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“We must remind ourselves once more that all Christian language about the future is a set of signposts pointing into the mist.” (N.T. Wright, “Surprised by Joy,” 132).

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“Evil is fascinating — the more egregious the offense the more interesting the reading” (last item below).

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What is in a name?

1. “Henceforth ...”

Seems like a strange name for a journal, doesn't it? What was the faculty of Berkshire Christian College thinking way back there in 1972? Let's look at a dictionary definition first, then at some of the 32 appearances of the word in the King James Version (the word is a bit archaic; it does not appear in the New International Version at all).

“Adverb – from this time forth; from now on” (my dictionary.com).

“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom” (Matthew 26:29).

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13).

Note two qualities of the word — and of the “Journal”:

The word is **forward looking** — “after this.” “... forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”

The word recognizes that the process is **incomplete**; note the ellipsis — “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13 – 14).

“Henceforth ...” — a good name for an Adventist journal.

* * * * *

2. “New.”

Brent Ross, president of Advent Christian General Conference, contributed “The Best Is Yet to Come” to the September / October / December 2008 issue of “Advent Christian Witness.” In it he refers to “a new heaven and a new earth” and to “the earth made new” (17). A perceptive reader raises a question: Is the earth to be renewed or replaced? Here are some basic Scripture passages to consider.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31).

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

“‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD, ‘so will your name and descendants endure’” (Isaiah 66:22).

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:18 – 22).

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:10 – 14).

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old

order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” (Revelation 21:1 – 5).

From the words of Isaiah and especially of Peter, one might infer that the created order is to be totally annihilated and replaced. It is clear from Paul, however, that the earth is not to be destroyed but renewed. Like the human creation, the physical order needs to be redeemed. It seems to suggest urban renewal on a massive scale. It is more renewal than replacement. The following factors help to dispel any apparent differences between Peter and Paul.

“New” is often used in a sense that does not require an object other than the one to which we first referred. An example is individual conversion. Paul puts it this way: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17). The convert is the same material entity that he was before, but the orientation of his life is very different. He is a new person. What a diet or exercise program on television, and you will probably hear a reference to being new people.

Most of the Scripture quotations above are highly symbolic. The city in Revelation 21, for example, is a cube which is 1,400 miles in each direction. Its streets are pure gold. But gold is not a very good paving material, and it is difficult to conceive of a city that goes 1,400 miles straight up. These are the ways of expressing the grandeur of Jerusalem in the life to come. As John points out, what is important is that “the old order of things” is gone; the “order of things” is new. Peter expresses in graphic language the necessity for drastic changes between present age and the age to come.

Most important is the fact that throughout Scripture the created order is regarded as a positive — something good. God made it, and he always does a good job. One would expect the good creation to be renewed rather than destroyed.

3. “Urgent.”

A possible heads up to those of you who advise elderly parents or parishioners: **Fraudulent NGO’s fleece the flock.**

It is common knowledge that unscrupulous rascals take advantage of the elderly. Prepaid home improvements never get done. A long lost account has been discovered in your name; it costs just \$250 in seed money to get it released. Goodbye seed. Another way to take advantage of the elderly is to start an organization and ask them for a donation. The relatively small amounts involved at any one time make it more insidious than the more obvious scams.

Two years ago after my 95-year-old father asked me to look at his accounts, I discovered that he was receiving dozens of appeals. He was putting a five or ten dollar bill in each envelope without any discretion as to validity and value. He has spent the last year in a nursing home, and his mail comes to our address. One hundred eighty-seven organizations (Adoptapla-ton to Wyoming Catholic College) have appealed for funds, most of them monthly or quarterly.

The fundraising industry (legitimate or otherwise) is well-organized and clever. They know how to push the right buttons: pity, piety, patriotism, fear, etc. Often something is included in the envelope (calendar, card, a dollar bill, a flag, even a t-shirt — and the ubiquitous address labels — all to make you feel guilty if you do not respond. A common gimmick is the inclusion of a survey: “Please let us know what you think by completing the enclosed survey and return it in the envelope provided — with your **urgently** needed contribution to the cause.” Note the combination of emotional triggers in this appeal from a form letter, although it is made to seem personal:

I have been desperately trying to figure out what
I did to make you want to end our friendship. ...
Donations to Christian Voice have fallen to some of

the lowest levels I have ever seen, and I'm afraid this could be the end. ... without your help, I'm afraid Christian Voice is finished. And then you and I will never be able to stop a radical homosexual lobby from getting special rights ("Robert Grant," July 2009).

Contributions to Americans for Faith and Freedom ("Robert Grant"), Americans for One Language ("Ronald Mitchell"), Christian Voice ("Robert Grant"), and Seniors Center ("Gary Jarmin") are sent to the same post office box in Washington, D.C. Four others use another box in Washington. Each protests the Red Chinese military base on pier J, Long Beach, California. Appeal style, handwriting, etcetera are like that of Christian Voice's "Robert Grant." The appeal to former contributors is practically identical: "I almost didn't write you this letter because I was afraid I had done something to upset you. You see, I had sent you several letters recently. ... " (Moseley).

The evidence indicates fraud, but how many in their eighties or nineties can be expected to catch on?

We moved and the fundraisers quickly picked up the new address (much more quickly than several that we wanted changed!). There must be a central office that keeps track of who contributes and where they live.

Most of the organizations are legitimate, and some of them are worthwhile — Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Berkshire Christian College, Berkshire Institute for Christian Studies, American Cancer Society. Others are of questionable worth — Americans for One Language (learn English or leave), Marijuana Policy Project Foundation (legalize it), United States Justice Foundation (make Obama produce his birth certificate).

Your counselees might be advised to contribute only to organizations with which they are well acquainted (and not to put cash in the mail). Membership in the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) is reassuring. And if the

organization is not bold enough to put their name on the outside of the envelope, toss it unopened!

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“This conference, in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage” (Lambeth Conference 1988).

* * * * *

“The genocide [Rwanda 1994] was well planned and carried out under the orders of the government with the complicity among others of the Anglican and Catholic Churches in this predominantly Christian country. The whole world knew what was happening — and did nothing.” (last item below).

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**EZEKIEL 37 AND THE PROMISE-PLAN OF GOD:
A BARE BONES ECCLESIOLOGY VERSUS DIVINE
REVIVIFICATION OF ISRAEL**

Walter C. Kaiser Jr.

Ezekiel 37 is a critically important document that uses both the Valley of the Dry Bones and the Joining of the Two Sticks (representing Judah and Northern Israel) to point to a whole new future for the people of Israel. All too frequently, however, the tendency for many evangelical interpreters is to conclude that Israel has by New Testament times become the Church, or that the Valley of Dry Bones is a picture fulfilled in Matthew 27 with the death and resurrection of Christ.

This paper will attempt to exegete this passage and then show how it has been treated in recent thought. It will attempt to show that the return from the Babylonian Exile does not completely fulfill the conditions for what is said here and thus this passage still ties in with Zechariah 10, which is also claiming a return of Israel after they are back in the land in 518 B.C.

Special attention will be given to hermeneutical conclusions of Covenant and Dispensational Theology.

While the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel is one of the great chapters of the Bible, it has been sadly neglected in the recent discussions. The most pressing question is this: Does God have a future for “Israel” or did he transfer the promises originally made to Israel over to the New Testament “Church” and thereby replace Israel with the Church in the program of God? It is this question we wish to pose in light of an exegesis and discussion of Ezekiel 37.

The Context of Ezekiel 37

The Lord gave the prophet Ezekiel a series of six prophecies on the night before the news about the destruction of

Jerusalem reached the exiles in Babylon (Ezekiel 33: 21 – 22). Each of the six prophecies dealt with a future relationship God would have with the land and people of Israel. These prophecies spoke to the following themes:

1. First there was an explanation as to why God had laid waste Israel's land. It was due to her idolatrous practices (Ezekiel 33:23 – 33).
2. Then God would remove the self-centered leaders who had robbed the people. Instead, the Lord would himself shepherd them as the Davidic Messiah who would care for them (Ezekiel 34:1 – 31).
3. The third message declared that the Lord would take on Edom and all similar nations that had harbored hostility against his people. He would not only devastate them, but he would repopulate the land of Israel again and make the land fruitful once more (Ezekiel 35:1 – 36:15).
4. In the fourth message, the people themselves would be cleansed and renewed by the Spirit of God. They would be revived as a nation once more (Ezekiel 36:16 – 37:14).
5. The people would not only be dramatically revived, but they would be reunited as a single nation, no longer separate powers consisting of a northern group of 10 tribes and two southern tribes, known as Judah and Benjamin (Ezekiel 37:15 – 28), but all in one kingdom once again.
6. Finally, in the sixth message, God would thwart the concluding act of the enemies of Israel led by Gog and he would establish their dwelling place securely in their own land (Ezeiel 38 – 39).

At the heart of these six blocks of text were messages four and five that took up the question of the people. How could they be presented any picture of hope given their constant penchant for unholiness? The answer was that they must first be punished with

the exile for defiling the land and themselves (36:17 – 20). But then they would be regathered back in their land (36:22 – 24), cleansed from their iniquities (36:2 – 33a), and given a new heart and a new Spirit (36:26 – 27). The central vision to this restoring work of God came in the Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones.

The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1 – 14)

The vision of the Valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1 – 14 is one of the most dramatic and best-known passages of the Old Testament. If for no other reason, it is best known because of the spiritual that sings about “the leg bone connected to the hip bone” and so one with all of the other bones. “Now hear the Word of the Lord. Them bones, them bones, them dry bones. ...” Those bones were go’ in to walk all around once more by the power of God.

While modern interpreters have generally steered away from an interpretation that depicts a literal resurrection of the bones of the nation Israel, yet there is strong evidence for a genuine resurrection of life from the old order in the nation Israel to a whole new order of things for that ethnic group of people. Resurrection is the very method that God will use to complete the three earlier predictions of renewal that had been spoken to the nation Israel. The new community would live in a renewed land (Ezekiel 35:1 – 36:15), have a renewed community that had a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:16 – 38), and experience a new shepherd leadership (Ezekiel 34:1 – 31).

