

THE APOCALYPSE OF RESTORATION OR EDEN REVISITED

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It was the sixth day of creation week and God was finishing up what He had started the day before. So THEY were not His first thought that day. By now His idea was six days in the making, and how good it all seemed to Him--how beautiful! Everything was an intimate completion of the other, like the members of the Godhead. Light collaborated with darkness to make day and night; earth and sky were engaged in mutual sustenance, a marriage of dew and mist; sea and land acknowledged each others bounds and respectfully deferred to each others boundaries; every herb and tree bore within its own bosom the guarantee of its perpetuation, but only in collaboration with other elements of the natural world; the sun cooperated with the moon and the stars to mark off time and seasons, and to give light to the earth. All nature spoke of unselfish giving and loving teamwork in the task of promoting life. And now living creatures in the sky, in the sea, and on the land were to receive life from their natural habitat while contributing to that environment by loving, lawful obedience and faithfulness to their calling. Within their "kind", they were to fill the earth.

To be sure, THEY were not his first thought that day, but it was only because He was busy setting the stage for them, the culmination of His creation, the ultimate expression of His eternal Self and his eternal Love: man and woman. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". Man was created first, then woman as his full and indispensable complement. Hierarchies were not implied in this particular order anymore than the darkness was meant to be seen as superior to light, simply because it was there first. Rather than hierarchies, man and woman were to be seen as a fulfillment one of the other, evidenced in the assigning of dominion over nature to both of them. Together they were to replenish the earth and subdue it.(Gen.1:28) "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". The parallelism here of "image" and "likeness" is not entirely gratuitous. The nature and character of the Trinity had already been reproduced to a certain extent in the natural world which in turn spoke eloquently of the Godhead's reciprocal and generous giving of life, truth, and beauty. God declared His creation to be good because it was true, true to the Divine Model and true to its calling in the loving order of the universe. And it was good because it was beautiful, that is, it spoke

of a harmonious order, a kind of reconciliation and oneness of diverse yet complementary elements. The natural world, then, was the image of its Creator, but not until man and woman came into being was the Creator's "likeness" so fully reproduced.

That likeness, as Ellen White points out, was evident in the "outward resemblance" of both man and woman to their Creator, a rather interesting notion for those of us accustomed to visualizing God as thoroughly male. And yet, in its own cryptic fashion the Genesis story of creation in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 2, insists on explaining that man and woman were created together and, more importantly, as the physical and moral likeness of the highest divine entity, a concept that was revolutionary for its time and even distasteful to religions contemporary with the Hebrew. The Bible in its dignified and understated manner and Ellen White, more explicitly, both speak to the likeness of God in male and female as not being limited to the physical. They were God-like in mind and soul, a point that Adventism makes in the face of traditional Christian theology, so heavily colored by Greek philosophical thought which tends to downplay or reject altogether the complementary oneness of male and female in the creation. The great Advent reformer, Ellen White, wrote: "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"(Educ., 17), and she further notes that "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 thoughts". Educational reform as understood by the Adventist church regarding the Sabbath and man's responsibility to his/her body through healthful living always harks back to the pre-Fall era of humankind's existence. The models we lift before humanity are those fresh from the Creator's hands. So, too, reform in the education of the human mind is founded on the complementary oneness of man and woman at their creation.

Ellen White in her role as reformer took certain hermeneutical liberties to explain her understanding of the image-restoring function of education. She states that Adam and Eve were created to be the "image and glory of God", quoting from I Cor. 11:7. If we look up the biblical text we will find that here Paul is giving a presumably tenable argument to explain why a man need not cover his head while a woman should. "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God". Ellen White, ignoring the apostle's culturally-defined line of thinking, does, however, extract the Christian principle, a principle that even Paul finds it necessary to underscore in verse 11, namely that both man and woman are the image and the glory of God.

