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A WIND OF DOCTRINE BLOWS THROUGH THE CHURCH:
THE ALTERNATE HAMARTIOLOGY
OF *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE*

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 5 |
| From Important Issues to the Core Issue | 7 |
| New England Background for the Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin | 8 |
| The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin to 1930 | 9 |
| The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin from 1931 to Questions on Doctrine (1957) | 10 |
| The Doctrine of Sin in Questions on Doctrine | 11 |
| The New Problem | 13 |
| The Evidences for Condemnation by Birth Nature Examined | 15 |
| Ephesians 2:3 | 15 |
| Romans 3 | 19 |
| The Doctrine Not Sustained | 25 |
| The SDA Doctrine of Sin from 1957 to 1980 | 25 |
| The 1960s and 1970s | 25 |
| The New Fundamental Belief Statement of 1980 | 27 |
| The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin From 1981 to the Present | 30 |
| Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (1988) | 30 |
| Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (2000) | 31 |
| (Questions on Doctrine Annotated Edition (2003)) | 32 |
| Seventh-day Adventists Believe (2006) | 33 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary | 33 |
| Excursus: History Repeated in North American Division in 1990s | 33 |
| Discussion | 37 |
| Many Religious Groups Reject Original Sin | 37 |
| The Influence of Questions on Doctrine | 38 |
| A Wrong Prescription | 39 |
| How Many Adventists Included? | 40 |
| Pastoral Concerns | 40 |
| Summary and Conclusion | 42 |
| Endnotes | 46 |

Introduction

Fifty years ago, “the product of a few men”¹ was published in the name of the Church as the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. It is not difficult to believe that the participants were well intentioned. And yet, it is precisely when we are most in earnest, when we feel the stakes so inestimably high, that we are at risk of bending moral principle. Good motives do not always translate into good outcomes. To the Adventists, it seemed a new era was opening. It was—although not quite as hoped for.

With the evangelical courtship of the 1950s, the Adventist leaders started something the extent of which they did not anticipate. The traditional Adventist landscape was being radically changed...²

Intending only good, the self-described “little committee of four”³ pursued its mission: the creation of a new volume offering what they considered to be doctrinal clarification.⁴ In retrospect, Raymond F. Cottrell’s warning seems as prophetic as prescient: “Let us be certain that nothing gets into the proposed book that will take us the next 50 years to live down.”⁵

Just two decades later, Kenneth H. Wood could plainly declare what had in fact come to pass:

I believe that the evangelical dialogues and publication of *Questions on Doctrine* created a climate in the church favorable to criticism, suspicion, uncertainty, rumor, and a loss of confidence in leadership.⁶

What had appeared to some eyes in its day a grand triumph, scant years later was seen with consequences in train. Good intentions and the enormous energy invested in the project could not compensate for the secrecy, theological revisionism, and heavy-handedness surrounding the book.

Every modern community of faith publishes material which later forms the inevitable backdrop for theological development. Theological sediments are laid down in time. A current generation feeds on those ideas, taking from them what they will. Eventually, earlier elaborations of theological system harden and a new generation comes onto the scene; a fresh layer is deposited. The process continues.

For the first time, *Questions on Doctrine* offered Adventists a doctrine of sin that was both evangelical and unscriptural. And yet, in the years between then and now, Seventh-day Adventism has published a different view of sin than that offered in *Questions on Doctrine*. Those on both sides of the debate have noted the theological centrality of the doctrine of sin.⁷ William Johnsson may have said it best:

The issue behind the issue is the concept of sin. Those who want to understand more clearly Jesus' human nature would get further if they stopped debating whether Jesus came in humanity's pre-Fall or post-Fall nature and spent time looking at what the Bible says about sin itself.⁸

The issue of Christ's human nature is more crucial than Johnsson thinks,⁹ but he is correct in pointing to the doctrine of sin being "the issue behind the issue." And yet, in spite of consensus by those on all sides of the discussion indicating the base line nature of this doctrine, the topic has seen only limited exploration.¹⁰ The author was able to locate few substantial treatments of the doctrine of sin in Adventism¹¹ and no significant previous theological treatment of

the hamartiology of *Questions on Doctrine*. But how can the next generation present an Adventist message if as a people we remain in unclarity with reference to this teaching?¹² What will the current generation take from *Questions on Doctrine* and what will they leave? What imprint upon the Church, if any, is likely to remain from the alternative view of sin offered in 1957?

We propose that *Questions on Doctrine* introduced to Adventism a new doctrine of sin that taught condemnation according to birth-nature¹³—a fundamentally flawed teaching. After a period of unclarity, the denomination rejected the book’s alternative hamartiology, sustaining the doctrine of sin held precedent to its publication.

From Important Issues to the Core Issue

Seventh-day Adventists with at least a rudimentary knowledge of the controversy surrounding *Questions on Doctrine* will have heard that the main areas of friction concerned the nature of Christ and the atonement. One true benefit flowing from its republication in the Annotated Edition was the admission by the 2003 editor that the original authors had misrepresented to their evangelical interlocutors the true Seventh-day Adventist position on the humanity of Christ. George R. Knight discovered almost a dozen ways of stating this without explicitly saying that they had lied.¹⁴

Even the portion of *Questions on Doctrine* which L. E. Froom in the end insisted marked its greatest contribution¹⁵—Appendices A, B, and C—has come under scrutiny. Appendix B had to be significantly modified after its publication,¹⁶ and the present author has under preparation a significant review of Appendix C: The Atonement, which will demonstrate that Froom’s tendency to cherry-pick the statements selected for it renders it an unreliable guide to Ellen White’s view of the atonement.¹⁷

The nature of Christ and the atonement are truly important issues. And yet, we recognize that the more central presupposition underpinning the theological disagreement encompasses how the church views the concept of sin. The changes attempted in the middle of the last century required their architects to present a different understanding of the nature of Christ than that which previously was with virtual unanimity held by the church. It is imperative to address the roots of the debate more than the branches. Therefore, this document pursues the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of sin from past to present, punctuated by the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*, pausing to review and respond to the evidences given by the book in favor of its alternative hamartiology.

