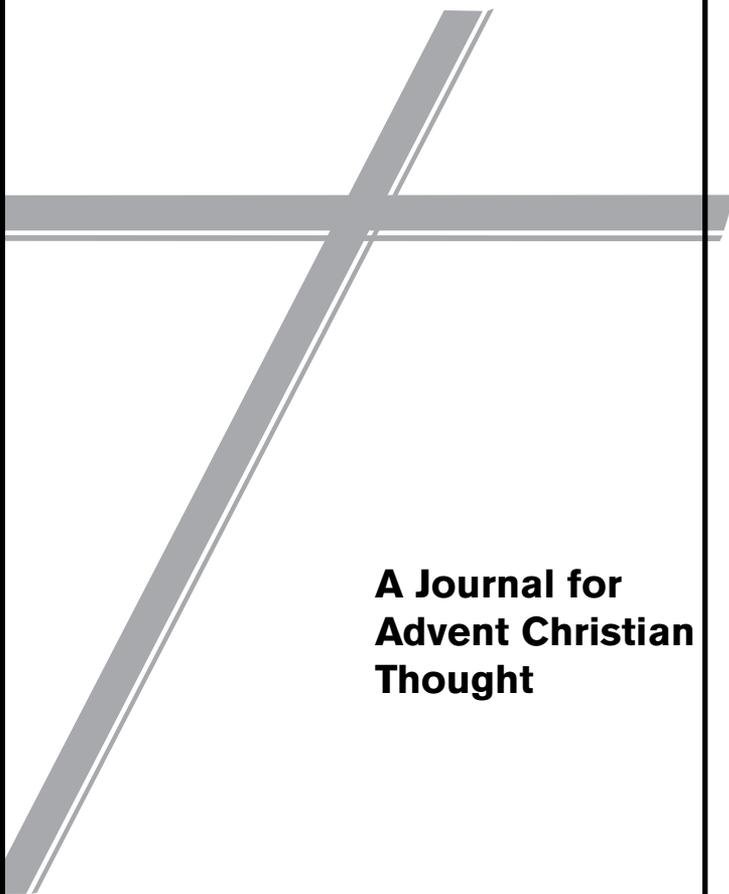


HENCEFORTH ...



**A Journal for
Advent Christian
Thought**

Vol. XL, No. 2
Fall 2014

HENCEFORTH ...

JOURNAL FOR ADVENT CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Vol. XL, No. 2

Fall 2014

Henceforth ... is published twice a year (minimum 60 pages per issue). Manuscripts (articles, essays, book reviews, etc.) for possible publication are welcome.

Publisher: Advent Christian General Conference of America.

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The individual opinions expressed herein do not represent necessarily the thinking of either the board or of General Conference. They are expected to provoke thought and action on the part of Advent Christians.

Subscription rates: \$7.00 per year; \$12.00 for two years; \$3.75 single copy. Many back issues are available.

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted in
Religious and Theological Abstracts.

ISSN 0895-7622

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THE LIVING GOD

Rev. Jefferson Vann

When the early Christian Church set out to define herself in the first few centuries after the ascension of Christ, the creeds she produced indicated that her primary concern was the nature of God. From these early creeds developed a set of standards that still stand as tests of orthodoxy. From the seeming paradox of God's unity and three-ness the doctrine of the trinity developed. Other definite standards of theology proper were also set, for example: God is immutable and infinite as regarding time (eternal), space (omnipresent), power (omnipotent), and knowledge (omniscient). These descriptions are derived from a reading of what the Scriptures assert concerning God, including the various titles of God given in Scripture.

Not every title of God in Scripture has been given equal footing when it comes to establishing orthodoxy in theology proper. Some titles are quite obscure and are not understood well, thus are less frequently quoted. One such title, *The Living God*, deserves more careful attention than it has been given by theologians to date. It relates to certain attributes of deity. Those attributes are power and permanence. *Living God* implies that God is more powerful than his enemies, exists exclusively in a different category than the gods of the nations, and will exist eternally — long after they have perished.

In the Old Testament the term is used in a variety of contexts, sometimes in fear of God, sometimes in confidence in God. The first undisputed reference to the *Living God* in the Masoretic Text is Deuteronomy 5:26. Here Moses recounts to the Israelites how they reacted when YHWH revealed himself to them on Mt. Sinai. They begged for Moses to intercede on their behalf so that they would not have to experience that miracle again! Their question is telling of their relationship with this God: "For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?"

This reaction is somewhat understandable when one remembers that these are the Hebrews who had seen first-hand the mighty acts of God against Pharaoh in Egypt. The plagues that came upon the Egyptians were a judgment from God and a display of who he was. The “Exodus was essentially a statement concerning God, not humans. This event was to reveal God’s glory first, and then secondarily bring about human redemption. That vision of God’s redeeming glory would serve as the focus of the redeemed community’s motivation to serve him.”¹ But in Deut. 5:26 the memory of God’s power displayed in the violence of the Exodus, coupled with the violent display on Mt. Sinai, motivated the Israelites to fear God, not serve him.

Proximity to the holy God ... proved uncomfortable for them. They feared for their very lives (vv. 24-26). Having survived one such encounter, they did not wish to risk further contact with the Holy. Instead, they requested Moses to mediate their dialogue with YHWH (v. 28).²

The term they used for God there spoke of the sharp distinction between YHWH and those discarded gods of Egypt. They were gods of tradition and superstition, but he was the *Living God*. They probably could not have explained all the details of that sharp distinction, but for them it undoubtedly existed. They saw YHWH as different from the gods of the nations, and that difference was reason enough to keep a respectable distance.

The Hebrew of the phrase from this verse (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים) is the most complete used for the title. The same phrase is found in 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; Jeremiah 10:10, 23:36. The same concept is implied by the phrase (אֱלֹהִים חַי) found in 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Isaiah

¹ Robert B., Hughes, and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 34.

² Mark E. Biddle, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 117.

37:4, 17. The shortest way of expressing the concept is simply (יְהוָה) found in Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2; 84:2. The Greek terms used in the Septuagint are a variety of case-forms of the noun θεος and the participle ζων, derived from the verb ζω. Altogether the term is found 35 times in the Bible.

Many other titles of YHWH are more well known, in spite of the fact that they occur less frequently in the text. *El-Shaddai* (אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי) for example, only occurs five times. The frequency of the occurrence of the phrase *Living God*, along with the special contexts in which the term is found, implies that the term should have a more prominent place in our theological vocabularies.

Joshua picked up on the fear factor of Deut. 5:26 and harnessed it in favor of the Israelites. He said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.” Once again the term is used with a strong connection to the violent power of God manifested by the miracles of Exodus. Perhaps there is also an allusion to that power manifested on Sinai that gave the Israelites such timidity.

Another idea can be inferred from Joshua’s use — one that might have been connected with the term all along. YHWH is among his people, thus not one of these seven nations can stand up against them, because of the *Living God* among them. The miracle power of Exodus is present to support the Israelites in their conquest of the land. The term appears to have been “turned into a liturgical formula in Judaism.”³ As such it served to encourage Joshua’s armies as they prepared for battle to gain the land promised to them by God.

The fear of God that had been manifested by the Israelites at Sinai is now seen on the faces of the pagan nations in Canaan. Rahab puts it this way,

³ Moshe, Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible: Deuteronomy 1-11*. (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 324

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.⁴

The assertion is that YHWH is stronger than the local gods of Canaan, thus the Israelites are a people to be feared. So Joshua turns that Sinai fear to good use for his people, as a motivation for courage in battle, and resolve to get on with the conquest. Their hearts are strengthened while the hearts of the people in the seven nations are melting with fear. Their fortified cities are no match to a people whose God can defeat the Egyptians and the Amorites.

For Joshua, “The living God characterizes the Lord as one who lives and acts, contrasted with the pagan gods, who are ‘dead,’ that is, unable to act and save their peoples.”⁵ His expectation is that “victory over the inhabitants of the land will confirm who is living and who is dead.”⁶ The conquest was a god contest.

The next occurrence of the phrase is also in the context of the conflict between pagan nations and Israel. The voice is that of a young shepherd named David who is angered at the human giant who dares to challenge the armies of the divine conquering God.

⁴ Joshua 2:9-11 ESV.

⁵ Robert G., Bratcher, and Barclay M. Newman. *A Handbook on The Book of Joshua*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983), 42.

⁶ J. Gordon Harris, and others. *New International Biblical Commentary: Joshua Judges, Ruth*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 33.

And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? ... Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.”⁷

Whereas Joshua had invoked the term to encourage an army to fight, David invokes the term to the chagrin of an army who had refused to fight. But the same imagery emerges from the term itself. The God who defeated Pharaoh’s army and the Ammonites, etc., is certainly not at the mercy of this uncircumcised Philistine, no matter how tall he is. The *Living God* is taller.

David is not only inspired to make his boast because of the nation’s victories in the past, but also because of his own personal experiences of victory, which he attributes to the presence of the *Living God* with him in the fields. The lions and bears had to fall because of the presence of God accompanying the shepherd.

According to Keck, David “sees clearly what Saul and the rest of Israel apparently do not: that to respond only in terms of the Philistine trust in force of arms leaves them in the clutches of fear and death, but to understand the Philistine offense as being against a living God is to open up powerful and unexpected resources for life.”⁸ But the conflict is not merely between the might of the Philistine army and YHWH with his army. The god of the Philistines is also a player. David asserts that YHWH is the *Living God*. Who, then, is the god of the Philistines? Radmacher says that “there are two battles here. One is the outer battle on

⁷ 1 Samuel 17:26, 36 ESV.

⁸ Leander E. Keck, and others, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Vol. II*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1111.

the field; the other is the inner battle in the king's tent!"⁹ Actually, there are three battles. The third is the battle to determine who the living God is.

So far, the term *Living God* has been used in two types of context. The first is fear of God's violent display of power. The second is national conflict, where God must defend his reputation by delivering his people powerfully and miraculously. Another example of the latter type is found in 2 Kings 19.

It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.¹⁰

The parallels between this story and the preceding one are remarkable. Both involve a pagan who taunts the Israelites (Goliath and Rabshakeh). Both exhibit a fearful king (Saul and Hezekiah). Both kings are addressed by a man of God (David and Isaiah). This story makes it clear that a conflict of the gods is in progress. The King of Assyria boasts that none of the gods of the other nations were able to deliver them (18:33-35; 19:10-13). Hezekiah reacts as one does when he hears blasphemy: he tears his garment. "Hezekiah's hope was that God, having been ridiculed by the Assyrians, would act on behalf of His people and prove

⁹ Earl D., Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1 Sam. 17:1-58. (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999).

¹⁰ 2 Kings 19:4, 16 ESV.

that He was the true and **living God** by granting a miraculous deliverance to His people.”¹¹

Freeman comments “The Assyrian monuments give evidence of a custom that illustrates the haughty language of this verse. It was the practice of Assyrian conquerors to take the idols that they found in the temples of the people whom they subdued and carry them to Assyria, and put them in Assyrian temples as captive gods.¹² Ironically, Israel had no national idol for the Assyrians to capture. Overholt adds “The thing to note is the contrast drawn between the effective power of the ‘no gods,’ who could not save their own nations, and Yahweh, whom Hezekiah feels certain will be able to deliver his.”¹³

God, through a miracle again, kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night, and eventually causes Sennacherib’s own sons to assassinate him. The effect of this deliverance was to once again accentuate the difference between Israel’s *Living God* and all other gods. The information found here in 2 Kings 19 is reproduced in Isaiah 37, along with the two references to (אֱלֹהִים חַי) (37:4, 17).

