

QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE -- *DEJA VU*

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Recently, Andrews University Press printed a new edition of the groundbreaking 1957 book, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. In a Ministry article, Woodrow Whidden gave some background information regarding the original book and its recent reprint.

Whidden notes that the 1957 edition "proved to be one of the most controversial publishing events in the history of Adventism....The publication of QOD in 1957 was the culmination of a series of conversations held between conservative evangelicals and SDA leaders from March 1955 into 1956. The main evangelicals were Donald Grey Barnhouse, radio preacher and editor of *Eternity*, and Walter Martin, a young researcher. The Adventist conferees included noted historical theologian Leroy Edwin Froom, W. E. Read (a General Conference Field Secretary) and Roy Allan Anderson, prominent evangelist and editor of *Ministry*.

"One of the positive results of the dialogue was that Barnhouse and Martin declared Seventh-day Adventists to be bona fide Christians who should not be considered to be cultish....However, the QOD answers, especially those regarding Christ's human nature and atonement, proved to be seriously disturbing for many Seventh-day Adventists....

"The main voice of dissent belonged to M. L. Andreasen, one of Adventism's most respected theology professors and writers of the 1930s and 1940s. His distinctive views on the atonement and the humanity of Christ did seem to represent a certain consensus within Adventist thinking....Many considered his views to be solid Adventist orthodoxy....

"The key theological principle...was Andreasen's Christology. He firmly held that Christ had taken a sinful nature, just like Adam's after the Fall (in other words, a sinful nature with tendencies to sin). Thus with the empowering Christ as an example to His last-generation followers, the final atonement could be effected from the heavenly sanctuary as it played out through the sinless perfected characters of the embattled saints on earth....Thus Christ, through the remnant's victory, will defeat Satan, vindicate God's demand for perfect obedience, and this vindication of God will finally enable Christ to come....

"It is safe to say that the two most controversial and ongoing legacies of QOD are that it sparked new discussions of what Adventists mean by the following: 1. The expressions 'final atonement,' and 2. The 'fallen, sinful human nature of Christ.'...

In the new edition of QOD printed by Andrews University, "the book has been editorially supplemented with an introduction, annotated footnotes, and an updated bibliography by well-known Adventist historian and writer George R. Knight....Knight has pulled no punches, especially when it comes to exposing the way L. E. Froom and his colleagues were 'less than transparent' about the denomination's long-held (since the 1890s) consensus on the 'post-Fall' humanity of Christ....Knight also suggests that Froom and his colleagues gave a false impression as they developed the notorious 'Appendix B,' entitled 'Christ's Nature During the Incarnation,' which consists of Ellen White statements....The controversial heading, which says Christ 'Took Sinless Human Nature,'...implied that this was Ellen White's idea when in fact she was quite emphatic in repeatedly stating that Christ took 'our sinful nature' and that 'He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin.'" (Ministry, August, 2003, pp. 14-17)

A year later, Ministry printed another article giving more background to the original writing of QOD. However, the editor prefaced the article with an explanation. "Last August Ministry published an article by Woodrow Whidden announcing and commenting upon Andrews University Press' republication of the book Questions on Doctrine. In the same issue Ministry declared itself on one side of the most divisive aspect of the book when, in the editorial, we affirmed the sinless human nature of Jesus, and attached a reprint of an insert that Ministry had published in 1970....As part of Ministry 's coverage of these topics, we are pleased to publish the ascendant alternative Adventist view on the nature of Christ. Herbert Douglass, one who was intimately involved in the 1950s and 1960s struggles over Questions on Doctrine , agreed to express this alternative perspective." (Ministry, August, 2004, p. 16)

There are some revealing words used in this editorial preface. The historic Adventist view is that Christ took fallen human nature. The new, alternative Adventist view is that Christ took a partly fallen and partly unfallen nature. But here the editor calls the historic Adventist view the "alternative perspective," implying that the new view is really the mainstream and orthodox

view, while the historic view is just a different, minority perspective. By careful word choices public opinion is often conditioned to accept new ideas, all the while believing that the "new view" is really the established view.

Douglass begins by quoting George Knight's opinion that "this book...easily qualifies as the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history. A book published largely to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism, its release brought prolonged alienation and separation to the Adventist factions that grew up around it."

