

CONSENSUS STATEMENT
Third International Bible Conference
Jerusalem, Israel
June 20, 2012

Theological Prologue

An emphasis on the biblical understanding of humanity has been characteristic of the Seventh-day Adventist movement from its beginning. According to the Bible's foundational anthropological descriptions, male and female human beings are "creatures" in the "image of God" (Gen 1:26-27)—expressions which point, respectively, to what human beings have in common with other forms of life and to what distinguishes them within the natural world. As creatures, human beings are physical beings in a physical world, dependent for life on God, who alone possesses immortality (1 Tim 6:16). Even though dependent and finite, human beings have great value to God. God's pronouncement that what he had made was "very good" (Gen 1:31) thus affirms the goodness of the body, refuting dualism. It affirms the value of material reality, and therefore of physical, corporeal existence, and excludes the notion that human beings could exist in any sort of non-physical or disembodied state.

As creatures in the "image of God," fashioned by God on the sixth day of his creative work, human beings are distinguished from other forms of life on earth in a number of significant ways (Gen 1:26-29). Though variously interpreted, the expression connotes that human beings are distinguished by unique relationships to God, to other creatures, and to each other, and endowed by God with special qualities and privileges, among which is the capacity to freely embrace God's sovereign love and will for them. God also places responsibilities on human beings, including care for his world and living in harmony with God and other human beings.

Created in the image of God, Adam and Eve and their descendants were placed at the center of the great controversy between cosmic forces of good and evil. Their willful rebellion against God's love adversely affected everything about them (Isa 59:2, Eph 2:11-13). Sin in its essence points to the tragic discrepancy between what human beings are meant to be and the condition in which they actually exist. Sin placed them in conflict with God, with one another, and with creation, and subjects them to pain, suffering, physical and mental decline, and eventually to death.

Just as a wholistic view of humanity affirms all the dimensions that make us human—including physical, mental, emotional, sexual, social and spiritual dimensions—a wholistic view of sin acknowledges that every aspect of our humanity is unfulfilled and damaged. Similarly, a wholistic view of salvation envisions the restoration of our humanity—in all of its essential aspects.

The theme of human restoration appears throughout the Bible. Sinners are offered the opportunity for a restored relationship with God as they place their faith in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, whose death reconciles them to the Father (Rom 5: 6-15, 2 Cor 5:17-19). The

presence of the Spirit in the life of believers continually renews and restores their fellowship with God and each other. The doctrine of the resurrection promises restoration on a personal scale—an immortal, glorified body. Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom promises restoration of a perfect social order. And biblical apocalyptic literature promises restoration on a cosmic level—new heavens and a new earth (Rev 21:1-5). These various forms appeared proleptically in the ministry of Jesus, who forgave sin, healed the sick, challenged injustice, and, when necessary, defied oppressive powers, cast out demons, restored human relationships and raised the dead. As evidenced in its evangelistic, educational, community service and medical work, it is the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to extend the multifaceted restorative ministry of Jesus to the spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, sexual, and social needs of human beings, whom God still regards as children, created in the divine image and designed for fellowship with God and each other.

The Context

Seventh-day Adventist scholars, educators, pastors, members and leaders minister in a world in which the challenges to the biblical concept of human nature are profound and pervasive. Hundreds of millions of persons accept and practice traditional religions which allow for or encourage animism, ancestor worship, communication with the spirits of the dead, or the use of occult powers. Millions more blend one or more of these false doctrines of end-time spiritualism with monotheistic faiths, including Christianity, resulting in a syncretism that robs the good news of Jesus’ death and bodily resurrection of its life-giving power. Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized the Bible’s teaching about the nature of man from their earliest mission endeavors: Ellen G. White referred to belief in the natural non-immortality of human beings as one of the “landmarks” of the Seventh-day Adventist message. The urgency of addressing the challenges of dualism in all its forms on faith and practice is underlined by the reality of confusion among some Seventh-day Adventists who have a background in other faith systems.

The Third International Bible Conference took place in Israel, June 11-20, 2012, at sites in Galilee and Jerusalem. The theme of the Conference was “Issues in Biblical Anthropology from an Adventist Perspective.” Committed to a biblical worldview, more than 300 Adventist theologians and administrators from around the world gathered together to explore biblical, theological, historical, missiological and scientific perspectives on anthropology, to foster fellowship and unity among theologians and among theologians and administrators, and to be better equipped to serve the Lord and His church. Through the study, discussion, and fellowship this Conference provided, it was hoped that participants would experience a renewed sense of belonging and be stimulated to make further valuable contributions to the world church through their teaching and ministry.