Again Mrs. White has no qualms about applying to both male and female what the Bible seems to suggest is only the male prerogative. “Endowed with high mental and spiritual powers, Adam and Eve were made but ‘a little lower than the angels’”(Educ., 20), a quote from Hebrews 2:7 which in turn is a quotation from Psalms 8:4-6. “What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor and thou didst set him over the works of thy hands”. Notwithstanding the male-oriented mind-set that characterizes this passage, Ellen White applies the intent of the passage to both male and female as the image of God and as lords over the natural world. She further states that the purpose of their high calling in creation was "not only to discern the wonders of the visible universe, but to comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations"(I bid.), a capacity she perceives both man and woman to have. The beauty of Nature should not be taken gratuitously by humankind--beauty should be seen as charged with truth about God and man. Likewise their high privilege of spiritual discernment required a lofty moral calling that presumably rested as heavily on his as on her shoulders. God did not teach Adam one thing and Eve another. Both, perceived by God to be equally educable, learned everything that was important to their physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. Ellen White sees a parallel. Just as Paul did, between the Creator's initial calling forth of the light to shine on chaotic darkness and the learning process in which both Adam and Eve were to be engaged- “In ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God’(I I Cor. 4:6) their mental and spiritual powers developed and they realized the highest pleasures of their holy existence”. (Educ.,22) The text from which she quotes reads as follows: “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. The school at Eden, says Ellen White, “was a representation of what God desired the whole earth to become”. For this reason, the Advent movement looks before the Fall for its models of reform.

The nature of God's love is such that not even the Fall thwarted His desire to set Eden up as a model and even to surpass it through the redemptive role of Jesus Christ. To be sure, the warning that “Thou shalt surely die” was not immediately fulfilled in a physical sense when Adam and Eve sinned. But another death did set in right away--it was a spiritual death that broke the oneness and invented hierarchies of domination and subordination that, were it not for God's merciful intervention through Christ, we would indeed be forced to accept. Yet, when all seemed lost. God was there to promise restoration to the fullest degree. It would not be through the creation of another holy pair, but through the death and resurrection of God in the form of

fallen humanity. From Emmanuel, God with us, all mankind would once again learn of its elevated privileges and high responsibilities given it before the Fall. Indeed all was not lost at the Fall. Even nature suggested redemption--the branches stripped bare by the relentless claws of winter would revive in all their splendid verdure in the Spring. So man and woman were to learn that they are not chained inexorably to the consequences of sin nor to the hierarchies that sin brought in its wake. There was a Way of return to the Eden's model and that Way was Jesus Christ. So, too, man and woman took with them into captivity their divinely-appointed power of choice through which the Spirit of God could work to transform the natural human heart and with which they could exercise intelligence to improve their lot in life. Fallen humanity need not accept the thorn and thistles; they could weed out the enemies of life in their gardens and in their characters in order to beautify the earth and make it give fruit for God and for humanity.

Ellen White, for one, never ceases to be awed by God's loving plan to return men and women to their privileged position prior to the Fall through the inworking and the outworking of the Holy Spirit on human nature. Christ's willingness to assume human nature broke the evil spell and elevated humanity to its original position. Through, as Mrs. White puts it, "connection with Christ", men and women become worthy of their restored role, in Christ, as sons and daughters of God. That Mrs. White understood that restoration in Christ to be complete is evidenced in the following passage: "They [both man and woman] are to increase in the knowledge of the divine will and constantly improve in intellect and morals, until they shall attain to a perfection of character but little lower than that of the angels"(4T 563). It is no wonder that she should revert to this expression of man's unfallen state to describe man's restored state in Christ. In Christ there is no bickering about who leads and who follows; who rules and who submits. Both male and female submit to their mutual head who is Christ and in so doing are free to submit to one another in respect and love.

The history of mankind has borne out God's prophetic warnings at the Fall. Woman has given birth in pain; man has found it easy to rule abusively over her and she has collaborated by assuming an overly submissive stance or by abusively ruling over him. Man has and still must make a living by the sweat of his physical and emotional brow, but work, too, has become a curse, a man's very manliness having become inextricably linked with his ability to earn money at a job. Even in their fallen state, if men and women had remembered their noble beginnings (and this was one of the functions of the Sabbath) and had maintained mutual respect, the excesses of abuse would not now be crying out like a long-silenced conscience for Justice and

rectification.

