as being the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), IIIa. 60. 2.

³⁷ “. . . [W]e have it on the authority of many saints that the sacraments of the New Law not only signify, but also cause grace.” Ibid., IIIa. 62. 1.

³⁸ “I answer that, We must needs say that in some way the sacraments of the New Law cause grace.” Ibid., IIIa. 62. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., IIIa. 75. 1.

⁴⁰ “Consequently, since the sacred things which are signified by the sacraments, are the spiritual and intelligible goods by means of which man is sanctified, it follows that the sacramental signs consist in sensible things.” Ibid., IIIa. 60. 4. “I answer that, As stated above (A. 6 ad 2), in the sacraments the words are as the form, and sensible things are as the matter.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa. 60. 7. “I answer that, Sacraments are necessary for man’s salvation, in so far as they are sensible signs of invisible things whereby man is made holy” _____, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa. 61. 3.

⁴¹ I am not exactly clear about what Aquinas meant by “Divine institution.” It seems to imply divine revelation of some sort, either in Scripture or according to Roman Catholic thinking by the institution of the Church.

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa. 60. 5.

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paradigm] to the Word [Word paradigm]. Today, the new revolution in worship is locating the presence of God in music [Charismatic paradigm].”⁴³ Clearly, the Sacramental and Charismatic worship paradigms build on the same ontological foundations and oppose the Word paradigm initiated by the Reformation.

Yet the Reformers never fully developed the Word ministerial and worship paradigms from the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle. Instead, they continued to assume the Roman Catholic ontology and Sacramental paradigm.⁴⁴ This background in their tradition has encouraged Evangelical leaders facing rapid changes in postmodern culture to revive the Roman Catholic sacramental paradigm and other ancient mystical practices creating an eclectic approach to worship and spirituality.⁴⁵ Charismatic worship is not disappearing but evolving into emergent worship liturgies and spiritual disciplines.⁴⁶ Both the problems emergent liturgy faces and the solutions it advances spring from postmodern cultural trends. Emerging liturgy is culturally grounded and all-inclusive. According to it, there are many ways to worship the true God and all have the same validity.⁴⁷

⁴³ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*, 191.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), IV. 14. 1. Luther explains God works in and through the Sacrament and makes the preaching of the Gospel a sacrament. The sacramentalization of preaching raises a question mark on the way, role and work of how the Word paradigm functions in Protestantism. “For a sacrament is a matter of faith, because in it only the works of God proceed and are effected—through his Word! Therefore, those who consider the sacrament to be thus in the Word will forget both worship and adoration. That is what the apostles did at the Supper [Matt. 26:26] and yet without any doubt they were most acceptable and did him the proper honor. They acted just as one does when he hears the gospel, the Word of God—to which the highest honor is nonetheless due because God is nearer in it than Christ is in the bread and wine. Yet no one thinks of bowing before the gospel; instead everyone sits still, and in listening gives no thought whatever to the kind of honor he will do to the Word.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Work* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1999), 36:295.

⁴⁵ Eddie and Ryan K. Bolger Gibbs, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 222-24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

⁴⁷ “The emerging church desires new wineskins for worship. These new wineskins are needed in response to our new postmodern culture. It is a terrible mistake to ignore this, and a somewhat arrogant one if we still believe that how we currently worship is the one and only way to worship God.” Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 9.

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Among new liturgies (rites/sacraments), we find a desire to reconnect with ancient practices of the Roman Catholic liturgy, monastic and mystical spiritual disciplines, making the Eucharist central, integrating tradition with contemporary culture, art,⁴⁸ and symbols.⁴⁹

Evangelical Christianity is experiencing a near total eclipse of Scripture and shows no willingness to turn to Scripture. Incredibly, Adventists continue to follow Evangelical practices with undiminished confidence. Because of their basic implicit operative assumption that Evangelical theology and practices are compatible with Scripture, Adventist leaders are embracing the Charismatic liturgical paradigm and its Ancient/Future⁵⁰ postmodern upgrade advanced recently by “emergent churches.” Consequently, some Adventist churches are not only promoting the use of a variety of music styles but also the need for using a variety of “worship styles.”⁵¹

6. The Word Ministerial Paradigm

Christ’s Word ministerial paradigm, however, shines clearly in Scripture, and operates in Adventism around the world.⁵² Let us review some of its salient features.