This vision of the valley of the dry bones belongs to a group of messages stretching from Ezekiel 33:21 – 39:29, all of which were received during the night prior to the arrival of a messenger with news of the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 3:21 – 22). Therefore, the interpretive setting for these messages was one of dispelling the despair the people would experience over the impending, but disheartening, news that Jerusalem had

fallen and the throne and kingdom of David no longer seemed to exist!

It is worth noting well that the figure of a resurrection had real meaning for the people and did not need to be explained. Resurrection of the body is not all that foreign to the Old Testament as too many modern interpreters of the Old Testament seem to have concluded in the past. After all, mortal Enoch, “the seventh” from Adam, had gone directly into the immortal presence of God in Genesis 5, as had Elijah, the prophet in 2 Kings 2:11 in his ascension to heaven. Moreover, Elijah had restored to life the widow’s son (1 Kings 17:22) back to life, just as Elisha had restored the Shunnamite’s son (2 Kings 4:34 – 35) to life. The prophet Isaiah had also declared that God would one day “swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:8) and he announced that “your dead bodies will live, their bodies will rise. ... The earth will give birth to her dead.” In like manner, Hosea mocked death and the grave (Hosea 13:14), asking them where their victory rested, while the prophet Daniel announced that “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Therefore, the doctrine of a resurrection of the body was not all that novel or foreign to Ezekiel’s listeners or to those who had preceded them.

However, Ezekiel 37:1 – 14 is not, as some church fathers incorrectly supposed, a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of all the dead. It is not the text that supports the general resurrection of all the dead in the last day. Instead, it is a description of Israel’s awakening to life out of her stupor of death in the Babylonian exile, as Ezekiel himself makes clear under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

What makes this view so certain is the pivotal verse 11 of Ezekiel 37 that declares:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ ”

What could be clearer? Therefore, rather than it being a resurrection of individuals, as spoken of in Isaiah 25:8; 26:19 or Daniel 12:2, it is the bringing to life of the nation of Israel once again, just as Hosea 6:2 affirmed. Hosea taught that “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”¹

The passage divides itself into two parts: the description of what Ezekiel saw in the vision of the valley of dry bones, verses 1 – 10; and the interpretation of the vision in verses 11 – 14. To reject the interpretation offered in verses 11 – 14 is to jeopardize one’s ability to understand verses 1 – 10. The same rule follows in other prophets from this same period such as Zechariah and Daniel: the prophetic analysis that follows a prophetic discourse supplies its own interpretation, thereby helping the reader to understand the meaning of the prophecy.

The chapter begins by noting that the “hand of the LORD was upon [Ezekiel],” a phrase used also by Elijah and Elisha when describing God’s power being levied against Israel for her sin or her enemies as sign of hope for Israel. This phrase occurs in the book of Ezekiel seven times (1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; and 40:1).² In this context, the power of God was on the prophet to announce the prospect of hope for the nation.

The prophet was taken in a vision to a valley filled with dried, bleached bones that littered the valley floor. While the text does not tell us where the valley was or even why the vision had to take place in a valley, it was probably the same valley where Ezekiel had received his first vision in Ezekiel 3:22, 23 and again in 8:4. The prophet was guided “back and forth”³ among the bones of those who had been “slain” (vs 9) in the

¹ See also the theology of a general resurrection in Deuteronomy 32:39, “I kill, and I will make alive,” 1 Samuel 2:6 and Psalm 30:4.

² See other places for the “hand of the LORD” in Exodus 9:3; Deuteronomy 2:15; 1 Samuel 5:6; 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Jeremiah 5:17.

³ Literally, “around”

valley before the “Spirit of the LORD” asked him the question: “Son of man, can these bones live?” (vs 3).

What could the prophet say? God alone knew the answer to that question (vs 3b). Therefore, without further ado, Ezekiel was commanded to “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ ” (vs 4). The God of the whole universe announced in verses 5 – 6 that he would cause breath to come into these bones, attach sinews to them, and cover them with skin. This in itself would be startling enough: but there was more. All would see that the power of the word of God to effect his will would be as awesome in the future as it was in the days of Ezekiel two millennia ago!

Immediately Ezekiel obeyed as he began to prophesy (vs 7). It appears that even before he finished prophesying Ezekiel heard the “noise” or “rattling” as bone after bone came together in this valley that was littered with these anatomical remnants. Despite the marvel of this event, the bones still were not living: “there was no breath in them” (vs 8c). The bones were without vitality!

Daniel Block has noted that the bones on the valley floor do not represent merely the victims of Nebuchadnezzar’s wars who were left out in the fields, but “they represent the entire house of Israel, including even those who had been exiled by the Assyrians more than 130 years earlier.”⁴

Once again, The Lord commanded his servant the prophet to “Prophesy to the breath ... Come ... O breath and breathe into these slain that they live” (vs 9). This time the bones “came to life and stood on their feet — a vast army” (vs 10).

This two-staged prophetic act reminds us of God’s work in creation: First, God formed man out of the dust of the earth, then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became alive (Genesis 2:7). In Ezekiel, however, the breath does

⁴Daniel I. Block “The Book of Ezekiel”: Chapters 25 – 48 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 379.

not come directly from God as it did in creation; but from the “four winds” (vs 9). Normally the “four winds” would indicate the four corners of the earth (cf Isaiah 43:5 – 6; Jeremiah 31:8). Thus, the two-stepped restoration of the bones could well refer, according to some, to Israel returning to her land in the last days in an unconverted state without life and vitality in spiritual things. However, that meaning will now need to be weighted against the interpretation given by the Lord himself in verses 11 – 14.

O. Palmer Robertson emphasizes the “two stages involved in this process of resurrection” as being an “obvious parallel between this account on the infusion of life in Ezekiel and the creation account in Genesis 2:7.” For Robertson this “makes it plain that Ezekiel’s vision of a return to life refers to a single event.”⁵ What Palmer draws from this is:

However the establishment of the state of Israel [in 1948] may be viewed, it does not fulfill the expectation of Ezekiel as described in this vivid prophecy. Instead, this picture of a people brought to newness of life by the Spirit of God leads to a consideration of the role of the land in the context of the new covenant.⁶

Robertson then translates the old covenant concept of the land into what he considers categories of new covenant fulfillment. This is a movement, we are assured, of going from shadow to reality. It is apparent to all who heed the interpretive section given under inspiration of God in Ezekiel 37:11 – 14 that this vision does not intend to symbolize the general resurrection of all the dead. It simply pointed to the raising up of the nation of Israel, which lies slain and without any human sources of hope.

⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, “The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing Co., 2000), 24.

⁶ O. Palmer Robertson, “The Israel of God,” 25.

Palmer feels that Peter Walker has a similar analysis of Ezekiel's vision of Israel's restored temple. Walker concludes that the New Testament writers were presumably not expecting Ezekiel's prophecy to be fulfilled literally at some future point in a physical Temple. Instead this prophecy became a brilliant way of speaking pictorially of what God had now achieved in and through Jesus. Paradoxically, therefore, although Ezekiel's vision had focused so much upon the Temple, it found its ultimate fulfillment in that city where there was "no Temple," because its Temple is the Lord Almighty and the Lamb (Revelations 21:22).⁷

Using this same type of analogy, Palmer sees the New Testament fulfillment of the revived "House of Israel" as the promise made concerning Abraham in Romans 4:13 that he would be "heir" not just of "the land," but of "the world." Thus, the "image" of the House of Israel becomes the Church and the Old Testament image of the "land" and in turn is equated to "the world" in Romans 4:13. Palmer adds to this the promise in Romans 8:22 – 23 where the whole creation groans in travail waiting for the rejuvenation of the whole earth! Therefore, Robertson concludes, "By this renewal of the entire creation, the old covenant's promise of land finds its new covenant realization."⁸

Finally, Robertson asks what did Jesus mean when he declared that the meek would inherit the earth? (Matthew 5:5). The amazing thing is not his answer, for he does see all believers, regardless of their ethnic roots, inheriting in the world they live. But what is startling is that these texts should figure in the discussion of the promise made to Ezekiel when God announced that "these bones are the whole house of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:11). It was these bones that God would bring out of their graves (in Ezekiel's mixed metaphor) and bring back to their own land. By this act those same "bones" would know that Yahweh was none other than the Yahweh himself.

⁷ P. W. L. Walker, "Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 313.

⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, "The Israel of God," 26.

The rest of the divine interpretation in Ezekiel is this:

They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone: we are cut off.” Therefore prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD’ ” (Ezekiel 37:11b – 14).

The condition of Israel when God would do this new act was one in which they were dead and cut off from God. They were without hope. However, God himself would intervene, “open” their graves, and “bring” them “back” into “the land of Israel.” Peter Craigie is just as clear that this is the meaning of this text. He warned, “The prophecy, in other words, is not concerned with any theology of resurrection from the dead; ... rather its focus is on the restoration of moribund exiles to new life in their original homeland.”⁹

The act of revivification included the promise of the land (Ezekiel 37:12, 14, Hebrew `adamah). But it also included placing God’s “Spirit in [them]” so they could “live.” The fact that God will “bring” (Hebrew *hebi*) them into the land and grant them rest (Hebrew *hinniach*) demonstrates that the work of the Spirit is not a divine act differing from the raising of the dead to life in this nation. Thus, there are two events announced in these verses, not three: (1) The bringing of a nation out of their graves, and (2) The leading of them back to their land again. There does not seem to be a separate communication of the Holy Spirit distinct from the impartation of the breath of life to the dead corpses.

⁹Peter C. Craigie, “Ezekiel” (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 261.

The Reunification of Israel: Ezekiel 37:15 – 28

In a new vision, which is a sequel to the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37:1 – 14, Ezekiel performs another of his symbolic actions to get his message across. He was told by the Lord to take two sticks of wood and identify them: one as belonging to Ephraim (standing for the 10 northern tribes as signified by the house of Joseph) and the other as belonging to Judah (and presumably the tribe of Benjamin). Then he was to “join them together into one stick so they [would] become one in [his] hand” (Ezekiel 37:17).

