

An Evangelical Analysis of Jan Paulsen's "Theological Landscape" 2002 Key Note Address To the SDA Biblical Research Committee and SDA World Leaders

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Prologue

I am a former Seventh-day Adventist ordained minister, pastor, theology professor, and administrator. I was born in an Adventist home. My father was an Adventist pastor, evangelist, and administrator. All my formative education was in SDA schools and colleges, including my Master's of Divinity at Andrews University Seminary (M. Div. 1972). Following in my father's footsteps, I became an Adventist pastor, missionary, evangelist, departmental director (Youth: North Perú Mission 1975-1977) seminary teacher (CESU: Lima, Perú 1978-1980), and finally Conference Secretary for one of the largest conferences in North America.ⁱ At the time I was interviewed for my job as Conference Secretary I made it clear that my task would be to provide alternatives in thinking, planning, and envisioning the mission and role of the church. I was told by the interview committee that was precisely what they wished to see in the administration of the conference. At that time I was already extremely drawn to the message of the gospel in the writings of the apostle Paul. Thus I hoped to offer alternatives in the theological thinking of the church's mission and outreach. In fact, the message of justification by faith had been persuasively drawing me with cords of love ever since my seminary days at Andrews. As part of an assignment for a Sabbath class, we had been assigned readings in Luther and Calvin to show that they had manifested strong inclinations in favor of the seventh-day Sabbath observance. Noting that one had to read much between the lines to come to such conclusions, I spent most of my time thrilling in Luther's commentary on Romans, the Psalms and his writings on Righteousness by faith in Christ's righteousness alone. I was inspired by these writings. Although at times I saw glimpses of these in some of the writings of Ellen White, other of her statements negated what she has written in accord with the Reformers. However, the message of salvation as I was beginning to see it in the gospels, the epistles, drew me to the ministry. I hoped to build on my father's ministry in the SDA church, since I remembered his ministry strongly focused on the cross of Christ and the Scriptures alone.

As it is with countless current and former SDA pastors and concerned lay people, for years I thought the church would willingly see that the only true way for "revival and reformation" energizing the fulfillment of its mission would be the message of justification by faith through the merits of Christ alone. I thought that Christ's life, death, and his glorious resurrection as his free gift of eternal life to all those who believe in him would come to the center of the church's mission. This was my secret wish as I entered the ministry, and ministered alongside many other pastors, missionaries, in the work of the church. I dedicated nearly 20 years of my life to the SDA ministry in hopes that the church would reorient its ministry and theology towards the cross of Christ and his justifying merits.

When in 1988 I accepted the responsibility of Conference Secretary I also did so with the hope that somehow I could make an impact on the theology of the church, using my influence, gifts, and ministry to preach and teach the cross of Christ.

I remember just a few weeks into my leadership role at the Southeastern California Conference, I was taking part in a Conference officers' planning session. The item under discussion was for each one of us to give ideas regarding ways to encourage our pastors to be more involved in what was termed "soul winning", which was equated with the preaching of the gospel. I suggested that

perhaps it would be a good idea to involve our pastors in a workers' retreat at which the only topic for study and discussion would be the nature of the gospel. If we could get our pastors to understand and agree on the gospel, certainly they would be more enthusiastic about their soul winning. To my surprise, my idea was met with immediate and resounding silence. We went on to the next item on the agenda.

After the meeting, a top church administrator came to my office. I remember the moment so clearly. Waving his long finger in my face he said, "Haroldo, there is one thing you need to know about administration. If you want to be successful in administration... [and here he paused to emphasize what was coming next]... if you want to be successful in administration, *don't get involved with theology!* That is the quickest way to ruin your administrative career". "Successful administrators", he continued sweeping his arm across a long desk, "and I'm speaking across the board in Adventist administration, *don't get involved in theology!*" Even after he paused, his finger continued to wave in my face. I marveled in quiet. For there behind him on the other side of the large glass windowpanes of the office, was one of the largest SDA universities in North America.ⁱⁱ You could even see the church, and the buildings of the theology department. "So this is the way it is in SDA administration", I quietly told myself. "No involvement with theology. A theological mission with no theological involvement. Hmmm.... quite a dilemma".

That dilemma which I lived and eventually didn't survive in Adventism, continues to be the dilemma for the Adventist church today, nearly 20 years since that open window into the chasm that is Adventist theology and the administration of the church's mission.

Jan Paulsen's address before the Biblical Research Committee and guests in 2002 continues to highlight that dilemma which is always resolved on the side of an administration – across the board – that refuses to deal with the theological nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ as he gave it to the disciples.

The SDA church's negation of its theological mission is a challenge to the rest of Protestant evangelical Christianity, where to a greater or lesser degree, the dilemma is also played out, with other players and themes, but bordering close and at times also negating the essential gospel nature of the Christian church.

In the following, I will analyze as a former SDA administrator, Jan Paulsen's address and what it means not only for the SDA church today but also for evangelical Christianity. This analysis might be deemed dated. However, Paulsen was reelected president of the General Conference in 2005, and in that capacity continues to travel worldwide affirming the same declarations he made in 2002.ⁱⁱⁱ

I do not write the following analysis as I once hoped that the SDA church leadership would see itself in need of theological change. The SDA church is a closed loop system to change. It will not change. Although it denounces other Christian faiths for their failure to see their errors, Adventism leads the way in obscuring the gospel of Jesus Christ with one of the most "craftily and cleverly devised fables" regarding Christian faith and practice.

Ever since emerging from Adventism I have seen the following principle as the key principle driving all of Adventist theology, administration, teaching, evangelism, and pastoral care. This principle is the one unifying principle within the writings of Ellen White, regardless of the sources she used in preparing her work. That principle is this: Adventism affirms a commonly held truth in order to deny it with one or more subtle and pious sub-truths or alleged applications of the truth. For instance, Adventism will affirm the work of Christ as our sin bearer only to deny it with the subtle falsehood that in the end Satan as God's scapegoat will bear the sins of all. Adventism will affirm the work of Christ as God's mediator, only to deny it with the subtle and pious teaching that just

before the coming of Christ, believers will have to live before God without Jesus as their Mediator. Their perfect lives will sustain them before the coming of the Lord with power and great glory. In my experience, the believers' reactions are to undervalue the work of Christ as Mediator because in the final analysis, in the most critical moment of their lives, at the coming of the Lord, they will have to stand on their own, without Christ's intercession before the Father. Therefore if in the future at the most critical moment of their lives they will not need Christ, why should they need Him now? This is the reason why they so rigorously adhere to their law keeping and observances without regard to the blood and the life of Christ on their behalf. Talk to an Adventist about the blood of Christ, His perfect life, His merits, His obedience, the value of His merits, and they soon become bored and turn their backs on you. Talk to an Adventist about the persecution, the "preparation for the final crisis", the fine points of Sabbath observance, the beast, the image of the beast, even about hydrotherapy, and you have them captive for hours!

Adventism will affirm that the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone is the standard of faith and practice for all Christians, only to deny the principle of Sola Scriptura by affirming that the writings of Ellen White are also an inspired and authoritative source of truth! This principle permeates all of Adventism and as will be seen is the foundation behind Paulsen's appeal for Theological Unity in the SDA church.

