

## **The Image of God and Educational Philosophy A Biblical Construct?**

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### **Introduction**

Seventh-day Adventist educators have recently engaged in a process of developing and refining a statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy. As I understand the process, the attempt is being made to be faithful to Adventist educational roots and to seek out the distinctive characteristics that define Adventist education. The conclusion of the search is summed up in these words, “The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: *to restore human beings into the image of their Maker*” (italics original).<sup>1</sup>

The italicized wording is unquestionably drawn from the writings of Ellen White, whose formative influence on the Adventist philosophy of education cannot be denied. In her foundational book on the subject, entitled *Education*, she states, “To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created. . . .this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.”<sup>2</sup>

It is no crime to base one’s philosophy of education on the seminal work of an influential writer. But the Adventist claim goes much further than this. The summary statement distributed at the International Conference on the Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education explicitly asserts that it is “derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.”<sup>3</sup> And there is no question that Ellen White herself believed that this core

distinctive could not only be derived from the Bible but was, in fact, central to the Bible's fundamental message.

The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise in the Revelation, "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads," [Rev 22:4] the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme,—uplifting humanity,—the power of God "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 Cor 15:57]. People who grasp this thought have before them an infinite field of study. They have the key that will unlock to them the whole treasure-house of God's Word.<sup>4</sup>

As vast a claim as we find here, I know of no serious attempt within biblical scholarship to undergird that assertion directly from the biblical writings themselves. In fact, the phrase "the image of God" is relatively rare within the Bible, being found in a total of six passages.<sup>5</sup> How can such an infrequent use of language be claimed as "the central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other clusters"? How can it be "the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible"? The following is a preliminary investigation of these sweeping claims.

### **The Creation Story**

Any serious study of the "image of God" concept must begin with the creation story of Genesis 1-2. The creation story is found in the opening section of Genesis, covering the first eleven chapters. Scholars call Genesis 1-11 the Primeval History. The narrative of Genesis 1-11 covers the pre-historic period of the Bible's story, the time before we have human records or archaeological evidence. This primeval history goes all the way back to the beginnings of the human race. And it all begins at the creation story.<sup>6</sup>

Within the creation story, Genesis 1 provides the big picture, covering the entire creation week. The progression through the original week leads up to the climax of the story, the creation of the first pair of human beings, the parents of the whole human race, Adam and Eve.

In Genesis 2, then, an interesting thing happens. The rest of the creation is taken for granted and the story zeroes in on the sixth day. The first couple becomes not only the center of attention, but virtually the sole focus of attention. It's very clear that whoever put this story together was very interested in the human race. The origin of the human race is the reason for telling the entire story.

### *Three Basic Relationships*

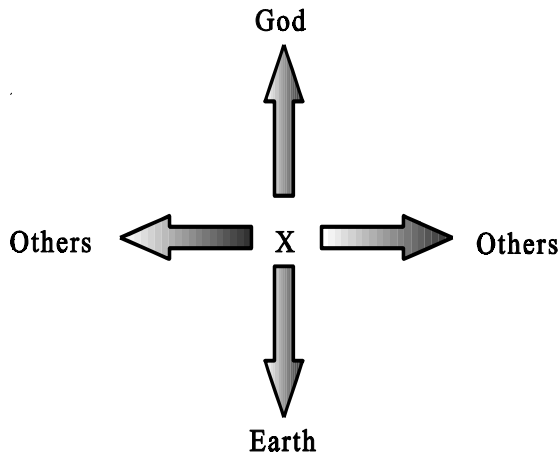
The key text for our topic is Genesis 1: 26-28. There we learn about God's intentions for the human race: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves along the ground.'"

This passage provides a basic statement about the creation of human beings in the image of God. The image of God is described in terms of three basic relationships, illustrated in figure 1. Mr. X in the center is Adam. He has an upward relationship with God. Adam was created in the image of God; that means God is the superior. Adam is directed toward God as his authority and it's what you might call a "mentor-client" or "mentor-disciple" relationship. Since God's creative power is the one thing we know about Him so far in the story, one implication of the image of God concept is that human beings were designed to mirror the creativity of God in some way.<sup>7</sup>

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**ADAMS THREE RELATIONSHIPS**

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Figure 1.

It might be helpful at this point to note that most of us have three different kinds of relationships. First, there are mentoring relationships in which you become the teacher or the guide. The other person may be getting more out of the relationship than you are but you do it because you are a Christian, perhaps, or because you like the person or because you are related to them. The relationship of a father with his son would normally be an example of a mentoring relationship. The rewards are not always equal, but the mentor enters into the relationship out of a concern for the development of the other individual.

The second kind of relationship is the exact reverse of the mentoring relationship; it is a client or discipling relationship, in which you are the one who receives the most, you are the learner. In that kind of relationship you are the one who grows and develops with a mentor. So you can have unequal relationships in both ways.

The third kind of relationship is the relatively equal relationship. This is a friendship in which both sides benefit equally, each party may

mentor at one time and be a disciple at another time. A good marriage, for example, will normally be a relationship between equals. You find all three types of relationship in the Genesis story.

While Gen 1:26-28 emphasizes the God-humanity dynamic very strongly, the image of God is more than just a spiritual concept. The text specifically emphasizes (verse 27) that the image of God was created both male and female. Adam and Eve—who together make up the human race in this story—have a relationship of equality where they love and serve one another.<sup>8</sup> So there is a social dimension to the image of God as well as a spiritual one.