The title finds its way into the Psalms as well. Psalm 42:2 states “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” The entire psalm sounds like the words of one who is desperately depressed and seeks to cheer himself up. No doubt the image of a mighty, miraculous, violently powerful God is enough to overcome the depression.

Another Psalm contains the same longing, but this time in a context of joyful praise. “My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts

¹¹ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)

¹² James M. Freeman, and Harold J. Chadwick. *Manners & Customs of the Bible*. Rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 271.

¹³ Thomas W. Overholt, “The Falsehood of Idolatry: an Interpretation of Jeremiah 10:1-16.” *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 16 (Apr 1965), 9.

of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God (Psalm 84:2).” The praise appears to make up for the apparent disappointment of one who (for whatever reason) is unable to be where he wants to be — in the Lord’s presence at Jerusalem. According to Wiersbe, “life has its disappointments, but the three beatitudes in this psalm (dwelling, desiring, and depending on God) tell you how to handle them.”¹⁴ Personal disappointments must be seen in perspective, and there is no greater cure for depression than the sustained relationship with the powerful *Living God*.

Jeremiah picks up the term (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים), which had been used in 1 Samuel. He says “But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.”¹⁵ The context is again contrasting Israel’s God with the gods of the nations. The triplet parallelism helps us to understand Jeremiah’s meaning of the term “living.” Living is synonymous with true. The gods of the nations are not to be regarded as true gods, because they do not share God’s divine attributes.

This is not to say that those gods have no existence. They are not the same as the idols that Jeremiah condemns with sarcasm: “Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good (Jer. 10:5).” Carl F. H. Henry asserts that “Yahweh (is) the living One who, in contrast to the lifeless non-existing heathen gods, evidences his existence and presence in absolute supremacy.”¹⁶ He thus blurs the distinction between idols (which are nothing) and gods (which are real beings who must

¹⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *With the Word Bible Commentary*, Psalm 84:1. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1991

¹⁵ Jer.10:10 ESV.

¹⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, “The Living God of the Bible.” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 1 Spr 1997. 16-31.

be judged).¹⁷ The *Living God* is greater than the gods because he is more powerful, and will outlast the gods of the nations. This is seen clearly in Jeremiah 10:11, which (inexplicably) uses Aramaic to say “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.” As Ackroyd comments, “The Aramaic saying (v. 11) (is) in all probability a marginal note subsequently inserted in the text, interrupts the Hebrew but is entirely relevant, since it makes the same point that whereas Yahweh is creator of all, the other gods are not creators and must perish, an idea which is echoed in the last line of v. 15.”¹⁸ Actually, a case could be made that the verse is not an insertion, based on the same logic.

The apostle Paul reminds us that ... “For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).” The pagans, through their idolatry are submitting to demons (1 Cor. 10:20; Revelation 9:20). Those demons will have their day in God’s divine court, and will eventually lose their authority, and their lives.¹⁹

Note that the latter reference makes a clear distinction between the idols and the demons. The difference is that the demons are not “true” and they are not “eternal.”

Edwards notes “Many passages ... emphasize the fact that unlike Yahweh the images are impotent and lifeless; they cannot hear; they cannot stand; they cannot come to help in response

¹⁷ cf. Psalm 82:1, where God stands in judgment over the gods. Those are not human rulers, as some suppose. The term “god” (אלהים) is consistently used in the Psalms for YHWH or the gods of the nations.

¹⁸ Peter J. Ackroyd, “Jeremiah 10:1-16.” *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 14 (O 1963), 389.

¹⁹ cf. Psalm 82:7-8.

to the cries for help from their people.”²⁰ The term *Living God* for YHWH indicates the opposite: He is always alive and can respond to help his people.

Jeremiah again evokes the term in his denunciation of false prophets. He advises “But ‘the burden of the LORD’ you shall mention no more, for the burden is every man’s own word, and you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God (Jer. 23:36).” To claim to speak God’s word when you are really only speaking your mind is to deny that YHWH is the *Living God*. It is to equate him with those helpless gods of the nations. In Jeremiah’s day, as in our own, often the burden presented as God’s burden is someone else’s big idea. Carson points out that this is still a danger in today’s church: “In terms of declaring God’s word in the church of Christ and to an unbelieving world, the responsibility — as awesome as for the prophets of old — is to declare his ‘whole counsel,’ never tailoring it for our own ends, or deliberately making it more palatable than it is.”²¹

The Old Testament book that most often refers to YHWH by this title is Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar praises the God who “lives forever” (הַיְיָ עֹלָמַיִם) (4:34) at the end of his days of humiliation. He uses the Aramaic (אֵלֵּהּ אֵלֵּהּ חַיִּי) (6:20, 26) to describe Daniel’s god, who is distinguished by his eternal reign. Here we see that being a “living God” is not just about being powerful. There is a real sense in which the other gods differ because they are temporary, while YHWH is permanent.

God is “the one who lives forever” (בְּחַיִּי הָעוֹלָמִים) according to an angelic figure in Daniel 12:7. This not only verifies the words of that repentant pagan king, but also reveals another use of the

²⁰ Edward M. Curtis, “The Theological Basis for the Prohibition of Images in the Old Testament.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 28/3 (September 1985), 277-278.

²¹ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. 4th ed., Je 23:9. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

concept of God's eternal life. The angel is calling on the fact that God will live forever to validate the veracity of his statement. The phrase "as the LORD lives," (חַי־יְהוָה), is used numerous times in the Scriptures as a means of confirming or verifying a statement.²² This concept, then, that God is different because he lives forever was a fundamental principle of Jewish life.

The prophet Hosea used the term *Living God* as well. In 1:10, he predicts a restored Israel, which is no longer (לֹא-עַמִּי) (not my people), but (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי חַי) (children of the living God). There is a hint of eternal salvation there, in that being a part of the community of the *Living God* suggests that believers will also live forever. These hints will be explained more fully in the New Testament.

But before traversing the so-called 400 "silent years," one can pick up sounds in the Second Temple literature that also speak of God in terms of his eternal life. Four times in the story of "Bel and the Dragon" God is called by that title.²³ The story parodies the foolishness of idolatry, portraying Daniel as a super-sleuth who proves that idols are not alive, but God is. The term is also found in 3 Macc. 6:28.

The New Testament continues the Old Testament's usage of the phrase, utilizing all cases of the noun *θεος* and the participle form of the verb *ζωω* used adjectivally. This use is the same as the Septuagint corresponding to the Hebrew terms mentioned above.

The most famous New Testament use of the title is Peter's confession of Christ, when, at a crucial point he admits "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16)." Seen against the background of the title's usage in the Old Testament, this takes on even more significance. Jesus is much more than Elijah, or one of the prophets, because all of those persons are

²² Cf. Jdg. 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam. 14:39, 45, 19:6, 20:3, 21, 25:26, 26:10, 16, 28:10, 29:6; 2 Sam. 4:9, 12:5, 14:11, 15:21; 1 Ki. 1:29, 2:24, 22:14; 2 Ki. 2:2, 4, 6, 4:30, 5:16, 20; 2 Chr. 18:13; Jer. 4:2, 5:2, 12:16, 16:14f, 23:7f, 38:16; Hos. 4:15. See also the variation "as God lives" in 2 Sam. 2:27; Job 27:2.

²³ 1:5, 1:6, 1:24, 1:25.

mortal. God, however, is the *Living God* (του θεου του ζωντος). He is able to do more than give temporary victory over one's foes. His victory is permanent, because he is permanent. The phrase in Greek contains four definite articles, as if to emphasize that Jesus is the only Son, and God is the only *Living God*.²⁴ Often commentators, like Thiemann, ignore the term του ζωντος entirely, even though claiming that Peter's statement as a whole is very important.²⁵ Likewise, Berge calls Peter's confession "the focal title in the Christology of Matthew," yet fails to comment further on the adjectival participle.²⁶

At Christ's trial, the high priest invoked the title, seeking to force him to confess blasphemy (Matt. 26:63). This shows that the term was still a popular title for God, especially when making serious affirmations. The *Textus Receptus* version of John 6:69 contains the title as well, apparently a gloss added as a means of harmonization. Paul uses the title in Acts 14:15 to discourage idolatry: "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."

The apostle Paul quoted Hosea 1:10 to show that God's grace extends to Gentiles. In 2 Cor. 3:3 he calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of the *Living God*. In 2 Cor. 6:16 he calls the Church the temple of the *Living God*. He also praises the Thessalonian believers because they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9). Here again is a reflection of the terminology used in Jer. 10:10. He uses the phrase several times

²⁴ ὁ χριστος ὁ υἱος του θεου του ζωντος.

²⁵ Ronald F. Thiemann, "Matthew's Christology: A Resource for Systematic Theology." *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 4, D 1977, 350. Note how Thiemann shortens the statement to "Christ, the Son of God."

²⁶ Paul S. Berge, "Exposition of Matthew 16:13-20," *Interpretation*, 29 J1 1975, 283.

in 1 Timothy, exhorting believers to recognize God's hand in their salvation.

The writer of Hebrews uses the term four times.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (3:12).

... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9:14).

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:31).

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering (12:22).

His goal seems to be to encourage Jewish Christians to hold on to their faith in Christ in a time when they might be tempted to revert to the old Judaism. To revert would be to fall into the hands of the living God, something the Israelites of Deut. 5:26 did not want to do. But they have not come to Mount Sinai (emphasizing the curses of the Mosaic covenant, but Mount Zion (emphasizing the promises of the Davidic covenant).

Finally, John mentions the title in Rev. 7:2-3.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

This chapter mentions two sets of believers who are sealed with the seal of the *Living God*. The first are obviously Jews who believe in, and remain true to Christ. Perhaps the 144,000 represents those first-century Jews who came to Christ amidst persecution by their own brethren. The second group is multicultural, and too large to number. Perhaps these represent believers of all nations who come to Christ during this age before he returns. Both have the seal of the *Living God*, therefore both groups will not be utterly destroyed. Through the miracle of the resurrection, made possible only by him who lives forever, they will be united alive at the parousia. The same *Living God* responsible for delivering Israel from her enemies will also deliver these believers from the domination of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet.

R. T. France suggests that the contemporary Christian world has a real need to rediscover the fact that God is the *Living God*.

As far as the ordinary man in the pew is concerned, God is dead. His daily life runs its predictable, gilt edged, humdrum course without reference to God. He would, of course, be scandalized by the suggestion that God is dead, but if it were true it would make no practical difference in his life. His work, his home, his sport, his politics, yes, and even his church life, would run on very much the same.²⁷

Perhaps the concept that God is alive and lives forever was such a given for the people of the early church that they felt no need to include the immortality of God in their creedal statements and doctrinal formations. But modernism and post-modernism pose a significant challenge for the believer. He must re-

²⁷ R. T. France, *The Living God*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 10.

learn how to act and speak as if (or better, seeing that) God is forever alive. Even theologians run the risk of so compartmentalizing themselves by specialization in systems of thought that the reality of God's eternal existence can fail to sink in.

The Bible's assertion that God is the *Living God* can touch contemporary lives in the same way that it did the ancients. He can be feared, revered, loved, relied upon and longed for. But going through the motions of Christian life (and even Christian ministry) without a close personal relationship with him can lessen the chances of this happening. Even the disciplines of prayer and Bible study, without this living contact, remain unfruitful. But these disciplines may be helpful methods of achieving and maintaining that contact. Following the commands of Christ can help believers affirm the reality of God as the *Living God*. Obedience to all the commands of Christ makes sense because of the power and permanence of God, as expressed by the title *Living God*.