Douglass continues by describing what happened as QOD was being prepared for printing. "You can imagine our astonishment when we began to see the galleys of the forthcoming book with comments such as this one on pages 8,9: 'The replies were prepared by a group of recognized leaders, in close counsel with Bible teachers, editors, and administrators....These answers represent the position of our denomination in the area of church doctrine and prophetic interpretation....Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.' But as far as we and some others were concerned, these statements did not represent the reality surrounding the production of QOD. Many were troubled by the direction of the book and told the authors so."

Douglass again quotes George Knight's observation that "Milton L. Andreasen, 'the denomination's most influential theologian and theological writer in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, had been left out of the process in both the formulation of the answers and the critiquing of them, even though he had been generally viewed as an authority on several of the disputed points.'...

"Froom took a poll of Adventist leaders and discovered that 'nearly all of them' felt that Christ had our sinful nature. Further, the recently retired General Conference president, W. H. Branson, wrote in the 1950 edition of his Drama of the Ages that Christ in His incarnation took 'upon Himself sinful flesh.' But Froom and Anderson nevertheless affirmed in what appeared to George Knight to be a 'less than transparent' way that 'the majority of the denomination has always held' the humanity of Christ 'to be sinless, holy, and perfect' despite the fact that certain writers had occasionally gotten into print with contrary views. Unfortunately, this is what they told Walter Martin....One of Froom's letters acknowledged that in QOD 'some of the statements

are a bit different from what you might anticipate.'

"Many have felt that if Andreasen, with his undisputed theological experience, had been asked to participate in formulating answers to Martin's questions, theological equilibrium would have prevailed. Here again we must recognize the Calvinistic presuppositions of Barnhouse, Martin, and other confreres. For them the human Jesus was 'impeccable,' that is, incapable of sinning....

"How can we summarize what Knight called 'a less than transparent' defense of conventional Adventist thinking on the humanity of Jesus? The Ellen White statements appended to QOD created 'a false impression on the human nature of Christ.' The authors supplied in bold face a subheading: 'Took Sinless Human Nature.'...Curious touches of intimidation are apparent when the authors said (after spelling out their interpretation of Ellen White statements) 'it is in this sense that all should understand the writings of Ellen G. White when she refers occasionally to sinful, fallen and deteriorated human nature.'...Not only did the quotations contradict their contexts, they seem to have been arranged to foster a particular presupposition....

"As Knight says, QOD 'easily qualifies as the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.'...Most, if not all, of the so-called 'dissident' or 'independent' groups of the last 45 years are direct results of the explicit and implicit positions espoused by QOD on the atonement and the Incarnation....Most, if not all, of these 'dissidents' would not exist today if QOD had not been published....

"In 1975, a representative group of us gathered in Washington in response to the Review and Herald Publishing House's call for counsel regarding the republication of QOD. The leadership of the General Conference was generally opposed to its reprinting. The more the book was examined, the firmer their denial for a reprinting became....

"Areas of concern that may still require open discussion are found in the extended notes on pages 516-529 of the new republished edition of QOD. The author of the notes...is correct: 'The logic that flowed from that belief was that if Christ was just like us, yet had lived a sinless life, then so must other human beings--especially those of the last generation....[This teaching] became the belief of the majority of Seventh-day Adventists in the first half of the twentieth

century. That teaching was so widely accepted that it no longer needed to be argued in Adventist literature. It was accepted as a fact. It was upon that teaching that M. L. Andreasen would build his final generation theology.'...

"The second topic that has severely divided the Adventist Church since the late 1950s was the issue of righteousness by faith. Evangelical media observed that by the 1970s the church was divided between 'Traditional Adventists'--those who defended positions that were 'accepted facts' before QOD--and 'Evangelical Adventists' who emphasized the Reformation understanding of righteousness by faith. Implied in this 'evangelical' understanding was a rejection of (1) Adventism's distinctive view of a pre-Advent judgment, and (2) the connection between the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the cleansing of habits and choices culminating in the close of probation....