But the image of God has a third dimension, a physical one. Not only do humans have a relationship with God and a relationship with each other, there is also a relationship with the earth. You could call this a mentoring relationship as well. The human race is in a mentoring relationship with the earth, to cultivate the earth and make it a better place. That relationship is spelled out in more detail in Genesis 2 where Adam is expected to care for the garden and is given a position of authority over the animals.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Fall*

So with Genesis 1 and 2 the human race gets off to a good start. But then we come to two texts which break our hearts, Gen 1:27 and 6:5. “So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27, NIV).” A good start. The human race is functioning just fine. They are created in the image of God, so everything’s going well. Then comes Gen 6:5 (NIV), only a short time after: “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” The Primeval History moves from “created in the image of God” to “every single inclination of their heart was evil all the time.” What a difference! What a tragic change! What happened in the short time between these two? We call it “The Fall.” In the Fall, the perfect relationships of Eden were broken. And broken relationships are at the root of evil.

Figure 2 looks a lot like Figure 1 but it now shows that there are two consequences of sin, there are natural consequences and there are applied consequences. When the relationship with God is broken, the natural consequence is fear. When the relationship with others is broken, the natural consequence is division, bickering, arguments and violence. When Adam's relationship with the earth was broken, the natural consequence was decay and decline.<sup>10</sup>

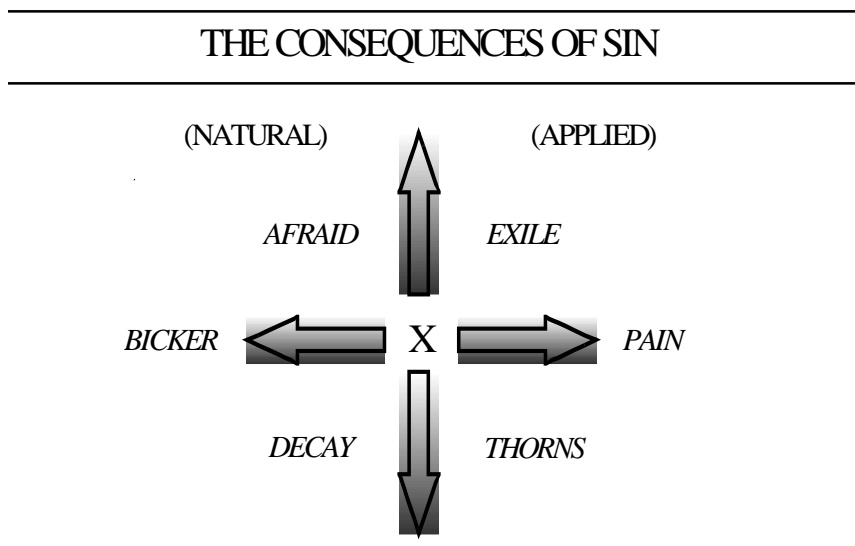


Figure 2.

In addition to the natural consequences of sin, there were also applied consequences. As sinners, Adam and Eve were required to leave the garden and go into exile. They could no longer stay in the direct presence of God, and they lost access to the tree of life. The pain of childbirth is also listed as an applied consequence of sin. And to the natural consequence of decay and death was added the complication of thorns and weeds in the environment. The animals became as afraid of humans as the original humans were afraid of God. Lying behind all of these “curses” is the ultimate individual penalty, death. The ultimate consequence of sin is eternal separation from God.<sup>11</sup>

### **From Creation to Abraham**

After the story of the Fall the text of Genesis 4-11 develops three main themes. The first of these is that sin results in the undoing of the creation. In order to grasp this in the text of Genesis 4-11, it helps to know some Hebrew. In the Hebrew, the account of the Flood uses specific language to show that in the Flood God was taking His own creation apart and returning it to its original condition, a planet completely covered with water (Gen 1:2)!

In the creation of the physical earth, God had worked on the principle of separation and distinction. He separated the dry land from sea, and He separated the waters above from the waters below (Gen 1:7, 9, cf. also 1:4,18). In the Flood story that very same process is reversed. The waters from above come down and the waters from below come up. The waters of the sea come over the land and the earth is restored to its pre-creation condition, water completely covered the earth (Gen 7:11, 20). In the Flood story, the processes that separated and made distinct in creation were reversed. So you have an undoing of creation, a return to pre-creation chaos (Gen 1:2,9-10 cf. 7:18-20).<sup>12</sup>

A second major theme in Gen 4-11 is that God's grace restores creation. After the Flood story there is a restoration of earth in a new creation. The language of Genesis 8-9 picks up on the same language already used in Genesis 1-2 and 6-7. It expresses the rebuilding of creation. God is once again doing what He had done before. He begins with a wind over the watery chaos (Gen 8:1, cf. 1:2). The vegetation returns (8:11, cf. 1:12). The animals are restored to the environment (8:17, cf. 1:25,28). God restores the seasons (8:22, cf. 1:14-18). He once again establishes care for the animals. Just as Adam took care of the animals in Eden, so Noah does it on the ark (Gen 2:18-20; 7:6-10,14-16). And just as Adam sinned because he ate the fruit of a tree, so Noah sinned because he drank from the fruit of a vine (Gen 3:6; 9:20-21). The covenant God makes with Noah also echoes the language of creation (cf. Gen 1:28-30; 9:1-3).<sup>13</sup>

The third major theme in Genesis 4-11 is that the judgments of God are two-fold. They are both positive and negative. When Adventists think of judgment, they often think of the negative. "Oh, no—they're going to

look at all my personal record, all that rotten stuff. I'm in big trouble!" But to the ancient Hebrews, judgment was two-fold—positive as well as negative. We see this clearly after the Fall. God cursed the ground and banished Adam and Eve from the garden, this is certainly negative (Gen 3:22-24). But on the positive side He makes clothing for them so they can handle the climate outside paradise (Gen 3:21). And He puts enmity between them and the serpent so that his damage will be limited (Gen 3:15). So God judges them positively as well as negatively.

