

DEC '68

"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night:
if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

THE HOLY FLESH QUESTION - 2

At the 1901 General Conference Session in the morning minister's meeting of April 17, Dr Harvey Kellogg took considerable time explaining the medical missionary work, and answering questions of criticism concerning the Sanitarium and its work. "Fully three hundred of the brethren" were present including the leading ministers from Indiana.¹ Following the discussion, Ellen G. White arose, and read her testimony regarding the Holy Flesh Movement in Indiana.² Looking back upon this experience, she wrote in 1907 these words:

During the General Conference of 1901, instruction was given me in regard to the experiences of some of our brethren in Indiana, and regarding the *doctrines* they had been teaching in the churches. I was shown that through this experience and *the doctrines taught*, the enemy has been working to lead souls astray.³

It was not just one doctrine that the testimony condemned but also the doctrines which led to the concept of holy flesh. In fact the advocates of Holy Flesh had not perfected to the ultimate the concept of holiness in the flesh. Sister White had stated in the testimony that if this teaching - perfection in the flesh - were carried a little further, "it will lead to the claim that its advocates can not sin; that since they have holy flesh, their actions are all holy."²

What was the basic issue in the holy flesh controversy? In our previous thought paper, we noted that Elder Hankins asked Elder Davis if he believed that the body "is brought back to the condition of man before the fall?" To this,

Davis replied, "NO, emphatically NO, this is what the testimony condemns."⁶

What led the holy flesh advocates to teach that the body could be restored to the condition of Adam before the fall? When this factor is known, we can understand the basic issue of the controversy *then*; and the doctrinal lesson that this phase of our church history would teach us *now*.

Following the Camp Meeting at Muncie, Indiana in 1900, Elder S. N. Haskell wrote to Sister White regarding his face to face encounter with the leaders of the Holy Flesh agitation. He stated their chief theological contention thus:

They believe that Christ took Adam's nature before he fell; so He took humanity as it was in the garden of Eden, and thus humanity was holy, and this was the humanity which Christ had; and now, they say, the particular time has come for us to become holy in that sense, and then we will have "translation faith", and never die. ⁴

Another observer amplified this incarnation concept and its application as made by the holy flesh advocates. G. A. Roberts writes:

The essential feature of the doctrine was that when Jesus passed through the Garden of Gethsemane, He had an experience which all must have who follow Him. It was taught that Jesus had holy flesh, and that those who followed Him through this garden experience would likewise have holy flesh; that the text, "A body hast thou prepared Me," showed that Christ had a specially prepared holy body. The Scripture, Hebrews 2:7-14, was used to prove that Christ was born with flesh like "my brethren" and "the church" would have after they had passed through the garden experience. ⁵

What then was the basic issue in the controversy concerning holy flesh? The question between the men of Indiana was *not* the matter of whether the gospel could preserve men from sin, or whether the power of the Holy Spirit was ample to keep human beings from sinning. *The question was the humanity of Christ, and its application to the life of the Christian!*

Did the leading exponents of the Holy Flesh teaching admit to this concept of the incarnation as charged by Elders Haskell and Roberts? S. S. Davis gave his understanding briefly in replying to the questions asked by Elder Hankins. Four of the eight questions asked concerned the incarnation. Question Seven,

and Davis' reply is most interesting. They are:

Is every child born into the world naturally inclined to evil even before it is old enough to discern between good and evil?

Answer. - Yes, unless preserved from the law of heredity in conception by the power of the Holy Spirit. ⁶

It is not difficult to deduct that Davis believed that by His birth through the operation of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' human nature was different from the human nature received by all the other children of Adam.

Elder R. S. Donnell was more specific. In a paper written on the nature of Christ about 1903 at Memphis, Tennessee, he stated:

When Adam sinned he lost the nature which God gave to him at creation, and received in the place thereof, the nature of Satan. . .

Then if, when Christ the second Adam came to redeem man, He took on Himself the nature which Adam received in the fall, He took upon Himself the nature of Satan, and not the nature of man. ⁷

Then further: -

He [Christ] took a body which showed by its deteriorated condition, that the effects of sin was shown by it, but His life proved that there was no sin in it. It was a body which the Father had prepared for Him. Heb. 10:5. Christ's body represented a body redeemed from its fallen spiritual nature, but not from its fallen, or deteriorated physical nature. It was a body redeemed from sin, and with that body Christ clothed His divinity; thus by His life, on earth, He showed what humanity will do when filled with the divine mind. ⁷

The battle that Christ was to wage in the flesh, against the flesh, was already won for Him at birth, for according to the teachers of the Holy Flesh Movement, the body He received was redeemed from "its fallen spiritual nature."