Responding to a society that defined "god" in a thousand different ways, the early church championed a God who was consistent in his nature and sovereign in his power. But they failed to challenge their society with a theological concept that the Bible had introduced: the permanence of God, compared to the temporary lives and reigns of the gods. The apostle Paul said that God "alone has immortality" and deserves "honor and eternal dominion" (1 Tim. 6:16). By contrast, the gods of the nations are (*ασθενη και πτωχα*) "weak and inferior," and do not share God's nature (*μη ουσιν θεοις*).²⁸ Paul envisioned a time when all of Christ's enemies (including the gods of the nations) would be put under his feet.²⁹ This concept of God's power and permanence, identified by the phrase *Living God* in Scripture, should have had a more prominent place in the early church's proclamation. It certainly also has a place in today's world of postmodern pluralism.

²⁸ cf. Gal. 4:8-9.

²⁹ 1 Cor. 15:25

If anyone should be making the proclamation of the truth that God is eternal, it should be Advent Christians. His exclusive immortality is one of our most cherished distinctives. Too often, we as Advent Christians have avoided preaching and teaching those distinctives for fear of offending other believers who hold to doctrines which conflict with it. The doctrine of innate immortality (borrowed from Greek philosophy) conflicts with it. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment in hell (the result of reading biblical texts about hell with an a-priori assent to innate immortality) conflicts with it.

Believers who reject conditionalism need to know that their cherished doctrines are denials of the biblical teaching of God's exclusive immortality — which they claim to adhere to. Their doctrine of human nature (that all human beings are born immortal) needs to conform to what the Bible says about God's nature (that he alone is immortal). Their doctrine of hell (that it is an eternal process where God has to keep sinners alive forever to torture them) rejects the fact that only the living God can be the source of eternal life, and he has not chosen to give that gift to those who refuse Christ.

It could be that conditionalists (including Advent Christians) will have a major impact on the next generation of evangelicals. But that is not likely if we remain merely known as a people who reject the traditional teachings on the nature of humanity and/or hell. It is more likely if we become known as a people who are passionate about defending what the Bible clearly says about God.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF AN URBAN ADVENT CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN CHICAGO

by Kimon Nicolaides III, PhD.

The author expresses appreciation to the many contributors to this paper to include but not limited to: The Aurora University Library for granting access to their Advent Christian Collection, the Hope Community Church and staff for allowing a review of their church records and to interview their standing members, to Lee Welkley, Bob Price, Duane Crabtree, and many others for editorial suggestions and most helpful insights.

Introduction

The history of most urban neighborhoods in the United States over the past century is likely to reveal considerable demographic changes. Chicago is no exception. West Chicago, in particular, is a good contender for one with the highest rates of change in ethnic compositions. For the ever accelerating rates of globalization, urbanization and migratory patterns in the twenty-first century, these neighborhoods can provide a laboratory for the types of social problems such changes can bring. Studying one such surviving community may provide insight on how to cope with, or resolve, these problems. Such a community with sufficient cohesion and social fabric to clearly identify boundary markers and membership may be found in a local community church. Hence, this paper focuses on one such urban church within the neighborhoods of West Chicago, the Hope Community Advent Christian Church of West Iowa St. (Hope Church).

The relatively brief history of this church revealed some common threads woven into its identity that may have helped it survive through these dramatic environmental changes. This study noted that racial discrimination may take precedence over theological distinctives within an Evangelical denomination at both the broader corporate and the congregational levels of leadership in determining patterns of fellowship and sites of worship. However, some of these denominational distinctives,

if adequately demonstrated by sound exegesis of biblical truths, sufficiently acknowledged, and embraced by believing members, can provide a cohesive force to withstand and prevail over the schismatic tendencies resulting from demographic changes in an urban environment. This requires a faithful stewardship of these truths by those entrusted to transmit them, i.e., 1) sustaining its foundations by comprehensive learning, 2) consistently applying their biblical principles at all levels, and 3) safeguarding its integrity with transparent accountability while extending mercy, love and forgiveness. This study thus noted the vital role of ongoing publications of theological periodicals in meeting these requirements to sustain the momentum of a spiritual awakening and to keep the clarity of the distinct truths they uphold alive and relevant.

Formative Years of the Advent Christian Denomination

Hope Church belongs to a small Evangelical denomination that came out of the second Great Awakening in North America in the nineteenth century. In 1831, William Miller, a lay Baptist New Englander, was convinced from his interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and other passages of the imminence of the Lord's return. Without specifying a date, he expressed his qualified opinion of the probability of that event occurring sometime on or about 1843.¹ More than 65 other biblical scholars in Europe and around the world, acting independently of Miller, around that time had arrived at the same conclusions, although none had as great an influence (Ferrell 2007, 5). That was attributed to their failure to broadcast these findings through the publication of numerous journals, as was the case in America (Ferrell 2007, 13).

¹ Later on as the end of the designated window of the expected time frame approached Miller yielded to a consensus of views that it would be likely to occur no later than October 22, 1844 (Ferrell 2007, 267).

In 1839, a disciple of Miller, Joshua Himes, organized committees to finance and publish these views. He helped to start missionary associations and organize camp meetings, conferences, publishing houses and journals that became popular throughout the United States, Canada, England and several other countries. In the following decades the Awakening interest generated a flood (literally hundreds of millions of pages) of publications, tracts, pamphlets, books, weekly periodicals and journals on prophecy and eschatology around the country. They included *The Midnight Cry*, *The World's Crisis*, *Our Hope and Life in Christ*, *The Advent Christian Herald*, *Messiah's Advocate*, *The Signs of the Times* and later *The Advent Herald*, *The Light Bearer*, *The Present Truth Messenger*, *The Advent Christian Times*, *The Voice of the West*, *The Advent Christian Witness*² and many more. I do not think these publications were proponents of setting actual dates.³ They advocated, rather, for understanding the imminence of Christ's second advent and argued for a premillennial eschatology. The sense of the very impending nature of that advent spawned a renewed urgency to respond. More than a million new professions of faith were made in North America alone during the nineteenth century (Knight 1994, 213) and a great interest was focused on Messianic prophecies. This renewed premillennial outlook challenged the post millennialism then in vogue, and especially the relative degree of spiritual complacency accompanying it.

In 1835, Henry Grew wrote on the topic of conditional immortality. George Storrs preached on it in Albany in 1842. His sermons were also published. They claimed that immortality was not inherent to man's nature, but that it was a gift obtained only upon accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. This contradicted the traditional view of damnation, i.e., in its specifying of a state of

² *The AC Witness* was a successor to *The World's Crisis*.

³ Some of the earlier publications did propose such dates.

eternal conscious torment in Hell (Mansfield, 1913b), for which inherent immortality is prerequisite.⁴

Miller was not a conditionalist. However, Himes was later convinced of it and became an avid advocate of their cause. By 1858, 80% of Adventist preachers (Adventist here being defined as Millerites) had also been convinced of man's conditional immortality, largely due to the outstanding biblical exegesis of men like William Sheldon (Sheldon 1902) and others published in *The World's Crisis* (Stearns and Collins 1960, 14). Fierce opposition, evident to this day in exclusivistic policies, arose from leadership in mainline denominations. Adventists were expelled from these denominations for holding this tenet, and many others for their premillennialism, while not a few more were forced to withdraw their membership for their outspoken stand against slavery (Ferrell 2007, 68 – 87).

The practice of observing a seventh day Sabbath was atypical. Those doing so (less than 10%) formed a subsequent group under the leadership of Ellen White after 1860, while still tracing their roots to Miller. His impact on her as a child of 12 and 14 is recounted in "Testimonies" (Stearns and Collins 1960, p13f; Ferrell 2007, 102). The term Adventist in this paper, thus, refers to Advent Christians, and not to Seventh Day Adventists.

The first general assembly of the Adventists occurred in October 1840 in Boston, Mass. The Advent Christian (AC) Association was formed from this conditionalist arm of the Adventist's movement in 1854 (*Advent Christian News* Jan. 1959, 12). This included the launch of the publication of *The World's Crisis* in

⁴ Tertullian (c. 160-225 A.D.), the first Christian espousing inherent immortality was Latin. The earlier Greek fathers and Apostles were uniformly conditionalists (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53-4; 1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:10) with the sole exception, possibly, of Athenagoras (Roller, 2011, 52). The position of "conditional immortality" was based on the biblical meaning of the term death (e.g., Gen. 2:17; Ps. 49:12; Eccless. 9:5; etc.), i.e., loss of life. The belief that man is inherently immortal is found universally in all cultures and religions (Albinus 2007), but stems from, agrees with, and relies on, Satanic suggestion (Gen. 3:4).

Lowell, Massachusetts, the main periodical of the denomination continuing weekly for more than 100 years, and advocating conditional immortality. This publishing society, in Boston then (1856), had a subscription of 3,000 (5,000 later). A meeting it convened November 1861 (Mansfield 1913a, 2 – 3) brought into existence the denomination now known as the Advent Christian General Conference (ACGC).⁵ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the two decades from 1840 to 1860 their membership grew from about 5,000 to roughly 35,000, while the four largest Protestant denominations were in decline (Johnson 1919, 234). Their own tally counted 54,000 members that year (*A.C. Witness* 1960 Jan., 13).

The Formation of an Advent Christian Community in Chicago Land

Hope Church was re-chartered in 1959, but remained an AC church, with roots tracing back to the Adventists who first came to Illinois in the mid to late 19th century. Most of these preachers were initially rural, itinerant and pulpitless until they planted a church. Many traveled great distances on horseback or foot. Some eventually settled in the Mid West or on the West Coast. One couple, the Mansfields, came to Milwaukee, Wis., in 1852. They then moved to Indiana, and later to Michigan, while starting and organizing some 20 AC churches. They held meetings in more than 100 towns, built nine halls, pastored a church in Indiana for six years and one in Buchanan, Mich., for 13 years (Johnson 1919, 167).

In July 1863, Mansfield, along with Himes, and D.S. Clark, held tent meetings in Chicago before an AC church was planted there. Many Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Spiritualists and Nothingarians (sic) attended. Several converted. (Johnson 1919, 259). At a regional conference that year they established a printing society for Western publications. Himes was editor. In 1870 their

⁵ Other sources, supporting the official position of the ACGC denomination, will show that it began in 1860.

publication the *Voice of the Prophets* became the *Advent Christian Times*. Providentially in 1872, the year after the fire when Chicago's publishing companies suffered great losses (Andreas 1884, 736), the Adventist publishing offices moved from Michigan to 11 South Canal Street, Chicago, and its printing facilities to Norwood Park (Johnson 1919, 1960), having then a subscription of 7,000, its high water mark (Johnson 1919, 197). Mansfield was then assisting in an AC mission work in Chicago (Wellcome 1874, 345 – 6; Mansfield 1914, 3). A few years earlier (1860s), an AC businessman A.M. Billings came to Chicago and built the Green Street Tabernacle (New York Times 1887, Jan. 15) on 91 S. Green Street. The publishing company moved its offices there in 1874. Frank Burr already had a congregation there, and became the editor of the *Advent Christian Times* (Johnson 1919, 197).

German was the predominant ethnic minority in Chicago then, estimated at about 60,000 (Andreas 1885, 613), rising to 400,000 by 1900 (*World's Crisis* July 1, 1908, 9) when the total population would increase from about 150,000 to 1.7 million. Other sizeable minorities were Irish, Scandinavians and Bohemians (The Annual Lakeside Directory 1875 – 6, Andreas 2007, 613). Most were first generation immigrants. The AC churches were mostly German initially, but also had some Scandinavians and later Bohemians as well.