⁴⁸ “The arts are not mere decorations that enhance worship, nor are they mere illustrations of truth. Instead, the arts participate in their eschatological meaning. They are creation put to praise.” Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*, 200.

⁴⁹ Gibbs, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures*, 227-34.

⁵⁰ Robert Webber (1933-2007), an Evangelical professor of ministry at Northern Seminary in Lombard Illinois, used the Ancient/Future designation to refer to the need to remember and retrieve ancient practices of Roman Catholicism as we move into the contemporary world.

⁵¹ Apparently, La Sierra University offers 27 worship styles to students. La Sierra University, “Faith Is Formed at La Sierra University,” *Adventist World*, February 2010, 48.

⁵² Ellen White is the main representative of this model. She has developed it extensively throughout her writings, probably better than any other theologian and minister. Adventism works within this model. See also, Philip G. Samaan, *Christ’s Way of Reaching People: The Fine Art of Relational Witnessing* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990); _____, *Christ’s Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995); _____, *Christ’s Way to Pray: How Christ Prays for Us and with Us* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003); _____, *Christ’s Way of Making Disciples* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999).

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According to Christ's ministerial paradigm, baptism requires the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit operating through Bible study to generate theological/spiritual understanding that may lead to faith, personal conviction of sins, repentance, confession, and forgiveness of sins (justification by faith).

When this theological/spiritual transformation takes place in a person, he or she has become a spiritual disciple of Christ adopted into his Family. Such believers are ready for baptism. Christ saves disciples. After all, Christ commanded the Church to baptize disciples and then, once they became spiritual disciples, to teach them all the things He had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). They in turn will go on to make disciples themselves.⁵³

Only the application of Christ's ministerial paradigm will revive/reform the church, change the world, and hasten Christ's Second Coming. According to Christ's ministerial paradigm, God's power operates through the understanding of Scripture. This is the only true method of "church growth." Christ's commission to the Church is not to grow an institution but to sharpen the spiritual instrument for the proclamation of God's final message to the world.⁵⁴

The Word ministerial paradigm assumes that God operates salvation through the revelation and understanding of His word in Scripture. Paul clearly explains that salvation is by faith (Romans 3:22, 25), and that faith is generated from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). For Paul, faith is not a mere mental assent but the obedience of faith⁵⁵ that comes from understanding and accepting the content of divine revelation of Christ in the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments. Thus, biblical revelation and its understanding becomes central to the experience of Salvation and therefore to the ministerial paradigm of Scripture.

⁵³ Carmelo Martinez, "La Metodología De La Misión a Partir De Los Textos De La Misión," *DavarLogos* 8, no. 2 (2009): 148-49.

⁵⁴ Raoul Dederen, "The Church," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001), 549.

⁵⁵ "The content of hearing corresponds to that of what is heard. It is the reception of grace and the call to repentance in response to salvation and its ethical demand. Thus faith and obedience are the marks of real hearing (cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26): the "obedience of faith." Gerhard Kittel, "Akoué?," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

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Understanding the axis of ministerial experience well, Ellen White grasped that “[i]n the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one.”⁵⁶ The Word ministerial paradigm, then, stands on the revelation of Scripture and the educational process necessary to generate faith and obedience in the life of human beings.

Failure to recognize this simple methodological foundation has prevented Adventist ministry from retrieving and building on the clear and deep reflection Ellen White has provided in this area. As a result, Adventists connect education with primary teaching and school activities rather than with pastoral and church ministries. This momentous neglect may be the most significant methodological blunder in modern Adventism.