"Everything is connected to everything else on the genuine gospel tree; when one aspect of gospel truth is compromised, many other doctrines become tainted! Part of the fallout since 1957 is the cavalier treatment of Ellen White's ministry. Such a view of Mrs. White's ministry became the modus operandi for many pastors and teachers who seemed to get the impression that she has a 'wax nose.' In recent years, Ellen White has been viewed by some as a devotional writer but not a theological guide." (Ministry , August, 2004, pp.16-21)

The Melvill Connection

During the last two decades there has been a refinement of the QOD position on the nature of Christ, since it was recognized that QOD seriously misrepresented clear Ellen White statements. Henry Melvill was a popular Evangelical Anglican clergyman of the 19th century. "What he taught was first adopted in the book, Seventh-day Adventists Believe... , published in 1988 by the Ministerial Department of the General Conference. There, Melvill's position was given as a summary statement as to what Seventh-day Adventists believe in regard to the nature Christ assumed in the Incarnation. It is now being used by Dr. George R. Knight in his Annotated Edition of Questions on Doctrine

This 'orthodox doctrine' of Melvill is promoted by Knight as the position to explain 'all' of the Ellen G. White statements on the subject....The position taken by Melvill required Divine

intervention which he freely set forth, and which in turn provided an 'exemption.'...

"We might ask the question as to why this 'orthodox doctrine' has so much appeal as the solution to the problems raised over the doctrine of the Incarnation in contemporary Adventism....In 1982, the White Estate released a document...captioned 'Henry Melvill and Ellen G. White: A Study in Literary and Theological Relationships.'"

In Ministry , December, 1989, Tim Poirier studied Melvill's sermon, "The Humiliation of the Man Christ Jesus." "Poirier commented: 'Ellen White drew extensively from this sermon...,for her article entitled, "Christ Man's Example," in the Review and Herald of July 5, 1887.' In this sermon, Melvill digresses 'to consider the question of Christ's humanity.' It is from this digression that the theology on the nature of Christ was drawn in Seventh-day Adventists Believe... (pp. 47, 57), and which Dr. George Knight goes to great lengths to explain in his annotations in the republished Questions on Doctrine (pp. 522-524)."

But it is enormously significant that "Ellen White did not borrow a single concept from the digression. Even Poirier admits this....'We have not found that Ellen White directly borrowed any material from this digression.'...Since there was extensive borrowing from the sermon, the failure to find a single reference where anything from the digression was borrowed, would indicate that Melvill's conclusions in the digression were rejected by Ellen White! BUT these rejected conclusions were accepted by the author...of Seventh-day Adventists Believe... as well as by Knight."

Following is what Melvill actually wrote in his now famous digression. "'There were consequences of the fall....We divide...these consequences into innocent infirmities, and sinful propensities....Now Christ took humanity with the innocent infirmities. He derived humanity from his mother....Like her he could hunger, and thirst, and weep, and mourn, and writhe, and die....But whilst he took humanity with the innocent infirmities, he did not take it with the sinful propensities. Here Deity interposed. The Holy Ghost overshadowed the Virgin, and, allowing weaknesses to be derived from her, forbade wickedness; and so caused that there should be generated a sorrowing and a suffering humanity, but nevertheless an undefiled and a spotless; a humanity with tears, but not with stains; accessible to anguish, but not prone to offend.'...Melvill's answer to the question is simply 'Divine Intervention.'..."

Roman Catholicism also teaches 'Divine Intervention,' in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, but that of Mary so she could not transmit to her Son, 'sin in the flesh.' 'So we hold--and we give it you as what we believe the orthodox doctrine (to be)--that Christ's humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen...."Made of a woman," Christ derived all from his mother that we derive, except sinfulness. And this he derived not, because Deity, in the person of the Holy Ghost, interposed between the child and the pollution of the parent."

Parts of this section of Melvill's digression were used as the summary statement on the nature of Christ in the book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* . "Knight in his Annotated Edition of Questions on Doctrine declares that 'Melvill held that the incarnate Christ was neither just like Adam before the Fall nor just like fallen humanity since the entrance of sin. That appears to be the position Ellen White held....Melvill's model is the only one that can explain all of Ellen White's statements on the human nature of Christ."