The obsession of early Adventists with the Lord's return boded poorly for planning, goal establishment or budgeting resources. Preachers were itinerant (Welkley 2011). Chicagoans initially heard many early Adventist preachers like Miles Grant. Few, however, stayed. Hence, purchasing a building for worship was not as high a priority among some of them. The Lord's return momentarily would render all else obsolete. The present urgency demanded one focus: bringing in the sheaves. Few anticipated the needs of ongoing pastoral ministries. More pragmatic Advent Christians migrating into the area, such as Billings, were put off (Welkley 2011).

The Green Street Tabernacle pulpit was filled by numerous evangelists such as the very popular George Sederquist and Frank Burr (*World's Crisis* Dec. 24, 1947; Johnson 1919, 345). Miles Grant

was the congregation's leader for some time prior to 1870 (*World's Crisis*, Dec. 24, 1947; *Our Hope and Life in Christ* Feb. 9, 1910, obituary M. Wilcox, 13). Green Street was across the river from the fire in 1871. Its Tabernacle was spared. From 1870 to 1876, Burr was listed as its pastor in the Chicago Directory. In 1892 when Billings died without deeding the building over to the church, they had no place to worship. The congregation was scattered.⁶

So in 1892, the Mansfields returned to Chicago from Mendota, Illinois, and regrouped 19 of the disbanded flock. They initially met at a local blacksmith's shop on the South side of the city. (*World's Crisis* Aug. 9, 1899, 11). In 1893, the Chicago World's Fair hosted a Columbian Exposition, which included a World Parliament of Religions that sponsored several Essayists. September 14 was Advent Christian Day. They provided speakers to give essays on religion. These lectures attracted large and enthusiastic crowds for several nights in a row as reported in the Chicago newspapers (Johnson 1919, 415; Welkley Interview). These were later compiled, edited and published by Elvira Mansfield (Mansfield, 1893). She also organized the women into a Helper's Union, raised funds for missions, and served as its president. In 1896, the congregation led by Mansfield rented a hall at the State Street Masonic temple for two hours on Sundays, being more central and conveniently located within the downtown loop. They had grown to more than 130 when he left in 1899, and had assumed a mission work on the city's West side, at Kommen-sky and 15th Streets. That eventually became what is now Hope Church (*World's Crisis* Dec. 31, 1948, 12).

⁶ That year Ben J. Devries established a mission work also called Blessed Hope Mission on Chicago Avenue (*World's Crisis* Feb. 11, 1948, 12). The Pacific Garden Mission, or "the Old Lighthouse Mission," then on State Street in 1877 had many Adventists (Welkley interview). The Chicago Directory listed two AC churches still operative in 1892, one German speaking on the corner of Chicago Avenue and Chase Street, pastored by Dr Charles Koier, and the other on 213 West Madison St, pastored by H.G. McCullogh (*The Chicago Directory* 1875 – 6, 64; *Our Hope*, Oct. 6, 1909, 5).

The First Advent Christian Church of Chicago

In March 1900, Orrin Jenks became pastor of the State Street congregation. He also provided evening and midweek services at another hall on Chicago Ave, two miles outside the loop. He proposed building their own facility. In 1902 they purchased a lot, later began construction, and on December 31, 1903, dedicated the First Advent Christian Church of Chicago (FACC) at 424 Augusta Street. His assistant in 1909, R. L. Petersen, later went to India as a missionary, (*Advent Christian News* Nov. 1959, 16). While there, Jenks baptized more than 100 members, oversaw the construction of the church and parsonage, cleared their debts (except for a \$700 balance on the parsonage), and raised an additional \$1,000 plus to build another facility for the outreach program.

The Blessed Hope Advent Christian Church of Chicago

In April 1908 their outreach mission began worshipping in the basement of the facility, and it was renamed the Blessed Hope AC Church (LaGrange AC Church Bulletin April 1958; Welkley 2011). By 1910, a charter member of FACC, George Erhardt, reported 130 in Hope's Sunday school and the need for a larger facility. In 1910, Jenks left FACC to lead the denomination's new Bible College at Aurora. James Gardner took over at Augusta Street and was also listed as the pastor of the Blessed Hope AC Church. He also held nightly tent meetings the following July at the corner of Chicago Avenue and Christiana Street while advertising in the *Chicago Record Herald* (*Our Hope* July 12, 1911). A German speaking congregation, then still at 274 Augusta Street, had to put up with the racket of an adjacent railroad (*World's Crisis* July 1, 1908, 9).

That year, the denomination held its 55th annual conference of the Northern Illinois region in Chicago, highlighting its loss of ministers, decline in attendance, and the need for longer pastorates. They participated in a temperance law observance parade.

White female slave traffic was seen as a serious threat due to city government corruption. Another grievance noted was the media's universal categorization of anyone then predicting the end of the world as being Adventists (*Our Hope* Sept. 22 – 29, 1909, 3 – 9).

Gardner's ministry at FACC was shortly followed by Charles A. Decker, the treasurer of Aurora College, as interim until September 1913. During this time, Erhardt was leading the Blessed Hope AC Church together with the help of a brother, Tilton. They attracted large crowds with many Jewish attendees at outdoor meetings that summer (*Our Hope* Aug. 1913). That fall, John A. Downy came from a church in Indiana to pastor FACC, noting it as a rough year (*Our Hope* Jan. 12, 1914), although boasting within a month their largest attendance yet (*Our Hope* Feb. 11, 1914, 12). In October 1914 they had 85 members, growing to 95 in the morning service, and 72 in the evening service by July 1915.

In 1916, under Erhardt's oversight, the Blessed Hope AC Church purchased an old Methodist church building located on 4104 Greshaw Street (Welkley Interview). By then, they had up to 175 at morning services. Their Sunday school was up from 79 to 284 that year (*Our Hope* Nov. 15 & 29, 1916, 11). In September 1918, Downy left FACC to work for the Ohio Regional Conference, noting it as a difficult field. W.O. Williams, a pastor in Indiana, waiting a commission as a U.S. Army chaplain, withdrew his application and went to FACC. He arrived in October and served until May 1925.

Many Adventists saw the great unprecedented and fearful World War in Europe as an ominous and prophetic fulfillment of Scriptures. It was a sign of the times that God was "bringing in the end, that these were the early travail pains of Earth's last catastrophe, and of creation's second birth" (Johnson 1919, 591). The spectacle of so called "Christian" nations at war with each other before a watching world of non believers was not so shocking to those Adventists whose memories spanned the 50 odd years since their own origins. The rise in attendance then was likely not unrelated to the ongoing horrific news of these events.

In 1923, Hope Church's building was condemned, abandoned, and later demolished (Welkley Interview).⁷ The FACC and Hope Church congregations held a joint watch night service on the last day of 1923 at Augusta Street (*Our Hope* Jan. 1924, 12). A series of revival services held during the spring of Williams' final year (1925) recorded the largest attendance of the past eight to 10 years at FACC (*Our Hope* Oct. 1918 & May 1925).

A few months subsequent to William's departure from FACC, its pulpit was filled by Warman, who came from a church in Villisca, Iowa. After two years of ministry, they had 46 new members, with Sunday school attendance and offerings doubling. However, Warman noted a growing sentiment to sell the property at Augusta Street so as to relocate to a more "American" part of the city (*The World's Crisis* May 5, 1926, 2). Such sentiments may have had more to do with the post WWI sensitivities of 2nd generation Germans regarding their own identity. Immigration then had brought the Jewish component of their neighborhood up to about one in five residents. This was quite low, however, compared to the Lawndale neighborhood (the site of Hope Church). They (Hope Church) had then a large influx of Bohemians, and Jewish immigration to Lawndale was growing so rapidly (Welkley 2011) that in five more years, Jews would comprise more than 95% of their neighbors, by far the highest concentration in Chicago (Holli and Jones 1995, 150).

During Warman's tenure at FACC, A.E. Bloom began to lead the Hope Church (*Our Hope* May 4 & 16 1927). James Todd was overseeing its Sunday school and its attendance rose steadily. Bloom also served as editor for *Our Hope and Life in Christ*, and in 1928 published a hymn book for the denomination, "Songs of Faith and Hope." Will Shuma, who later became ACGC's secretary/treasurer saw his Sunday school class at Hope Church grow

⁷ This was originally the Methodist Church building which they had bought in 1916. It was finally demolished in 1923, but some of the bricks were saved and built into the new building, which was dedicated in 1924.

that year from three to 56 boys (*Our Hope* May 16, 1928, 11). The next year Warman left FACC to lead an AC Seminary in Bridgeport, Alabama. Fim Murra (Mrs.), the president of the Helper's Union, filled FACC's pulpit until J.H. Crouse came in June 1929. That summer as Augusta Street was widened into Augusta Boulevard, FACC made the largest annual donation to the general united budget, Crouse wrote a Sunday school training manual for the denomination, and proposed opening a home for the aged.

The next year Hope Church's Sunday school attendance dropped to 64 although 32 accepted Christ in the first four months (*Our Hope* April 17, 1929). With the market collapse of 1929, many left to find work. Later that year Midwestern region's primary weekly journal *Our Hope and Life in Christ* began publishing only every other week, and then merged with *The World's Crisis* in Boston. The printing presses in Chicago were sent East (*Our Hope* Oct. 30, 1929, 2). In 1930, the Blessed Hope AC Church and FACC combined their evening services (*The World's Crisis* Feb. 19, 1930, 7). In March 1931, Blessed Hope had a Sunday school attendance of 129 on Pastor Bloom's last day. He remained in Chicago as the Midwestern region's corresponding editor for *The World's Crisis*.

By November 1932 most of the FACC's members had left for jobs away from the economically depressed conditions of Chicago (*The World's Crisis* Nov. 9, 1932, 7). FACC's Christmas pageant that year still had 40 participants in full costume (*The World's Crisis* Jan. 11, 1933, 7). By August of 1933 Chicago's World's Fair had more than 7 million visitors. Advent Christians did not participate directly this time, but held an extensive evangelistic campaign (*World's Crisis* Aug. 16, 1933, 6).

In 1935 revival came again to Chicago (*World's Crisis* Jan. 23, 1935, 4). In 1936, Hope Church's elder, Erhardt, died, but not before baptizing a third generation member of his clan and donating the funds necessary to build another AC mission chapel at Galesburg, Illinois (*World's Crisis* Mar. 4, 1936). A few months later Crouse left FACC to work for the Advent Christian Mission Society and Arthur Northup took over. FACC's mission giving doubled and things improved that year (*World's Crisis* Sept. 12,

1936). A hundred members from both congregations met with another 100 from Aurora College for their annual picnic the summer of 1938 (*World's Crisis* June 8, 1938).

In 1941 FACC's homecoming speakers, denominational leaders, S.H. Perry and C.H. Hewitt, noted the uphill struggle they faced in reviving a weakened work in a difficult community full of foreigners (*World's Crisis* Nov. 5, 1941, 5). Nonetheless, they resumed their evening and mid-week services as new members joined, attendance rose, and their Christmas pageant was packed out (*World's Crisis* Feb. 4, 1942, 11), the events of Pearl Harbor having some effect.

The Hope Community Advent Christian Church of Chicago

In 1942, the Blessed Hope AC Church was renamed the Hope Community AC Church to better reflect the needs of their changing community, with Leonard Lowe, having just arrived, as its new pastor (*World's Crisis* Feb. 4, 1942, 11). Under Shuma's leadership, the youth formed a Loyal Workers Union. Three enlisted to serve in the military, and three more do so within another month. The publishing society noted the added war costs while trying to raise subscriptions by another thousand. By then, Northup had left FACC to go to Westfield, Mass., and Jenks, now President Emeritus of Aurora College, was FACC's interim while writing his memoirs for the *World's Crisis*. He mentioned the losses of both churches during the depression. Many who left began new AC churches all along the West Coast from Pasadena, California, to Bellingham, Washington (*World's Crisis* July 28, 1942, 11).