Since the power of ministry is in the Word of God (John 6:54, 63; Romans 1:16),⁵⁷ neglect and weak performance in this area directly translates into diminishing returns in regards to the unity and mission of the church. Instead of uncritically downloading from the web the latest ministerial resources inspired by postmodern cultural trends and based on foundations alien to Scripture, Adventists should become leaders and trend setters in building solid Christian experiences and communities on the Word of God.

To achieve such a high level of servant leadership we need to become “thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thought.”⁵⁸ Adventists need to create a generation that think and act in the light of Scripture rather than in the light of tradition and culture. This requires nothing less than a macro-paradigm change in ministry, liturgy, and Seminary education. Such changes will become instrumental in overcoming the protestantization of the Adventist mind and will diffuse the eclipse of Scripture by removing

⁵⁶ Ellen White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), 30.

⁵⁷ “The life of God, which gives life to the world, is in His word. It was by His word that Jesus healed disease and cast out demons. By His word He stilled the sea and raised the dead; and the people bore witness that His word was with power. He spoke the word of God as He had spoken it to all the Old Testament writers. The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ. It is our only source of power.” _____, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 250. On the nature of the power of words see Esther Sánchez, and Víctor Armenteros, “Visualizaciones De La Misión: Aproximación Narratológica a Los Relatos De La Misión En Los Evangelios Y En Ellen G. White,” *DavarLogos* 8, no. 2 (2009): 105-06.

⁵⁸ White, *Education*, 17.

cultural traditions that prevent its light from shining in the hearts of human beings in the church and the world.

5. Summary

The limited and partial phenomenological analysis of selected evidence explored in the two articles of this series does not lead to final but rather initial conclusions calling for further research and verification. Based on the phenomenological description of a few marks and traces of the Adventist theological and ministerial practices, I suggest that the protestantization of the Adventist mind and lifestyle is real, uneven, ongoing, broad reaching, and intensifying. Disconnected from the doctrinal formulations of the Church, the protestantization phenomenon takes place at the existential level of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The protestantization of Adventism came into existence by way of a progressive forgetfulness of the Biblical system of theology that originated its being. Because early Adventist pioneers stood on the consistent and relentless methodological application of the *sola, tota, prima Scriptura* principle, and, the discovering of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, they were destined to move beyond Protestant theologies and practices.

In the first article of this series, we reviewed how early Adventists' implicit understanding of the conditions of theological methodology, specially the Sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical key to the complete and harmonious understanding of Christianity, guided them in the initial and exhilarating task of discovering the inner historical logic of Biblical truths. As they applied the Protestant *sola Scriptura* principle they found themselves further developing the theological task that Protestant theology had left unfinished. They were the heirs of the *Sola Scriptura* Systematic Theology project initiated by the Reformation.

Sadly, the theological revolution implicit in the doctrinal discovery of the early formative years (1844-1850) and its methodological implications for Christian theology decelerated. With the passing of time Adventists did not recognize or apply the macro-hermeneutical principles they implicitly discovered, notably the sanctuary doctrine, to the entire range of Christian theology and teachings. Ellen White, however, was the glaring exception. Consistently through her long writing career, she used the Sanctuary and the "pillars of the Adventist faith" as hermeneutical principles guiding her

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Bible interpretation and construction of a comprehensive, yet incomplete, outline of Christian theological thinking and ministerial praxis.

Nonetheless, Adventists became distracted with church business and neglected their emerging theological thought and Ellen White's explicit macro-hermeneutical pointers. *QOD*'s superficial affirmation that Adventism shares most Protestant doctrines opened the gates to the protestantization of Adventism. Eventually, they forgot the hermeneutical role that the Doctrine of the Sanctuary plays in their theological methodology and replaced it with the Evangelical hermeneutical principle of justification by faith. This macro-hermeneutical paradigm shift revealed and intensified the protestantization of the Adventist mind. Moreover, as the Reformers, Adventists overlooked the *sola, tota, prima Scriptura* principle, and embraced the plurality of theological sources on which the Roman Catholic theological system stands.⁵⁹

In this article, we surveyed briefly the impact of this shift in scholarly and ministerial methodologies in the last fifty years. In scholarship, the church moved from doctrines to exegesis, systematically neglecting the areas of Systematic and Fundamental theologies. By default, this movement facilitated reliance on Evangelical theologies to fill the vacuum left open by Adventist scholarship.