I write the following analysis in hopes that other pastors and lay persons will be led to see that the gospel of Jesus Christ and Adventism are not only in opposition to each other, but that Adventism is at war with the gospel. Adventism is indeed within the camp of the dragon that went to make war with the woman and her seed, Jesus Christ. That such is the case will be made plain in the analysis of Jan Paulsen's address.^{iv}

THE THEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE	ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS
<p style="text-align: center;">BY JAN PAULSEN</p> <p><i>From April 29 to May 8, 2002, some 45 church leaders gathered to consider the topic "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." The group was comprised of General Conference personnel, most of the presidents of the world divisions, and several scholars. The conference was called by the General Conference and organized by the Biblical Research Institute. A series of papers on theological topics provided the structure for the deliberations.</i></p> <p><i>In order to provide a biblical setting, the conference convened first in Greece and then in Turkey. The group interspersed theological discussions with visits to Athens, Corinth, Istanbul, some of the sites of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, and finally Patmos. Retracing the footsteps of Paul and John proved deeply inspiring to the participants.</i></p> <p><i>General Conference president Jan Paulsen gave</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HAROLDO S. CAMACHO</p> <p><i>The April 29 to May 8, 2002 dates first caught my eye and reminded me of a couple of other dates I had come across recently. Between November 2-4, 2001 at the Jesus Institute Forum symposium, and then on February 9, 2002 at the Association of Adventist Forums meeting in San Diego, CA, the late Raymond Cottrell presented a landmark result of decades of his studies on the sanctuary doctrine within the Adventist church. For those who may be new to Cottrell's name, he was the principal editor for the SDA Bible Commentary, pastor, missionary, and after his retirement, tireless scholar and consultant for various SDA committees and administrators worldwide. His loyalty to the SDA church remained unquestionable until his death. Nonetheless, his landmark presentations broke ranks with the SDA traditional interpretation of Daniel 8:14, the 2,300 day prophecy, and related interpretations. Together with Desmond Ford's, Cottrell's study challenging the church's long held position on 1844, has recently shaken the foundations of this doctrine.</i></p> <p><i>The fact that Jan Paulsen as president of the General</i></p>

the keynote address. After its presentation the assembled leaders requested that it be printed in the Adventist Review and also be made available for distribution as a stand-alone publication. We have therefore prepared Pastor Paulsen's address, "The Theological Landscape," as an insert in the Adventist Review and arranged for extra copies to be printed. Members desiring a copy of the address should contact the Biblical Research Institute, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904-6600. -- Editors.

Conference just a few months later called this meeting "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church" is a testament to the power of Cottrell's exposé. Paulsen's response in calling this meeting of 45 world wide church leaders cannot be described as anything less than reactionary, fearing a worst case scenario of church leaders breaking ranks from Adventism. Paulsen's quick reaction in calling for "Theological Unity" probably averted the fulfillment of his worst fears. However, it also fulfilled Cottrell's warning that the church was once again submerged into an age of biblical and theological obscurantism.^v

The level of expense of the Biblical Research Committee's follow up on Jansen's initiative is also telling of the amount of tithe resources the church was willing to spend on averting what it saw as a major crisis. A 10-day meeting involving 45 church leaders plus at least a dozen support personnel brought from Washington and other parts of the world certainly was no mean expense. At approximately \$15,000 dollars per attendee (including hotel, meal stipends, and the attending logistical staff such as translators and translating equipment, medical staff, and other equipment accompanying the General Conference president) easily placed this meeting's expense at nearly if not over one million dollars! It would be a sign of the church's openness to disclose the expenses for this meeting. Notice that the meeting included side trips to Athens, Corinth, Istanbul, the isle of Patmos, and other sites. This would mean charter bus and boat expenses, plus meals, special communication and secretarial equipment transportation, and additional hotel expenses. This was clearly a major financial investment on the part of church administration. The meeting clearly had more in mind than just discussing "Theological Unity", and providing inspiration from following in the footsteps of Paul and John. A crisis had to be averted, no expenses barred. Note that the heading on the article in the Adventist Review did not include the names of the attendees, particularly the scholars, nor did it include the names and authors of the papers presented.

Given my own experience in administration's relationship to the theological task of the church noted above, the task of this meeting was not theological discussion, dialogue, nor study. This meeting was clearly an administrative initiative to negate whatever waves of questioning church doctrine Cottrell's presentation may have caused among top leadership in the church the world over.

I wish to reflect on the theological landscape as I see it, with primary reference to our church and our mission. I realize that this could be almost never-ending; therefore, you will understand my need to be selective. And also, while I will give some pointers that will indicate directions, as I see them, a number of my observations will simply be by way of identifying the issues, stating why I think they are important to us, and why they should be addressed.*

The scene on which we step out as Seventh-day Adventist believers every day is no different from that of society in general. There's no "private" Adventist world, however much some may try to define small corners as such. The world we meet every day as we open the door to step out, or as we turn to the news media, is overwhelmingly secular and sometimes--particularly in the West--aggressively atheistic, and is being drawn regularly into tension with the values of religious systems. Whether this is more so today than at other times in history is difficult to say; communication has so radically shrunk the world that we not only have an awareness of what is happening everywhere else, but also feel a sense of involvement and ownership in the morality and ethics of what's happening in the remotest parts of the world. Above all, the world that surrounds us is very insecure and unstable, a reality that impacts the personal lives of our own people and speaks to the urgency of our mission as a church.

I focus on 10 areas:

Paulsen's remarks are no mere reflection. These remarks are carefully thought through. In fact, Paulsen states that he has been selective in his themes, although he does not share with the listeners the basis he used to select them. He has given deep study to what he wants to say in his opening remarks, is well aware of his authority, and the power that his understated "reflection" will have over his captive audience. These meetings are not about reflecting together about theology. "*Administrators don't get involved in theology*". These meetings are about affirming the president's understanding of the theological direction the church should take and warning those who may be tempted to look too carefully at alternatives such as Cottrell's.

At the outset, Paulsen paints a worldview for which the Seventh-day Adventist message is the answer.

However, this is not the worldview painted by Paul in Romans 1 and 2. There is no reference to sin or sinners in this worldview. Since the world is not defined in terms of sin and sinners needing to be put right with God, then there is no need for a Romans 3-10 gospel. There is no need for the Romans 3:21 proclamation, "But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God is revealed". The world is defined at worst as "aggressively atheistic", then in milder terms as at "tension with the values of religious systems", and back again as having questionable "morality and ethics"; finally it is described as an "insecure and unstable" world. These realities, according to Paulsen, call for the urgency of the Seventh-day Adventist mission, which somehow has the answer to these ills, none of which is sin. Clearly this is not an appeal for the church to take up with urgency the preaching of Christ and his cross, but its unique "mission as a church".

The 10 areas of Paulsen's focus yield an extremely profound insight into his understanding of the essence of Seventh-day Adventism. None of the 10 areas have directly to do with the person of Christ, or his sacrifice on the cross. As will be seen, Paulsen's understanding of Adventism is that it has superior knowledge or understanding of God and the world. Adventism is not about the person of Jesus Christ. It is not about his merits, nor his perfect obedience on our behalf, nor his death on the cross in our place, nor his finished work of salvation on our behalf on the cross. In his 10 areas of focus for the world church leaders seeking "Theological Unity", the cross shines for its absence!

Thus, in so far as the first area of Paulsen's reflections, a

1. The Second Coming--Do We Still Believe?

In my view, it's important for us consciously to recognize the transitory nature of our world, its history, and our place in it. It's something that should occupy our thinking, preaching, and planning as a church. This must be very deliberate. It is to me a troubling thing when a church member walks up to me and says: "Why don't we hear more about the end of time and the second coming of Christ? Don't we now believe these things as we used to?" And sadly, I suspect there are in our community those who in truth no longer believe these things as we used to. As other Christians have found their own ways of understanding the eschaton, so many Adventists are finding nonliteralistic interpretations of the end-time more acceptable, more respectable, and less intrusive into their personal lives. In my view, unless we very deliberately attend to our teaching, preaching, and what we write, we will drift and become what we were not when we first took the name Adventists.

The preaching and teaching of the eschaton is neither paranoia nor gloom--nor is it pessimistic. We believe that the world as we know it is not repairable and is not survivable. This is not the general Christian view of the world. But it is the Adventist view of it. Have we reviewed with our ministers, with the teachers in our schools, with the writers of our books and journals, how these realities of the future are to be projected, both in our public witness and in the nurture of our own people? Do we plan to do it? For if not attended to, they will disappear, with the passing of time, from our sight and thinking.

Is it possible that with an eye to mission we have underestimated the appeal that the preaching of these eschatological realities (that lie at the heart of our message of hope) may in fact bring to very secular people--people who have no defined faith in God as such, but who have also concluded for their own reasons that our world is unstable and insecure, and are hoping that maybe, just maybe, there is something more?