The story of Cain might also seem to be totally negative in its judgment. God offers Cain some choice words of rebuke (4:6-7) and banishes him from the human race (Gen 4:11-12). But there is a positive side to the judgment as well. God puts a mark on Cain so that nobody will hurt him (Gen 4:13-15). In the Flood story, of course, there is a negative judgment: the whole antediluvian world was destroyed and all the people in it. But there is also a positive judgment as well. In providing the ark, God set a group of people apart as the first biblical example of the remnant concept.<sup>14</sup>

After the Flood story comes the Tower of Babel. Again, no one has any difficulty spotting the negative judgment at the Tower of Babel—God knocks the tower down, confuses their languages, and scatters the people (Gen 11:7-9). That is a certainly a negative judgment. The positive judgment is a lot less obvious, especially for Western minds with their chronological perspective. But if you read Genesis as a literary piece, the end of Genesis 11 concludes with the story of Abraham. And what does God say to Abraham? "All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3).

While our Western minds immediately note that there are at least 600 years between Babel and Abraham, the language of the story line ties the call of Abraham back to the table of nations in Genesis 10. There you have a listing of all the nations of the world—it is the entire world in need of God. It is a world that is all messed up and just as bad off as the world before the Flood. It is a world that is under curse. Does God have a blessing for that world? Yes, the blessing comes through Abraham. Through him God addresses the dilemma of the whole human race that is under the curse. In fact, the story of Abraham is really the solution to the whole



problem of sin as introduced in the Fall. Genesis 12:1-3 becomes the crucial text that ties together the entire Pentateuch.

### **Abraham as a Second Adam**

Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV): “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”

#### *A Three-fold Promise*

A careful look at this text shows that the promise to Abraham involves three things: God promises him a land, He promises that he will become a great nation, and He promises to make Abraham a blessing. So the three things God promised Abraham can be summed up as land, nationhood, and blessing.

The word “blessing” is sometimes misunderstood. At its root it is a covenant word. Just as the concept of curse expresses a negative response to human behavior, so blessing expresses a positive response. According to Genesis 10, the whole world was out of favor with God and subject to His negative judgment. So in offering a blessing on Abraham, God was offering a blessing to the whole world. Through Abraham the whole world was to be brought back into favor with God.

If you were to read your way through the Pentateuch—Genesis to Deuteronomy—you’d find some form of this three-fold promise stated at least twenty-five times.<sup>15</sup> The promise keeps getting repeated, reformulated, and restated in different ways. Let’s take a look at just one of these restatements in Genesis 17, because it helps us to unpack what these three promises are all about, the land, the nationhood, the blessing. As you read through Genesis 17:1-8 (NIV) below, look for these three promises in it.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell face down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

In Genesis 12, there was the promise of blessing, but here that promise is restated. Instead of blessing, God talks about the covenant He will establish to restore the relationship He wants to have with Abraham and with all of his descendants. Then along with a reference to nationhood again, He talks about the numerous descendants Abraham will have. God also restates the promise of the land and clarifies it more specifically, it is to be the land of Canaan.

### *Abraham and the Restoration of the Image of God*

Why does God promise Abraham these three specific things? Let's go back to the beginning for a moment.

Back in the creation story we noticed that the image of God involved the three basic relationships of Adam and Eve: to God, to each other, and to the earth. The curse then specifically affected those three relationships: exile from the garden was the result of a break in the relationship between Adam and God; the childbirth pain affected the propagation of the human race and their relationship with each other; the thorns were an imposition on the relationship between Adam and the earth. So the curse that comes in Genesis 3, in the Garden of Eden, is a three-fold

curse corresponding to the three relationships that made up the image of God which Adam and Eve received at the beginning. (Figure 3.)

RELATIONSHIP AND CURSE	
Relationship	Curse
God	Exile
Others	Childbirth
Earth	Thorns

Figure 3.

Now let’s take this a step further. In the original image of God the human race received a vertical relationship with God; in Genesis 3, after the Fall, there was separation from God; but in Genesis 12 and 17 comes a blessing, full relationship with God was to be restored in Abraham. In the original image of God, there was harmonious relationship between the male and the female, after the Fall this relationship was under the curse—symbolized by the pain of childbirth. In Genesis 12 and 17, however, God promises to restore human relationship through the nationhood of Abraham and his many descendants. The land, obviously, corresponds to both the original dominion in the garden and to the thorns that frustrated that dominion after the Fall. (Figure 4.)

ABRAHAM: RESTORER OF CREATION			
CREATION	CURSE	GEN 12: 1-3	GEN 17: 1-8
God	Separation	Blessing	Relationship
Others	Pain	Nation	Posterity
Earth	Thorns	Land	Land

Figure 4.

So what God was promising Abraham was not just a fresh start, He was promising a restoration of Eden. He was promising to restore the fullness of the image of God. The promises to Abraham were not simply national promises, they signaled the full restoration of what was lost in the Garden of Eden. This is how the Tower of Babel comes into play in the Abraham story. The Tower of Babel represents the whole world under the curse; it is the whole world in need of blessing. So when God calls Abraham, He calls him with the rest of the human race in mind. His intention was to restore the image of God and bring all peoples back to paradise.

While the Flood story is the first eschatology of the Bible in a physical sense, the call of Abraham is the first eschatology in New Testament spiritual terms. The call of Abraham is not just a local event, it is part of a cosmic picture: the whole purpose of the Primeval History (Gen 1-11) was to set the stage for an incredible act of ultimate salvation that God was going to do through Abraham.

**The Fate of the Old Testament Promise**

*In the Pentateuch*

But Gen 12:1-3 is more than just the climax of the Primeval History. The passage also functions like a “hinge” in the Pentateuch. It points back to the Primeval History and offers God’s response of grace to that history. But it also points forward in that the rest of the Pentateuch—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—all hark back to this promise in Genesis 12. The book of Genesis is concerned primarily with the promise of posterity. The book recites many challenges to the multiplication of Abraham’s descendants (war parties, barren wives, famine). But when the book comes to a close, the family numbers 70, a small number still, but reasonably secure at last. (Figure 5.)