While studying Scripture at deep scholarly levels, Protestant theological traditions were shaping the mind of the Church. Moreover, in exegetical scholarship the lack of a Biblical Fundamental Theology led many Adventists to utilize the historical critical method, thereby extending the eclipse of Scripture at the very point where its light should dawn in the mind of the Church.

Simultaneously, through the protestantization of the Adventist mind a momentous paradigm shift occurred from its Biblical Word/Spirit paradigm to the Charismatic paradigm of contemporary Evangelicalism. Although

⁵⁹ Probably unawares and unintentionally, *QOD* and *MOD* reveal a foundational paradigm shift in the Adventist understanding of the hermeneutical and material condition of Adventist theological methodology. If Adventists' beliefs on God and the Gospel are Evangelical as *QOD* and *MOD* affirm, Adventists accept implicitly the plurality of revealed sources of theology on which the Evangelical Doctrines stand. Early Adventist commitment to the *sola, tota, and prima Scriptura* principle and to the deconstruction of Evangelical theology evanesced in main stream biblical Adventism. This phenomenon partially explains the existence of "evangelical" and "progressive" Adventist communities.

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the Charismatic ministerial paradigm fits the theologies of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists, lack of development in the Word ministerial paradigm has led Biblical Adventists to adopt it as the only perceived way to face the challenges of postmodern cultural changes.

The shift in the ministerial and liturgical paradigms becomes visible around Adventists institutions in western developed countries and is yet in its initial stages of development. Adventists have not yet formally embraced the Charismatic ministerial and liturgical paradigms. Yet, some promote them; some use them for pragmatic reasons. The majority of Biblical Adventists quietly condone their existence through silence. Stealthily, a new Charismatic generation of Adventist leaders is underway. They will challenge the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura*; the platform on which the Remnant Church stands or falls.

As a result of its ongoing protestantization, Adventism walks through a theological and spiritual crisis of self-understanding that seriously detracts from its unity and mission and eclipses Scripture. Adventist leaders continue to affirm biblical doctrines with their brains while Evangelical theologies and practices progressively shape their hearts, lifestyle, and mission.

Perhaps, if a new generation revives the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle, and the Sanctuary doctrine as the macro-hermeneutical vision, Adventism will overcome its protestantization, reverse the eclipse of Scripture, and strengthen the Word/Spirit ministerial and liturgical paradigms.

6. Conclusion

Life is change, therefore Adventism changes. In a worldwide community, changes have a multiplicity of causes that pass from one generation to another via tradition. One of them, the long-held traditional conviction that Evangelical theology and ministerial paradigm are biblical has encouraged successive generations of Adventist leaders to increase and broaden the uncritical adoption of theological, ministerial, and liturgical Evangelical practices. These practices eclipse Scripture, produce divisions, and hinder the mission of the Church. Above all, they destroy the essence of Adventism and the reason for its existence as the remnant church.

The protestantization of the Adventist mind has created a well-established Adventist tradition. Instead of fighting Protestant traditions by discovering biblical truth, a growing number of Adventists

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evangelize without understanding or thinking through what they believe and preach. They offer complete instantaneous salvation wrapped in empty doctrinal formulations. Moreover, Adventist pragmatism encourages Church life to revolve around missionary work. Within this context, it is not surprising to find many Adventist leaders that implicitly encourage evangelists and reward ministers to neglect and even discourage Bible study and theological understanding as unrelated to church life and mission.