And when it comes to preaching and teaching eschatology, I believe it's not a prerequisite that

more pertinent question for the Seventh-day Adventist church today is:

The Cross of Christ--Do We Still Believe?

The teaching and preaching of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus is incomprehensible without saving faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. "And He said to them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I say to you, I will not any more eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And He took the cup and gave thanks and said, Take this and divide *it* among yourselves. For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come. And He took bread and gave thanks, and He broke *it* and gave *it* to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of Me. In the same way *He took* the cup, after having dined, saying, This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:15-20).

Paulsen's question to the SDA world leaders comes back to them in a modified form as asked by thousands of Adventists within the church today: "Why do we not hear anymore about the sacrifice of Christ and his death on the cross? Do we no longer believe in Christ and Him crucified?"

The only way to be ready for Christ's second coming is to live by faith in the "new covenant" of His blood, poured out for us. Paulsen makes no mention of this vital link, established by Christ between His sacrifice and the Second Coming. Without saving faith in the blood of Christ as the symbol of the new covenant the preaching of the eschaton is indeed, to use Paulsen's words "paranoia, gloom, and pessimism".

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Never once in my seminary experience was this link talked about or studied or at the center of any of my professors' teachings regarding the second coming. I am sure that many Adventists would indeed be surprised to see the connection. For Adventists the way to be ready

eschatology, I believe it's not a prerequisite that all things be perfectly clearly understood in order for the reality of the last things to be declared and accepted by faith. And by "last things" I'm referring primarily to the ongoing ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, to the second coming of Christ, and to judgment. It seems to me that at this time, post September 11, the preaching of things that testify to God's intervention in history can be a powerful witness. Is there not a hunger for a vision? Will September 11 continue to be the solitary end-time point of reference? I think not. But I would suggest that it will be a catalyst to keep us awake, sober, and sensitive without leading us to resort to what is highly speculative, overly imaginative, but ultimately disreputable.

But let me back up just a bit. I made the comment about much of the West being plagued by an aggressive atheism. I think it is there, accompanied by the depressive void that agnosticism creates. The two somehow live together, and neither of them knows God. One asserts that he is not there--that in fact we are on our own; the other, simply that we don't know.

Now, this is obviously a challenge to all Christians. But it's also a very real challenge to us as Seventh-day Adventists. The belief in the existence of God is the primary belief on which all other doctrines as well as life itself are placed, defined, and experienced. It's where faith begins; and it's the starting point from which faith asserts itself. Therefore, it's of utmost importance that as Adventists we recognize it and address it. Such is done only if it is addressed in a systematic, focused, and deliberate manner. It is not ours only to deal with. Other Christians have to deal with it also, but we must leave it to them to do what they must do. We must accept what we must do, and this is one we must address. Are you examining with your preachers, teachers, and writers how you are going to do that?

for the second coming is by becoming a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church and accepting its doctrines and observing its practices. Saving faith in the blood of Christ is not taught as the *only* way to be ready for the Second Coming. Never. Look up Fundamental Belief #16 on the Lord's Supper: no mention of the Second Coming. Look up Fundamental Belief #25 on the Second Coming: no mention of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus taught that his body and blood were to be our firm hope in his coming. His disciples were to remember his blood poured out for them as the reason for his soon return. Adventism removes the sacrifice of Christ as the reason for the blessed hope of his coming. Rather than his sacrifice as the reason for his coming, Adventism in Paulsen's words substitutes the Adventist belief "that the world as we know it is not repairable and is not survivable". What a clever sleight of hand! Incredible micro surgery on the gospel of Jesus Christ to remove the troubling stumbling stone of the once and for all sacrifice of Christ on behalf of all sinners! In its place is inserted the inescapable reality that the world is beyond repair and survival. Without the preaching of the cross. And this is not paranoia? Not gloom? Not pessimism? Indeed, without the cross, there is no blessed "hope that burns within our hearts".

Adventism's hope is not biblical hope. It is not New Testament hope. It is not even the "blessed hope" of 2 Timothy 2:13. In this text the phrase "blessed hope" is intimately related to the phrase "who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity", which is found in the next verse, v. 14. Adventist hope is the private property of Adventism, it is "our message of hope".

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Adventists might be reminded that whatever hope they claim is theirs to give is based on the dashed hopes of the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844. But the blessed hope, the hope which Christ gave the entire Christian church "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the

ungodly" (Rom 5:5-6). Brother Paulsen, this hope in Christ's shed blood is the more than Adventists' "just maybe, something more" that you claim the secular world may find in Adventism. The fact that "at just the right time, while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly" is the sure hope the secular world is needing, and which Adventist mission is denying.

Paulsen's concern is that if they preach anything else "we will drift" away. Will the preaching of the cross of Christ cause Adventism to drift away? The problem is that Adventism began adrift from the cross. At its inception its unifying factor was not the cross of Christ.

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The unifying factor was the preaching of the second coming *without* the preaching of the blood of Christ shed as sign and promise of his second coming. But the preaching of the second coming without the essential link to the broken body of Christ is to deny the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

The preaching of the second coming without the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin, is to preach nothing but death and condemnation to eternal death. The Passover lamb sacrificed for us continues to be the means for the salvation of all men and women from every nation, tribe and tongue and peoples! The doorposts must still have the mark of the blood of the lamb.

Unwittingly Paulsen recognizes Adventism's problem with Adventist eschatology: "I believe that it is not a requirement for all things to be understood perfectly clear in order for the last things to be declared and accepted by faith". This is an astonishing declaration by the president of a religious organization that alleges to have special knowledge regarding the last days!

It is perplexing that a religious institution that invests

millions of dollars annually in theological seminaries around the world, on a Biblical Research Committee handling practically an inexhaustible yearly budget, Departments of Religion in nearly all of its universities with libraries and the most technologically advanced research tools, and above all, claiming to have the "spirit of prophecy" into last days events, could make such a disclaimer!

Or could it be that these same institutions and scholars, as well as Mr. Paulsen himself, have been reviewing Raymond Cottrell's study on Daniel 8:14 and have no Biblical response to the problems Cottrell highlighted? ^{vi}

Could it be that the Adventist meaning of "the last things" such as described by Paulsen: the "current ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary... the judgment" have no Biblical foundation at all?

Therefore, Paulsen's dictum: "it is not a requirement at all that all things be perfectly understood". The extra-Biblical version of the church (Ellen White's) should be "declared and accepted by faith"! His own words of admonition need to be heeded by Adventism: "leading us to resort to what is highly speculative, overly imaginative, but ultimately disreputable," has no place in Biblical eschatology. Is Paulsen perhaps suggesting that the Biblical injunction, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth", does not apply when studying "the last days"?

All Biblical study regarding the last days finds its meaning in the person of Christ. The words of Jesus to the Pharisees are addressed to all who see only time-lines, days and seasons in eschatology: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of Me, and you will not come to Me that you might have life" (John 5:39-40).

What Paulsen says regarding the atheists and agnostics' dilemma regarding the existence of God "we just don't know", could also be said of what he says regarding current SDA eschatology's conclusion: "We are not sure. Let us accept by faith"! Adventism concludes that based on the study of the Scriptures they cannot understand everything. Therefore what they call Ellen White's "inspired commentary" must be accepted as true, even though Biblical studies do not support them.

Paulsen's challenge to Christians and Adventist leaders regarding atheism and agnosticism confronts Adventism with a greater challenge. Paulsen challenges Adventists

to get involved with apologetics.

“The belief in the existence of God is the primary belief on which all other doctrines as well as life itself are placed, defined, and experienced. It's where faith begins; and it's the starting point from which faith asserts itself.”

But the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges Adventism to get involved with the preaching of the cross of Christ. The scriptures insist that the story of the cross is the most powerful argument on behalf of the existence of a God of love. This simple story of God's love shown on the cross is the message that awakens faith within the heart. That is why this method is called “the foolishness” of the cross.

“How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” However they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14-17).

The good news or “glad tidings” is none other “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scriptures says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for ‘Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:9-13). Once more Paulsen's question may be turned back upon Adventism: “Are you studying with your preachers, teachers, and writers how you are going to do this?”