The meaning of this symbolic action was immediately given in verses 18 – 28. All of this must have been done in a public display, for the people asked, “Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?” (vs 18). The prophet explained: God was going to join the kingdom divided since the days of 931 B.C. into one nation once again.

I will take the Israelites out of the nations [note the plural] where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They shall be my people and I will be their God” (vss 21 – 23).

The word “one” (Hebrew, `ehad) occurs 10 times in this text. There would be one nation, one king, one shepherd, and by implication, one God among this revived and restored people. Not only that, but two new elements are added here: (1) the people

would be restored to their land forever¹⁰ (vs 26, cf. 34:25), and (2) A sanctuary would be constructed among them that would remain forever (vss 26c, 27, 28). This could not be the return from the Babylonian exile, for the extent mentioned here is “forever.”

Now the key point to be repeated here is this: It is clear from our vantage point that not all of these promises were fulfilled after the return of the Jewish people from their exile in Babylon. The nation never was reunited into one kingdom, nor did they ever have only one king or shepherd over them. But the most telling feature was that the Messiah, the Davidic “Servant of the LORD,” did not come to rule over them and they have not as yet ceased from all of their sinful backsliding. Israel is not yet “holy,” nor is God’s eternal sanctuary among them! While there were some immediate and limited fulfillments, as there always are in a “now, but not yet” inaugurated eschatology, the long-range and complete fulfillments still await a future day.

This passage, then, embraces 13 promises that illustrate God’s determination to revive, restore and reestablish the nation of Israel, despite wide-ranging disparagement of this claim among contemporary believing scholars and laity. They include:

1. God will regather Israel from among all the nations (vs 21a);
2. God will bring Israel into their own land again (vs 21b);
3. God will make one nation of the two divided kingdoms (vs 22a);
4. God will place one king over the nation (vs 22b, 24);
5. God will see to it that the nation is never again divided (vs 22c);
6. God will make sure that Israel will never again serve idols (vs 23a);

¹⁰The word “forever,” Hebrew ‘olam, is used five times in this passage: vs 25 (bis), 26 (bis), 28.

7. God will save Israel from all their sinful backsliding (vs 23b);
8. God will enable them to walk in obedience to his law (vs 24b);
9. God will establish them in their land forever (vs 25);
10. God will establish a new covenant of peace¹¹ with Israel (vss 26a; cf 34:25; Jeremiah 31:31 – 34);
11. God will multiply them in their land (vs 26a);
12. God will establish his sanctuary among the Israelites and will personally dwell there forever (vss 26c, 27);
13. God will make Israel a testimony to his saving grace (vs 28).

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to conclude that God has transferred in *their entirety* his promises made with the patriarchs, David and the prophets, over to the New Testament Church. A passage, such as the one included in this investigation, is too explicit and too detailed to provide for that interpretation. It is one thing to recognize some of the symbolic elements in a prophecy, but it is another to spiritualize it into something that is quite other than what it was interpreted to mean by the original designations and interpretations given at the time of its writing.

Likewise, Hans K. LaRondelle is too one-sided in his approach when he declares that the prophecies in Ezekiel 36:24 – 33 and 37:22 – 26.

¹¹ See Bernard F. Batto, “The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 187 – 211. The “Covenant of Peace” centers on three prophetic texts: Isaiah 54:10; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26. Numbers 25:12 uses the same expression, but it should not be considered with the above three texts. For similarities in content, see Hosea 2:18 – 25 and Leviticus 26:3 – 13.

“... stress that God’s central concern with Israel is her restoration, not as a secular, political state, but as a united theocracy, a spiritually cleansed and truly worshiping people of God. Ezekiel’s focus in his restoration promises is not primarily on Israel’s return to her homeland, but on her return to Yahweh.”

There is no question that the promises made in the Old Testament were meant to include all who believed in all ages and among all peoples, not just the believing in the nation of Israel. That is what we have strenuously argued for in our Promise Theology. Nor do we doubt that it was always a matter of how the heart was related to God that was a central concern in both testaments. But this in no way detracted from the holistic view of redemption that included the material side of the promise of God in the covenants. In this way, Israel acted as God’s sign that all the nations, indeed, in all times, and that all physical things belonged to God as well as those that were of a spiritual nature.

LaRondelle urges us to use the New Testament and Christ as the “true interpreter” of Old Testament prophecies rather than “seeking our own independent solution” to these texts. Based on Matthew’s word from Jesus that the meek would inherit the earth, he boldly goes on to apply “Israel’s territorial inheritance to the Church by enlarging the original promise of Palestine to include the whole earth made new.”¹²

But such advice seems to forget that the same Lord gave the Old Testament revelation and attached his own divine interpretations to the original words of prophecy. To act otherwise is to set up a supra-sessionist model of interpreting the Bible in which the later passages not only supplement the previous ones (which is correct), but they also supercede what had been given in olden times, even when there were no indications of a built-in obsolescence in the Old Testament. This is dangerous. It leads

¹²Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Israel of God in Prophecy,” 138.

to a canon within a canon and a *tendency* towards a Marcionite approach to hermeneutics, especially in the realm of eschatology.

On the contrary, God is not finished either with the physical side of creation or any other aspects of his holistic view of persons and things. He will conclude his work in history just as he said he would in order to show that he is Lord of all history, persons, and nations. This will not entail a dualism in which he designates Israel as a separate people or that he has a dual purpose for history that involves an earthly as well as a heavenly calling. Promise Theology¹³ holds that God has One “People of God” ever (yet with many discernable and distinguishable *aspects*), and he has one *program* of the “kingdom of God” forever (even though we may isolate several *aspects*) in that single program of the kingdom of God.

As a tribute to the grace of God, the Lord of all history will bring Israel back to the land he originally promised to them as far back in time as the days of the patriarchs. Nothing in Israel will merit this action nor will it indicate a form of partiality or chauvinism by God. It will only signal that God is able to complete in space and time what he had pledged. It will also indicate that he is sovereign over the nations of the world, over the physical aspects of the universe, just as he is sovereign in sending his Messiah and providing redemption for all the families of the earth. Holistically, the promises that appear in the same Abrahamic-Davidic cannot be separated, divided, or interpreted independently so as to contrast with each other.

¹³ See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Toward Old Testament Theology” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) for an early discussion of Promise Theology. This volume is now in its 27th printing. Also see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Christian and the ‘Old’ Testament” (Pasadena, California: William Carey Press, 2000) for a more popular, but more recent discussion of the features of Promise Theology. It is neither dispensational or Covenantal in its approach, though it shares features with both in so far as biblical support can be found to substantiate the various features.

The promise of (1) the Seed, (2) the land, and (3) the gospel that in that seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2 – 3; etc, Galatians 3:8) was all of one piece, one promise-plan, and in concert and continuity with both testaments.

* * * * *

“Is there not a striking discontinuity in the traditional view between the price that Christ paid for the believer’s sin and the price that the unbeliever pays for his own sin? (see “Areopagus Journal” below).

* * * * *

Concerning the preterist interpretation of the events of 70 A.D: “Let me say it emphatically for the sake of those who are confused on the point (and to the amusement, no doubt, of those who are not): the second coming has not yet occurred.” (N.T. Wright, “Surprised by Hope,” 127).

* * * * *

ADVENT CHRISTIANS AND THE ESCHATOLOGY OF N.T. WRIGHT

Floyd L. McIntyre

N.T. Wright, formerly cannon theologian of Westminster Abbey, is currently Bishop of Durham, England. He is considered one of the foremost New Testament scholars of our time. Wright, an Anglican, is conservative in his theology and has gained a reputation of staunchly defending the historicity of Jesus and the gospels. He has written many books and given lectures in colleges, seminaries and other venues both in England and in America.

Sometimes known as “Tom” Wright, he is an engaging speaker and author. A serious scholar, Wright is extremely easy to read and even more captivating as a speaker. His winsome way, dry British humor, and ability to communicate complex theological issues in a clear fashion make him a very popular personality.

Many Advent Christians have taken on a great interest in the writings of Wright. This is due primarily to the idea that somehow, Wright has come to embrace a doctrinal position that appears to be congruent with the doctrinal distinctives of the Advent Christian Church. His emphasis on the resurrection of the Christian as the real “Christian hope” as opposed to “going to heaven when you die” has caused many in the Advent Christian Church to embrace him as an ally in putting forth this biblical doctrine.

I first encountered the writings of N.T. Wright when I purchased one of his books to satisfy a book club obligation. The book: “What Saint Paul Really Said; Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?” A few pages into chapter two, I came to this statement.

“Jews like Saul of Tarsus were not interested in an abstract, timeless, ahistorical system of salvation. They were not even primarily interested in, as we say today, ‘going to heaven when they died.’ (They believed in the resurrection, in which God would raise them all to share in the life of the promised renewed Israel and renewed world; but that is very different from the normal Western vision of ‘heaven.’) They were interested in the salvation which, they believed, the one true God had promised to his people Israel” (33).

All by itself, statements like this tend to give rise to excitement in Advent Christian circles. At first reading I was captivated by the notion that someone of N.T. Wright’s theological stature would see personal eschatological matters from this perspective. In many of his writings, some of which we will mention further on, the same point of view is put forth. One might easily get the impression that Wright is really troubled by the traditional view of “going to heaven when you die” as opposed to resurrection being the true hope of the Christian. You would be right.

However, the book itself is not without controversy. Because of his knowledge of second-Temple Judaism, and his position regarding Paul’s theology, Wright is considered one of the advocates of what has been called “The New Perspective on Paul.” Serious questions have arisen regarding his understanding of the doctrine of justification. Much has been written on this matter particularly by Reformed scholars such as John Piper. After much theological turmoil, Piper came forth with his own response to Wright with his “The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright,” which has been followed up by Wright’s own response to Piper titled, “Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision.”

Wright’s understanding of justification, is subject matter for another essay. Anyone who is seriously interested in the

doctrine of justification as understood by N. T. Wright needs to read all of these volumes. It is not possible to give a full review of these significant books in this essay. Furthermore, the main purpose of this essay is to discuss points of Wright's theology that are of special interest to Advent Christians.