Because of this mind set, a growing number of Adventist leaders and church members are ignorant of Biblical thinking and doctrinally illiterate.⁶⁰ As believers receive doctrines without a spiritual theological understanding, a high number of Adventists experience biblical doctrine as “head knowledge,” unrelated to salvation and spiritual life. In short, the protestantization of the Adventist ministerial paradigm promotes evangelization, mission, and church growth, but disregards theological/spiritual understanding of Scripture.⁶¹ Personal study and understanding of the Bible, once at the very heart of the Adventist ministerial paradigm and spiritual experience becomes the unnecessary indulgence of ivory tower professors.

I assume that most Adventists leaders are honestly unaware of the protestantization of their Adventist faith and experience. In a simplistic uncritical way, partially conditioned by *QOD* and *MOD*, mainstream Adventist leaders assume by default that Evangelical theology and ministerial practices are biblical and therefore compatible with Adventist beliefs. Yet, some are well acquainted with this trend and promote it as a true expression of the Adventist experience.

Due to the protestantization of the Adventist mind, Adventist changes in theology, ministry, mission, and liturgy mimic Evangelical changes in the same areas. These changes, in turn, intensify the protestantization of

⁶⁰ Neal C. Wilson, “The President Calls for Renewal,” *Adventist Review*, April 7, 1988, 12.

⁶¹ Of course, in the Charismatic ministerial paradigm there is a place for Bible study. Yet, the experience of Salvation and relation to God takes place directly from God to the soul of the believer without the mediation of Christ or His words in Scripture. The direct encounter between God and the soul of the believer is the center of the Charismatic model of ministry that stands at the center of contemporary Evangelical and Roman Catholic spirituality. Bible study is not the place of the encounter between Christ and the believer, but a step we can take toward a direct experiencing of God.

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Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture in the mind and actions of the Church.

Why do *QOD* and *MOD* view Evangelical theology and ministerial patterns as complementary to Adventist distinctive doctrines? What is the foundation for the generally positive view Adventists have of Evangelicalism? From the methodological perspective, the uncritical assumption that Evangelical theology and practices flow from the unambiguous affirmation of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle may explain the foundation on which the protestantization of the Adventist mind stands. How could it be otherwise? After all, if Evangelicals study Scripture as the inerrant Word of God and believe in Jesus as their Savior, their theological and ministerial conclusions should be in harmony with Scripture. Of course, Adventists have a few eschatological details to add (in Froom's view Adventist separative doctrines, and in Knight's eschatological affirmation), but they are not seen as challenging, but rather, expanding Evangelical Christianity (the rest of the broad spectrum of Christian doctrines). As we explained earlier, present day Adventists have inherited this view at least since *QOD* and probably ever since the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference meetings.⁶²

In my view, this assumption has permeated the Adventist mind for a long time. My own personal experience testifies to this fact. I remember fondly my first class in Systematic Theology. At the time, I was in my third year of theological studies, the year was 1965, and I had no way to know that Leroy Froom was about to publish *MOD*. The professor, a missionary holding a Master of Divinity degree from Andrews University, required us to study the one volume on Christian theology written by Arminian theologians⁶³ Orton H. Wiley and Culbertson's one volume on Christian Theology.⁶⁴ He told us, most of the book was theologically correct.

⁶² I suspect this much. Yet, I have no time to do the necessary historical research on the full history of the protestantization of the Adventist mind briefly sketched in this series of articles. I hope Adventist historians will explore this issue and either confirm or falsify my suspicions.

⁶³ Roger Eugene Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 30, 33.

⁶⁴ The text book was the Spanish translation of the English original, H. Orton; Paul T. Culbertson Wiley, *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1946).

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However, he warned us not to accept the few portions that dealt with the Sabbath and prophecies.