In 1943 Hope Church had the most young people of any AC church serving in the military (*World's Crisis* Jan. 12, 1944). The general conference was providing interim preachers for FACC while its present congregation was being scattered again due to "the abnormal circumstances of the period" from 1939 to 1942 (*World's Crisis* June 12, 1944, 14). In 1942 Jenks assumed the last pastorate of FACC. In February 1944 Hope Church burned their

20-year mortgage (*World's Crisis* Mar. 15, 1944, 13). In 1945 Pastor Lowe left to go to a Methodist church. J. Murray Hanna, a former Aurora student, came to Hope Church that fall. He started a VBS (Vacation Bible School) the next summer with 11 staff workers. The next winter he ran an evening missionary school. The following summer they heard accounts of Alice Longland, their own missionary to India, then home on furlough (*World's Crisis* June 9, 1948, 5). In 1949 Hope Church's homecoming saw 87 at Sunday school. The next year they averaged 77 at their services and their pastor was elected to the publishing society. In 1951 Hanna led evangelistic services at several AC churches and went on evangelistic tours on the East Coast. Jenks died suddenly and FACC became inactive. Some of its members moved over to Hope Church (*World's Crisis* 1951, 27 June 17, 1951, 9).

In September 1951, Hanna, seeing hundreds respond to the gospel, left Hope Church to become a full time evangelist (*World's Crisis* Aug. 6, 1952, 4) and in February, S. Perry of Aurora College was interim. In May he was part time and attendance averaged 78. Perry published *The Hope Herald* monthly. That summer's VBS had 37.

Welkey noted the demographic changes occurring during this period:

After WWII the Greshaw Street neighborhood had a significant influx of Appalachian white people from Kentucky and Tennessee, e.g., the Mays family came from an AC Church in Kentucky, in the 1950s. Many joined the church. Earlier between 1925 and 1935, many synagogues were built in the area and it was very Jewish. Several Jewish children attended Sunday school at this a small predominantly Bohemian Protestant congregation. With Bohemian names such as Zajis, Kopriva, and Kudlata, some became leaders in the community, e.g., one was chairman of the board of the directors of Aurora College. Fred Kudlata was an attorney. The Black migration to Chicago from the south was also predominantly after the Second World

War ... first to the South side of the city and then expanding to the West side. About 1955 the first Black families moved into ... West Grenshaw Street. When I taught Sunday school there in 1959 ... it was predominantly Black. When our family moved to Chicago in 1965, four blocks per month were becoming Black per to Illinois Bell Telephone (Welkley 2011).

By the mid 1950s those coming from FACC were primarily of German descent. They proposed selling both church properties to rebuild together in a suburban location. From the sale of the FACC property they purchased a lot at Lagrange Highlands. A contingent of Hope Church, then a mixture of mostly Caucasian and Black folks from Hope Church, including the families of Sidney Cole and Jude Morris, chose to remain on Grenshaw Street (Welkley 2011). It was not until April 1959 that a ground breaking was held at the Highlands Lagrange site about 10 miles West (*Advent Christian News* April 15, 1959). Both congregations still worshipped together with Wilsey McKnight at Hope Church. African American, J. M. Monegain, led their evening services (*Hope Church Bulletin* April 1958).

The Re-Chartered Hope Community Church (Advent Christian) Chicago

They then rechartered into two separate congregations. Most planned on going to Lagrange. The denomination designated their Lawndale site, Hope Community Church (Hope Church), a national project for an integrated urban outreach mission church (*Advent Christian News* June 1959). That year Lee Welkley, an Aurora freshman, taught Sunday school there. His class of 4th and 5th grade boys grew from six to 40. The next year McKnight, also a carpenter, was building the new church at Lagrange with volunteer help (*Advent Christian News* Apr. 19, 1961). During this decade the flight of Blacks from the South increased the population of Chicago by a million. Most were crowded into a narrow strip

of land on the South side. Despite considerable resistance, they overflowed to Western suburbs, with mounting racial discord.

That year's census recorded 20,000 families living in the 12 block area surrounding Hope Church, with their Easter attendance of 234 exceeding their goal of 175 (Clothey 1960, 11). The denomination allocated \$5,000 in support of the urban mission. The Longs moved there while McKnight planned to relocate with those going to Lagrange. By May 1961, Long was averaging 100 at Sunday school (*Advent Christian News* May 1961). By Mother's day the two congregations were finally at their own sites.

Later that summer both pastors resigned. Long accepted a call to Fresno, Calif., and McKnight from exhaustion. Mike Haynes, a Bostonian Black visited the Hope Church for a couple of weeks to consider the possibility of a call. One hundred, eighty attended their VBS, and 113 enrolled in Sunday school, while they averaged 70 in Worship (*Advent Christian News* Oct.; Sept. 1961). In December, Haynes declined their call, and Herbert Holland from Aurora College filled the pulpit. In January, Mike Whitley took over as interim until McKnight, recently recovering from a heart attack, returned to Hope Church, the Lagrange pulpit being filled (*Advent Christian News* July 1963). Health, however, continued to plague him.

In 1965, McKnight invited Welkley, then pastoring churches in Connecticut, to return to Hope Church as a pastoral candidate. Welkley came to Hope Church in April 1965 and remained until 1977 (Welkley 2011). He started with 54 members (24 adults) of whom 70% were black and 30% white. In 1966 a block of homes kitty corner to the church was demolished to build a school, displacing 200 and six to 10 families of their congregation. The school was four to five years in building (Welkley 2011).

Next was the issue of Black identity. African Americans could no longer be called Negroes, but Blacks. The summers of 1966 and 1967 saw several racial riots. A decade earlier the treatment of the Clarks, a Black family trying to move into the Western neighborhood of Cicero, was well documented, gaining worldwide con-

demnation (Wilkerson 2010, 372f). The only change by the sixties was the increased concentration of Blacks on the West side.

In April 1968 James Earl Ray, a drifter from Illinois, went to Memphis in pursuit of the man leading civil rights marches through those neighborhoods. Another young boy named Steven Epting coincidentally was at his mother's side on Mulberry Street across from the Lorraine Motel, Martin Luther King Jr.'s abode that evening, when a single .30 caliber bullet was fired (Epting 2011). When the news of King's assassination broke out, the riots erupting in Chicago would permanently change the demographics of Lawndale and surrounding neighborhoods. Jewish and White owned businesses were wiped out. Neither the Welkleys nor any Whites could pass through without having their car assaulted. A Black member of the congregation would have to drive them to church (Welkley 2011). Two weeks later President Johnson signed into effect civil legislation banning housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion or national origin. The discrimination from which African Americans had fled in the South may have been institutionalized and overt, while in the North, covert, but it was just as real and virulent:

The Blacks were the last hired and first fired, injustice was everywhere, civil rights denied, prejudice, segregation, racial tension, limited educational opportunity and so much more had brought the city to an emotional boiling point. Once, after entertaining two black teenagers in our home after a church service, our car's rear window was smashed with a hydrant cap. We and our landlord, who lived downstairs, began receiving threatening phone calls (Welkley 2011).

Robert Price addressed this issue by writing reviews monthly for the *Advent Christian News* of books dealing with the racial tensions, which he labeled as the major social problem of our time. He challenged the denomination "One reason why our churches are dying is for refusing to open their doors to anyone who is not of the right color" (*Advent Christian News* Oct., 12;

Dec. 1969; May; Sept. 1970). Caroline Welkley (Lee's wife) published an article *I'm White and Ashamed*, highlighting guilt by association with white brothers and sisters who treated blacks so despicably (Welkley 1969, 15 – 16).

The next year (1969) youth participation of about 200 in the summer program broke all records (*Advent Christian News* Oct. 13, 1969). Attendance at Hope Church doubled in both morning worship service and Sunday school from 1966 to 1970, while the mid week service continued to grow. Welkley proposed a plan at the Home Missions Conference to reach inner city youth. Another 150 young people participated in the summer of 1970 (*Advent Christian News* Oct. 10, 1967).

With the ongoing Vietnam War and job scarcity, the GI bill and draft prompted many youths to enlist. Funerals were conducted frequently for those not surviving. Johnson's War on Poverty gave Mayor Daley access to urban funds. He established Urban Progress Centers to assist grassroots neighborhood people develop programs for youth and job development (Welkley 2011). In 1973, Price, then the moderator for the church board at Hope Church and an Assistant Professor of History at the Chicago State University, again challenged the denomination with his article, published in the *Advent Christian News* (Price 1973, 12 – 15). He pointed to the blatant discrimination against Blacks by denominational leaders, seen in a proposition made at the annual conference to transfer out of their region, Black Advent Christian churches simply because of their color. He also noted that no Black minister would be accepted in a White AC church.

During Welkley's tenure from 1965 to 1977, more than 80 young people from the church went on to college. They began a seven-week summer program to reach ghetto youth with more than 70 participants (*Advent Christian Witness* Sept. 1969). In 1975 they purchased a new church building in the Austin neighborhood about five miles away at 5900 West Iowa Street (their present location), allowing them to minister to another neighborhood by alternating times between Sunday school and morning worship. Many youths not old enough to drive were unable

to travel beyond their own neighborhood. In 1976, they hired youth minister, Leonard Sharber, and minister of communications, George F. Zajis. Their Austin neighborhood outreach program was growing 30% annually. Its morning worship attendance was at 146 and Sunday school was 115, with comparable increases in offerings. They published the *Hope Herald* every two months, had three choirs, with 284 (a new record) at Easter services, and participated in SCUPE (Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education) helping seminarians to minister in the church. Several members also took a Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar led by Melvin Upchurch.

The denomination began a fund drive of \$100,000 to help pay for their new Austin worship facilities. The summer program was then running eight full weeks. They were still ministering to two congregations each week and membership had reached 200. In August 1977, Welkley preached the last sermon of his 12 years as senior pastor of Hope Church in which he averaged 70 hours weekly on ministerial duties (Welkley 2011). Price became the interim minister in addition to being moderator, while still teaching full time at Chicago State. During this time, the Deaconate helped to manage the ministry with Price's oversight and the various ministries continued for three years until Upchurch accepted their call to be the senior pastor (Price 2011). Sharber was then Associate Minister and Director of Christian Education. George Zajis had died (Hope Community Church Annual Report 1981). Price went to Lagrange to avoid impeding the new pastor.

In 1983 Hope Church joined the Circle Community Center, a collaborative of Christian civic-minded urban churches, to provide greater economies of scale in outreach ministries. They began leasing out their Austin site fellowship hall to a pre-school Head start program weekdays. Upchurch resigned in 1985 due to exhaustion but stayed on until his replacement, Carter, was appointed in February 1986. Curtis Johnson was also hired for Grenshaw Street (Hope Community Church Annual Report 1985; Jan. 1986 Report).

At close to 65, Carter was the oldest senior pastor since Jenks was at FACC in 1951. In 1989 with a drop in attendance Hope

Church voted to sell the property at Grenshaw Street and consolidate at a single site. Johnson left for a United Methodist Church in Milwaukee that summer and Carter retired the next March. In May, Charles Cooper, a frequent attendee of church services became an interim. In October he became the senior pastor, initially only part time due to a lack of funds. Cooper's new bride died four months after assuming the pastorate (Hope Community Church Annual Report 1991). For the rest of his ministry at Hope Church, he remained single. The annual reports gave glowing accounts of increases in attendance, offerings, great preaching, and the acquisition of a new parking lot, although after two years he was still part time (Hope Community Church Annual Reports 1991, 1992). However, two years later, Cooper, for numerous reasons including his wish to leave the denomination, would himself be forced to leave, but not before taking some members with him (Norwood 2011, Le Faire 2011).