THE PROMISES FULFILLED		
GEN 12: 1-3	GEN 17: 1-8	PENTATEUCH
Blessing	Relationship	Exodus/Leviticus
Nation	Posterity	Genesis
Land	Land	Numbers/Deuteronomy

Figure 5.

With the book of Exodus, the family of Abraham numbers in the millions and the focus shifts from posterity to the relationship with God. The books of Exodus and Leviticus outline how God separated Israel from their king (Pharaoh) and brought them out to their new king, Himself. He makes a covenant with them at Sinai and establishes the regulations by

which they are to live (ten commandments, etc.) and by which the covenant could be restored whenever it is broken (the sanctuary). With Numbers and Deuteronomy, on the other hand, the focus moves to the land; Numbers outlines the events leading up to the invasion, and Deuteronomy provides the constitution for the nation that Israel would become when they enter the land. So Gen 12:1-3 provides an over-arching structure in which we can understand the dynamic of all that is taking place in the five books of Moses.<sup>16</sup>

In a real sense Deuteronomy 28 provides both the climax of the Pentateuch and the setting for all that follows in the Old Testament. (Figure 6.) Through obedience to its constitution Israel was to inherit the blessing, they were to grow more and more prosperous and powerful, until the conditions of Eden would be restored again (Deut 28:1-14). Through their prosperity and greatness the world would also become blessed. On the other hand, through disobedience they could grow weaker and weaker, the land would become less and less like paradise, until they would return to exile, the condition from which God had brought them out of Egypt (Deut 28:15-68).

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THE LAW OF DEUTERONOMY		
Obey and Live	=	(Blessing)
Disobey and Die	=	(Curse)

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Figure 6.

With the book of Joshua, therefore, we would expect the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. But instead of Canaan being a matured Eden, it echoed the probationary nature of the original paradise. The options of life and death, blessing and curse (Deut 30:15-19), echoed the two trees in the Garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The conquest did not lead Israel to Eden itself, but to a probation-

ary opportunity to co-operate with God in the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. If they chose the course of obedience, there would be a gradual process over time leading up to a restored Eden and a restoration of the image of God in the human race. But the reality of the monarchy and of the prophets is that Israel took the course of the curses of Deuteronomy (Deut 28:15-68) rather than the course leading to blessing (Deut 28:1-14). Instead of becoming a missionary nation that brought blessing to the world, Israel became self-absorbed and lost the blessing itself. In Deuteronomy itself (30:1-6) is the expectation that the promise would not be fulfilled by Israel in Canaan, but only after a replay of Adam and Eve's exile from the garden.

### *In the Prophets*

With the prophets of the Old Testament<sup>17</sup> it became clear that the history of Israel in Canaan is the story of a downhill path back to a new Egypt (Babylon–Daniel 1) and a new bondage (Isa 11:15-16; Hos 2:8-15). But the three-fold promise embedded in the image-of-God concept is not lost sight of.

The central focus of attention in the Old Testament prophets is the exile of Israel from the land promised to Abraham, followed by their eventual return to Palestine. This “Exile and Return Theme” is dominant in the writing prophets whether they wrote before, during, or after the Exile.<sup>18</sup> Beginning well before the time of the Exile, God enabled the prophets to envision a “transformed future,” a future in which God would mightily intervene in their history and change everything.

The most comprehensive picture of Israel's ideal future can be found in Ezek 36:22-38; which portrays a three-fold transformation of reality.<sup>19</sup> God planned to transform *human society* by restoring Israel to her land and to her witness to the nations (Ezek 36:24,28,33-36). He would transform *human nature* with a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 38:25-27). And He would eventually transform *the natural world* itself, banishing hunger and violence (Ezek 36:30,35).<sup>20</sup>

While much more could be said about this three-fold promise of God's intervention, I have written extensively on this point in the past.<sup>21</sup> What I would like to point out here, and what I don't believe has been seen in previous scholarship, is the natural connection between the three prom-

ises to the nation in the prophets and the three promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 17. God promises in the prophets to restore the people of God to their land, building a new Jerusalem and restoring the monarchy there (Mic 4:1-8; Isa 2:2-5; 11:1-16; 33:17-22; 49:14-26; Zech 9:9-10). In other words, the national and social aspect of the promise to Abraham would be restored after the Exile. This transformation of human society would reverse the curse on childbirth and fulfill the promise that Abraham's descendants would be the most numerous and powerful on earth.

God also promises in the prophets to renew the hearts of His people. The reason the eschatology of Deuteronomy failed to restore the image of God was Israel's record of repeated failure to obey, or even to repent (see Isa 1:3-6). By the time of the writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi), there was little hope that this pattern would ever change unless God acted to restore out of pure grace, before Israel even prepared itself to respond (Ezek 36:24-31). The remedy for Israel's decline was a new heart, a new spirit, and a new attitude of obedience (Ezek 36:25-27). This transformation of human nature fulfilled the promise of a restored relationship with God (cf. Deut 30:6; Isa 33:23-24; 44:22; Jer 29:10-14; 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-29; Mic 7:15-20) and of blessing to the nations (Isa 19:23-25; 60:1-3,9-17; Zech 8:20-23).

Finally, the promises to Israel in the prophets go far beyond Palestine and the hearts of God's people. The entire earth is to be restored to a paradise state. Because of sin the natural world is hostile to itself and to the humans who were to have dominion over it (Gen 1:26-28). It is under the curse. There is often too much water, leading to floods, or too little, resulting in desert. Beasts devour people instead of serving them as God intended. The Old Testament prophets, therefore, indicated that God planned to engage in a major transformation of the natural world. "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them . . . they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isa 11:6-9). These things and more would happen when Israel was restored to its land (Isa 35:1-7; 65:25; Hos 2:18-23; Ezek 34:25-31). So great would be the transformation that even the heavenly bodies would be affected (Isa 24:21-23; 30:23-26; 60:19-20; Zech 14:6-8; Ps 102:25-27). With this transformation of the natural world comes the restoration of Eden and the restoration of



the image of God in its dominion over the natural world.