Years later, when as a rookie professor of theology I was preparing my lecture on God I freely “downloaded” from Evangelical theologian Augustus Strong’s *Systematic Theology*.⁶⁵ At the time, I felt I was doing what the Adventist denomination expected from me. However, I had some early warnings that what I was doing was not compatible with Adventist and Biblical beliefs. One student told me my teachings had a “Thomistic” bend. Since I was unfamiliar with Aquinas’ works at that time, I dismissed the idea. Yet, when I had time to check the biblical references Strong used to support his teachings I got a second puzzling warning. The biblical texts did not support and even contradicted Strong’s positions. I also dismissed this warning. I thought deeper theological training would help me to see what Strong saw in his biblical references. I never suspected Strong could be wrong in his teachings on God. After all, my professors of Systematic Theology had told me to trust in Evangelical authors.

Yet, scholarly training in Scripture’s original languages, and, in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic theologies did not help me to see what Strong saw in his biblical references. I was puzzled, but I still implicitly trusted Evangelical theologians. I still trusted my first professor of Systematic Theology.

To break long held implicit assumptions was very difficult. Yet, a strong conviction on the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle and studies in ontology helped me break the spell under which I was operating as an ordained Adventist minister and professor of theology.

Could this long held working assumption be wrong? Does Evangelical theology stand on the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle? Adventists should double check this assumption. I suspect Evangelical theology works from non-biblical philosophical assumptions and therefore does build on the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle. Additionally, Adventists should take a serious look at current developments in Evangelical thinking. To face the challenge of postmodernity Evangelical leadership is leaving Scripture further behind by embracing Roman Catholic thinking and postmodern culture.

⁶⁵ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907).

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Should Adventism accept or challenge the methodological basis articulated by *QOD* and *MOD*? Promoting the protestantization of Adventism or letting it continue to run unchallenged will eventually turn Adventism into another Progressive Charismatic Evangelical denomination moving back to Rome. Should Adventists be concerned about this trend? I think we should because it is transforming the very essence, identity, and mission of the Church. In my opinion, Adventism as a whole should carefully evaluate this trend and attempt to overcome it.

7. Epilogue

If we do nothing, mere inertia will lead Adventism to the next step in the eclipse of Scripture: The replacement of the Biblical ontology and metaphysics implicit in the Sanctuary doctrine with classical philosophical thinking. After all, the Evangelical theologies and practices Adventism follows implicitly assume the same classical philosophical ideas from which Roman Catholic macro-hermeneutics flow. They implicitly lead to postmodern pantheism, which lies behind the Charismatic worship renewal and spirituality Adventists are incorporating from the leaders of the rapidly mutating Evangelical coalition. Ellen White clearly understood that “[t]he spiritualistic theories regarding the personality of God,” implicit in Kellogg’s pantheism, “followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy.”⁶⁶ According to her, Adventism will face the same ideas again.⁶⁷

As some Adventists implicitly incorporate these ontological views from their readings of Evangelical literature, their understanding of theological method will progressively intensify the protestantization of Adventist thinking, inviting twenty-first century Adventists to venture into ecumenical postmodern waters. While the protestantization of Adventism is changing the minds and hearts of biblical Adventists around the world, doctrinal formulations remain conservative and reflect earlier times when the Sanctuary doctrine was the hermeneutical key that opened to view a complete and harmonious system of biblical theology.

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958 and 1980), 204.

⁶⁷ “We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” *Ibid.*, 197.

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Clearly, the protestantization of Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture are more difficult to assess because they are not external but internal to the Adventist experience. Moreover, the changes and challenges they produce are not cosmetic or superficial but deeply affect the foundation, essence, and mission of the Remnant church. Yet, most Adventists promoting innovations closely following the latest evangelical trends are not aware they are changing the essence and nature of Adventism. Moreover, I believe that the immense majority of Adventist leaders and church members do not understand the assumptions and the unintended consequences of changes taking place in the practice of ministry.

What should biblical Adventists do? Should they keep silent to preserve the unity of the Church? In a similar situation when panentheistic ideas seriously challenged the pillars of the Adventist church, Ellen White's message was: "No longer consent to listen without protest to the perversion of truth. Unmask the pretentious sophistries which, if received, will lead ministers . . . to ignore the truth."⁶⁸ Some Adventist leaders, following Ellen White's advice are alerting the church about the dangers from within.⁶⁹ Yet, mere denunciation of wrong will not bring constructive change. The only way to avoid this outcome is theological development in faithfulness to Scripture. Such a task is enormous and complex. No single individual can achieve it. To start the conversation about how to overcome the protestantization of the Adventist mind and the eclipse of Scripture, let me share three suggestions.