2. The Question of Identity

There are many things we have in common and can do in common with Christians of other churches, but we are Christians of a very specific identity. That identity is reflected in teachings, in what we value, and in our quality of life. I wonder: Have we become or are we becoming more recognizable as "Christians" than we are as

2. The Issue of *Mistaken* Identity

What Paulsen says regarding “Christians of other churches” vs. Adventist Christians having “a very special identity”, brings to mind the popular “reality shows”. In the case of Christians one might imagine bringing together many Christians on an island. Give them a

Seventh-day Adventist Christians? And is it possible that this is something we'd like to see happen and, therefore, are being deliberate about projecting ourselves in this manner? To the extent that this is so, what is it that has brought us to this point? Is it a consequence of "theological mobbing"? Is it a consequence of an inferiority complex? Is it a consequence of just wanting to blend in better?

While I am not suggesting that our pulpits should be closed and that a speaker from another spectrum of the Christian community should never be seen addressing one of our gatherings, there are times when I am genuinely perplexed and puzzled as to why such a person was invited and what he or she had to say that one of our own could not have done as well and with less confusion. Are we about to fall victim to something that we are not defining or would prefer not to spell out? I am speaking about our readiness to protect our identity.

In the second half of the 1950s there was a wind sweeping through our ranks that said we should become more "Christ-centered" in our preaching (more *theologia crucis* and less *theologia gloria*). And that has happened, and has to a considerable extent been undergirded by a better understanding of what Ellen White in her writings urged us to do. In and of itself this was good.

But as is often the case, nothing is quite as simple as it seems, and the skill of "doing one and not leaving the other undone" is compromised. For the fact is that within the larger Christian world and culture in which we as a church exist, we do have a very specific identity, which we lose to our own destruction. I am reminded of the words spoken by a lay woman member of one of our committees--spoken in rebuke to us as elected leaders: "You have to remember that being a Seventh-day Adventist is a voluntary thing!" And that is true. Even as Christians, the people who worship in our churches on a Sabbath morning could have been something else (Lutherans, Pentecostal, Anglican, Catholic), but they chose to be Seventh-day Adventists. We are a community of Christians with a very specific and defined identity. And our people have made a very deliberate choice for some very good reasons. It is important that these reasons not be made to look inconsequential or

series of identity tests. But at the end of the day you will see who are the true Christians – more so than any others – they are the Seventh-day Adventists. Why? Because their teachings are so very different from the teachings of other Christians.

This indeed, unfortunately, is all too true. Frankly there is something that distinguishes SDA's from among other Christians. As an example, just look at Paulsen's entire address. Where is the cross of Christ? Where is the centrality of Christ's sacrifice? Where is the foundation of Christ's shed blood on behalf of sinners? Where is the foolishness of the preaching of the cross? Missing. The issue of Adventism's identity as Christian is a case of mistaken identity.

"Just look at Paulsen's entire address. Where is the cross of Christ? Where is the centrality of Christ's sacrifice? Where is the foundation of Christ's shed blood on behalf of sinners? Where is the foolishness of the preaching of the cross? Missing. The issue of Adventism's identity as Christian is a case of mistaken identity."

Without the basic tenets of Christianity, Adventism does not measure up to the requirements of a Christian identity, and even less a "very special" identity. In these days where Identity Theft and Fraud run rampant, let Christians beware: "Someone is trying to impersonate you, in order to rob you of your Christian liberty, your gifts, and most of all, your assurance of salvation through faith in the complete sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on your behalf!

In order to be successful in Adventist administration there are other skills to learn besides avoiding theology. One of these skill is to learn "administrative speak". Paulsen uses this skill effectively. It is typically used in all types of politics, including religious politics. First, the politician affirms a commonly held belief. Then it is astutely denied. In its place, the politician inserts his own belief. All the time the unwary hearer believes the politician is actually stating their commonly held belief. However, the politician has worded things so confusingly that he has actually denied any commonly held belief and supplanted it with another, his very own. This type of double speak is the key to understanding Adventist

irrelevant.

So the question that every Seventh-day Adventist has the right to ask is: Do we continue to profile as we should the Adventist identity--from our pulpits, in particular, but also in the classroom and in our journals? Or is it possible that we don't even talk about it as leaders or in our professional ranks? When was this an item on the agenda of your executive committee or board? This is not a statement of doom and gloom. It's meant simply to say that if not specifically nurtured and projected, identity cannot be preserved.

doctrine, and the key to its deception.

Yes, brother Paulsen, notwithstanding your denial, you are suggesting that speakers from other Christian communities do not address Adventist meetings, and in particular that they talk about the gospel. Paulsen's presidential demeanor conveys that message with perfect clarity. However, when it comes to the teaching and the preaching of the gospel within Adventism, "one of [your] own could not have done it better." One of your own would have preached "another gospel". If Adventism truly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paulsen would identify himself with the cross, and the preaching of the cross would be Adventism's copyright.^{vii} Then, Christ and not Adventism's attorneys would protect its identity. When we trust in Christ for salvation, He is our only Advocate before the Father.

Paulsen's next statements are at the center of his warning and also at the core of the deceit perpetrated by Seventh-day Adventism. Those evangelical scholars and sympathizers who still defend Adventism as an authentic Christian movement and not as a sect, pay close attention to Paulsen's following words.

"In the second half of the 1950s there was a wind sweeping through our ranks that said we should become more "Christ-centered" in our preaching (more *theologia crucis* and less *theologia gloria*). And that has happened, and has to a considerable extent been undergirded by a better understanding of what Ellen White in her writings urged us to do. In and of itself this was good."

Christian theology in general does not support a disjunction between *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloria*. In fact, based on Philippians 2:5-10, and on the greater emphasis given by the gospels to the sufferings of Christ following the promises of the second coming, it is clear that Jesus himself taught that the way to glory was through the *via dolorosa* of the cross. But this is not typically taught in Adventism. Throughout my years in Adventism, both in teaching and in administration, it was evident that there are countless teachers, professors, pastors, laity, and administrators who secretly believe the gospel. But they are tied by the fear of losing their jobs and the means to support their families should they openly declare themselves on behalf of the gospel. I also felt that fear. They hold on to the hope against hope that someday, perhaps the church will change, allowing the open preaching of the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ.

However, in such hopes they are relieving the dashed hopes of the Great Disappointment. The SDA church with its current leadership that supports alienation from the cross through the false authority of the writings of Ellen White, will never be a true evangelical Christian church. The SDA church puts on a Christian disguise but with its "peculiar beliefs" denies the power of the gospel, the power of the cross of Christ.

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But the perfect love of Christ overcomes all fears. It was not until I left Adventism that I was able to find truly a new life. The Lord has certainly made me a new creation, and I rejoice in the full assurance of my salvation. The great and merciful God, as promised, has met all my needs through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

There is no disjunction between the glory of Christ at the cross and the glory of Christ at His coming. In fact, the glory of Christ at His coming is because He returns victorious as the Lamb of God. Due to His full and complete sacrifice. He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Lord's supper as the sign of His broken body is the sign of the new covenant as well as the promise of His return. The glory of Christ was manifested at the cross. The glory of Christ throughout eternity will always be proclaimed by all the redeemed with the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain".

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Contrary to what Paulsen alleges, the preaching of the cross has not been heard prominently in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Neither has it occurred due to a "better understanding..." In fact, her writings are the first within Adventism to stumble with respect to the

preaching of the cross of Christ. Although some of her statements do appear to urge the preaching of the cross, the weight of her writings uphold a prophetic scheme and a theology contrary to the preaching of the cross. This phenomenon of affirming and denying is what I have elsewhere called "The Canceling Factor in the Writings of Ellen White".^{viii} Among other consequences, the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment cancels out the full and complete, finished work of Christ as the sinner's substitute for the remission of sins.