Tragically, the End envisioned by the prophets never came true in any literal sense at the time of the return from Babylonian exile. Those who experienced the Return found it very disappointing (Hag 2:1-9). When you reach the end of the Old Testament, therefore, Israel is further from the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham than it was at the time of Joshua. Instead of climaxing with the restoration of Eden and the image of God, the Old Testament ends in failure and defeat, looking longingly toward a future in which these promises might be fulfilled (Mal 4:5-6). The Old Testament looks forward to something outside itself for the restoration of the image of God in humanity.

### **Jesus and the Image of God**

With such a long period of failure in the background, how could the promises to Abraham ever be fulfilled? Paul's answer to that question was, "through Jesus."

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal 3: 8-9, 13-14)

So Paul clearly believed that it was through Jesus Christ that the promises to Abraham were to be fulfilled. And that fulfillment was not to be limited to a restoration to Palestine, it would include the full restoration of the image of God in the person of Jesus Himself. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15). The combination of the phrase "image of God" with "firstborn over all creation" makes it clear that the original image of God concept in Genesis is at the heart of Paul's concept of Jesus. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of

unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4, cf. Heb 1:3). If it is unbelief not to see in Christ the image of God, then Paul is saying that seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of the image of God concept is a central part of New Testament belief.

So the New Testament not only sees in Jesus the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, but also a new creation, the full restoration of the image of God in humanity. This is evident in a number of ways that language is used in the New Testament. "In the beginning was the Word. . ." John 1:1, cf. Gen 1:1. With this sentence we are introduced to the idea that the same Jesus who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14) was the One through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3). The God who "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1) was Jesus. The God who said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3) was Jesus. The God who "formed man from the dust of the ground" (Gen 2:7) was Jesus. The God who walked "in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8) was Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

But the New Testament view of Christ in the Creation goes much deeper than an assertion that Jesus is the One who made all things. For the New Testament, the story of creation becomes a marvelous parable also of Jesus' saving work and of the importance of His human nature. In light of this it is most interesting to read Luke 1:35 (NIV). "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'" The concept of the Spirit of the Most High "overshadowing" Mary reminds the reader of Gen 1:2 where the "Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The result of the Spirit's work in Genesis 1 was the creation of the world. The result of the Spirit's work in Luke 1 was a new creation, the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the new creation promised in OT prophets like Isaiah (Isa 65:17).

### *Jesus as the Second Adam*

It is not surprising, therefore, that New Testament writers in general, and Paul in particular, freely compare Jesus with Adam (Rom 5:12-19).<sup>23</sup> The Adam of Genesis is the "first man" or the "first Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), Jesus is the "second man," "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45-47). Adam is "the earthly man," Jesus is "the Man from heaven" (1 Cor 15:48-49).

Like Adam, Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). (Figure 7.)

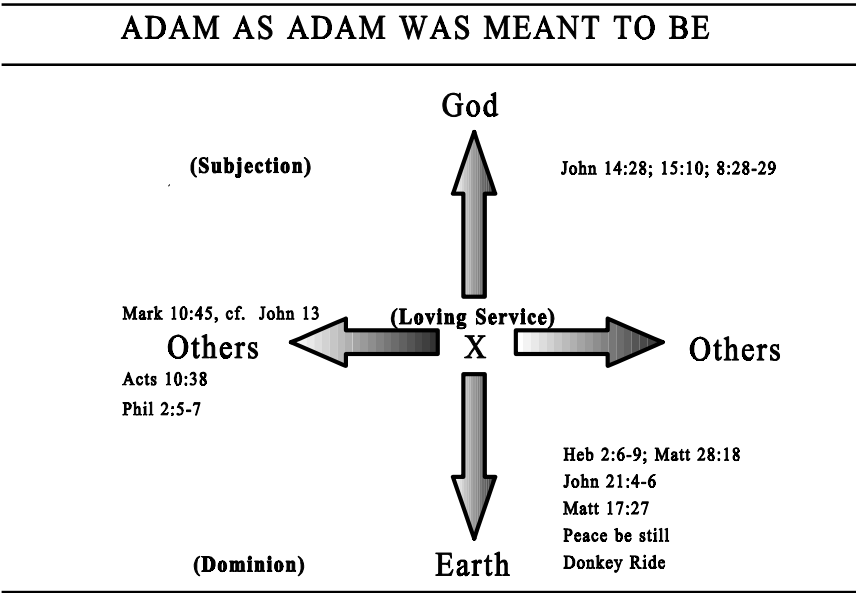


Figure 7.

In what sense is Jesus the new Adam? In what sense is he like Adam and yet greater than Adam? The crucial element is that Jesus is like Adam in His relationships. Jesus too had a perfect relationship with God, with others, and with the environment around Him. Jesus came to earth to become Adam as Adam was intended to be when he came forth from the hands of the creator. When this principle is understood, a number of simple concepts in the gospels become filled with fresh meaning.

In John 14:28 Jesus makes the statement, “The Father is greater than I.” This text is freely used by Jehovah’s Witnesses to show that Jesus is inferior in nature to the Father. But they have failed to understand the “second Adam” significance of this text. As the new Adam, Jesus was in perfect subordination to His Father. As the image of God, Jesus obeyed

the commands of His Father (John 15:10). As the second Adam, Jesus did not operate on His own, but was taught by His Father (John 8:28). He was in a relationship of perfect subordination to His Father. He was Adam as Adam was intended to be.

