

"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

May 71

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

SHADES OF DOCETISM

First, so that the lay reader may catch the full import of the title of this thought paper, a definition of terminology is in order. The Docetists were a Gnostic sect of the first century who taught "that Jesus had not a real, but only an apparent human body."¹ The name is derived from the Greek verb - δοκεω - which means, "to seem". The Docetae also taught "the evil of matter, and particularly of the flesh, and therefore could not entertain the idea that the divine could form a union with the human as long as men were in the fleshly experience."² It was against this heresy that John wrote, declaring that "many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."³

We as Seventh-day Adventists emphatically deny Docetism, and state without reservation that "when Jesus took human nature, and became in fashion as a man, He possessed all the human organism."⁴ "It was not make believe humanity that Jesus took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature."⁵ We don't believe when Paul stated that Christ "was made in the likeness of men"⁶ - εν ομοιωματι⁷ ανθρωπων γενομενος - he was teaching that it was only an appearance as the Docetists taught. Yet when Paul uses the same language to describe the nature of the humanity taken by Christ, we seek to modify the force of the concept. Paul wrote to the Romans that God sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh"⁸ - εν ομοιωματι⁷ σαρκος αμαρτιας. Because we know that the whole course of our life tends toward sin, and that none of us have ever lived a life free from the acts

of sin, we have difficulty accepting the concept that Christ would be willing to accept the risk in uniting to Himself the fallen nature of man. However, to deny this involves shades of Docetism.

Those who deny that Christ accepted the fallen nature of man in the incarnation are well aware of certain statements in the Spirit of Prophecy to the contrary. The first attempt to mitigate the force of these statements was in the book - Questions on Doctrine. It was written that Christ was "exempt" from the inheritance received by the "natural descendants of Adam."⁹ The writers of this book sought to reconstruct the previous teaching of the church regarding the incarnation by suggesting that Christ bore our fallen nature "*vicariously*. . . , just as He bore the sins of the whole world."¹⁰ Now from two different sources¹¹ it is being suggested, so as to pin-point the time when Christ accepted vicariously our fallen nature, that this nature was placed upon Him during the wilderness temptation, just as our sins were placed upon Him on the cross. Gane writes:

The E. G. White statements usually quoted to prove that Christ inherited our fallen natures are often those found in her description of the wilderness of temptation experience. And in her account of this event she especially emphasizes that the reason for the intensity of the struggle was that the sin, guilt, passion, depravity, infirmity of the entire race was laid upon, imputed to, vicariously borne by Christ at this time.¹²

In the previous thought paper, this writer listed four statements from the Testimonies of the Spirit which stated clearly that Christ did indeed unite man's fallen nature to His sinless nature. In not a single instance does the context suggest that Sister White was speaking about the wilderness temptations, but was referring to the whole of His earthly life. To illustrate, let us consider the reference found in a Review of 1900. [I will put in italics the sentence used, and underscore relevant thoughts in the context.] It reads:

The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon Himself, laying aside His kingly crown and royal robe. He became poor, that we through

His poverty might be made rich. One with God, He alone was capable of accomplishing the work of redemption, and He consented to an actual union with man. In His sinlessness, He would bear every transgression.

The love that Christ manifested can not be comprehended by mortal man. It is a mystery too deep for the human mind to fathom. *Christ did in reality unite the offending nature of man with His own sinless nature,* because by this act of condescension He would be enabled to pour out His blessings in behalf of the fallen race. Thus He has made it possible for us to partake of His nature. By making Himself an offering for sin, He opened a way whereby human beings might be made one with Him. He placed Himself in man's position, becoming capable of suffering. The whole of His earthly life was a preparation for the alter.¹³

Verily, Christ "was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."⁵ In the teaching of the Spirit of Prophecy no Docetism is found, not even shades of the heresy! Jesus Christ is the Pattern Man, not for adults only, but also for children and youth. Children are to "bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon Himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted."¹⁴