Paulsen's claim that "In and of itself this [greater emphasis on *theologia crucis*] has been good" is also false. If the preaching of the cross indeed had taken place, and was paramount to SDA theology and evangelism, the assessment would not be given in such guarded and reserved terminology: "In and of itself this has been good". When you affirm the theology of the cross with such mediocre and neutral terms you are in effect denying the theology of the cross! The theology of the cross is not affirmed in muted terms. Didn't Ellen White say that we should give the trumpet a certain sound?

As demonstrated in the New Testament, the reality of the power of the cross calls for the highest worship and acclamation. Paulsen's declaration regarding the preaching of the cross, "In and of itself this has been good" is a far cry from Paul's "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

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Jesus Himself said of his *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloria*, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to Myself" (John 12:23). Speaking of differences between the old covenant of the Law and the new covenant of Jesus' blood, Paul exclaims, "Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets,

came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!" (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). Certainly the apostle Paul was among those who "had been swept in the winds of the *theologia crucis*" of the Holy Spirit's outpouring! Would the apostle Paul have survived as an evangelist and theologian in the Adventist church today? Would one hear Paul exchanging the glory of the ministry of the cross for the "special message" of the Adventist church?

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"Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:12-17).

To say of the preaching of the cross "In and of itself this has been good" is not only to speak with a veil. It is to speak muffled by "cleverly devised fables" clogging and jamming the heart, mind, body, and soul!

According to Scripture, believers are called to "see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). One cannot sing "In the cross of Christ I glory" for the opening hymn, and then in the sermon say of the cross "in and of itself, it was good".

One cannot sing "In the cross of Christ I glory" for the opening hymn, and then in the sermon say of the cross "in and of itself, it was good".

Adventist administrative policy for evangelism has as its hidden dynamic: the negation of the preaching of the cross. Let me explain by an example. While I was still in administration, I asked the president of a very large and powerful union in North America, "What would happen if we as Adventists made the preaching of the cross, our distinguishing characteristic? What if we were to out preach other evangelicals in the preaching of the cross?" The immediate and unflinching response was "We'll leave that to the evangelicals. We have our own special message to give". Do you hear the same double speak? On the one hand, the preaching of the cross *seems* to be affirmed, but then negated by "*We have our own special message to give*". More special than the preaching of the cross of Christ? Adventists answer with a resounding "Yes!" A message more special that negates and nullifies the preaching of the cross of Christ? Again the result of the Adventist answer is to the affirmative. But how does the dynamic of negation and nullifying work?

The hidden Adventist administrative policy for evangelism goes like this: "Yes, we'll let the evangelicals preach the cross. But we'll preach our own special message".

But then, when Adventism preaches its "own special message", it denounces evangelicals as apostate Protestantism because it does not teach the Sabbath truth, does not accept the special truth of the investigative judgment, denies the validity of the "spirit of prophecy" in Ellen White, does not accept health reform, and so on.

Where then is the preaching of the cross? "Let the evangelicals preach the cross. We have more important 'present' truths". But at the same time the Adventists have cast the evangelicals as apostates and reprobates. If the evangelicals' mission is so summarily dismissed, I ask, Who then is left to preach the gospel of Christ and Him crucified?

The preaching of the cross is nullified. Is there not a greater deceptive spirit working in that mind set and thinking? Is not that the kind of deceptive thinking coming from false christs and prophets that "they may

lead astray, if possible, the elect"? (Matthew 13:22).

This is the point at which present Adventism deftly shows its deceptive hand. Cunningly and deceptively the preaching of the cross is taken out of Christianity altogether in an extremely pious and devoted manner claiming to have "special truths" and the "gift of prophecy".

Read any Adventist article regarding the cross and the sacrifice of Christ. Listen to any Adventist sermon on the cross by any of the church leaders. You will find such. But without fault they will come to this incredible sleight of hand wherein they affirm the sacrifice of Christ, only to deny it and nullify it with some pious rhetoric regarding the need to become the last generation that will show the universe its perfect obedience to God's law, or some such manifestation of human piety that nullifies the once and for all provision of God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself who gave everything that God required for salvation in His perfect life and sacrifice.

All of Christ's finished work is cancelled out by the unfinished works of the believer. These articles *never* conclude with the shout of victory that in Christ they are once and for all reconciled with God who was in Himself reconciling the entire universe unto Himself at the Cross. There is no cry of faith from the believer saying "Amen, so be it!" There is always some fanciful footwork to place the emphasis back onto the believer, and the believer's surrender to the church, which in Adventism, is equated with surrender to Christ. In its present form Adventism is certainly a "cleverly devised fable" whose intention is to subtly tear down the message of the cross, extirpating it from the message of the Christian church.

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"Since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (2 Corinthians 3:12).

4. The Idea of "Remnant"

Among other issues that I believe must be specifically attended to in our development as a church is the very question "What is the church?" Is it identical to the question "What is the

4. The Idea of the [Old Covenant] "Remnant"

Included in Adventism's sleight of hand is what it does

Seventh-day Adventist Church?" We have made some very generous statements about other Christian communions, some even written into our policy book. These are genuine and sincere statements. They surface particularly when we sit in conversation with other Christian groups. And I believe that we have been sincere in affirming that God is not ours and that we are not His exclusive family. We state that those who affirm the name of Christ and bring Him as a witness to peoples and nations are indeed instruments of God in his efforts to bring salvation to all.

And yet we hold that we are something special. The *remnant language* comes into use, although often with hesitancy--we are not sure just how we should say it. I suspect there are many in our church who are not at ease with this idea, and who have not reconciled it in their own minds. We shun the perception of being arrogant, and we don't want to come across as being overly exclusive, but at the same time we believe that being *Seventh-day Adventists* has direct bearing on our salvation; that while a believer can be saved as a Catholic, I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation were I to leave what I am now and join any other community.

Also we hold that the Adventist community is an instrument for salvation in God's hands such as no other. We hold these things, but we stop short of saying that you have to be a Seventh-day Adventist in order to be saved. And if you don't have to be a Seventh-day Adventist, why bother? some will ask. Is there something cloudy about this? My point here is, Do we seriously talk about this--particularly with our workers?

Very little is written on the subject of ecclesiology in our church. The linkage between a member's growth in knowledge and understanding and the uncompromising responsibility of discipleship is not pursued as it should be. Understanding requires response. The fact is that one cannot as a disciple step out of what one is today and go back into a state of less knowing and less understanding. One is constantly moving forward, constantly building on what was there yesterday. Anything other than that would be disobedience and would, in my view, jeopardize one's life with the Lord. Obedience to the Lord is always obedience where one is--in time, in culture, in experience, and in history. And salvation is contingent on that obedience. This

with the Biblical doctrine of the remnant. Whereas even in evangelical circles there is an open discussion and enriching study on the New Covenant meaning of the remnant, it is not the exclusive notion with which Adventism has invested itself. Adventism will not enter into this discussion. It has no need to.

According to Paulsen, "the Adventist community is an instrument for salvation in God's hands such as no other". Once again the cross of Christ is nullified. Listen carefully to the pious terms. But is there something *not* wrong with this statement? Look at it carefully. Listen carefully to the pious terminology. There was another sleight of hand. Adventism dealt a card that looks legitimate. An alarm should have gone off. Does not any Christian community want to be considered "an instrument for salvation"? But in these words Adventism claims that it "is an instrument for salvation in God's hands such as no other"? *As no other?* Will not anyone protest? Will not anyone raise the question, "And what of the cross of Christ, as *the* sole instrument for salvation in God's hand?" Is it just a matter of semantics? Did Paulsen mean to say something else that will be carefully explained somewhere else and upon further study? Is it just a motivational phrase to help evangelists in their special work? If the cross of Christ is not your main motivation, then one has to resort to extreme self aggrandizing discourse to validate your existence and value before each other, other faiths, and society at large.

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An instrument for salvation in God's hands such as no other?

Greater than the cross? Can God use another instrument that is not the cross for salvation? Have things changed since the cross? Adventism does imply and indeed affirms that since 1844, God has found another instrument greater than the sacrifice of His Son for the redemption of humanity: The Seventh-day Adventist church.