Jesus also had a perfect relationship with His fellow human beings as He walked on this earth. This relationship with others was beautifully illustrated by the foot washing service in John 13. Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). “He went around doing good” (Acts 10:38). “He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself” (Phil 2:5-8). If every person on earth had the spirit and attitude of Jesus, there would be sweet harmony in the loving service each would provide for the others. True equality is found in mutual submission and service. Jesus demonstrated in His relationships with others that He was Adam as Adam was intended to be.

It is in His relationship with the environment that the parallels between Jesus and Adam become especially interesting. The first Adam was created to rule over the earth (Gen 1:26, 28; Heb 2:6-8). The second Adam inherited that role from the first by the new creation (Heb 2:8, 9). He was Adam as Adam was intended to be. Thus many of the stories in the gospels make sense as illustrations of Jesus’ dominion over the earth.

The disciples went fishing on the Sea of Galilee one night, for example, but they caught nothing (John 21:1-3). Why were they fishing at night? Lure fishing takes place in daylight. You want the fish to see the lure, be attracted and bite into the line. But net fishing works best at night. The fish “stumbles” into the net without even realizing that anything is there. If you have had no luck during the night, the net fisherman has one last chance in the early hours of the morning. He can throw the net on the shady side of the boat. A fish enjoying the early morning sunshine wanders into the shadow of the boat, is blinded momentarily, and ZZZAAAPPP!!! The fish is caught.

But in the biblical story, a man was standing there on the beach (John 21:4,5). He knew a lot about preaching, but He seemed to know very little about fishing. He called out, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat” (John 21:6). Since the disciples weren’t stupid, He was clearly inviting them to throw the net on the sunny side of the boat! Not a great strat-

egy under ordinary circumstances. But this was no ordinary preacher. This was Adam as Adam was intended to be. He had dominion over the fish of the sea (Gen 1:26,28)! Instantly, 153 fish obeyed Him, because He was the second Adam, He was Adam as Adam was intended to be.

On another occasion, Jesus directed Peter to catch a particular fish that had scooped up just the right amount of change to meet an urgent tax bill! So Jesus was clearly in dominion over the fish of the sea. He also ruled over all the earth (Gen 1:26). Even the winds and the waves obeyed Him (Matt 8:26,27). So the disciples were right to ask, “What kind of *man* is this?” He was Adam as Adam was intended to be.

Sometime after this Jesus took a ride on an unbroken colt (Mark 11:1-8). If you or I were to try this, the ride would be a short and merry one! But Jesus had dominion “over every living creature that moves along the ground” (Gen 1:28). He could freely declare, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). He was Adam as Adam was intended to be. He lived perfectly in all three of Adam’s relationships, He lived in obedience to God, in loving service to others, and in dominion over the earth and its animals. The image of God was fully restored, not only spiritually, but also socially and physically in Him.

The Adam-Christ typology has some further dimensions. Like the first Adam, the second Adam had a wayward bride. “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (1 Cor 11:2,3). The church is here likened to Eve, carrying the “second Adam” typology a step further. The first Adam was put to sleep, and an opening was made in his side. From that opening came the substance from which God made the woman. Similarly, the second Adam was put to sleep (on the cross) and an opening was made in His side. From that opening came the substance (water and blood—cf. 1 John 5:6) from which God created the church.

Jesus Christ is all that Adam was meant to be. He was tempted on the point of appetite (in the wilderness, cf. Matt 4:1-3). In his temptations, He was passing over the same ground where Adam had failed, but where the first Adam failed, the second Adam conquered. In overcoming

Satan's temptations, Jesus passed over the ground of Adam's failure and redeemed it.

On the other hand, Jesus also accepted the consequences of Adam's failure. Because of sin, the first Adam came under the curse. He was cursed with nakedness (Gen 3:10,11), thorns (3:18), sweat (3:19), and death (2:17; 5:5). Likewise, on the cross the second Adam came under the curse of the first Adam. He too was naked (one purpose of crucifixion was humiliation in front of your family and friends—Heb 12:2) and suffered from thorns, the sweat of anguish, and, ultimately, death.

So we see a great reversal in the experience of Christ. He lived a perfect life in our human flesh, though he had to battle the full force of human temptation. He was Adam as Adam was intended to be. On the basis of His perfect life, we inherit eternal life and justification. What had been the original Adam's by right of creation has been purchased back at infinite cost. At the same time, although He did not deserve it, He carried in His body on the tree (Rom 8:3; 1 Pet 2:24) all the consequences of human sin. He reaped the full force of the curse. As a result, the death and condemnation that we inherited from the first Adam is no longer held to our account (Rom 5:19). (Figure 8.)

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## GOD'S MIGHTY ACT IN CHRIST

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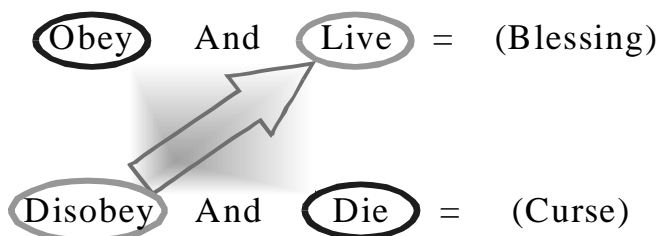


Figure 8.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’”<sup>24</sup>

For the writers of the New Testament, then, to talk about Christ was to talk about creation, and to think of creation was to see Christ. In Him the image of God was fully restored (Col 1:15). But it was not for Him to bear that image alone throughout eternity. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). In His humanity, Jesus conformed His life to the image of His Father. Those who enter into and maintain a relationship with Jesus are destined to be conformed into His image, just He was conformed into the image of His Father. It is a process of developing from one who has carried from birth the likeness of the “earthly man” to one who bears the likeness of the “man from heaven” (1 Cor 15:49).