This is instantaneous sanctification. If our sanctification is to be the work of a lifetime, then such a Christ could not be our example in sanctification.

It was their concept of Christ's incarnation that caused the Holy Flesh men to advocate a process of instantaneous sanctification known as the "Garden Experience." They had a worthy objective - "translation faith" - but it was misapplied and misappropriated because the basic premise was wrong!

We, today, face the same teaching with a similar goal. There is a substitution of terminology. In the place of the "garden experience" resulting in trans-lation faith; there is now an experience of faith that reaches "the last supreme act of the atonement". It is stated in these words:

While it is true that a Christian is married to Christ at conversion, the union is not fully accomplished until the judgment. When his faith reaches the last supreme act of the atonement, he will be united ("married") to divinity for eternity. Then he will be as sinless in the flesh as Christ was sinless in the flesh.⁸

What does it mean - "as sinless in the flesh as Christ was sinless in the flesh"? Upon what premise is this based? (Note how closely the teaching of the incarnation upon which this concept rests, parallels the teaching of the Holy Flesh movement regarding the incarnation.) In a new publication called, Present Truth, the basic concept is enunciated:

When the divine Spirit came to dwell in a temple of human flesh, a new human spirit was created. Through His supernatural birth, He [Christ] escaped from participation in man's Satanic inheritance. There was no trace of sin in His human nature.

One point about the humanity of Christ should be made clear. It was the Holy Spirit, and only the Holy Spirit, that created the unique sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.⁹

When these paragraphs were questioned by the writer, the editor of the publication replied:

The Awakening teaches that by uniting the sinful nature of man with the fulness of the Holy Spirit, all sinfulness was expelled from that humanity.¹⁰

I ask what difference is there between the expression that the body of Christ was "a body redeemed from sin", as taught by Donnell; and the statement that "all sinfulness was expelled from that humanity" by the Holy Spirit at Christ's birth as is being taught today by the Awakening? Except that it is approached from different directions, what difference is there between Donnell's assertion that if Christ had taken the fallen nature of Adam, He would have received "the nature of Satan"; and Brinsmead's pronouncement that Christ through His supernatural

birth "escaped from participation in man's Satanic inheritance"?

All of this is based upon a misunderstanding of two points: 1) Man's nature as a result of the fall, and 2) Christ's condescension. On the first point we read:

The fall did not create in man new faculties, energies, and passions; *for this would have been a reflection upon God.* It was through disobedience to God's requirements that these powers were *perverted*; the affections were *mislplaced*, and turned from the high and holy purpose to a lower aim to meet a lower standard. ¹¹

Concerning the second point, it is stated:

Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came *down to the level* of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile or sinfulness. He was ever pure and undefiled; *yet He took upon Him our sinful nature*, clothing His divinity with humanity that He might associate with fallen humanity. He sought to regain for man that which by disobedience Adam had lost for himself and the world. ¹²

¹General Conference Bulletin 1901, p. 306

²*Ibid.*, pp. 419-422 See also Selected Messages bk. ii, pp. 31-36

³Ellen G. White, Ms. 39, 1907

⁴S. N. Haskell, Letter to Ellen G White, dated September 25, 1900

⁵G. A. Roberts, "The Holy Flesh Fanaticism" Document File 190, Ellen G. White Publications Office

⁶S. S. Davis, Letter to Ira J. Hankins dated March 15, 1903

⁷R. S. Donnell, "The Nature of Christ, and Man", Memphis, Tenn. (circa 1903)

⁸R. D. Brinsmead, God's Eternal Purpose, p. 199

⁹R. D. Brinsmead, "The Atonement in the Light of the Nature of Man", Present Truth, No.2, 1968, published at Snohomish, Washington.

¹⁰Norman Jarnes, Letter to Wm. H. Grotheer dated August 15, 1968

¹¹Ellen G. White, "Partakers of the Divine Nature", R & H, March 1, 1887

¹²Ellen G. White, "The Importance of Obedience", R & H, December 15, 1896

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