Sharber then served as interim until the new pastor, Donald Clay came on board. By November 1997, after eight months of tenure, Clay noted the bleeding from the church's schism was finally under control. In fact, some sort of a revival was being experienced (Hope Community Church Annual Report 1997). Within another year Clay was on staff full time. By 2001 attendance was up to 55 and offerings were increasing. All the ministries of the church were operative. Mrs. Clay led the Christian Education committee. After an inspiring sermon in 2003 the church was once again filled with hope for renewal. The next day Clay, who struggled with obesity, died of a heart attack. (Norwood 2011).

Sharber again filled the pulpit as interim at both the Hope Church and Lagrange congregations. Steven Epting learned of the vacancy from a cousin who was a member of Hope Church. He had served as a prison warden and was then the associate pastor of a local Baptist church. In 2003, Epting became the senior pastor. In 2005, after 25 years of ministry, Hope Church lost their Associate Minister Sharber to an untimely and unexpected death from a heart attack. The new pastor is an energetic and dynamic speaker. Hope Church is once again making significant progress

with attendance and offerings more than doubling to date. There is a new sense of excitement about what God is going to do.

Conclusions

Many inferences may be drawn from this history. First, pastoring an urban church seems to require the stamina of a young man, as it can be very exhausting, taking its toll on one's health and family, if not adequately supported (Deut. 18:18; see especially Hurston 1994, 81 – 88). Price's interim ministry did relatively well, indicating that a) delegation is crucial, and b) any urban ministry requires a particular kind of discipleship to succeed. Perhaps those in such ministries need to prepare their successors before leaving. Second, an urban church ministry requires putting an appropriate priority on saving souls. However, this does not mean forsaking planning ahead as the 19th century Adventists discovered. And, as McKnight must have known, the time spent in constructing a church edifice takes away from that in evangelism. Third, the best pastor of an ethnic church need not be the same ethnicity as the congregation. Welkley succeeded as a White minister to a Black congregation in the midst of a world raging in a racial war with itself, thus, bearing an indisputable testimony to the reconciling power of the gospel he proclaimed.

Finally, it is also clear that despite challenges, the ACGC denominational distinctives have endured. It is fair to question, however, what difference those distinctive have made. The first answer any dyed in the wool Adventists would give is that the unadulterated gospel has been faithfully upheld and publically proclaimed by at least one congregation in Chicago. The past 50 years have not seen Adventists enduring anywhere near the same level of scorn their founders did, but their acceptance into the broader community of Evangelicalism is still limited. It also seems that the initial zeal both for evangelism and their defense of those distinctives have waned. It is proposed that those two attributes should go together. It was that zeal that motivated the early Adventist to sacrifice so much to get the word out through

whatever means available. It was also through those various means of publication that that high degree of zeal was maintained and their efforts focused.

The early church founders who suffered and sacrificed so much for their beliefs, transmitted them diligently to their disciples through publishing a constant barrage of literature. The long line of those following has not always shown much acquaintance with, nor commitment to those distinctives. This was especially so when the Western Region's publishing houses were no longer operative and pastors without much theological training took the helm. Whenever regional publishing efforts languished, church participation and evangelism were quick to follow suit. The knowledge of their heritage and distinctive beliefs are obviously important factors in defining their identity and having a strong sense of this identity is crucial for the motivation to continue.

Welkley, who graduated from the denomination's Berkshire Christian Bible College, held forth their testimony faithfully and saw substantial long term growth. Price grew up in an AC church in Boston and was firmly convinced of the absolute necessity of preserving their distinctive light. His contributions to the denominational publications on the racial issues evidenced the grace that having such convictions provided, and helped to overcome the schismatic forces then tearing at the fabric of their corporate communion. Cooper, on the other hand, who did not have any conviction of these truths, did all but split the congregation asunder and probably would have were it not for those within who stood firm for those truths.⁸

Epting, while not being from an AC background and having had his formal training in psychology, nonetheless, appears to be God's choice for this congregation. His sermons give evidence that he is a diligent student of the Scriptures. He is actively

⁸ It is also likely that some of the congregation's resistance to Cooper's proposed disaffiliation with the denomination stemmed in part from their simple unwillingness to break the ties of fellowship they had for so long enjoyed with other ACGC churches.

involved with the denomination, attending their conferences. ACGC leaders frequently visit and speak at Hope Church. The church, under Epting's oversight, has recently established another AC congregation in Africa and their community outreach is thriving. Evangelism being a major focus of his ministry, and having a strong sense of God's calling upon his life, and sovereignty in leading him, he is beginning to see the possibilities of the fruit being produced there now. Several are converted generally every week. Although perhaps not considering them yet as factors with overriding precedence, he does, nonetheless, accept the AC distinctives as true. With the support of long time members of the church and denomination, it seems likely that he will develop a fuller grasp of the critical role Hope Church plays in the overall scheme of God's redemptive plan and know why it is so important not to let their distinctive light go out.

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THEOLOGY PROPER: JUST WHO IS GOD ANYWAY?

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

the immeasurable one

If someone asked you to describe an automobile, it should not be too hard to do. You need merely describe it using common traits of autos, like make, model, chassis type, color, engine type, transmission type, or even the VIN number. We define things based on their similarity or dissimilarity with other things.

We define people the same way. We may say a man is tall, which means that in comparison to other people, his height is greater than the average height. Age, height, hair color, weight, race, regional accent and general build are often traits that are used to describe or define persons in order to identify them. These categories are useful because people have these differences that make it easy to compare them with other people.

But what if there were a person who was so unique that he could not be compared with any other person on the planet?

What if there was a person who could not be described by age, because he always existed, and always will? What if there was a person who had no corporeal expression, so that his height, weight and appearance could not normally be seen or heard? Such is the case with the God of the Bible. All the normal means of expression and measurement do not apply to him.

In fact, one of the traditional ways for theologians to describe God has been to use negative statements. In other words, God is described by pointing out who and what he is not. He is immeasurable, immutable and immortal. Or, to put it in one word: He is infinite. Scientists sometimes speak of space as being infinite, but only because they lack the means of measuring its immensity. The evidence from Scripture reveals that God is infinite by nature. Even if it were possible to measure the vastness of space, God's measurements would still be outside and beyond it.

For explanation purposes, we theologians sometimes convert these negative statements into positive ones. In doing so, we sacrifice accuracy, but we do so in order to express our faith in the One we are trying to define. The positive definitions of God's being that result from this conversion are that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.

omnipresent

To say that God is omnipresent is to ascribe all the space in the universe to him. It "means both that God is not a finite object in space and time besides other objects, and that no finite object, space, or time can exclude God."¹ It is, of course, not possible for human beings to verify that statement scientifically. Not only is it impossible for us to verify God's presence in any particular space, it is also impossible for the human race to be everywhere if we could observe him. We are defined by our limits, and that

¹ Owen C. Thomas, Ellen K. Woodra, *Introduction To Theology*. (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2002), 103.

prevents us from accurately describing one whose presence is unlimited.

We depend, then, on the evidence of God's creation and the special revelation of the Bible to affirm this faith statement about God. Since God created everything that exists in all space, it is not unreasonable to assume that he also exists in all that space. One of the differences between the Christian faith and that of the animists is that our God is not limited geographically. We see him as beyond creation, because he brought all creation into being, and providentially rules over it.

The biblical evidence for this faith statement is abundant. Psalm 139 laments that God is inescapable, but eventually concedes the fact, and seeks God's scrutiny and guidance. In Jeremiah 23:23-24 God asks, "Am I a God at hand, ... and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? ... Do I not fill heaven and earth?" Here we find a helpful distinction: while some people are aware of the existence of a lot of places, even if they have never been there, God is actually present everywhere at the same time. His omnipresence is not just an extension of his omniscience.

This can be true about God because he is not limited to a corporeal nature. Jesus made this clear when he told the Samaritan woman that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). It is not just that God lacks a body, but that he lacks the need for a body, since his essence is not defined as ours is. Human beings have spirits, which need bodies to animate, and without which they cannot function. God's is spirit, and his "body" is the universe.

The implications of God's omnipresence are awesome. We can be assured of his conscious presence when we gather in his name regardless of the size of the gathering — even if it's just two or three people (Matthew 18:20; Luke 24:36). Even if we do not feel that presence, it is there. Even if we do not worship as others expect us to, we have not prevented God's presence. We cannot. There is no place in the universe that is truly God-forsaken, thus we can be assured that he is always with us (Joshua 1:5; Isaiah

41:10; Matt. 28:20). God listens to the prayers of his people no matter where they are. His “calling zone” is not limited (Jeremiah 29:12-14; Matt. 6:6) because his presence is not limited.

omniscient

God’s awareness is just as extensive as his presence. He knows all things, even the future, just as well as the past. When Christians, Jews and Muslims affirm that God is omniscient, we are saying that he does not have limits to his capacity and consciousness that his creatures have. The attribute of omniscience “describes God’s infinite mind in terms of the intuitive, simultaneous and perfect knowledge of all that can ever be the object of knowledge. It relates to the eternal cognizance of the actual and to the possible and the contingent.”²

Human beings, for example, are capable of learning and growing in awareness, but are limited by factors such as brain capacity, availability of data and functionality. God has no such limits. He has a complete grasp of everything that is happening now, and an equally complete memory of everything that happened last year on this date, and next year and next millennium.

Once again theologians are left with the necessity of using approximate and negative language to describe this attribute of God, because there is no other being equal to God when it comes to knowledge. We do not say that God is omniscient because there is a pool of omniscient beings with which he can be compared. It is just as much a statement of our own limits as it is of God’s lack of limits. So we are forced to prove this assertion the same way we proved the assertion of God’s omnipresence. We appeal to God’s revelation of himself in his Word.

The Bible reveals that “the LORD is a God of knowledge” (1 Samuel 2:3). He is “perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16). “He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them

² Allan Coppedge, *Portraits of God*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 132.

their names. ... his understanding is beyond measure.” (Psalm 147:4-5). He announces the hidden things that we have not known (Isaiah 48:6). He “knows what is in the darkness” (Daniel 2:22).

God challenges his rivals to prove their omniscience by revealing the future or explaining the past (Isaiah 41:21-23). He laughs at the absurdity of putting one’s trust in a mute idol who cannot prove that it is even conscious, while God can prove that he is aware of all things. He challenges his people to remember that he has predicted the things that are now, showing that he alone deserves allegiance (Isaiah 48:3-5).

The concept of omniscience is baffling to human beings, and always has been. As the psalmist says, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:6). It is far easier to deal with a lesser deity, who does not know all things, so can be tricked into complying to my will by a well-placed insincere prayer, or a charm or ritual to which he must comply, so that I get what I want. But that is not the way God works. He sees both the deed and the motive. He hears both the words and the thoughts behind them.

Since God’s awareness is unlimited, our approach to him must be an open one. We dare not hide who we are with flowery words, or empty praise, like the Pharisee did in Jesus’ story:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 18:10-14 ESV).

Jesus used this story to teach the kind of attitude we should have as God's creatures. As we humble ourselves, we assess correctly our position in God's universe, but when we exalt ourselves (even when we do it with left-handed complements to God as the Pharisee did) we are being dishonest. This dishonesty about ourselves tilts the scale so badly that it reflects upon our view of God. We end up telling God "what a lucky God you are to have me on your side."

The God of the Bible sees through that hypocrisy and self-delusion. He knows the real score because he knows all things. It is his nature to know the whole truth, while his creatures know only in part (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12).

omnipotent

Believers are also drawn to extremes when attempting to describe God's power. His ability is unmeasurable, infinite. He is omnipotent. Since everything that is was created by him, it stands to reason that there are no limits to his power.

Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you (Jeremiah 32:17 ESV).

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:34-37 ESV).

Again I tell you, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the

kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:24-26 ESV).

With God there is nothing that is harder or easier. The only things he cannot do are the things he will not do, that is, things that are against his nature. His “will is never exercised except in perfect harmony with all the other attributes of (his) great and glorious being.”³ He cannot sin, lie, self-destruct, or do anything that would result in his not being who he is. He himself is a constant.

The Name of God

Perhaps this is the reason that he introduced himself to his estranged people in such a peculiar way:

Moses said to God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is his name?’ — what should I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM that I AM.” And he said, “You must say this to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” God also said to Moses, “You must say this to the Israelites, ‘The LORD — the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.’ ” (Exodus 3:13-15 NET).

With a confusing mix of Egyptian gods as a background, the Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt needed proof that the

³ Martyn Loyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Good News Publishers, 2003), 67.

God who promised to deliver them was different. God's covenant name — Yahveh⁴ — accentuates that difference. It screams "I am the One who has always existed and always will. It speaks of One who is not bound to the limits that all other beings are, One who is infinite, unmeasurable.

I believe it was this same name that Jesus referred to when he commanded his disciples to make more disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The three persons of the trinity are equally infinite, each part of the same Godhead, thus they all share the same name. It is this unmeasurable nature that makes God unique. All other gods have a beginning (as spirits originally intended to serve Yahveh). All other gods have limited knowledge and power. Our God is the "I AM," who has no limits and no peers.

the immutable one

James said that with God "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). He was drawing attention to another attribute of God: immutability. When we affirm that God is immutable, we are affirming (positively) that he is consistent; he acts and responds the same way that he always has. James made this affirmation about God to dissuade his readers from thinking that God was bringing trials upon them to do evil. Instead, he wanted them to realize that temptations come from within us, but remaining steadfast (imitating God's immutability) will lead to "the crown of life" (James 1:12).

Although God acts and moves through history, making his mark upon the lives of all his creatures, he still remains tran-

⁴ The name Yahveh (יהוה) is believed by many to derive from an ancient form (הוה) of the common verb "to be," (היה) although Beitzel argues that the etymological presupposition is not proven, and the name may have been used in Exodus 3 as an example of paronomasia (See Barry J. Beitzel, "Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: a Case of Biblical Paronomasia," *Trinity Journal* 1 NS (1980) 5-20).

scendent. His essential nature and attributes do not change. By his grace he changes us, but we do not change him. If he were changeable, it would mean destruction for God's people (Malachi 3:6). But he is consistent with himself. He can be trusted when no one else can.

It was this consistent nature that set God apart from all the other gods of the ancients. For the Canaanite, for example, a sure harvest this season might cost an extra goat from his flocks this season, or it might cost the life of his child. His gods were fickle; he could not depend on them. For the Israelite, what God wants is clear: it is codified in the law of Moses for everyone to know. It was not left to the whim of the latest shaman to reinterpret. This fact was meant to bring stability into the Israelite's life.

This stability came with a price. Since God cannot be changed, neither can he be manipulated. He cannot be bought off by a bigger offering, or enticed by a louder chant. He does not respond to magic words or magic charms. He is in control and remains in control. He does not relinquish that control to even those who have faith in him. He remains omnipotent. The ancient Canaanite could never accept such a God.

The modern world is filled with people who have the same disposition. They do not mind religion as long as they get to set the standards. They want a God that they can trust to be good when they want good done, but who looks the other way when they do evil to others. They are happy to sing about God the savior, but want nothing to do with God, the judge. They want a god who can tell them that they are the fairest of them all, and that everyone else is too.

The God of the Bible offers salvation and judgment. He can save believers precisely because it is his judgment from which we need salvation. His attributes are consistent, which is another difference between him and his creatures.

One distinction between man's attributes and God's attributes is that, whereas man has characteristics added or subtracted from him, God does not. A man can be joyful as a child and sorrowful as an adult. A man can be faithful as an employee and

unfaithful as a husband. God, on the other hand, never loses or gains any attribute of his person.⁵

This consistency serves as a rock of refuge for believers. As we face the difficulties associated with living life this side of eternity, we are assured that the rules of the game do not change. Life is determined not by blind chance, but by an immutable Person.

Although this attribute of God is encouraging, it also suggests some questions that the thinking Christian should consider. Even if they pose no serious problem to our faith, dealing with them may help us to answer objections from nonbelievers, who might question the reality of God. There are three such questions:

1. If God is unchanging, how can he affect history?

Some have suggested that God's transcendence means that, although he exists, he chooses not to have an impact upon the world that he created. Since he does not change, he limits the effect his presence might have on the cosmos by remaining at a distance, and simply observing. This view reverses the import of transcendence, since it emphasizes the unchanging nature of creation, rather than the creator. It is popular among those who resist the concept of miracles, because their worldview can get along without them.

Immutability speaks to the power of God, and does not limit his ability to affect his creation. It suggests that God interacts with the universe, but that, in the final analysis, that interaction does not alter anything he does or anything that he is. He can affect the course of history, or the course of my life, or yours, because he is sovereign over all things. If he chooses to have mercy on a sinner, it is because he is compassionate and merciful by

⁵ Jeremy Cagle, *Just The Simple Truth: The Attributes of God*.

(www.justthesimpletruth.com/pdfs/03-theattributesofGod.pdf).

nature — the transaction has not changed his essential nature. If he chooses to raise up one nation and put down another, he is acting within the parameters of his omnipotence. He never encounters a situation that forces him to act outside his nature.

His nature, however, is one of consistent intervention. The world is what it is because he keeps stepping into the mix and muddying his hands, so to speak. What appears to some to be a well-oiled simple machine that requires little maintenance, is actually a complex group of inter-acting systems that require constant tweaking and intervention.

2. If God is unchanging, why offer salvation to all?

If some see a problem with an unchanging God who changes history, others see a problem with an unchanging God who changes personal destiny. They suggest that it is unfair for God to offer salvation to all when he knows who will respond to that offer and who will not. He therefore knows that some (indeed many) will never take advantage of his grace, will never repent and display faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Yet he insists on proclaiming “whoever will” even though he knows only the elect will.

For those who see a disconnect here, one way to resolve the problem is for God to make a divine exception to his own nature: he must limit his sovereignty in the area of personal salvation. This will enable anyone who desires to be saved to accept Christ. W. E. Best sees this as an application of deism in the realm of soteriology.⁶ It seeks to solve the sovereignty/free will debate by assuming that God makes the concession to human sovereignty in just this one particular area.

Yet, when we look at what the Bible says about salvation, we see that God has not abdicated his role in this process. He does more than just set up an option, sit back and wish as people get

⁶ W. E. Best, *The Impeccable Christ*. (Lafayette, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc., 1971), 69.

close, then fall away. He sends his Holy Spirit and causes people to be born again into his kingdom (John 3:3, 5). It is an intervention. It is another one of those maintenance miracles that God does so often, we are tempted to think of them as normal.

We live in a world in which God is active, and constantly seeking the lost, and transforming them by the power of his Holy Spirit. This is the kind of God we have. It is not a God who is at the mercy of his creatures. He is immutable. He does not surrender his attributes even to accomplish what he wants.

3. If God is unchanging, is there hope for those who have not heard the gospel?

A third challenge, related to the second, is the notion that God would be unfair to provide only one chance for people to respond to his grace. There are some who see history as a series of dispensations, in which God acts differently, and expects different things from those who belong to him. To some, believing that God is changing helps to soften the impact of a world who largely neglects him. There is always the possibility that God has a “plan b” that will include those who are not responding well to this plan.

The problem is that such thinking has (once again) reduced God to an observer, when the Bible implies that he is the prime mover. For the sake of a “wider hope” the view requires that we reject the present hope. Our present (and only) hope is in the grace of God, who sovereignly brings the lost to himself through his Son. The fact that he is immutable should lead us to use all our resources to bring the dying world to Christ, because only he is the answer. When the next age dawns, it will be Christ’s age. The changes we will see will not reflect a change in who God is. Instead, they will reflect a more clear revelation of the immutable God we worship today.

(This article is excerpted from Jeff’s book *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, which is available electronically in Kindle for-

mat. He also maintains a weblog (blog) with the same name, in which each chapter of the book has been posted.)

IS IT TIME TO SHIFT OUR PARADIGMS?

Dr. Steve Brown

Introduction — The Issue: A “Paradigm Shift”

More than six years ago I met Jeff Reid and Steve Kemp, who talked a lot about paradigms and paradigm shifts. As I listened to them, my thinking about the church, church history, Christian education, leadership development, hermeneutics and missions began to change substantially.

Jeff wrote several articles presenting a central idea around which specific issues orbited much like the planets orbit around the sun. He called these articles “The Paradigm Papers.” The central idea captured my attention, making a lot of sense to me.

Reid explained his core idea as “Church-based Theological Education” or C-BTE. Many of you have read this series of articles. To me the issues raised in the Paradigm Papers triggered a “Copernican Revolution,” theologically speaking.

In addition, Steve, who formerly served as the Dean of Extension Education at Moody Bible Institute, challenged me to consider the possibilities of doing theological education from a church-based model rather than the institutional model. Like many of you, I had been trained in the institutional model in

preparation for ordination and pastoral ministry. I was challenged by the power of a different framework and struggled with the possibility of a “paradigm shift.” It was unnerving, especially in light of my work at BICS, where our passion is to not simply point young adults to acquire information about the faith, but to encourage them toward interior renovation and to develop skills to serve the church. Our platform was primarily designed on the schooling paradigm. It was the oxygen we breathed.

What I would like to do in this session is to travel through a discussion of this issue in two movements. My aim is to affirm the importance of the church-based conversation that has now been going on here in the Eastern Region for the last few years and to encourage its consideration and adoption by you, the leaders of AC churches in the Northeast, notorious for its hard-packed, rocky spiritual soil.

Movement 1 — Defining the Issue

First, what is a paradigm? Let’s spend a little time unpacking the concept. It may not be safe to assume that what I mean by the term is the same way you understand it.

The Greek term means literally “to show side by side.” In this sense a paradigm is a pattern, a model or an example. (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paradigm>)

If you studied Greek, you are familiar with the concept of a paradigm. When a student looks at the inflections of the verb “luw” or “pisteuw” on a chart, he sees an entire model of the uses of the regular verb. From luw one goes on to recognize deponent and compound verbs, at least that’s the idea. Oh yes, I forgot — the student has to memorize the irregular of eimi for which there is no paradigm! A paradigm is a set of forms that show the various elements of a single stem in a language.

A paradigm can also be understood as a cognitive framework. In this sense a paradigm is a theoretical construction, by which one explains how something works. Consider the helio-

centrism of Copernicus, for example — which brings us to the concept of a “paradigm shift.”

Scientists and philosophers, after thinking and working within an accepted conceptual model, may be presented with a set of problems unsolvable in standard ways. That creates a crisis forcing a leader, an organization, a movement, a culture, or, in our case, a movement of churches to look for solutions “outside the box,” to formulate, if you will, a new set of solutions. Often the crisis compels the invention of a new or different conceptual model. To adopt that new model is called a “paradigm shift.” The movement puts on a “new thinking cap” (Pearcey, *The Soul of Science*, p. 59), as did Copernicus when he suggested that the planets did not revolve around the earth.

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn, a science historian, used the paradigm concept to analyze the various epochs, from Aristotle to Einstein, in scientific research of the physical world. He described these shifts as occurring not so much because of logic or hard data, but because of value decisions. Important for this morning is Kuhn’s definition of a paradigm. In his book, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,” he wrote:

the term paradigm stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community (p. 175).