In Col 3:9-10, Paul describes the process in this way, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” So while the “image of God” language is used fairly rarely in the Scriptures, it is clearly a part of the way the apostles thought about Jesus and about the things that happen to people who enter into relationship with Him. As we get to know Jesus, whom to know is eternal life (John 17:3), we enter into a discipleship relationship with Him. As disciples, we study His life and His character, and by contemplating become conformed more and more into His image (2 Cor 3:18). As we are conformed into the image of Jesus, we are more and more conformed into the image of God for “I and the Father are one (John 10:30),” and “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9).”

So restoring the image of God in human beings is nothing less than bringing them into a Mentor-disciple relationship with Him (Matt 28:19-

20). The ultimate goal of the plan of salvation is that we would become like Him (Matt 18:23-35; John 13:35). "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The greatest of all creations is the one Christ affects in the lives of His people (2 Cor 5:17).

I would conclude, then, that a major subtext of the biblical witness is the concept of restoring the image of God in the sons and daughters of Adam and the descendants of Abraham. This begins to occur when we usher people into a redemptive relationship with Jesus, the Image of God. So biblical research supports Ellen White's contention that the ultimate goal of Adventist education should be the restoration of the image of God in humanity.

### **Some Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Education**

While I am a practicing educator, I probably know less of educational theory than most readers of this journal. Nevertheless, many have requested that I offer some implications of the image-of-God concept for Adventist education. The following are merely suggestive of what an exhaustive study by one more familiar with educational theory could provide.

(1) *Thinkers and Not Mere Reflectors.* It is interesting that at the point in the text where human beings are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), the only thing that has been revealed about God is that He is creative. So one implication of the image-of-God concept is that human beings were designed to mirror the creativity of God in some way.<sup>25</sup> Adam's naming of the animals shows that this human creativity was not to be limited to the procreative function of human sexuality that is inherent in the image, according to Gen 1:28. An education that seeks to restore the image of God in humanity will seek to draw out the full measure of human creativity, uniqueness, and individuality.<sup>26</sup>

This aspect of the "new birth" into God's image is breathtakingly described in John 3:8: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its



sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the spirit.” The new birth (to use the language of Jesus in John 3) makes one more like the Holy Spirit, who blows wherever He wishes. Rather than becoming predictable, like manufactured cookies, Christians energized by the new birth become unpredictable. But the energy of the Spirit brings out the true, God-given uniqueness of everyone who is born again. In Christ, and through the work of the Spirit, we become our true selves, creative and unique, just like the Spirit.

We see the same uniqueness in Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Jesus constantly caught people by surprise. He told old men to be born again, he spoke to Samaritan women, he refused to be bound by family pressures (John 2:4; 7:1-10), people never knew what He would do or say next (John 7:8-11; 8:1-11; 10:24; 11:55-57). We must never let our fear of uniqueness blind us to the working of the Spirit. Restoring the image of God includes attaining the full measure of our God-given uniqueness and creativity that are designed into our new birth as Christians.<sup>27</sup>

(2) *Environmental Concern and Consciousness.* As inheritors of a movement that emphasizes “adventism,” the belief in the soon return of Jesus, many Seventh-day Adventists have had a tendency to see the earth as somewhat “disposable.” After all, one day this planet will be destroyed in a lake of fire (Rev 20:12-15) and a new heaven and a new earth will be created. Some may argue that environmental consciousness is a waste of time in a world where few are in a redemptive relationship with Jesus.

But the first part of the denominational name, “Seventh-day,” points back to the importance and the value of the original creation. This life offers the chance to practice for eternity when the image of God will be fully restored. As we learn to practice good stewardship of the earth now, we will be conformed into the image of those who will do the same with the earth made new. Restoration of the image, in Old Testament terms, included restoration of the garden as well as of the relationship with God.<sup>28</sup> “Those who have made the most of their privileges to reach the highest attainments here, will take these valuable acquisitions with them into the future life. . . .The capability to appreciate the glories that ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,’ will be proportionate to the attainments reached in the

cultivation of the faculties in this life.”<sup>29</sup> “Even if we do not lose our souls, we shall realize in eternity the result of our unused talents. For all the knowledge and ability that we might have gained and did not, there will be an eternal loss.”<sup>30</sup>

(3) *The Process by Which the Image Is Restored.* The New Testament writers, Paul in particular, held the conviction that in the person of Jesus the image of God was fully restored in humanity. It is, therefore, in communion with Him that we enter into the process of restoration ourselves. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18 KJV). As we contemplate the image of God expressed in the person of Jesus, we become molded more and more into His image. Ellen White beautifully expressed this concept in the following:

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.”<sup>31</sup>

An educational philosophy that centers on restoring the image of God in humanity will not only be redemptive in the general sense, it will find ways to bring Christ into every aspect of that education. The various courses of education will either point to the true Source of transformation or they will serve as distractions from the primary purpose. Even good things can undermine the goal of education if they serve to distract both teacher and student from the ultimate goal (Jer 9:23-24). Perhaps the contemporary fascination with “What Would Jesus Do?” can offer useful insight into the process by which we can encourage our students to cooperate with the restoration that Jesus desires to bring into their lives.

I hope that the International Conference on the Philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist Education and the concepts presented in this article represent only the beginning of an ongoing discussion of this important subject. According to colleagues of mine at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul,

Minnesota, constructive change only occurs in response to a compelling vision or a burning platform. I believe that the concept of restoring the image of God in human beings is the best source for a compelling vision that will drive SDA education to new heights of usefulness.

### **Notes**

1. From “A Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy” (Version 7.5), as distributed at the International Conference on the Seventh-Day Adventist Philosophy of Education, April 7-9, 2001, at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

2. Ellen G. White. (1903). *Education*. Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 15-16.

3. “A Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy” (Version 7.5).