As the meetings came to an end, we, the participants, acknowledge that we were spiritually and intellectually enriched through Bible study, the devotionals, the seasons of prayer, the lectures, the discussions, and the educational visits to important biblical and archaeological

sites. We also proclaim that the Adventist understanding of human nature and its denial of anthropological dualism is deeply rooted in and nurtured by biblical anthropology.

Affirmations

Committed to the principles of *sola scriptura* and *tota scriptura*, and because we accept the Bible's teaching about the origin, nature and destiny of human life:

We affirm that human beings are creatures of God, fashioned indivisibly from the dust of the earth, into whom God breathed the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

We affirm the goodness of material reality and bodily existence, according to the divine word which declared "It is good" (Gen 1:31).

We affirm that God created human beings in the image and likeness of God. Therefore all human life is endowed with unique dignity, value, and responsibilities (Ps 8:3-8).

We affirm that sin has profoundly damaged human nature in all its dimensions, separating human beings from fellowship with God and each other (Rom 3:23; Gen 3:7-8).

We affirm that death is the inevitable consequence of sin, and is both a cessation of personal consciousness and an end to human life in all its dimensions until the resurrection. The breath returns to God who gave it, and the dust returns to the ground (Gen 3:19; Eccl 12:7).

We affirm that it is the saving activity of God through the death and bodily resurrection of Christ and through the continuous work of the Spirit to reverse the effects of sin and restore in humanity the image of God (1 Cor 3:16-18).

We affirm that at Christ's return, those in Christ, both living and the resurrected dead, will receive the gift of immortality, accept glorified bodies and enter the life everlasting (1 Cor 15:51-54).

Denials

We deny natural immortality in its various forms, including the concept of the immaterial soul, eternal punishment, and reincarnation in any life form.

We deny naturalism as an explanation for the origin of human life, or any form of life.

We deny the continuation of any consciousness after death, and thus the use of practices to commune with the dead, worship ancestors, or gain occult powers.

We deny all forms of anthropological dualism, especially the belief that "soul" and body are different orders of being.

Missiological Implications

It is a vital part of the mission of the church to proclaim Christ's victory over death, and deliverance from the fear of death and spiritual powers through faith in Him (Heb 2:15). We recognize that the fear of death and evil spiritual powers pervades human experience, and takes form in a variety of religious beliefs and practices. We accept the responsibility of teaching the biblical truth about the nature of human beings in every culture and context so that all who hear will find lives of freedom and joy in the gospel and be prepared to meet the Saviour in peace. We confidently expect the literal Second Coming of Jesus at which God will restore the wholeness of all who put their faith in Jesus. We preach and teach the Word of God, inviting persons of every race, ethnicity and language into fellowship with God and His end-time people. Recognizing the dignity and value of every human being, we engage in education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid, combatting poverty, injustice, and involvement in the occult. We do these things as expressions of Christ's goal to restore in human beings the image of God and full fellowship with God and each other.

Recommendations

Instructed by the teaching of Scripture and by Ellen G. White's conviction that the biblical doctrines of the Sabbath and the state of the dead will be of vital importance in the end-time (Rev 12:17; 14:7; 13:13-14), we recommend that church administration encourage and sponsor major scholarly work on biblical anthropology, and that ample funding for this important scholarly and educational work be made available. Missiological challenges unique to special regions of the world church should be addressed by dedicated funding.

Church administrators should encourage Seventh-day Adventist scholars, educators and leaders to place special emphasis on the biblical teaching about the nature of human beings in curriculum and strategic planning for Adventist tertiary education.

Seventh-day Adventist scholars should be encouraged to give additional attention to these important topics to provide resources to frontline pastors, teachers, literature evangelists and church members.

Sabbath school curricula, ministerial training, and continuing education opportunities should be designed to equip pastors, Sabbath school teachers, and chaplains to educate church members about the biblical teaching on the nature of human beings.

Additional and concentrated study should be directed by the Office of Adventist Mission to address the implications of the biblical doctrine of humanity to the Church's mission, evangelism and witness.