First, Adventism needs to move beyond exegesis and doctrine to a full theological understanding of divine revelation in Scripture. In other words, Adventists need to find in Scripture what they sought to find in Evangelical theologies and ministerial practice, a sound and harmonious understanding of biblical truths. We need to move beyond exegesis and doctrines to the full understanding of the harmonious system of truth that the Sanctuary doctrine opened to the view of early Adventist pioneers. The

⁶⁸ Ibid., I: 196.

⁶⁹ Mostert, *Hidden Heresy? Is Spiritualism Invading Adventist Churches Today*; Herbert Douglass, *Truth Matters: An Analysis of the Purpose Driven Life Movement* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006); _____, *Never Been This Late Before* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2006); _____, *Dramatic Prophecies of Ellen White: Stories of World Events Divinely Foretold* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2007).

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protestantization of Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture are leading Adventism back to tradition, culture, and philosophies. Because in the process we have neglected and lost the harmonious understanding of biblical truth, we constantly seek an ever-elusive “proper balance” between doctrines, practical emphasis, and even between evangelical Christianity and our eschatological distinctive doctrines.⁷⁰ The need for balance assumes an unbalanced reality or theological system. In Adventism, the assumption that Evangelical theology is biblical and therefore truth, brings in a perpetual systemic state of unbalance that stems from deep theological distortions caused by the philosophical assumptions implicit in Evangelical theologies.⁷¹

Second, the mission of the remnant necessarily involves establishing “Christianity upon an eternal basis.”⁷² Thus, instead of balance, we need to seek for the inner harmony of Biblical thinking by consistently applying the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle. This means to search for a proper and

⁷⁰ “As I have sought to demonstrate in such books as *A Search for Identity*, a struggle for a balanced Adventism has been at the center of the historical development of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Over time we have oscillated between overemphasizing those aspects of our belief system that make us Christians and those that distinguish us as distinctively Adventists [Here Knight perpetuates *QOD* understanding of Adventism as an Evangelical based denomination]. Today we have in the church what I call the Adventist Adventists, who see everything that the denomination teaches to be uniquely Adventist and groan a bit when we call ourselves evangelical. On the other extreme are those Adventists that we can describe as Christian Christians. Those at the pole of the denomination are overjoyed to be evangelical and shy away from Ellen White, the eschatological implications of the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary, and so on. Fortunately, in the middle we find some who might may be styled Christian Adventists, whose Adventism finds meaning in the evangelical framework that we share with other Christians.” Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*, 13. Clearly, Knight not only believes that Evangelical theology is correct and adopts it as Adventist, but thinks that Adventists find the meaning of what make them Adventists in the framework of Evangelical theology. That is precisely what has led to the neutering of Adventism that he correctly describes and decries. Perhaps, there is room for Adventist Christianity, a reinterpretation of all Christian doctrines from the hermeneutical perspective of the Sanctuary doctrine. See my series on “From Vision to System.”

⁷¹ Arguably, Evangelical theology is in itself unbalanced in nature precisely because it attempts to be faithful to Scripture on the hermeneutical basis of tradition that operates from philosophical ideas that are not only non-biblical but also incompatible with biblical ontology.

⁷² White, *Selected Messages*, 3: 407.