But the question remains, "Why didn't Ellen White quote from the digression if it echoed her understanding of the nature that Christ assumed in the incarnation? She ignored it, meaning simply that she rejected it. How deceptive can one be in trying to cover a previous deception?...Left unexplained by Knight in his zeal to press Melvill's position is how the law of inheritance (*Desire of Ages*, p. 48) was abridged so as to escape the effects of being of 'the seed of David.' Melvill said, "'Made of a woman," Christ derived all from his mother that we derive except sinfulness. And this he derived not, because Deity, in the person of the Holy Ghost, interposed between the child and the pollution of the parent.'...But this was in the 'digression' from which Ellen White did not quote." In contrast to Melvill's view, Ellen White wrote, "He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin." (*Bible Commentary* , vol. 4, p. 1147)

"In the teachings on the doctrine of the Incarnation, there is a key component which pervades each which deny that Christ took upon Himself the nature of fallen man. It surfaces as 'divine intervention,' which encompasses the word used in *Questions on Doctrine* , 'exempt.'...Every

child of Adam 'born of a woman' receives the fallen nature. There is no exception to this law of heredity, unless there is an exemption of divine intervention. The Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is an attempt to exempt Christ from taking upon Himself the fallen nature of man....In formulating what he calls the 'orthodox doctrine,' Melvill unhesitatingly declared the birth of Jesus to be a divine intervention which preserved Him free from the fallen nature of man....The Roman Dogma used the expression 'stain of original sin;' Melvill used the words, 'wickedness' and 'pollution.'...

"This so-called 'Orthodox Doctrine' was the final summation of the section on the 'Second Adam' in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* (p. 47). It is the position which is promoted in the Annotated Edition of Questions on Doctrine by George Knight. But it is not the belief which was held by the Church from its beginning to the 1940s." (Wm. H. Grotheer, *Watchman, What of the Night?* , June, 2004, pp. 1-7)

Christ's Human Nature and the Final Generation

Ellen White summed up the importance of understanding Christ's humanity in this way. "Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw....If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome....By His humanity He reaches us." (*Desire of Ages* , pp. 311,312)

"In unambiguous language, Ellen White forcefully drives home the point that Jesus must come in a humanity that is like ours. Christ reaches us 'where we are.' The ladder rests on the earth ; not on an insulated, shock absorber-outfitted platform above the earth. He 'took our nature;' His 'humanity reaches us.'" She makes her point even more emphatically in *Desire of Ages*, p. 117. "Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation....Our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities....We have nothing to bear which He has not endured."

"He took upon Himself those aspects of morality and spiritual weakness that we have to struggle against....He condemned sin...in sinful, human flesh where sin holds its ultimate power....Unmistakably, Mrs. White links the human nature of Christ with the kind of victory that

will bring perfection to God's people. The ladder reaches from the lowest to the highest with not a single rung missing. This is a message of hope for the weakest of God's saints. No one need be discouraged by the high calling of God, for there is no depth to which that ladder has not reached."

In his Ministry article, Woodrow Whidden points out that "'The QOD respondents were not enthused about Andreasen's vision of the people of the "final generation" being the agents through which Christ would effect the final atonement. While it appears that they did not directly attack Andreasen's final-generation atonement, they did disagree with the Christology that undergirded it.' Whidden rightly points out the significant disagreement between the QOD authors and the views of Andreasen over the issues involving the final atonement and the 'final generation.'...

"The presently continuing atonement in Christ's heavenly ministry spotlighted by the great controversy tends to bring discomfort to those who have favored the QOD positions. It is worth reminding ourselves that the New Theology has no true atonement phase with Jesus in the Most Holy Place, just a phase where the benefits of the already completed atonement are distributed. The New Theology has a truncated great controversy concept, one which is neither concerned to discover nor cares to explain any reason behind the delay of Christ's return. Inspiration spells out what that reason is--Heaven awaits a final demonstration in God's people of the power of the gospel to change people; to change people to the point that they can stand before God without fault....

"One last quote from the Ministry article states,...'Without Andreasen's undergirding "post-Fall" view of Christ's human nature, Andreasen's version of the perfecting of the final generation and its role in God's vindication is called into serious question. Here too is the most important legacy of QOD.'...We concur that the humanity of Christ is a central issue to all the discussion surrounding the QOD debates. We would add to that the significance and meaning of the atonement. What is abundantly clear, is that the proponents of QOD have ignored an overwhelming body of Scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy evidence that conclusively contradicts their thesis....The views that were historically Adventist that were so persuasively and profoundly brought to us by M. L. Andreasen and other faithful saints, are firmly grounded in the Bible and writings of Ellen White....