4. White, *Education*, 125-126.

5. The concept of human beings being made in the image of God occurs in Gen 1:26-27; 9:3 and 1 Cor 11:7. The concept is clearly applied to Jesus in 2 Cor 4:4 and Col 1:15, and is implied in Heb 1:3: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”

6. This investigation makes no presumption regarding the relationship between the biblical narratives of creation and the Primeval History and the theories of origins and the age of the earth to be found in scientific investigation. I believe that those who differ with aspects of the Bible’s account of origins can still appreciate the overarching thematic purpose of the creation accounts and how those themes are subsequently used to express the Bible’s message of redemption.

7. John Wesley Taylor. (2001, April 9). Presentation at the International Conference on the Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education at Andrews University; cf. von Rad. This human creativity is exemplified, but certainly not limited to, the procreative function of human sexuality that is inherent in the image according to Gen 1:28: “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.”

8. In *Patriarchs and prophets*, page 46, Ellen White suggests, “Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him.” Ellen G. White. (1890). *The story of patriarchs and prophets*. Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 46

9. This is expressed in the naming ceremony. In Hebrew thought, the one who names has a position of authority over the one named. Note that God is the one who names Adam and Eve. An implication of this mentoring relationship with the earth is that the animals can be perceived in a discipling relationship with the human race. Human beings are to be like God to the animals.

10. According to Ellen G. White (*Patriarchs and prophets*, 62), the flowers began wilting the moment Adam sinned.

11. The distinction between natural and applied consequences is drawn from the text. As the story is told, natural consequences occur even before Adam and Eve meet God. They become aware of their nakedness and take steps to remedy the situation (Gen 3:7,10-11). God doesn’t make them fearful of Him, they are fearful before He meets them (Gen 3:8-10). On the other hand, when God meets them, He articulates a further series of consequences (Gen 3:16-19, 22-24). They didn’t feel pain or experience any thorns until after God spoke to them. With the exception of the banishment, no reasons for adding to the natural consequences of sin are given.

12. Further linguistic support for the undoing of creation can be found in the language of “living things” in Gen 1:20-28 and 7:21-23, the seven days of Gen 2:2 and 7:10, and the “breath of life” concept in Gen 2:7 and 7:22. Warren Austin Gage. (1984). *The gospel of Genesis: Studies in protology and eschatology*. Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 7-16, offers the most detailed account of the creation-flood parallels that I am aware of.

13. The word “endures” (“as long as the earth endures”—Gen 8:22) employs the same root as “beginning” in Gen 1:1. There is also reference to the image of God (1:26-27, cf. 9:6) and to the curse on the

ground (8:21, cf. 3:17).

14. The first time that the Hebrew word for “remnant” appears in the Hebrew Bible is Gen 7:23 (NIV), “Only Noah was *left*.” This is the same word that is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the remnant of God’s people. This concept is drawn in to the Book of Revelation in such texts as Rev 11:13 and 12:17.

15. David J. A. Clines. (1978). *The theme of the Pentateuch*. Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 29-43.

16. I am indebted to Clines, 45-60, for the overall concept of Gen 12 through Deuteronomy being based on the original promise in Genesis 12:1-3.

17. By “prophets of the Old Testament,” we generally conceive of the books of the Bible running from Isaiah to Malachi in English Bibles. A broader definition of the term could include history books such as Samuel and Kings, which record the words and actions of prophets like Elijah and Elisha, who wrote no books. These history books also had the prophetic function of evaluating the actions of Israel and its kings in the light of the covenant expressed in Deuteronomy.

18. Most scholars would agree that Hosea, Amos, Micah, and at least part of Isaiah, were written well before the exile to Babylon that began in 605 BC. Ezekiel and Jeremiah were unquestionably written at the onset of and during the exile (conservative OT scholars would include Daniel in this group). Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi clearly lived and wrote after the return to Palestine under Zerubbabel around 537 BC.

19. A book on this period of Israel’s history that I have found extremely helpful is Donald E. Gowan. (1986). *Eschatology in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

20. *Ibid.*, 1-3.

21. Jon Paulien. (1994). *What the Bible says about the end-time*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 55-62.

22. This startling assertion has abundant support in the many “Yahweh quotations” in the New Testament. These are quotations from OT passages related to Yahweh that are applied without qualification to Jesus in the NT (for example, Rev 1:17-18, cf. Isa 44:6; 48:12; Phil 2:9-11,

cf. Isa 45:23).

23. Note the exceedingly perceptive remarks on Paul's "Adam christology" in James D. G. Dunn. (1998). *The theology of Paul the apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 281-292. Dunn believes that Paul repeatedly calls on Gen 1-3 as an explanation of the human condition. Gage, 27-36, has seen a number of the concepts cited in this article.

24. Ellen G. White. (1898). *The desire of ages*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 25.

25. Taylor; von Rad. This human creativity is exemplified, but certainly not limited to the procreative function of human sexuality that is inherent in the image, according to Gen 1:28: "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."

26. I would be remiss not to mention the classic statement on this subject from the pen of Ellen G. White, *Education*, 17: "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought."

27. This theme is also beautifully expressed in the "body of Christ" motif as addressed in 1 Cor 12. The church is made up of many "body parts" each functioning according to its unique design, all contributing to the whole as directed by the Head, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31).

28. On this life as a direct preparation for our activities in the next, notice the following provocative statements from the pen of Ellen White: "What we shall be in heaven is the reflection of what we are now in character and holy service." Ellen G. White. (1900). *Christ's object lessons*. Berrien Springs, MI: College Press, 361). "True education is the preparation for the physical, mental, and moral powers for the performance of every duty; it is the training of body, mind, and soul for divine service. This is the education that will endure unto eternal life (ibid., 330)."

29. Ellen G. White. (1923). *Fundamentals of Christian education*. Nashville: Southern Publishing, 49.

30. Ellen G. White, *Christ's object lessons*, 363.
31. Ellen G. White, *The desire of ages*, 83.

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