Not long after reading "What Saint Paul Really Said," I came upon a much smaller work, only 24 pages in length. "New Heavens, New Earth; The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope" is a small work and one of the Grove Biblical Series, a British publication. In this little booklet, Wright once again addresses the issue of Christian hope. The opening paragraph in chapter two reads thus:

"Jesus and the writers of the New Testament have very little to say about 'going to heaven when you die.' When I point this out to my students, as I do from time to time, they look shocked. Why? Very often, people have come to the New Testament with the presumption that 'going to heaven when you die' is the implicit point of it all, of Christianity and indeed of all religion. They acquire that viewpoint from somewhere, but not from the New Testament. But when they then read the New Testament, they think they find it there ... " (6).

As I noted earlier, statements like this can surely excite Advent Christians! However, a careful reading of the ideas put forth by Wright, will show his ideas to differ significantly from what traditional Adventists have believed. These differences are revealed in his treatment of the "intermediate state." Wright's understanding of the state of the dead and of paradise are closely woven together. These ideas are not made all that clear in the small booklet. One needs to read Wright more widely in order to fully grasp what he really believes and teaches on the subject.

Needless to say, Wright is correct in regards to the significance of the resurrection, both the historical/bodily resurrection of Jesus and that future resurrection promised to all believers.

Wright has authored a major three volume series titled, “Christian Origins and the Question of God.” They come to us in this order: “The New Testament and the People of God,” followed by “Jesus and the Victory of God,” and by “The Resurrection of the Son of God.” Since Advent Christians, are “resurrection people,” it is the final volume of the series that is of most interest.

Wright does a masterful job in treating the whole concept of resurrection. The work is a tome of more than 700 pages and discusses the topic of resurrection from historical, religious, philosophical and biblical perspectives. The work is a comprehensive treatment of the subject with a powerful testimony to the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus. Regardless of what other ideas Wright may advocate, this volume is a “must read” for serious students desiring to plumb the depths of resurrection theology!

Once again, in spite of Wright’s strong arguments for the resurrection of Jesus and of the believer, Advent Christians need to be aware that he does not walk in complete harmony with them in regards to the nature of the intermediate state. His own words say it best.

“What does Paul have to say about an intermediate state? Like other second-Temple Jews who believed in resurrection, Paul is left with an interval between bodily death and bodily resurrection, and this passage provides his fullest description of it. To begin with, he uses the regular image of falling asleep for death, enabling him to speak of people who are currently asleep but who will one day wake up again, and to do so with the echoes of Daniel 12:2, which as we say was one of the primary biblical passages on the subject. Three times, in 4:13, 14 and 15, Paul uses

this language, employing it also in a different sense in 5:6 – 10 (see below). *This has led some interpreters to speak of the ‘sleep of the soul’, a time of unconscious post-mortem existence prior to the reawakening of resurrection. But this is almost certainly misleading — another case of people picking up a vivid Pauline metaphor and running down the street waving it about* (emphasis mine).

“For a start, though Paul can refer to the ‘soul’ (*psyche*) among other anthropological terms, it is noticeable that he does not employ this term when referring to the intermediate state — unlike, say, the Wisdom of Solomon, and indeed Revelation. In fact, if we were speaking strictly, we should say that it is the body that ‘sleeps’ between death and resurrection; *but in all probability Paul is using the language of sleeping and waking simply as a way of contrasting a state of temporary inactivity, not necessarily unconsciousness* (again, emphasis mine) with a subsequent one of renewed activity (see footnote 14 below). The other references to the presently dead in this passage refer to them as ‘the dead in the Messiah’ (4:16), and as people who, though having fallen asleep, continue (and will continue) to live with him’ (5:10), to be ‘with Jesus’ (4:14), or ‘with the lord’ (4:17). That is the paradox and tension inherent in belonging to the risen Messiah on the one hand and being bodily dead, and not yet raised, on the other.

“Had Paul supposed this state to be unconscious, I do not think he would have written 2 Corinthians 5:8 or Philippians 1:23.”

All this is background and foundational to understanding some of the language in Wright’s popular book, “Surprised

by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church.” One phrase that occurs numerous times in Wright is “life after ‘life after death.’” Although somewhat confusing at first, careful thinking will result in understanding something about Wright’s position regarding the intermediate state.

In “Surprised by Hope,” under the heading PARADISE, he states:

“I therefore arrive, fourth, at this view; that all the Christians departed are in substantially the same state, that of restful happiness. *Though this is sometimes described as sleep, we shouldn’t take this to mean that it is a state of unconsciousness* (emphasis mine). Had Paul thought that, I very much doubt that he would have described life immediately after death as ‘being with Christ, which is far better.’ Rather sleep here means that the body is ‘asleep’ in the sense of ‘dead,’ while the real person — however we want to describe him or her — continues.

“This state is not, clearly, the final destiny for which the Christian dead are bound, which is, as we have seen, the bodily resurrection. But it is a state in which *the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Jesus Christ* (emphasis mine) while they await that day. There is no reason why this state should not be called heaven, though we must note once more how interesting it is that the New Testament routinely doesn’t call it that and uses the word heaven in other ways” (171 – 172).

Wright holds to the conscious intermediate state. Does he also believe in the “immortality of the soul”? That is a doctrine certainly not congruent with Advent Christian thought! This,

of course, raises the issue of what Wright believes about the final destiny of the wicked or the nature of hell. What he actually believes is not easily determined for he says little about it. Nevertheless, in his book, "Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship," he devotes an entire chapter to the subject of hell. It would appear that Wright does not hold the traditional view of eternal torment or conscious punishing. Rather, he uses terminology quite unfamiliar to define "hell." Again, in his own words:

"... most of the passages in the New Testament which have been thought by the Church to refer to people going into eternal punishment after they die don't in fact refer to any such thing. The great majority of them have to do with the way God acts within the world and history. Most of them look back to language and ideas in the Old Testament, which work in quite a different way from that which is normally imagined."

Further on he states:

"So from these two points — the danger of our wanting to send people to hell, and the fact that most of the New Testament warnings aren't about that anyway — we may already deduce that there is some serious rethinking to be done, for which, of course, we don't have the space within the confines of a single chapter in a book which is really about something else" (93).

Yet a careful reading of what he does say, in unfamiliar language and ideas, perhaps shows us what he really does believe about hell. He believes that the future plan of God involves the marriage of heaven and earth. One of his favorite lines comes from the well-known hymn, "This Is My Father's World,"

of which the last phrase of the last verse reads; “Jesus who died shall be satisfied, And earth and heav’n be one.” This is Wright’s view of eternity. However, he also believes that there is another marriage, brought forth from the courtship of idolatry, the marriage of hell and earth! He states:

“As Christians, we look for the marriage of heaven and earth, not their separation; and in that light we must look with Christian realism at the possibility of a different, and disastrous, marriage, which has become all too real a possibility in our own day; a marriage of hell and earth. That is what Jesus warned about in his own day. We can do no less in our own” (96).

Further he believes that those who continue to persist in this idolatrous marriage will in one way or another become inhuman.

“I see nothing in the New Testament to make me reject the possibility that some, perhaps many, of God’s human creatures do choose and will choose, to dehumanize themselves completely. Nor do I see anything to make me suppose that God, who gave his human creatures the risky gift of freedom and choice, will not honor that choice, albeit through the deep sorrow and sense of loss that any God we can truly imagine must carry at his heart, a sorrow lived out fully on Calvary. This I think, is the way in which something like the traditional doctrine of hell can be restated in the present day” (95 – 96).

Although Wright would be seen theologically by some as in the “Reformed camp” his statement regarding “the risky gift of freedom and choice” places his position somewhere outside the traditional doctrine of election. This would figure into

his understanding of the eternal destiny of the unbeliever as a matter of personal choice.

There remains for Advent Christians one more and very important area in which Wright offers a different perspective, that being the nature of the Second Coming of Jesus. Wright gives us a detailed explanation of his view of “the second coming.” In his book “Surprised by Hope” he devotes three chapters to the subject. It is impossible to adequately restate in an essay of this length the entire understanding of Wright on the subject. A few selected quotations which hopefully will suffice to show that his understanding differs considerably from the traditional view of the Lord’s personal, visible, bodily return. Yet, having said that, it also needs to be made clear that Wright would not deny the presence of Jesus in the New Heavens and New Earth. His emphasis on the “presence” (Greek *parousia*) of Jesus and how it will occur is basic and most significant in his thinking and reveals where the differences lie.

In the chapter *When He Appears* we read:

“The first thing to get clear is that, despite widespread opinion to the contrary, during his earthly ministry Jesus said nothing about his return. I have argued this position at length and in detail in my various books about Jesus and don’t have space to substantiate it here. Let me just say two things, quite baldly (125).

“First, when Jesus speaks of ‘the son of man coming on the clouds,’ he is talking not about the second coming, but in line with the Daniel 7 text he is quoting, about his vindication after suffering. The ‘coming’ is an upward, not a downward, movement. In context, the key texts mean that though Jesus is going to his death, he will be vindicated by events that will take place afterward” (125).

His second point deals with the stories that Jesus told about a king or master who goes away and promises to return. He states: “The stories are, in that sense, not about the second coming of Jesus but about the first one” (126).

Wright also deals with many of the Pauline passages that are traditionally interpreted as teaching about the second coming. Wright takes issue with the popular notion of a supposed rapture. Although most Advent Christians would applaud his stance on this along with his negative view of popular dispensational theology such as underlies the “Left Behind” series, his alternative interpretation also differs significantly from the traditional Adventist position. In sum, Wright’s view of the “second coming” is interwoven with his view of the coming together of heaven and earth:

Discussing Colossians 3 regarding the appearing of the Messiah, Wright states:

“This is clearly in the same ballpark as the other texts we’ve been looking at. But notice the key thing: that instead of ‘coming,’ or the blessed word *parousia*, Paul here uses the word *appear*. It’s the same thing from a different angle, and this helps us to demystify the idea that the ‘coming’ of Jesus means that he will descend like a spaceman from the sky. Jesus is at present in heaven. But, as we saw earlier, heaven, being God’s space, is not somewhere within the space of our world, but is rather a different though closely related space. The promise is not that Jesus will simply reappear within the present world order, but that when heaven and earth are jointed together in the new way God has promised, then he will appear to us — and we will appear to him, and to one another in our own true identity” (135).