When Isaiah identifies the Messiah's mission with that of setting captives free, he was talking about men and women--women bound and degraded by a sense of inferiority and uselessness or by having abdicated her moral and spiritual responsibility; men chained like so many slaves to a fragile ego sustained often by cultural myths. Isaiah sees the mission of the Messiah as one of a Liberator because he understood, as we do now, that man and woman since the Fall have been caught up in the apocalyptic conflict between Christ and Satan. The forces of evil tighten captivity's chains around men and women to enslave them to some artificially-imposed rote, to diminish their self-esteem or to overcharge it, to limit their movement in the church, in the home, and in society by giving them either too much or too little power so that they become spiritual and intellectual prisoners of their gender. What in the beginning was meant to be a source of physical and spiritual growth and prosperity--the institution of two genders, male and female--has become the cell from whose barred windows we barely catch a few paltry rays of what we are meant to be for one another and for God. Men and women who were meant to complement one another, respecting each other's freedom and dignity, have become mutually suspicious, despective, and even frightened of one another.

Jesus, once having cast aside att facades and having freed her to think on a spiritual plane, told the woman of Samaria that she must and could rise to the worship of God in spirit and in truth and,in so doing, she would most completely fulfill her calling as a woman. She immediately recognized in Jesus that Messianic mission of freedom precisely because she felt freed, perhaps for the first time in her life, to be all she was meant to be.

Nicodemus, another slave, was treated by Jesus, the eternal Liberator, to another insight into real manliness and real freedom. Full manhood would come through submission and a total relinquishing of all supposed power and authority, a giving in to the divine workings of a holier spirit than his own, that is, the Holy Spirit. That Spirit, like the Messiah, would as the Samaritan woman put it, "tell us all things". The good news that Christ told them and that He tells us today is precisely that we are both, male and female, once again students on equal footing whose learning comes from submission to the Master Teacher. Having become students and even staves to Christ, we become free to respect one another as equals even white promoting each other's unique spiritual and intellectual gifts in the cause of Christ. The purpose with respect to woman for which a man exists is to promote

her spiritual and intellectual and physical welfare as dictated by her calling in Christ, not by his convenience or his choice. So, too, woman is free to advance the welfare, spiritual, intellectual, and physical, of man as dictated by his calling, not because of some inexorable “place” he or she has been assigned, but out of her God-given individuality to think and to do and to love.

And so it is that in Christ, and through no other Way, men and women are finally restored to their Edenic complementarity. The utter beauty, truth, and simplicity of God's plan for man and woman leaves one in awe. That relationship modeled on that of the Godhead and symbolized in the marriage injunction, “What God hath Joined, let no man put asunder”, stands in all its unaffected dignity alongside the other great reform truths of the Adventist church, and in fact, gives the other truths their reason for being. After all, the Sabbath, as important as it is, was made for man and woman, not the other way around, and the health of the body is meaningful only as it serves the high calling of the man and of the woman. If the Sabbath is important to Adventism, it is because it is seen as having general application to both genders, who were made in the image of God. And if the Second Coming of Christ is of such capital concern to us, it is due to our conviction that God desires to restore fully men and women to their Edenic complementarity, one that begins now through our acceptance of Christ. It is precisely this democratic quality of salvation that separates Christianity from other religions. No other religion makes such a sweeping and comprehensive statement about the worthiness of all human beings, both male and female, as the Christian religion, and specifically the Adventist religion.

Adventist theology and even Adventist history mandates that we, of all Christian peoples, be the first to reevaluate the worth of woman and do so in the light of her Edenic complementarity and oneness with man and in the light of the Great Controversy. Our church has been privileged to have revealed to it, through a woman, truths of eternal import. This fact should have told us long ago something about how we are to look on the high calling of woman. It has been a blessing for our church, in my estimation, that Ellen White has been demythified for us, as painful as that process has been. We now are convinced that she was human and that she was a woman, like me or like any other woman sitting in this place of worship. The difference lay not in kind, but only in the degree of submission to the divine calling.

Just as Adventists have been the head and not the tail in pointing out the universal truths of the Sabbath, the Second Coming, the health reform, so it must be the first to declare that man and woman were made in the divine likeness and—that both within the church and within

marriage or outside it, both are free in Christ to work out salvation in their lives, not according to human will or human dictates or prejudices, but according to the high calling in Christ, whatever and wherever that may be.

As a church of reform we are on the threshold of eternity, called on to restore God's image in man and womankind through a healing and redemptive process of education. We are not urged to do so by social upheaval around us or by the precedent set by other Christian communities of believers. We are moved by the same Spirit for which Christ prayed before His sacrifice--the Spirit of love and unity, the Holy Spirit that we move upon the chaotic waters of our greed and selfishness and fear, and call on the Light to illuminate us and reeducate us to our lofty calling as the loving likeness of God to each other and to the world.