"Revelation describes the sealing of the 144,000 (last generation) in this way,...'I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.' (Revelation 7:1-3)...

"The following quote from Mrs. White sums up with unmistakable clarity,...'Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us,--the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, "It is finished.'" (Early Writings , p. 71) Notice the sequence: 'Filled with His fullness...perfection of character...Lord's people reach this mark...they are sealed in their foreheads...Filled with the Spirit...Complete in Christ...'It is finished" [close of probation].'

"In the day of judgment, the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated....He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God.' (Selected Messages , vol. 3, p. 360)...

"And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.' (Revelation 14:5)

...'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' (1 Peter 2:21-22)"

The experience of the final generation living without sinning is tied to the present atonement-making process in heaven. "Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation....There was no sin in him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble." (Review and Herald , March 14, 1912)

"Christ ultimately wins in the end because of what He did while on this earth and because of what He does through His people in earth's last generation. Jesus is at the center; He is the Author and Finisher, the focus of the last generation and of the whole universe as He is vindicated in His faithful remnant.... Enoch, Job, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus were more interested in vindicating the character of God than in saving their own lives.... They were willing to give up their own salvation in order to save others. This is the experience of the last generation. They are more interested in vindicating God's name, His character, than even in having their own names in the book of life.... Revelation portrays a people who give glory to God in their witness, their works, their life, their character. God is vindicated by His faithful people at the end....

"The evidence for Andreasen's last generation theology is found throughout the record of Inspiration.... Some want us to ignore the evidence, others would have us reinterpret it while they offer up alternative views; views that fit in with the prevailing current in the fallen churches around us.... God is waiting, longingly waiting for His beloved people to get serious; to allow Him to fulfill His promises in them.

"The writings of Ellen White clearly teach that God's last generation people are called upon to vindicate God's character before the world.... 'If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to... vindicate His character before the world.' (Testimonies , vol. 5, p. 746)... 'The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.' (Desire of Ages , p. 671) The sacrificial atonement would be 'of no avail' without the Holy Spirit doing His part to glorify God by reproducing in humans the 'very image of God.' And how is it that God is honored? 'In the perfection of the character of His people.' Could it be written any more plainly?... Is there not enough light on this subject to cause us to admit the bankruptcy of the QOD sentiments?...

"'While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary , there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth.... When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.' (Great Controversy , p.

425) When is Christ able to come? 'When this work shall have been accomplished.' What is this work? 'A special work of purification, of putting away of sin.' When is this work performed? While Christ is making 'intercession' in the heavenly sanctuary; while the atonement is taking place.... Inspiration undeniably affirms that God has made the ultimate success of Christ's atoning work dependent upon the perfecting experience of the remnant....

"Satan can make the claim...that Jesus, being both God and human, had some sort of advantage over others....Satan...could say, 'Jesus was the only one who could really keep God's law. What do you expect? After all, He was both God and man.' The only answer for God is to produce a whole group of humans who keep God's law and, like Jesus, do it under the most trying of circumstances....Our God is not in the business of leaving any questions unanswered in the great controversy. He will meet all possible objections....

God will not bring this controversy to an end until all questions have been answered. There will be absolutely no room for any doubts as to God's character, His requirements, or His power to give weak, sinful humans the ability to be in complete harmony (at-one-ment) with Him.

"Which brings us to the last generation. Satan has been marshalling all the deceptive powers of hell to hurl at God's last generation people....He is pulling out all the stops in his endeavour to cause God's people to miss the mark; to fall short; to let God down.

"On the other hand, God has unleashed the power of vital truths recovered, reactivation of the gift of prophecy as a special guiding light to His remnant, and the promise of Divine aid itself; all to enable His faithful in the last momentous showdown to come off more than conquerors....God's people will bring glory to God by His demonstrating His redeeming power in their lives.

"When Satan threw everything he could at Job, God was proven right. When Satan throws everything at the last generation, God is again proven right before men and angels. Satan...has been allowed to give it his 'best shot' and he has failed miserably. Like Job, the last generation vindicates God's claims and His character. God will prove that He can empower a whole generation of His faithful saints and that He is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." (David Qualls, "A Response

to Ministry 's ' Questions on Doctrine : Then and Now"" published on greatcontroversy.org
December 10, 2003)