What happened to Acts 4:12? "And there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name under Heaven

salvation is contingent on that obedience. This should temper any inclination to be judgmental both toward other Christian communities and toward other experiences and cultures within our own church. One has to consider where they are in their knowledge of the Lord and His truth, and in their experience with Him.

Similarly, since understanding and discipleship are dynamics that are constantly growing and moving forward, I'm compelled to share with others what I find. Those with whom I share my discoveries must also respond to Christ and dynamically move forward as the Spirit convicts and opens hearts and eyes, or their own relationship with the Lord is compromised. It's a never-ending process, and it's why we must share our understanding with Christians of other identities. An ongoing discipleship cannot be sustained without this. So we conduct evangelism among and gladly receive converts from other Christian communions. Discovery and discipleship compel us to do so. And we do this without sitting in judgment on what they were before.

So, in a sense, the "remnant" church both *is* and *is* in a constant process of *becoming*.

given among men by which we must be saved"? In the name Seventh-day Adventist, in the name "remnant church", do we have a greater and better name than the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

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Will someone not protest, as is done in the courts when an unjust and out of line statement is made, "Objection your Honor"?

That incredibly anti-gospel declaration is followed by another: "Salvation is contingent on that obedience". Not only is the SDA church the sole instrument of God unto salvation but one's obedience to the SDA church is the condition to be granted such salvation by the SDA church. I call upon SDA church leaders, my ex-colleagues, to call their church leadership into account for their words – and their actions. The SDA church cannot be farther from the gospel than it is today!

But someone will say, "Brother Camacho, Elder Paulsen didn't mean that. What he meant was..." Well... what did he mean? Let's look at the preceding paragraph:

We shun the perception of being arrogant, and we don't want to come across as being overly exclusive, but at the same time we believe that being Seventh-day Adventists has direct bearing on our salvation; that while a believer can be saved as a Catholic, I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation were I to leave what I am now and join any other community.

What we find in the preceding statement is the same Affirm then Nullify principle of promoting a falsehood. Affirmation of a truth: "While a believer can be saved as a Catholic". Almost a truth. A believer *will* be saved, by calling on the name of the Lord, even without any church affiliation: "And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:24 RV). Salvation is pro-active and affirming. Whosoever calls on

Jesus for salvation *will* be saved. This is another Biblical truth negated by Adventism. How does it deny it? Through Ellen White, who supposedly affirms the gospel of Jesus Christ. How does Ellen White deny that Biblical truth? Through her "Do not let anyone say 'I am saved'" statements.

Those who accept the Savior, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading.^{ix}

What an incredible and astounding fallacy! Those who have been Adventists for many years develop an insensitivity to statements like this. But such a declaration must be called for what it is: and outrageous offense to the blood and life of Jesus Christ who gave Himself over to death and death on the cross on our behalf!

How is it that one can admit to need a Savior, you let that Savior save you, but yet not say that *one has been saved* by that Savior? And this is not to mislead the believers? If you needed a Savior it was because you were at the point of dying, of losing your life. The Savior rescued you and gave you life. And life eternal! But then you cannot say that the Savior has given you such an infinite gift of salvation? What kind of a witness is that? An empty witness, devoid of a Savior. If you cannot say that the Savior saved you, either what the Savior saved you from was not that serious, or you are ashamed that you had to be rescued, or you are not very grateful at all.

According to Ellen White, one "accepts the Savior", but then one cannot even say, and even less *feel* that He saved you from the worst condemnation and loss?

According to Ellen White, one "accepts the Savior", but then one cannot even say, and even less feel that He saved you from the worst condemnation and loss?

Not even feel that you have been saved from death, and eternal death? Then what is one allowed to feel? As a practicing and believing Seventh-day Adventist are you then to feel what you felt before you were saved, to wit, the agony of death? Where is the joy of one's salvation if you follow this inspired counsel? Is this not tantamount to spiritual masochism? Yet it is deemed as inspired counsel from "the pen of inspiration"!

Is this the same "pen of inspiration" who taught in her writings that the words we speak have a direct effect on our own *thinking*?^x Therefore if we say that we are *not* saved or that we *are not sure*, then we are going to be self-influenced into certainly believing that we *are not saved or that we are not sure*. As a result we will continue to live out or fears, disobedience, sins, lack of love, living in fear of death. There will be no joy of our salvation, nor a certain and sure witness of our Lord and Savior, and even less of our salvation.

So what is the point of the Adventist doctrine of salvation? What was the use of the Adventist savior if one cannot even give witness that the savior saved you from eternal death? Either the Savior saved you from eternal death giving you eternal life, or he didn't save you from anything too grave. But if that is so, then such a savior is not too great a savior. Or, could it be that the Adventist Savior gives you eternal life, but then he takes it away so that you will once again feel under the sentence and condemnation of death? Any assurance is then given back to you in brief installments by the church as you participate in its life and fulfill in the support of the church with your financial contributions.

It seems ludicrous but such is the bone marrow of Adventism. The believer is denied the right to claim the assurance of one's salvation, finished and thoroughly completed by Jesus, only so that you may then have to turn to the church as the "instrument in the hands of God as none other". It is only then that you may, with full assurance declare that you belong to the remnant church, declaring that you would risk your own salvation if you were to leave it!

But to say that Christ has saved you through His once and for all finished salvation, through His own sacrifice (not ours), that is to be denied through silence?

Is there not a remnant left in Adventism to protest?

One can say that the church saves you, but you cannot say that Christ has saved you, and that you have passed from death to life. And this is the lesser light that is to lead to Christ the greater light?

Are there no Luthers left in the Seventh-day Adventist church to denounce such darkness?

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you, and that you have passed from death to life. And this comes from the lesser light, that is to lead to Christ, the greater light? Are there no Luthers left in the Seventh-day Adventist church to denounce such darkness?

To deny the believer the joy of claiming the assurance of salvation is a great offense to the life and the blood of Jesus who gave Himself unto death and death on the cross for our forgiveness. White's declaration denies the power of His salvation, the divine purpose for the incarnation of Christ, the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world.

Yet White's admonition to reject one's assurance of salvation is deemed to be the "pen of inspiration" by the SDA church. This is part of Paulsen's "special message", which he promotes to all worldwide leaders, and in direct contradiction to Scriptures.

But what does it say? "The Word is near you, *even* in your mouth and in your heart"; that is, the Word of Faith which we proclaim; Because if you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from *the* dead, you shall be saved. For with *the* heart *one* believes unto righteousness, and with *the* mouth *one* confesses unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Everyone believing on Him shall not be put to shame" (Rom 10:8-11).

Cry it out loud! Shout it from the mountaintops! "I am saved!" "I am saved!" "I am saved through the blood of the Lamb now and forever! "My salvation is assured through the completeness of His sacrifice on my behalf, and the faith He has given me to believe in Him!" Praised be the name of the Lord Jesus now and forever!

When we claim the Scriptures' testimony that we are saved at the moment of our confession of faith, the most wonderful and ecstatic feelings are released – we join the joy God feels for every sinner that repents. But it is not so in Adventism. According to official Adventism propagated from White to Paulsen, God does not allow us to participate in His joy, nor to rejoice in His finished work on our behalf.

So, what remains of the believer's testimony? In that he or she has a "special message" to give? More special than the marvelous, infinite, and overpowering good news that by believing in Him we have been saved from

news that by believing in Him we have been saved from eternal death? Adventism would want us to confidently say that we have a special message to give, but that we cannot have confidence in what Jesus Christ did, and in that astoundingly merciful position in which we have been placed through His grace: Eternally saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Savior!

What counsel would Ellen White give the apostle Paul when not resisting the joy of his salvation wrote,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:4-9).

Paul affirmed to the believers: "by grace you have been saved". This Scriptural truth is at the extreme opposite of Ellen White's admonition, "Those who accept the Savior... should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading." In light of the Scriptures I ask, "Who is misleading who?"

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This twisted logic is the key to understanding Adventism and the fundamental deceit it perpetrates: That the finished work of Christ on the cross for the sinner's salvation, has no efficacy at all.