Advent Christians need to take N. T. Wright seriously. Although his phraseology is compatible with traditional Adventist views, significant eschatological differences exist. Advent Christians would do well to make an effort to understand fully his points of view. Perhaps it is time for Advent Christians to carefully review our own position relative to these things.

Read N. T. Wright with an open mind and heart. He has much to offer that is helpful. Regardless of these differences in understanding between Wright and classic Adventist thinking, N. T. Wright is a champion in defending the resurrection of Jesus and the real biblical hope of the believer. For that we can be grateful!

ADVENTIST HERITAGE REVIEW

A PASSIONATE ADVENTIST

David W. Davis

I was born to Ralph Jr. and Phyllis Davis into a family with generations of Advent Christian heritage. My maternal grandparents (Riley and Elmira Alley) were Advent Christians as were their parents. My paternal grandparents (Ralph Sr. and Velma Davis) were split. My father's father was raised an Advent Christian as was his mother and as were her parents. When my great-grandmother married a second time, my step-grandfather and his parents were Advent Christians. However, my father's mother was Reformed Baptist (now part of the Wesleyan Church).

My ancestors helped establish the Alley's Bay and Beals Advent Christian Churches, both in Beals, Maine (an island township along the north-eastern part of the coast). However, because I spent a great amount of time with my paternal grandparents as I was growing-up, I was influenced in my early years mainly through the Alley's Bay Wesleyan Mission and the Beals Wesleyan Church. Sometimes, however, I went with my mother to "her church," either at the Alley's Bay Advent Christian Church or the Beals Advent Christian Church.

Please note that Beals was unique in that it had two Advent Christian Churches in the township. The Alley's Bay Advent Christian Church building was constructed first from an old school house in the late 1800s or very early 1900s, and the Beals Advent Christian Church building was constructed in the early 1900s about two miles away. Alley's Bay is on Great Wass Island and Beals is an island, so the two islands make-up the municipality of Beals, Maine. When there was no bridge to the mainland and no cars, the Advent Christians in Alley's Bay

would meet in the mornings at the little chapel and then walk at night over to Beals for the evening worship service. They would also hold their own prayer meetings separately. This tradition continued even for me throughout high school and college in the 1980s.

A bridge was built in the 1950s and there is a plethora of cars on the island. Needless to say, in the mid-1990s, services at the Alley's Bay chapel were suspended and the Advent Christian work is now carried on by the Beals Advent Christian Church, though some of us continue to meet irregularly for monthly services at the Alley's Bay Advent Christian Church facility.

I came to believe in conditional immortality by a direct challenge by Pastor Gary Havener of the Beals Advent Christian Church. I started attending some of the Advent Christian youth activities when I was in high school. There were times when we would discuss matters of eschatology, and one day as I was railing on about dying and going to heaven, Pastor Gary challenged me as to how biblical that thought was. He asked me to read through the Bible and see what it said about death and the afterlife. At first, my teenage mind rejected this idea as silly, but I did finally make the attempt and I read through the Bible. I was struck by the many places where death was described as "sleep" and of being awakened through "resurrection" as well as the "destruction" of the wicked. I became convinced of the truth of this doctrine as a result of reading the Bible through.

Of course there were other influencing factors — I would spend extended times in conversation with my father's brother, "Uncle Danny," as well as with my father's great-grandmother, "Grammie Nora," both devout Advent Christians and believers in conditional immortality. I would also visit other Advent Christians around Alley's Bay and engage them in discussions — Myrtle and Ernest Libby Jr. and Isaac and Eulala Seavey are two examples. I would also read publications about conditional immortality, which also helped me learn how to "think" about the message of the Scriptures.

Conditional immortality matters greatly to me as I believe it is the “key” to unlocking the truth and message of Scripture. Namely, that God gave humanity a “choice” about living or dying. Genesis 2:16 – 17 is the first record of such,

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Before the first couple’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden God said,

“Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” — therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

Again Moses emphasized in Deuteronomy 30:19 – 20,

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

There are many other examples in the poetic books and the writings of the prophets, but of course, the focus of this article is not to be comprehensive in a survey of the entire Old

Testament, but instead to answer why conditional immorality matters to me. Nevertheless, I do want to point out some of the things that Jesus said in the New Testament. Is there any greater example of conditional immortality than John 3:16 – 17? Jesus beautifully lays out the choice God gives concerning life or death, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” In John 11:25 – 26 Jesus is comforting Martha over the loss of Lazarus who had died. In the face of death and seemingly human hopelessness at the loss of life our Lord declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” He makes a similar declaration in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” In the Revelation Jesus says, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (verse 18). Of course, the themes of resurrection and eternal life through Jesus Christ, “the Lamb,” are two of the important themes of this “revelation of Jesus,” especially in chapters 20 – 22.

After surveying the above references, one can see the truth and message of Scripture is that if we love and follow God by turning to him through Jesus in faith and repentance, we will see life, living forever with God. If we persist in sin and in going our own way, we will not see life, but will perish. Knowing this message and this truth shows us who we are (mortal creatures of an immortal God). We come to understand the dire straits of humanity in which it found itself after the wrong choice in Eden, and why it was necessary for God incarnate, Jesus Christ, to “die in our place” and to be “raised to life as the first fruits from the dead.” We can further understand why death is such a part of life, and why there is such grief and pain at the loss of a loved one. For if Jesus did not hold the “keys of Hades and of

Death” there would truly be no hope for humanity’s rescue from the enemy, death. Finally, we see that even though cemeteries are eerie in their silence, they are still beds of great hope for those resting there that are “sleeping in Jesus.”

It is my firmly held belief in conditional immortality that causes me to hold tenaciously to my Savior, Jesus, to the Advent Christian faith and to give my life in Christian service for its promotion and advancement. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:1, I serve in ministry by the “will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.”

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CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY REVIEW

The complete September/October 2008 issue of “Areopagus Journal: the Journal of the Apologetics Resource Center” (except for four pages about an archaeological find and three of book reviews) is devoted to “hell.” Two-thirds of the cover depicts a raging inferno. It elicited the following response from a reader and a reply by one of the authors (January/February 2009, 8 – 9).

Dear Editor:

Three observations on your recent issue on hell:

1. Mr. Clendenen in his description of conditional immortality says, “God only raises the dead who have followed him and ... he punishes unbelievers by just leaving them as they are, dead and gone, no longer existing.” He attributes this view to Edward Fudge. Doubtless there are people who hold this view, but Fudge does not, and neither does any of the evangelical conditionalists whom you cite — Stott, Wenham, Pinnock, Hughes. They all believe in the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers.

Conditionalists “look for the resurrection of all men, followed by a just sentence according to the deserts of each, which will mean anguish (but not unending torment) for those outside Christ, finally terminating in the second death” (John Wenham, “The Goodness of God,” 34 – 35).

2. You refer to “a small number of respected evangelical theologians who struggle with the philosophical dilemma over the fairness of a loving God who would establish an eternal state of horrific punishment for people who are far less hideous and deserving than Hitler or Stalin” (4). True enough, but one might infer from this statement that advocates of conditionalism begin with this “secular sentimentalism” (Packer). With the exception of Pinnock, they begin with the exegesis of Scripture, including “the vocabulary of destruction.” As Wenham states, “The nub of the whole debate is the question of the natural meaning of the texts” (*The Case for Conditional Immortality*, in “Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell,” ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, 181). Packer eventually acknowledged this point. Concerning Stott and Wenham, he says, “Both men adopted annihilationism, in which they may be wrong, but they embraced it for the right reason — not because it fitted into their comfort zone, though it did, but because they thought they found it in the Bible” (“Reformation & Revival Journal” 62 (1997), 43; [documentation omitted in the original by oversight]).

3. Is there not a striking discontinuity in the traditional view between the price that Christ paid for the believer’s sin and the price that the unbeliever pays for his own sin? Traditionalists and Conditionalists believe firmly in substitutionary atonement — “Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said” (1 Corinthians 15:3 – 4). Christ’s literal physical death was prefigured in the Levitical sacrificial system in which the animals were killed, not tortured. But the unbeliever according to the traditional view pays a very different

penalty. I have not found an explanation of this point in Packer, Peterson, the “Areopagus Journal,” et al.

Freeman Barton Via email

Dr. [E. Ray] Clendenen responds to Mr. Barton below. The numbered points correspond to those in Mr. Barton’s letter. — Editor.

Dear Reader:

1. My words, which Mr. Barton quotes here from my introductory paragraph, are intended to express my understanding of the essence of “conditional immortality,” that sinful man is bound for destruction unless God grants immortality. I did not intend to say that Fudge and other annihilationists necessarily deny a resurrection of unbelievers for judgment prior to final destruction. But I admit that I should have written more carefully.

2. This quote is not from my article but from the introductory article by Craig Branch. However, although it is always difficult at best to correctly discern why someone does or believes something, Branch’s words may be supported by this statement from Stott: “Emotionally, I find the concept [of a literal hell] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain” (cf. D. L. Edwards and J. R. W. Stott, “Evangelical Essentials,” 314). John Wenham also wrote, “Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice. ... It is a doctrine that makes the Inquisition look reasonable” (“Facing Hell: An Autobiography,” 254). I don’t know where Mr. Barton’s Packer quote comes from, but in “Evangelical Affirmations” (ed. K. S. Kantzer and C. F. H. Henry, p. 117) Packer wrote regard-

ing conditionalists’ “assumption of superior sensitivity”: “The feelings that make people want conditionalism to be true seem to me to reflect, not superior spiritual sensitivity, but secular sentimentalism.”