In 1988, Hans Kung, the controversial Roman Catholic Scholar, adopted Kuhn’s paradigm model of science history to analyze the various mega shifts in the history of theology. In his book, “Theology for the Third Millennium,” Kung underscored the revolutions that occurred in the church since the first century. One example he charted was the rumbling ecclesial “earthquake” of Luther when he shifted medieval canon law driven by Aristotelian philosophy to the biblical text alone. That, Kung believed, was the evidence of a shifting paradigm (p. 127). He was not wrong.

Those of you who have become acquainted with the church-based conversation, know that the paradigm concept is prominent and powerful. That is why Reed used the term “Paradigm Papers” to lay out his challenge for church-based prototypes for ministry, from education to missions to hermeneutics.

I hope by now it is clear that a paradigm is a conceptual model used to understand a complex reality. Using this kind of tool, a movement, in our case a network of churches, could begin to think about “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community,” in our case, the churches of the Eastern Region. A paradigm may describe concepts already driving our thinking, or it can become a large-scale engine for change.

And here it is that we turn to the Bible. While Kuhn was trying to make sense of the history of science from his closed philosophical system, “below the line” (as Francis Schaeffer pointed out in “Escape from Reason”), and Kung was trying to make sense out of fragmented Western theology using Kuhn’s framework, we should read afresh the treatment of Luke and the apostles to discover “the models and examples, the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community” (in Luke’s writing, the planters of the early church) IF, THAT IS, THE MODEL IS THERE IN THE TEXT.

The challenge is not to lay on the Bible our paradigm proposals but rather to see if the apostles laid down a single guiding example, an imperative if you will, for us to implement in our ministries. That, I believe, is a necessary, but demanding, project for leaders in the Eastern Region.

Roland Allen was an Anglican missionary in China for eight years at the turn of the 20th century. He believed that every new generation of Christians ought to resubmit their traditions to the Word and the Spirit of God. In his short book, “Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours,” he wrote there are “certain principles which seem to lie at the back of all the Apostle’s actions and in which I believe we may find the key to his success and

endeavor to show some at least of the ways in which the apostolic method might be usefully employed today” (p. 8, 9). I bring Allen into this discussion as an exemplar who believed in the necessity of probing the paradigm problem.

The question to answer is this: does the New Testament, by design, lay out “THE way of Christ and his apostles” to echo Allen, or is it an account of what happened with no particular normative force for the future church?

That is, does the New Testament lay down principles and patterns to plant and empower churches that must be followed, or does it simply recount “a” way a few fishermen, a revenue agent and a converted rabbi did it thousands of years ago? If so, the Great Commission project depends on imaginative innovations going forward.

Movement 2: The Hermeneutical Imperative Facing Advent Christian Leaders.

Was Allen correct? The only way to test his thesis is to go over the biblical texts once more to validate or reject his three observations 1) that a core strategy informed Paul’s ministry, 2) that this strategy is discoverable, and 3) that enough of the strategy is available to guide the church in the planting and establishing mandates embedded in the Great Commission. If these three elements can be discovered, it would be reasonable to assume that the Holy Spirit intends for us to accept them as paradigmatic, in other words as informing truth for our ministries today.

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. That is axiomatic. The concern here is what did the author/s (and the Author) intend for the church to understand and implement?

My observation is this: Advent Christians are facing a hermeneutical imperative. Given our fragmentation, can we reasonably expect to come to an agreement on something so crucial as the biblical mandate for implementing the mission of the church? Our Regional Superintendent is asking us to consider a fundamental shift in the paradigm of our ministries. Should

missions, theological education, leadership development and all the rest be church-based in a radical departure from the institutional and attractional models we have relied upon for more than a century?

To consider these possibilities requires a serious reevaluation of the assumptions we accept as biblical. Multiple examples could be cited to illustrate the problem. Here is just one relating to world missions.

In 2005, Dr. David Dean published his history of Advent Christian Missions titled “Who Will Go for Us?” It is a lucid and triumphant account of the denomination’s work in other parts of the world, yet it illustrates the urgent need for Allen’s challenge.

Dr. Dean describes well the development of missions informed by an antecedent Western model for planting and establishing the church that was imposed upon the missions project. Our work in India was but one example with its compounds, buildings and ministries inflected by British and North American mentalities. Much effort has been made by our denominational leaders to deal with the effects of that old paradigm requiring difficult decisions, contentions with national leaders and not a little hand wringing to accompany the deliberations.

This was exactly the model against which Roland Allen opined in 1930. Now, missiologists believe that the western paradigm is spent, to be abandoned. It is no longer workable.

David Bosch, a missiologist at the University of South Africa before his death in a car crash in 1992, wrote in his book, “Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission”:

There is no longer any room for the massive affirmations of faith which characterized the missionary enterprise of earlier times, only for a chastened and humble witness to the ultimacy of God in Jesus Christ (p. 354-355).

It is possible that moribund churches and mission models might be prods to look at ourselves less in celebration and more in humility. In his very important analysis of the problem, David

Macdonald Patton, like Allen, a missionary in China, made this observation:

It is natural to us to seek to defend ourselves: to admit, of course, that we have our failings, but to insist that much of our work stands and has been blessed of God. This attitude is the prime obstacle to the gospel in your heart and mine; and its name is pride (“Christian Missions and the Judgment of God,” p. 51).

Paradigms can ossify as well as liberate a movement. But let that go, and let’s move on. Central to the discussion of paradigms is the correlative assessment of our underlying approach to interpretation. This is the heart of my concern. Advent Christians must work to construct a common hermeneutic framework. The wise man built his house on the rock. So should Advent Christians.

The literature on biblical hermeneutics is vast and varied from the “Expository Hermeneutics” of Elliot Johnson to the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer in his book, “Truth and Method.” The postmodern hermeneutic, which currently dominates interpretive theory, uncouples the author’s intent in the text by shifting meaning to the reader’s response to the text. So, the text no longer conveys intentional, objective, external meaning but becomes a “living” malleable document, much like the U.S. Constitution is being interpreted by liberal judges in America’s courtrooms. Significant, conflicting outcomes in interpretation have been hard upon us in the church for many years and it is time to get at this problem straight away.

Dr. Fred Ehle Jr., a mentor to many of us, offered me advice he received from Dr. James Nichols, his mentor. Fred counseled, when interpreting the Bible “take it as it reads.” At first glance that advice seems naïve. But on reflection Fred meant the Bible is what God has revealed to us through the authors. God intended to communicate truth. That truth is knowable upon study, reflection and testing. In other words, the only valid interpretation is one based on the intent of the author.

One great present day exponent of this approach to the Bible is Walter Kaiser, the now retired President of Gordon-Conwell. His body of work is a *tour de force* in laying down the principles of getting at the meaning of the author. We would do well to inform our hermeneutic practice, beginning with Kaiser's "The Promise Plan of God" for the overall approach to the Bible or beginning with his chapter *Legitimate Hermeneutics* found in the book "Inerrancy," edited by Norman Geisler (p. 117 - 147). (Helpful also is the work of E. D. Hirsch, "Validity in Interpretation.")

Twenty-five years ago Kaiser called upon church leaders to begin a "hermeneutical reformation" (Geisler, ed. p. 117). He declared:

Much of the current debate over the Scriptures among believing Christians is, at its core, a result of failure on the part of evangelicals to come to terms with the issue of hermeneutics (*Ibid.*)

In doing so he touched upon the problem that has infected Advent Christian DNA for 150 years. Once again, ours has not been a problem of acknowledging the Bible as the Word of God but one of interpreting the Bible. It is high time for concern, not over the inspiration of Scripture, but the over the meaning of Scripture.

Kaiser suggested axioms to guide such a project. Here are two of them to get the ball rolling. (Actually, Kaiser developed five axioms to guide hermeneutical reformation earlier in 1978. They can be found in the chapter, *The Single Intent of Scripture* in "Evangelical Roots," Kantzer, ed., pp. 123 - 140.)

1. God's meaning in revelatory-intention in any passage of Scripture may be accurately and confidently ascertained only by studying the verbal meanings of divinely delegated and inspired writers.
2. That single, original verbal meaning of the human author may be ascertained by heeding the

usual literary conventions of history, culture, grammar, syntax and the accumulated theological context.

On the issue before us: is a church-based paradigm embedded in the New Testament? One foundational treatment of the question is found in a chapter titled *Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent* by Fee and Stuart in the book “How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.” They conclude that, yes, in the Book of Acts Luke intends for us to discern powerful precedents (paradigms, if you will) to inform and motivate each successive generation of the church to build its ministry “**on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone**” (Ephesians 2:20).

Building off Fee and Stuart is this challenge: Let us commit ourselves to embrace the project of reading Luke and the apostles to validate the presence of a paradigm philosophy of church planting and expansion. Is there an identifiable pattern therein that guided the exponential growth of the church for nearly 300 years after our Lord’s ascension?

While the details and local forms developed by those pioneers may seem obscure to us, can we discover biblical antecedents to be employed wherever and whenever the church sprouts from the soil?

I think the BILD resources are helpful in getting at the issues, but I want to raise a caution. Advent Christians understand too well trendy treatments for church pathologies. Many of you have attended the national conferences featuring “successful” church leaders or read renovated practical theologies. But those approaches usually have not worked at home. There have been so many proposals; we have become cynical and hardened to the next great set of solutions to our problems. So, to heap more manuals or a shelf of books on you could stir up a hardened aversion to perceived programmed solutions.

But the church-based conversation has already begun in the Region. So as we cycle through the project, we would be wise to test the paradigm by a serious submission of our hearts and

minds to a fresh reading of Paul and Luke. But as we do, keep in mind that our approach to biblical interpretation needs some repair and propping up. How we go about this is more important than shifting the paradigm.

Our present crisis is a powerful motivator to seek solutions. True. But prevailing models can be straitjackets of the status quo. Resistance to calls for change is in our DNA. But we should not reject opportunity out of hand. The best way forward is to go back over the biblical material to determine the presence and nature of the church-based paradigm. From there must arise the conviction and determination to change ... or not.

An Exhortation

The theme of today's event is "Paradigm Shifts." To shift paradigms invites a revolution — to do so could be risky with uncertain outcomes. Is the Holy Spirit calling us to do that very thing? And to what is he pointing? How can we know what he wants?

My exhortation is to get behind the curtain to test our assumptions and current practices in a serious, large-scale submission to the Bible. There we should search for principles to address the dying present and sweep away the fragmentation that chains us to the theological DNA of the past.

Is it time to shift our paradigm? I say yes, it is overdue. And the place to begin is with a fresh reading of the New Testament followed by the courage to admit our failures and the determination to learn "The Way of Christ and His Apostles."

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ANTHROPOLOGY: TO BE HUMAN (Looking Ahead to issue XLI/1)

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

- The Spring 2015 issue will feature articles about the nature of humanity. We are looking for articles describing human nature.
- In the past, Advent Christians have debated the question of the components of human beings (whether we are best described as bipartite or tripartite, or something else. Articles on that question (and/or its current significance) are welcomed.
- Perhaps someone would like to explain how the Bible presents the question of race or ethnic identity?
- At least one article will be included that defends the concept of gender equality in ministry. Perhaps someone would like to propose and defend the concept of complementarianism?
- In this issue, we included a position paper by Rev. Steve Brown, which he presented at the 2014 Eastern Regional Convention on the subject of church based leader development. We continue to welcome such contributions that reflect what Advent Christians are currently thinking, regardless of the topic.
- What are you reading? Reviews of current books or web posts are always welcome.