Since leaving the Adventist church and embracing the gospel and the assurance of salvation, it has almost been entertaining to have my Adventist friends assure me in the good news that I cannot be all that sure of my

salvation! Such is the good news of salvation according to Adventism: "You can almost be saved". "You can almost be sure of being saved... but don't be too sure". "You can almost trust in the blood of Christ to forgive all your sins... but maybe not". "You can't be too sure".

Such is the good news of salvation according to Adventism: "You can almost be saved". "You can almost be sure of being saved... but don't be too sure". "You can almost trust in the blood of Christ to forgive all your sins... but maybe not". "You can't be too sure".

I say "almost entertaining" because of the pain it grieves me to see my brothers and sisters so close and so far from saving faith, as a gift of being part of the remnant, God's chosen, who have been given the ministry of "perhaps being reconciled with God in Christ... but just maybe, don't be too sure... but if you have a slight chance, you'll have a greater chance being a Seventh-day Adventist, but only if you are an obedient SDA... all the time... and if you 'cut and run' you "risk my whole spiritual life and salvation" – to quote Paulsen asserting that although a Catholic can be saved, what would happen to him and others "were I to leave what I am now and join any other community". Did anyone up to now have any question whether Seventh-day Adventism was a sect or not? What kind of mind control is that? Insidious. Crafty. A well-hidden deception. An appearance of piety, denying the power thereof.

So while on the one hand a "Catholic can be saved," on the other if you believe as a Seventh-day Adventist and jump ship, you risk everything. The blood of Jesus cannot cover that one great sin. To anyone who may be struggling with guilt over thinking about leaving Adventism or leaving it, the word of the gospel is:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that

depends on faith-- (Phi 3:7-9).

You have the assurance of your salvation through faith in Christ's accomplished salvation on your behalf. Hang on to it. Let no one rob your crown. It is already yours. Don't let anyone take away your joy through deceptive threats and preposterous declarations.

To those in other Christian faiths who have partaken and tasted of the good news, let Paulsen's own words place you on notice: "So we conduct evangelism among and gladly receive converts from other Christian communions." Seventh-day Adventism will allure you with the mirage of the remnant, a special and peculiar people, "an instrument of salvation in God's hands as no other". What will they give you in return? A load of burdens which not even their leaders can carry! Do not exchange the cross of Christ for another name. Adventism will take your faith, your financial resources, your assurance of salvation, it will even take your children, under the guise of the faithful remnant. It is a very special and cunning deception. It affirms the truth only to negate it through pious and presumptuous chatter.

There is one way though in which the SDA church is the remnant. It is the remnant of Old Covenant promise makers within the community of New Covenant believers in its better promises and Guarantor. As such a remnant, its testimony is declared null and void by the cross of Christ. Any remnant of the Old Covenant, such as Adventism, and there are others even within evangelicalism, are declared obsolete, faulty, and without glory by the Word of God in the face of Jesus, the Guarantor of the New Covenant, confirmed by His blood.^{xi}

One of Ellen White's greatest deceptions which is still in vogue and in use within Adventism concerns pastors and leaders who have left the church, such as myself and many others throughout the years. It is claimed, by appealing to Ellen White, that we are those "brightest lights that will go out". I have also been told that I am living proof that we are living in the last days, because in the last days those that leave the church will become its earnest enemies.

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To those in the Seventh-day Adventist church who may perceive those of us who have taken a stand only for Christ and Him crucified, and thus consider us their enemies, I would respond with Paul's question to the Galatians: "Am I now your enemy, just because I told you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16).

Following Ellen White's lead, it is also alleged that we who have left the church and no longer believe in the inspiration of her writings are nothing but the fulfillment of Satan's greatest deception of the last days.

Ellen White in her writings claimed that "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways, and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony."^{xii}

I look at this statement in the light of the gospel, as that sword that penetrates all darkness and cunning falsehood, and marvel "What an audacious attempt to make the delusion failsafe!"

To allege the nullification of her writings as the "last deception of Satan" is indeed a seemingly masterstroke of deceit, the most artful sleight of hand to close the loop on the deception she represents.

Note that according to White the very last deception is not even "to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God" in the Scriptures as "the true testimony".

White's concern is not for the validity or effectiveness of Scriptures but for the effectiveness and validity of her own writings! Why? Because if they are brought into question, then the rest of the "cleverly spun fables" of the doctrines she taught and form the basis for current Adventism, will come undone!

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When her writings are brought into question, the rest of her story falls apart. Thus the harsh warning. But the warning is self serving encased in a closed loop logical argument: "Believe in the testimonies because they are from God; if you question them you are falling into the last deception of the devil, because the testimonies are from God and not from the devil. Thus you should believe in the testimonies because they are from God; if you question them you are falling into the last deception of the devil"... so on and ad infinitum. The argument calls upon itself to prove itself. It has no outside witness. It feeds upon itself and those who choose to heed it. And with everyone who heeds it, the deception it claims it is not, grows stronger.

When you turn your head to look towards those who she claims are deceiving you, you are being deceived. It is like the thief who walks up to you, and says, "Watch out, there's a purse snatcher over there!" And when you turn your head to look at the purse snatcher, your own purse gets snatched away. Crafty! But very old. New disguise.

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In theological and religious circles this old trick is very, very persuasive. Beguiling. You trust the con man. You live with the con man. You support the con man. You give your money to the con man. The con man takes the best of you. And when the con man leaves you, you continue to believe in the kindness of the con man that took the best of what you had.

But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus

5. The Diversity of the Church

It is important that it be widely and comprehensively understood in our church what it means to be a diverse world church, that we are a community that contains both diversity and unity in one body. I would ask all of us to attend to this as a matter of urgency.

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The diversity of our church is seen in language, culture, race, and in the histories of the peoples among whom we live. It is *not* to be seen in value judgments of people based on any of the above. It requires understanding and tolerance on the part of all of us to recognize that people inevitably must be the children of their own soil--even when they become Seventh-day Adventists. This is neither pluralism nor syncretism--for which there is no place in our church. It just simply has to do with being natural--being alive and belonging.

I suppose it is good that 99 percent of our time we all live in our own parts of the world surrounded by our own culture. We don't have to be tested or irritated by that which seems a bit strange and foreign to us. But sometimes we are brought closer to one another (as we are at a General Conference session, for example), and we are tested. If you were to read some of the correspondence that comes to my office, you'd understand why I feel that we have a long way to go in this. Let's teach our people to be modest in their opinion about other cultures and tastes--in music and dress, and maybe also in diet. Diversity is a reality of life.

(2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Diversity, Unity, Differences, Nurture, Society

In the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the New Covenant of His blood, all these issues quickly become moot points. Either the church is involved in the gospel mission to lift up the cross of Christ, or it has no valid mission at all. Anything and everything else is chaff.

Raymond Cottrell in his 2001 and 2002 presentations of his sanctuary studies based on profound and thorough Biblical studies in essence was a call back to the basic principle of the gospel. Paulsen responds saying Adventism will not shift to accept those findings, notwithstanding that they are based solely on the Scriptures.

As far as Sola Scriptura, Paulsen goes even a step further than White in the estimate of the divine inspiration of those writings. Whereas for White her writings were a lesser light leading to the greater light, the Scriptures (this concept in itself has its problems: a flashlight leading us to find the sun in plain daylight?), for Paulsen as Adventism's foremost spokesperson, the Bible is supported by the writings of Ellen White.

The historic sanctuary message, based on Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White, continues to be held to unequivocally. And the inspired authorities on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think that there has been a change of position in regard to this.

The Bible is supported by the writings of Ellen White? Will someone not object? Since when is Scripture supported by something else? Was Scripture defective before the support of Ellen White came along? Did Scripture lack appropriate support and interpretation before Ellen White was shown in visions what it meant? Is there any question as to Adventism's cultic position in the Christian world?

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10. Living With Differences

There is some theological polarity in our church. Whether they be to the right or the left, reactionary or liberal, they are there. What should we do about it? Anything?

No one should be surprised at their existence, nor should we expect that there will ever come a time when they will be gone. Eschatology and apocalyptic preaching--which are part of the treasured heritage of our church--will produce strongly held and very focused convictions. And on the whole, individuals who join our community will do so for very specific reasons and firmly held convictions. An environment of polarity is sometimes the by-product of uncompromisingly held views--misguided or otherwise.