3. This is an excellent question, and one I have pondered a lot. My conclusion is that the animal sacrifices only hinted at the price required for sin, just as the bread and cup of communion only hint at the price Jesus paid. I think the nature of Jesus’ work at the cross is the profoundest mystery of the Christian faith, more so even than the incarnation. If we base our understanding of the penalty for sin on the experience of animals in the temple or even of what we see of Jesus on the day of his death, as horrible as that is before our eyes (cf. the movie “The Passion”), we only scratch the surface of the truth. For me the spade that uncovers a bit of the depths of Christ’s payment for my sin is the Bible’s teaching on God’s wrath and judgment against sin. The “cup” that caused Jesus such sorrow, deep distress, anguish, and horror in the Garden (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33; Luke 22:44) was not the cup of death but the cup of divine curse and wrath (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17 – 23; Jeremiah 25:15 – 16; Ezekiel 23:31 – 35; Habakkuk 2:16; Revelation 14:10 – 11). Only because Jesus is the infinite, eternal divine Son could he suffer such horrible eternal wrath for me, yet rise in three days.

* * * * *

BOOKS

1. New Books by Advent Christian Authors.

The last two years have been good for publications by Advent Christians. The five books reviewed below are all initiated, written and financed outside the denominational machin-

ery. Three are by Advent Christian pastors, one by the Berkshire Professor of Advent Christian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and one by the President of Family Builders Ministry. They are reviewed by the editor.

► **Isaac**

“Left Behind Or Left Befuddled: The Subtle Dangers of Popularizing the End Times,” by Gordon L. Isaac. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2008. vii, 160 p.; 10.72+ pb.

Okay, let’s get our prejudices out into the open, then see if the content of the book has any impact on them. An Advent Christian author published by a Catholic publisher and the one blurb on the back cover is by a Catholic scholar? Wonders never do cease! The fundamentalism of the “Left Behind” genre — and most Advent Christians — regards the papacy as evil. Add a large element of preterism in the interpretation of Revelation and a de-apocalypticizing of the New Testament, and the book is doubly suspect. The author will have to be especially persuasive to gain a hearing among ACs to say nothing of dispensationalists.

Let me express my regard for the book at the beginning lest my appreciation be missed in the details to follow. This is a good book well researched and written. A number of reviews are available online including several on Amazon.com. All of them are positive including one by Scot McKnight, a noted scholar. (I assume dispensational responses are forthcoming.) If I were teaching eschatology again, this book would be required reading. I reserve the right to raise a question or two.

The first chapter, “What’s All the Fuss About?” details the phenomenal success of the “Left Behind” series, which has made its authors and the publisher major players in evangelical publishing. Isaac cites several critics. Os Guinness, for example, calls the series “junk food for the soul” (9). As Isaac says, “Left Behind at its most basic rejects the very idea of open, demo-

cratic debate” (17). Then he speculates about why the series and its off shoots (a political series, a military series, the kids series, software programs, The Prophecy Club, etc.) are so popular.

The second chapter, “The Rise of Dispensationalism,” is a quick survey of the history of prophetic interpretation. It notes that millennialists and non-millennialists have existed in the church from the beginning, one or the other tending to predominate. Isaac suggests that the shift from millennialism to the non-millennialism in the fourth and fifth centuries “may have been due as much to the withdrawal of direct persecution as much as the arguments of authors such as Origen” (30), an important point for those of us who are not millennialist to reckon with (the syntax is a bit awkward).

Of the 25 pages in this chapter, three and a half are devoted to William Miller and five to John Nelson Darby. Other significant people and events are: C.I. Scofield and his study Bible, two World Wars, Hiroshima, the state of Israel established in 1948, and the Israeli capture of Jerusalem in 1967. The essential characteristics of dispensationalism are literal interpretation, a firm distinction between Israel and the Church, and the parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel 9. “Dispensationalism as a form of fundamentalism has a distinct profile well-suited to the American landscape” (50). Chapter 3 deals with the basic distinctive of the “Left Behind” theology, “The Secret Rapture of the Church.” 1 Thessalonians 4 is the basic rapture passage, and there Christ’s coming is conspicuously public.

For some of us, chapter 4 will be of greatest interest: *Israel: God’s People or God’s Timeclock?* The whole dispensational prophetic scheme (long parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week in Daniel 9, personal Antichrist, seven-year tribulation, pretrib rapture, rebuilt temple, etc.) depends upon the distinction between Israel and the church and the continuing relevance of Israel for prophecy. Israel is so important for prophecy that evangelical Christians in America have become one of the foremost supporters of Israel, including sup-

port for radical attempts to destroy the Dome of the Rock and replace it with a rebuilt Temple. As Isaac points out, that would have disastrous consequences for international relations.

Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 11 are key passages in the dispensational scheme. Ezekiel 37 describes a valley full of dry bones which come to life. “These bones are the whole house of Israel” (37:11). Isaiah states, “In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people” (11:11). The dispensationalist insists that this imagery was not fulfilled until the twentieth century in connection with Zionism, the new state of Israel (1948), the capture of Jerusalem (1967), etc. Isaac insists that these prophecies were fulfilled in the returned from Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

The author devotes eight pages to Matthew 24. There Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple, which occurred in 70 A.D., symbolically ending the old covenant, that is, the end of the age about which the disciples asked. “... the destruction of the Temple could only mean one thing: the end of the age. This is not the same as the end of the world” (88). Isaac cites Gary DeMar and N.T. Wright in favor of the view that Matthew 24 is fulfilled by the end of 70 A.D., a preterist position.

Two options are presented concerning Israel. Israel has a dominant place in the fulfillment of prophecy today, as the dispensationalist maintains. Or national Israel has been replaced by the Christian church since Christ’s death on the cross and has no further prophetic significance (generally the Reformed position). Several Advent Christian scholars choose a third option not mentioned here — the Church is the people of God, but the promises to ethnic Israel will still be fulfilled, without all the claptrap of dispensational theology. (See elsewhere in this issue for proponents of this option.)

In the next chapter, Isaac deals with “the subtle dangers of end times teaching.” Each element in the following description has ethical implications. Dispensationalists are overly preoccupied with prophecy. They have a “millennial mindset, which tends toward insider information, conspiracy theories,

and a very particular way of interpreting the world.” They use fear as motivation to convert and behave, have a pessimistic outlook on social progress, and label groups of people. According to its apocalyptic vision, prophecy is history written in advance. It has an intense sense of the importance and eminence of Christ’s coming.

This description fits at many points the denomination which Dr. Isaac represents. It would be interesting to have him compare the two apocalyptic groups. I wonder how many sermons I heard as a youth at White River campmeeting urging us to come to the altar tonight because Christ might come before morning. And exclamations of disgust at the moral level of our society are endemic among evangelicals. (“It is always the worst that it has ever been.”)

The biggest practical effect of dispensationalism may be its political activity. It supports Israel absolutely, including frequently contributions to radical Jewish groups who intend to replace the Dome of the Rock with a new Temple and to reinstitute the Old Testament sacrificial system. (This does not describe Advent Christians!) They oppose making concessions to the Arabs.

Recapturing the Christian Imagination (chapter 5) and *A Concluding Word* may be the most original and helpful parts of the book. Isaac presents as good a summary of the interpretive approaches to Revelation (130 – 138) as I have seen. One question is “apocalyptic or apocalypticism?” Revelation is apocalyptic. Interpreted as such, it gives “words of encouragement by which the believers are to overcome” the evil pressures of the Roman world. Interpreted literally it becomes an unconvincing description of modern times. “Preference for reading Revelation as history written in advance has caused Left Behind Christians to discard imagination and to disengage with messy real-life efforts to make things better in the Middle East” (142). It seems to me that dispensationalism is plenty imaginative, but its conclusions do not fit the literary genre which Revelation represents.

Isaac concludes with a classic summary of the “Left Behind” mentality with its particular “world to inhabit” and “language to be spoken” (149 – 154).

A reviewer can usually find a nit-picking slip or two, especially when a work is produced under extreme time pressures, as this one was. Isaac thrice mislocates Nehemiah, and the third time includes Ezra, as the leader of the return from Babylon in 535 B.C. (79 – 80, 114). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem for the first time in 444 BC and Ezra a quarter century earlier — long after the initial return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple. “... all eyes were riveted upon the Middle East in 1967 as the Six-Day War brought Jerusalem, with its temple precinct, into Jewish hands for the first time since the Babylonian captivity” (75). Jerusalem was in Jewish hands after they returned from Babylon circa 535 BC until its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD.

A weightier issue arises from the adoption of Gary DeMar’s preterist contention that “all the signs spoken of in Matthew 24 were fulfilled in the first century” (89). A student once described me as a neo-preterist because I put the fulfillment of so much of this chapter in the first century. To put it all there, however, is an exercise in extreme deapocalypticizing.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (14).

“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (26 – 27).

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the

clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (30).

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (42).

All of these prophecies have been fulfilled?

* * * * *

► **Hathaway**

“A Legacy of Faith: A Fresh Look at Blessing, Morality, Self-worth, And Mentorship,” by Rick Hathaway. Mustang, Oklahoma: Tate Publishing, 2007. (249 p. pb; 6.99+ Amazon) Reviewed by the staff.

“This was initially intended to introduce ... [the author’s] children to a grandfather they had never known. ... I decided to write this account as a formal thank you to him.” The author’s wife also “deserves a very special thank you and acknowledgment of her value” to the author. The book is a potpourri of autobiographical episodes, social observations, scriptural applications, and sage advice. It is not a literary or psychological masterpiece, but it is a warm, heart-touching expression from an experienced pastor writing from the depths of his own experience and concern.

This work immediately struck a chord with me with its description in the first chapter of a large poor family with a pious hard-working father (the difference being that Rick was deprived of his father when the latter was 54 while I am still learning from my father who is 96). Rick states, “I was proud of my father, not for what he achieved in life, but for what he achieved in spite of life” (25). I like that. We, too, had no indoor plumbing until I was in high school, and I too often felt at school that I was an outsider.

The book is structured around four “lies” that our culture tells us regularly, with three or four chapters devoted to each. The four lies: 1. Blessing means having. 2. Morality is relative. 3. Life has no value. 4. Males are meaningless. Men, you may want to fast-forward to this last one. Rick is expert at illustrating his homilies from Scripture, his own life, and current events. He writes “with the same conviction that Jeremiah had to release the ‘fire shut up in his bones.’ ... with that passion I hope to stimulate the reader’s thinking” (16).