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harmonious understanding of Biblical truth from the philosophical presuppositions built in the doctrine of the Sanctuary. This project is not new. Early Adventist pioneers started it. Ellen White developed it extensively. In time, the protestantization and eclipse of Scripture led to the discontinuation, neglect, abandonment, and replacement of the Sanctuary as the hermeneutical principle of Christian theology with Evangelical hermeneutical principles. Nowadays, when referring to Adventist theological hermeneutics, Biblical Adventists no longer refer to the Sanctuary but to the “Great Controversy.”⁷³ They are closely related but not identical. Moreover, the Sanctuary Doctrine provide the inner theological framework for the theological interpretation of Salvation History as the Great Controversy. For this and other reasons, the Sanctuary Doctrine continues to be the broad inner biblical structure that opens to view the

⁷³ “But the genius of Seventh-day Adventism does not lie so much in those doctrines that make it distinctive or in those beliefs that it shares with other Christians. Rather it is a combination of both sets of understandings within the framework of the Great Controversy theme found in the apocalyptic core of the book of Revelation.” Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, 203. Yet, Knight does not give many clues as to how the Great Controversy functions hermeneutically. Herbert Douglass has expanded this idea considerably. “The Great Controversy Theme is the organizing principle of what has come to be known as the distinctive message of Seventh-day Adventists. It provides the glue of coherence to all of his teachings-theology, health principles (health maintenance plus the prevention and cure of disease), education, missiology, ecclesiology, social relations, environmental stewardship, etc.” Herbert Douglass, *God at Risk: The Cost of Freedom in the Great Controversy* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2004), 19. Adventist theologian Norman Gulley is pioneering the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* Systematic theology project in his ongoing Systematic Theology, the first to use the Great Controversy as the guiding hermeneutical principle. In so doing, Gulley moves beyond the protestantization of Adventism and the eclipse of Scripture. He explains, “[t]he cosmic controversy is the biblical metanarrative within which human creation, the great stories of the Old Testament, the life and death of Christ, and the great stories of the New Testament took place; where the resurrected ministry of Christ and work of the Spirit of Christ take place; where the return of Christ and the final judgment will take place. So the cosmic controversy is the biblical context for all self-revelation of God in Scripture.” Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xxii. Gulley expounds further, “[t]he cosmic controversy metanarrative provides the worldview within which the inner coherence of all doctrines is seen by their placement within the unfolding drama.” Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, xxvi. Although these authors move away from tradition to Scripture, they are just pointing to or starting the immense task of reinterpreting all Christian doctrines from Scripture.

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inner logic of biblical thinking necessary to bring Christian theology to an eternal basis. This task requires not only the explanation and interpretation of the Seventh-day Adventist “distinctives” but also a reinterpretation of the entire range of Christian doctrines, teachings, practice, and mission. The full and consistent application of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle requires nothing less.

Understanding the inner harmony of biblical thinking dispels the need for balance. A harmonious truth and practice does not need balance. Moreover, the harmonious understanding of Bible truths will justify the existence of the Remnant Church squarely on Scripture. Incorporating this understanding spiritually in the minds, hearts, and actions of believers will foster unity, teaching, and practice, and advance its global eschatological mission.

Third, the mere existence of a harmonious theology will achieve nothing unless it permeates the mind/spirit and actions of the church. This will require the conviction that theological understanding is central to salvation and the ministry and mission of the Church. New generations of Adventist administrators, pastors, and professors need to engage closely in interdisciplinary dialogue and research as the ongoing default method of church business. Finally, pastors and missionaries should intentionally work within the Word/Spirit educational paradigm bringing the harmonious understanding of biblical truth to the mind of each person within the church and in the world.

In a time when Protestant leaders are going back to Rome,⁷⁴ Adventist leaders, administrators, pastors, seminary, and university professors should start going back to Scripture and using the Sanctuary Doctrine as the macro-hermeneutical key to understand the complete and harmonious system of Biblical truth. Should we open our hearts to the inner logic of God’s word through the educational ministry of the Holy Spirit and treasure it in the inner recesses of our spirits, we will no longer experience doctrines as “brain” knowledge but as the transforming and saving power of God through the Holy Spirit. Then, the church will be of one mind and Adventism will fulfill its God-given final mission.

⁷⁴ Mark A. and Carolyn Nynstrom Noll, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

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