What do we do with all of that? In the main, I suspect that we just learn to live with it. Little is to be gained by chasing these polarities. Doing so has a way of usurping the church's agenda, and the environment created within the church becomes hostile and strained. I say *we learn to live with it*, with the proviso that the church, in its teachings, programs, and activities, must at all times be visibly loyal to our heritage and our identity, and never give just cause to the charge of having "gone astray". Even then caricatures of our

Scripture defective before the support of Ellen White came along? Did Scripture lack appropriate support and interpretation before Ellen White was shown in visions what it meant? Is there any question as to Adventism's cultic position in the Christian world?

Adventism calls for people to take a stand for the truth "though the heavens fall". Where are those who take a stand for Scriptures and the gospel today? They are there, waiting, and waiting. Throughout my four years in ministry I shared my gospel hunger with numerous Adventist leaders who according to them, were just waiting for the right time to take a stand, to speak the truth, to call to accountability... That was over ten years ago. Will the time ever come?

The time will not come. The "gospel remnant" which is growing within the church must arise and leave for the promised land. "Christ your Passover has already been sacrificed for you", your doorways have already been sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, the time of your visitation has already come. You must step out by faith and let the Spirit of the risen Christ mold and form you into a new creation, which will praise the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.

Living with the Differences but Loyal to "Our Heritage and Identity"?

Paulsen cannot close his "Theological Unity" address without an appeal for loyalty "to our heritage and to our identity". Aside from being another example of "administrative speak" to heed administrative actions, it is also revealing as to Adventism's obsession with being different, and claiming a special, unique, and ultimately *sole* place as God's people on earth: "the instrument for salvation in God's hand as no other". Does Scripture allow such a place for any Christian group? Here is Scripture's response to the appeal for uniqueness among God's people.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool so that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; for it is written, "He takes the wise in their own craftiness." And again, "*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.*"

loyalty will be made.

Of course, there are and will be moments when the church has to make a public statement of clarification addressing the polarity, but then the church has to get on with its *business of mission*. That is where the focus of the church energy and activities must be. Let us not be drawn into battles that at their best are only distractions.

A further word needs to be said about our being "loyal to our heritage and to our identity." Some would have us believe that there have been significant shifts in recent times in regard to doctrines that historically have been at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism.

Take specifically our understanding of judgment and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the prophetic messages in which these teachings are contained. Some are suggesting that since the 1980 (Glacier View) meetings, the very teachings that the church affirmed that year at those meetings have been abandoned, and that the church has essentially moved to accept the very positions it rejected then. Such a claim is a distortion of reality, and nothing could be further from the truth. The historic sanctuary message, based on Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White, continues to be held to unequivocally. And the inspired authorities on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think that there has been a change of position in regard to this.

The question to which the church should constantly be sensitive is: Have we been loyal to "who we are and why we are"? Preserving our identity has to do with the integrity of our church. Faithfulness to the Lord and to the reasons for which He caused this movement to arise cannot be compromised. If we drift, it is not the "brethren" (whether on the left or the right) who will hold us accountable, but the Lord Himself. And ultimately that is what really matters.

* You may find it extraordinary that this comes to you with no references or quotes--although many such, both inspired and less so, could have been provided. However, what I am seeking to do is a fairly humble task, namely that of selecting and identifying, with

Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours, whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or *the world*, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Corinthians 3:18-23).

The call to be "loyal to our heritage and to our identity" needs to be judged by Scripture's injunction: "Therefore let no one glory in men". Loyalty to the heritage and a unique identity means glorying in the men and women of Adventism. To many Adventists, they have no history or identity apart from that which the Adventist church gives them. Such a total domination of one's personality is another identifying mark of the sectarian and cultic identity of Seventh-day Adventism rather than any unique identity as God's special remnant people.

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Indeed glorying in the men and women of Adventism is what I was taught and learned all through elementary, academy, college, and seminary. There was not one Adventist so called unique doctrine that was not tied to some man or woman, a pioneer of that particular doctrine: Joseph Bates and John Nevins Andrews: the seventh-day Sabbath; Owen Crosier and Hiram Edson for the cornfield vision explaining the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844 as Jesus passing from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place, a doctrine with no Biblical foundation; Josiah Litch and Charles Fitch for the doctrine of holiness or sanctification prior to the second coming; Uriah Smith for the prophetic schemes of Daniel and Revelation, Ellen and Jams White for putting it all together through a presumed prophetic gift. These are just a few. We learned to honor the memory of these men, matching pictures to men, doctrines, works, births, deaths, books written, sons, daughters, missionary trips...

broad strokes, a few issues that, in my view, are important to the life and witness of our church.

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We could have been drawn to the cross of Christ. We could have been taught to glory in His sacrifice. We could have been taught to cherish and rejoice in the assurance of our salvation through His shed blood. But we were not taught to glory in Christ. Rather, we were taught to glory in men. And we did. And Adventists still do. And call for continuing such honor and loyalty to the teachings of these mere sinful mortal human beings.

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We don't know what struggles these men went through in their spiritual lives to come to their conclusions. But what is evident is that their work together was woven into a theological fabric of half understandings, misperceptions, compounded by lack of adequate research tools, resources and training. Sincere as most of them surely were, they were sincerely wrong in their conclusions. They all had one common starting point: adrift from Calvary. They focused on some particular doctrine founded on a defective understanding of Scripture, and in conjunction with a growing network of men and women in disaffection with their own spiritual past. Unfortunately, it seems as if an unseen spirit of deception aided and abetted their work together to create the cleverly devised fable that Seventh-day Adventism is today.

Paulsen is correct. Adventism has not shifted or changed its emphasis. It began with adrift from the cross, and it has remained adrift from the cross. It has had "sweeping winds" trying to blow it back to the cross – winds of the Spirit. These were the winds of the mid-fifties, of the early 80's, and the current winds among many of its young people and laity who constantly say to their pastors and church leaders "We wish to see Jesus". The denominational response is "We need to preserve our unique identity", we need to be "loyal to our heritage".

And more winds will come, calling Adventism back to the cross. And each one will be repelled. In essence Paulsen has said "Adventism will not drift away from being adrift from the cross". For this, "it is not the 'bretheren' who will hold SDA leadership accountable, but the Lord Himself". "Ultimately that is what really matters", because together with accountability, grace and mercy is extended. "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

So then there remains a rest to the people of God. For he who has entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Therefore let us labor to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of unbelief. For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:9-12).

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ⁱ Southeastern California Conference, with headquarters at Riverside, California (1988-1992).

ⁱⁱ Loma Linda University, La Sierra Campus.

ⁱⁱⁱ In February 2007, Paulsen visited the Palm Springs, California area, where the author resides.

^{iv} Paulsen's entire address is found at: <http://www.adventistreview.org/2002-1524/story3.html>; it is translated into Spanish at: <http://www.exadventista.com/content/view/66/36>. The following analysis does not contain Paulsen's entire address, but the reader is referred to the sources cited to read it in its entirety. Neither does this analysis cover all of Paulsen's ten areas. The analysis only covers the theological areas.

^v The "Sanctuary Doctrine" – Asset or Liability? Raymond F. Cottrell, 2002, <http://ellenwhite.org/1844rc.htm>.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} The SDA church has a copyright on its name and diligently pursues in the civil courts with high paid attorneys any other organization that includes any or part of its name.

^{viii} "El 'factor aniquilante' en los escritos de Elena G. de White; <http://www.exadventista.com/content/view/49/28/>.

^{ix} Ellen White, Daily Devotional from Maranatha, August 17, 2004. <http://egwlists.whiteestate.org/Lists/devotional/Message/580.html>

^x <http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll/egw-comp/section00000.htm/book07409.htm/chapter07420.htm>

^{xi} Hebrews 8:6-13; 2 Corinthians 3:7.

^{xii} Ellen G. White Letter 12, 1890; <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pay/PAYc25.html>.

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