You would do well this evening to put aside the pen and notepad that you were using while reading Dr. Isaac’s book, sit back, relax and enjoy the end of the day with Rick.

* * * * *

► **Blackstone**

“Meet Me for Breakfast,” by Clayton Blackstone. Charlotte, N.C.: Henceforth ... Publications, 2009. Ca. 174 p. \$15.00 pb.

Some of you are acquainted with Clayton Blackstone’s *Sunday Musings* in a series called “Meet Me for Breakfast.” The title suggests an invitation to join a friend for a meal and for relaxed but substantive conversation. Clayton characteristically bares his soul, revealing himself more openly than most of us are willing to do. He deals with basic human needs and failings — anger, lethargy, depression, compulsiveness, presumption, disappointment, miracles, tragedy. The autobiographical beginning and the deliberations based on Scripture and history lead to a universal application. As I participate in the conversation (i.e., read this week’s *Musing*), my mind is roused and I am often moved to shout “amen” or to discover a lump in the throat. I sometimes hear the prophet Nathan say, “Thou art the man.”

Knowing the quality of the musings, the “Henceforth ...” board requested permission to print 52 of them in book form. Pastor Blackstone has edited them. Here are a few samples.

One minute I was thinking about shrubs and flowers, hammocks and fire pits, a canopy of stars and quiet conversation and the next, my soul's autumn. An autumn that brings with it the dropping of leaves to expose things hidden behind lush foliage. And I knew in that moment just how much my soul needed the cyclical coming of fall. ... But my soul needs autumn at least as much as it needs summer. My soul needs the dropping of activity and pretense to expose the me who hides behind the me others see.

Ken pulled the pin and lobbed the verbal grenade in the direction of my feet. "Clayton, I thought you were doing better with your anger, but it seems as if you're drifting backwards." My friend's words exploded in some subterranean cavern of my soul, shattering the fragile truce I had signed with my illusion.

When I began this journey, I imagined that pastoral work was mostly great sermons, cutting edge programming, and building projects without end. More than three decades later, I sense the rightness of John of the Cross's observation that "It is a common matter of observation that, so far as we can judge here below; the better is the life of the preacher, the greater fruit he bears, however small his rhetoric and however ordinary his instruction. For it is the warmth that comes from the living spirit that clings; whereas the other kind of preacher will produce very little profit, however sublime be his style and his instruction."

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► **Alves**

"We Are the Sons of God — So What? Believe God about Who You Really Are," by David C. Alves. Bloomington Ind.: iUniverse, 2009. 185 p. \$14.39+ pb.

Prince or pauper? Believers in Christ are children of God, and far from being beggars, they should live and act like royalty.

This book was birthed out of two desires and an act of obedience. The author desires to love Christ and to see God's will realized in the church. He also believes that he has been given insight that God wants shared and that he is called to share it. In the author's own words,

“My sincere desire is that in the reading of this book alongside your Bible, God will reveal his will for your life. He will show you what he desperately wants you to know and that you will begin to see, and walk as a son. And you will not only experience the joys meant for you to know, but that the new mindset you put on, by believing God, will make you useful to Jesus who will impact your world through you” (xxviii).

This process is accomplished by following seven steps, corresponding to the seven chapters of the book, plus introduction and conclusion. They are: know God, know the problem, know the solution, know who you really are, bear the likeness, believe God, and stay focused. Like Blackstone above, Dr. Alves quotes Eugene Peterson in favor of “long obedience in the same direction” (125).

In the end, what can be said? God says you are his son. “Simply agreeing with God” (156).

This book is full of scriptural exposition, wise advice, and illustrations from the author's own life and his extensive reading. It appears that the most controversial issues are in the endnotes: spiritual gifts, women in ministry, ecclesiastical governance, etc. The author has an abundant, but not arrogant, self

confidence. He is right, “This book has the potential to radically alter your understanding of who you really are — your high calling as one of the sons of God” (xviii).

* * * * *

► **Batson**

“Tools for a Great Marriage: Practical Help for Building a Marriage that Lasts,” by William Batson. Cape Neddick, Maine: Family Builders Ministries, 2008. 189 p.; \$14.39 + pb.

The blurb on the first page of the book summarizes as well as can be done:

Willie Batson gives you the blueprint for building your marriage on God’s principles in a format that is simple, clear, practical, and easy to apply. This is a book that husbands will enjoy reading. Follow-up questions set the stage for great couple’s times together.” This book is not a psychological text but a manual to be used by a couple, teachers in Sunday school or small groups, and pastors. It is based on biblical principle, the wisdom of the author after more than twenty years of marriage ministry, and the author’s extensive reading.

The stage is set in Chapter 1 where Mr. Batson removes tools from “A Great Marriage Toolbox”: a Bible, an adjustable wrench, a set of clamps, a hatchet, and a can of WD-40. You have some idea about how the Bible is used. You must read the book to learn about the other tools.

A sample of the mature wisdom :

Instead of focusing on what you’re missing, consider

being proactive and loving your spouse. Take a step back for a moment and examine your marriage. Forget what you need, or want, and focus on the express needs of your husband or wife. Make an honest assessment of whether you are doing everything, within reason, to meet those needs. (54)

The end of each chapter has both questions and assignments. Take Chapter 5, *Help! We're from Different Worlds*, for example. "What traits of your spouse that once fascinated you now bother you? What weaknesses of your spouse that you did not notice at first now stand out and bother you?" Similarly, list strengths. "In the course of the coming week, find ways to affirm those strengths as you relate to your spouse. ... Discuss how accepting one another in your marriage will 'bring praise to God.' "

This book is rich with insights for married people of any age, but it would be particularly helpful for young marrieds.

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2. Review Essays.

► A global faith

"The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith," by Mark A. Noll. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2009.

Reviewed for "Henceforth ..." by Robert J. Mayer.

Part of my normal routine is a haircut every six weeks, and this morning I took care of that little task at the place where I usually go about a mile from home. After I was finished, the pleasant young African-American woman who cut my hair asked if I was 65 and eligible for the senior discount. I laughed

and said something about that still being a few years away. On my way home, I pondered that exchange because it was the first time I had ever been asked that, and I thought to myself, “You have now arrived at late (very late) middle age, and the world has changed dramatically since you grew up in San Francisco during the 1950s and 1960s.”

As I read Mark Noll’s latest book, “The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith,” I thought about how things have dramatically changed in the ways that evangelicals think about world missions and the expansion of the Christian faith. Fifty years ago, I remember hearing that Christianity was a faith practiced mostly in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and a host of other western countries. Today, we talk about Christianity being a global faith with the bulk of Christians living in the developing world. Fifty years ago, it was the responsibility of western Christians to take the gospel and the benefits of Christian civilization to the rest of the world. Today, we hear that fulfilling the Great Commission is probably best done by indigenous Christians with western missionaries playing at best a supporting role. Fifty years ago, career missionary service was seen as perhaps the highest calling an American Christian could undertake. Today, we talk about short-term missions with American and other western Christians performing specific tasks and projects within a one-week to one-year time frame. Fifty years ago, Western missionaries were central to the expansion of the gospel. Today, missionaries come from the developing world to England, France, the United States, and other European countries.

According to Noll, “the Christian Church has experienced a larger geographical redistribution in the last 50 years than in any comparable period in its history” since the first century. Even more significant, “more than half of all Christian adherents in the whole history of the church have been alive in the last hundred years. Close to half of Christian believers who have ever lived are alive right now” (21), and with this growth

has come “a dramatic multiplication of the forms of Christian faith that are now found on the planet” (23).

All of this, in Noll’s view, should lead Christians in North America to “ponder more seriously the great ongoing drama of world Christian transformation” (14). For Noll an important key to understanding this transformation is found in how early evangelicals in the 18th and 19th centuries adapted to a post-Christendom separation of church and state as adopted in the United States constitution. Certainly, many early evangelicals were comfortable with the fusion of church and state found in just about all of post-Reformation continental Europe. But the geographic, cultural and political realities of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century America would force churches who had previously enjoyed the privilege of state sponsorship to compete with each other and with host of new uniquely American Christian movements who were “willing to set aside the authority of tradition, even evangelical tradition, in appropriating the faith for themselves” (52). In Noll’s view (and this reviewer thinks he is right), this unique American post-Christendom is rapidly spreading through much of the developed and the developing world (with some important exceptions) and that means evangelical Christianity in those contexts will take on a number of the characteristics found in American evangelical Christianity including “the American turn toward voluntary, self-directed organizations as the dominant means for carrying on the work of the church” (111).

This reality has led some to conclude that “moneyed Westerners” are using evangelicalism to forge their narrow economic interests in developing countries, and that evangelicals are committed to spreading a Christianity dominated by imperialist American capitalism. These charges, as evidenced by the late 20th century campaign against Wycliffe Bible Translators and other evangelical missions organizations, are misguided in that they fail to recognize that the “primary agency in recent movements of Christianization has not been the missionaries but the new converts themselves” (106). In addition, as in-

indigenous forms of Christianity have emerged throughout the developing world, believers in those contexts have often asked theological questions unique to their own cultural circumstances. For example, “South Korean Christians treat respect for ancestors — both living and dead — as a Christian duty, even though to outsiders it might look suspiciously like ancestor worship,” (26) and East African Christians view public confession of sin as a normal part of regular Christian worship (27).

What does all of this mean for the future? According to Noll, “the impression that Christianity in its essence is either European or American is ... simply false” (191). “The gospel belongs to every one in every culture; it belongs to no one in any culture in particular.” Authentic biblical Christianity grounded in a Trinitarian orthodox understanding of Christian faith does “challenge, reform, and humanize” cultural values whenever it enters a new geographical location or cultural context, but it also expresses itself uniquely within specific cultural contexts. “In the New Testament it is crystal clear that cross-cultural communication (missions) does require proclamation, preaching and the bringing of the good news. ... What the New Testament does not teach is that the ones who proclaim the message are responsible for how the churches develop in those new cultures” (196). As the apostle Paul did, they “pass on local leadership to local leaders” who understand their local culture.