In the book of Revelation, the Seed of the woman is presented as the Man-child.¹⁵ In the Greek, there are three words that John could have used to describe Jesus as a Man. He could have chosen - ανθρωπος - which is used to indicate man in the generic sense. Such a designation is found frequently in the gospels where Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of man.¹⁶ He could have selected - ανηρ - which means man in reference to his sex, but also has broader shades of meaning. It is used to contrast an adult with a boy, and a husband in relationship to a wife. In the Scriptures this word is also used to describe the appearance of non-sexual heavenly beings such as the angels.¹⁷ John, however, moved by the Spirit chose the word - αρσεν or αρσενα - to picture the Man-child. This word denotes singularly the male sex. Jesus Christ was a man in every sense of the word. The emphasis is heightened by the fact that this designation is quoted from a prophecy of Isaiah, where the Hebrew word - zakar - is used to distinguish the male child.¹⁸ The etymology of this word indicates the emphasis to be drawn.¹⁹

Our Saviour in accepting humanity was not bereft of any organism or glandular structure common to the rest of the sons of Adam, but became liable to all the temptations such as are come to man. He understood the drives which the Enemy could stimulate in seeking to cause men to violate the seventh commandment. He was not a eunuch, nor an angel. Neither did He isolate Himself from contacts with the opposite sex. Seven times did the sexually weak, but evidently very desirable Mary hear Jesus pray for her, and rebuke the power that held her captive. There is no evidence that this was done in public meetings, but rather on such occasions which could be construed in modern parlance as private counseling sessions. But Mary came to understand how offensive was her sin to His unsullied purity.²⁰ So victorious was the Man-child that He could pin-point the violation of the seventh commandment to a mere look, and then after a ministry which involved close contact with the opposite sex, and with women as a part of His traveling company,²¹ could ask the question - "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" And no one could lift an accusing voice!²² He who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron, must first set an example that He was able to rule the nature of man with an iron rod.

We might ask what were the weaknesses which formed a part of the humanity which our Lord united to His divinity? Hear the answer:

Christ was to take humanity upon Him, not as it was when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden, but as weakened and defiled by four thousand years of sin. He was to come as the Son of man, like every child of Adam, accepting the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were, what was the inheritance bequeathed to Jesus in His human nature, Scripture reveals in the history of those who were the earthly ancestors of our Saviour. With such a heredity, Jesus came as one of us, to share our sorrows and temptations, and give us the example of a sinless life.²³

One need only recall some of those earthly ancestors - Judah, Rahab, and David - to understand the inherited drives that sought expression in the humanity of the Son of man. But with all of this, our Saviour sinned not! The stupendous victory

of our Lord - beyond human word description - is but dimly perceived. Then to cover this Life with shades of Docetism, hides Him from the view which the last generation of youth - sex-orientated, and weakened by indulgence - need to see. O how we need to lift up our Saviour in all His glory - truly the Son of God and the Son of man - the Man-child who was caught up to the Throne of God, there to make intercession for us.

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- ¹James Wharey, Sketches of Church History, p. 25
²Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 58
³John 7
⁴Ellen G. White, Letter 32, 1899 (5BC:1130)
⁵Ellen G. White, W-106-1896
⁶Philippians 2:7
⁷"Likeness i.e. resemblance. . . , freq. such as amounts well-nigh to equality or identity:. . .Ro viii.3. . .; Phil. ii. 7" Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 445.
⁸Romans 8:3
⁹Questions on Doctrine, p. 383
¹⁰Ibid., p. 60
¹¹Erwin R. Gane, Christ and Human Perfection, The Ministry, Oct, 1970, Supplement, & Verlene DeWitt Youngberg, Perfection, College Press, Keene, Texas.
¹²Gane, Op Cit., p.14
¹³Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Vineyard", Review & Herald, July 17, 1900
¹⁴Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, August 23, 1894
¹⁵Revelation 12:5
¹⁶Matthew 16:13
¹⁷Luke 24:4, Acts 10:30
¹⁸Isaiah 66:7
¹⁹William Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon, 9th Edition, p.278-279
²⁰Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p. 568
²¹Luke 8:1-3
²²John 8:46
²³Ellen G. White, Pre-Publication draft of Chapter IV, "The Birth of Christ" Desire of Ages, paragraph 1, Andreasen Collection #2

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Note: - The next regular issue will be dated as September, 1971, in keeping with our new publication schedule of nine regular and three special issues each year. If your address is changed by August 1, 1971, please send us the new address in time for the mailing on or about August 15.

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