Isn't that what Christians have been doing throughout Christian history? Despite our human frailties and mixed motives, despite the times when we have confused the gospel with our own cultural assumptions, at our best we have proclaimed the good news in ways that have allowed for indigenous expressions of Christian faith to emerge in new geographical and cultural environments. Evangelicals in America often lament what they see as a lessening impact of Christian faith on American culture. But our ultimate task is not to make any one culture more Christian. Instead it is to express in our lives and our communities the good news of the gospel and invite people throughout the world to follow Jesus Christ in whatever cul-

tural context they find themselves, and then work out both the private and public implications of the Christian faith in their cultural circumstances.

Noll's work is supplemented by several important case studies including a description of the emergence of Korean Christianity, an enlightening discussion of the East Africa revival (something that I found very helpful), and a case study describing the development and impact of global Pentecostalism. Fifty years ago, my small Advent Christian Church in San Francisco infused in me a deep concern and passion for world missions and the expansion of the gospel. Noll's new book offers readers a hopeful provocative context for thinking about world missions at the beginning of the 21st century and reminds me that my passion for the spread of the Christian faith is just as important now as it was 50 years ago.

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► **Self-destructive nations and denominations**

“Never Silent: How Third World Missionaries Are Bringing the Gospel to the U.S.,” by Thaddeus Barnum. Colorado Springs: Eleison Publishing, 2008. 380 p. \$21.00 + up; hb. Reviewed by Freeman Barton.

Last Sunday (September 28, 2008) this Advent Christian reviewer attended a charismatic evangelical Anglican church. Impressive. His son and family are active members of the Church of the Apostles, which meets in a public school in Fairfield, Connecticut. Its pastor, Thaddeus Barnum, is a bishop in the Anglican Mission in America. I have been moved a number of times by his passionate biblical preaching. A UPS truck backed up the drive this week delivering two copies of Barnum's book, “Never Silent.” I have a half dozen books waiting, but this one is a “can't put down” type.

A country without grace

Evil is fascinating — the more egregious the offense the more interesting the reading. The first quarter of this book compels attention especially. But on further deliberation, the last three quarters is equally evil, equally important, and it is fascinating in itself. The first part recounts the rather brief but vicious period of genocide in Rwanda. The latter part recounts the self-destruction of the Episcopal Church USA. What ties these rather disparate subjects together is the worldwide Anglican communion of churches and a small black African named John.

John Rucyahana is the central figure in this book. He is Bishop of the Atalecan Church in the farthest northwest province of Rwanda. The book begins with a description of John's impact on the author and then on whoever heard him during his years as a seminary student and on annual preaching tours in the United States. Thaddeus met John in 1988 when the latter was a student at Evangelical Seminary near Pittsburgh and the former was pastor of the Episcopal Church in the area. Another Episcopal priest who heard this unimpressive looking man described him:

Well look at him. He doesn't exactly fit the American stereotype of what a strong church leader should look like. He's quiet, short in stature, a peaceful man — humble. In appearance, he's mostly lamb, not lion. He doesn't "light up the room." We need tall, handsome, outgoing, mover-and-shaker types who turn our heads when they walk in the room and attract us by their charm and charisma. ... If you told me this little African priest was going to impact the American church in a dramatic way, I would have said, "You've got to be kidding!" (39).

The first meeting between John and Thaddeus was particularly well-timed. Thaddeus had just read Festo Kivengere's "I love Idi Amin," and he had begun asking himself hard questions about his own level of dedication.

Just asking the questions made me realize how untested I was. I was a sheltered, spoiled, overeducated, and underworked American Christian who had never truly experienced authentic opposition. What did I know about the cost of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? How could I relate to ... African bishops ... let alone the young children who willingly died for the sake of the gospel? How could I understand Bishop Festo, a Christian leader modeling the New Testament command to love our enemies? There was something about Festo — the conviction of his face, the depth of his Christian character — that pricked my heart deeply and left me wanting more. (25)

John may have been quiet and humble, but he was adept at asking probing questions that encouraged the process of self-evaluation. And he could be assertive. His favorite order was, in the face of heresy, unbelief and immorality, "Never be silent" (264 and throughout).

John was a native of Rwanda, a member of the Tutsi tribe, which was more well-to-do but less populous than the Hutus. The uncomfortable situation of the Tutsis under a new Hutu government is highlighted by the fact that John went into exile in Uganda in 1959, and he was there during the dictatorship of Idi Amin. During three or four months in 1994, Hutus butchered 800,000 Tutsis and uncooperative Hutus, one tenth of the population of Rwanda. The genocide was well-planned and carried out under the orders of the government with the complicity among others of the Anglican and Catholic Churches in

this predominantly Christian country. The whole world knew what was happening — and did nothing. The United Nations withdrew its forces. As one missionary told a reporter, “There are no devils left in hell. They are all in Rwanda” (53).

John returned to his country as an Anglican priest in 1994 in the aftermath of the massacre. In addition to his ecclesiastical duties, he was commissioned by the new government to participate in the program of national justice and reconciliation. He tells about preaching to prisoners who had been convicted of murder. He highlighted the need to deal first with his own hatred of the killers of his relatives. Then he could carry out the important ministry of bringing God’s love to Hutu killers who were suffering severely from guilt. He was elected bishop in 1997.

Rwanda is somewhat reminiscent of the situation in Uganda in the 1970s. Many of you will remember Francis Ssebikindu and Rebecca Kikulwe. They came to Berkshire Christian College as refugees from Idi Amin. Francis was the best student preacher I have ever heard. While they were there, the Ugandan Minister of Culture, Kefa Sempangi, visited the campus with his family, all of them refugees. He describes in nauseating detail the horrors of Amin’s reign in his book titled, “A Distant Grief.” I remember taking Rebecca back to campus after an English lesson in Pittsfield just after a presidential election (probably 1980). She expressed her amazement that we can have a major election without gunfire and people getting killed.

A denomination lacking grace

Concern for what was happening in the Episcopal Church USA (EC) resulted in the formation of several movements working for reform. At the same time that he was dealing with the needs of Rwandans, John was involved in the movements led by the ministerial staff of All Souls Church, Pawley’s Island, South Carolina. The timing again was significant. In February 1997 the Second Anglican Encounter in the South met in

Kuala Lumpur. Those present knew what had been happening in the EC: blessing same-sex marriages, ordaining practicing homosexuals, defeat of a motion upholding traditional Christian morality, later the choice of a practicing homosexual as bishop of New Hampshire, toleration of adultery by the clergy, and the teaching of heresy. The assembled leaders from Africa and Asia produced a statement in which they “were gently but firmly calling the wealthy, powerful Episcopal Church to account” (94).

The EC General Convention met in Philadelphia in September. It rejected the Kuala Lumpur Statement, and it elected as presiding bishop a man who had been ordaining practicing homosexuals. It extended “health coverage to the unmarried lovers of church employees” (96).

Shortly after the convention, four leaders of All Saints Church felt compelled to respond to the offenses of the General Convention. They called a meeting attended by 30 bishops. They issued a statement titled *First Promise*, the name taken from their ordination oath to “be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this church has received them” (98). At a dinner party of All Saints leaders with Bishop John Rucyahana, “it all came together” (100).

Barnum recounts in some detail the sequence of events that followed, a result of the work of *First Promise* (the name comes from an item in their ordination statement) and other evangelicals within the EC, and especially the result of initiatives by a number of African and Asian archbishops and bishops. Evangelical Anglicans (including Episcopalians) became increasingly concerned with the direction in which the Episcopal Church was going.

Increasingly theological heresy has been promoted and immorality accepted. Two outstanding examples are John Spong and Gene Robinson. Spong, bishop of New Jersey and a noted scholar, explicitly denies the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Robinson divorced his wife and lives with a male lover — and he is a bishop. Same-sex unions are commonly blessed and

practicing homosexuals are ordained. (The EC moved further in this direction this past summer [2009] at its national convention.) The Anglican Communion worldwide, prodded particularly by the African bishops, has publicly disapproved the heretical and immoral developments in the United States and Canada.

Theoretically there can be only one Anglican diocese in a geographical area. Due to divine blessing and astute maneuvering, evangelical Anglicans have been able to establish numerous churches in the United States. They are subject, not to the local bishop, but to bishops in Africa. Pray that the Lord of the Church will continue to bless the American and Canadian Evangelical Anglican churches. The EC leadership is not quiescent. It uses its economic muscle in both Africa and North America. Africa loses its subsidies, pastors lose their retirement benefits, and churches lose their buildings. American evangelicals are accused of stirring up strife for political ends.

The Lambeth Conference is a once-a-decade meeting of worldwide Anglican bishops. In 1988 it adopted this statement by a 526 to 70 vote:

This conference in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage. [The resolution], while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation. ... [It opposes] ... the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions. (141).

Lambeth 1988 seemed to be a clear victory for the traditionalists. The EC and the Church of Canada were considerably estranged from the worldwide Anglican Communion. The

victory ought not be celebrated long. Four African archbishops and a number of others in various countries refused to attend Lambeth 2008 because of the Anglican Church's slowly loosening grip on traditional moral values.

“Never Silent” is impressive for a number of reasons:

1. It deals with an extraordinarily important subject, the dissolution of one of the “main line” American denominations due to heresy, unbelief and immorality. Along with the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church in United States of American and the Church of Christ, it demonstrates the deleterious effect of relinquishing orthodox theology and traditional morality.
2. Barnum has an extraordinary ability to re-create dialogue convincingly — even when he was not present.
3. He writes smoothly and is easy to read (not the subject matter but the syntax).
4. The author is very modest. He was present at and a participant in many of the events, but he is not at all intrusive. Like Luke in Acts, “we” is often the only clue to his presence.

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“But our ultimate task is not to make any one culture more Christian. Instead it is to express in our lives and our communities the good news of the gospel and invite people throughout the world to follow Jesus Christ in whatever cultural context they find themselves, and then work out both the private and public implications of the Christian faith in their cultural circumstances” (Robert J. Mayer above).