New England Background for the Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin

The beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of sin are rooted in the New England religious milieu from which the church sprang forth. “The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a major clash of old Calvinism with Anabaptist, Arminian, Quaker, Socinian, and Pelegian thought. This clash resulted in a seedbed of new thought and a shaking of the old establishment,”¹⁸ says Edwin Zackrison.

With regard to the history of the doctrine of original sin, Adventists came on the American scene toward the end of a protracted attack on Federal theology by dissenting elements, which terminated in a drastically altered view of the doctrine.¹⁹

Zackrison points to the incorporation of this view into early Adventism. The teachings of Nathaniel and John Taylor were widely distributed and came to dominate in the Northeast.

In a real sense conditionalism [conditional immortality] and New Haven views of human responsibility coalesced in Adventist theology. The Adventist view of Adam’s sin was an element of a larger anthropology that became part of the church’s faith. . . . The conditionalism of Taylor was preserved in Storrs and accepted by Adventism along with the new

view of original sin. The line can be clearly seen from Storrs, through Stephenson and Hall, and finally to Loughborough where the teaching became entrenched in the developing Adventist theology and remained essentially unchanged for the next three decades.²⁰

The New Haven views contrasted with the old Calvinism; imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity was rejected. Concepts are never formed in a vacuum. Sometimes current ideas mesh with the Bible, other times not. Few elements that compose the Seventh-day Adventist theological understanding are original with the movement, and the Adventist understanding of hamartiology is no different.

The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin to 1930

When Adventists adopted George Storrs' teachings on the nature of man, they adopted as biblical also his anthropology. These views were propagated "in 1854 and 1855 through articles by J. M. Stephenson, D. P. Hall, and J. N. Loughborough."²¹ The denomination was founded in 1861 and General Conference in 1863. Uriah Smith was the most prolific writer addressing the topic.²² The earliest years saw most discussion of original sin (when it occurred) in tangential form, such as lists of defective Roman Catholic doctrines like infant baptism.²³

From the beginning Seventh-day Adventists maintained strong recognition of the role played by human free will. As a general point, religious systems that give substantial space to the idea of free will have a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and human decision-making. Systems that focus on divine sovereignty tend to depreciate the importance of human free will and of decisions made by humans. Adventism, coming from its Protestant, Radical Reformation roots, followed the same logical pattern, in its emphasis on free will.

Ellet J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, consonant with their Christology, rejected the view of original sin popularly accepted in Christendom because of its teaching of condemnation or guilt on the basis of birth-nature. They saw that the humanity of Christ must be cut from the same cloth as fallen humanity in order for Jesus to legitimately stand as the Substitute and the Example needed by the race.²⁴

In short, pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Seventh-day Adventism offered scant support for the doctrine of sin as propounded in the 1957 volume. The earliest Seventh-day Adventist statements of belief taught no such doctrine.²⁵

The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin from 1931 to *Questions on Doctrine* (1957)

Adventist teachings touching the doctrine of sin current in 1957 trace back to the 1931 Yearbook statement of beliefs. Only two passages from that statement could even remotely be considered pertinent²⁶—the fourth, and an excerpt from the ninth:

4. That every person in order to obtain salvation must experience the new birth; that this comprises an entire transformation of life and character by the recreative power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Matt 18:3; Acts 2:37-39).
9. Mortal man possesses a nature inherently sinful and dying.²⁷

The fourth statement merely affirms the necessity of the new birth—a point upon which evangelicals and Adventists alike will immediately agree. The same will concur with the sentence from the ninth.

The 1931 statement never affirms or suggests that man is guilty or condemned on the basis of his birth-nature. Indeed, the 1931 Fundamentals' eighth item states the very opposite: "The law of God is written on their hearts; and through the enabling power of the indwelling Christ,

their lives are brought into conformity to the divine precepts”—an experience impossible of realization if even those who believe are able only to produce works of sin. Thus, the 1931 statement affirms that men, in their fallen nature, may obey God’s will and live lives of obedience. This is pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Until the appearance of *Questions on Doctrine*, then, the basic Seventh-day Adventist position on sin was problematic neither for the nature of Christ’s humanity, nor for the Church’s understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the close of probation, or any other Bible doctrine.

The Doctrine of Sin in *Questions on Doctrine*

With the arrival of *Questions on Doctrine* a new approach to sin was offered. According to the book,

Adam’s sin involved the whole human race. ‘By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin’ declares the apostle Paul (Rom 5:12). The expression ‘by sin’ shows clearly that he is referring, not to actual individual sins, but rather to the sinful nature that we all inherited from Adam. ‘In Adam all die’ (1 Cor 15:22). Because of Adam’s sin, ‘death passed upon all men’ (Rom 5:12).²⁸

The above is what was actually published. The version offered in the pre-publication draft had been more abrupt:

Adam’s sin involved the whole human race. ‘By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin’ declares the apostle Paul (Rom 5:12). The expression ‘by sin’ shows clearly that he is referring, not to actual individual sins, but rather to *original sin*—the sinful nature that we *have* all inherited from Adam. ‘In Adam all die’ (1 Cor 15:22). *By that original sin*, ‘death passed upon all men’ (Rom 5:12).²⁹

These sentences, as ultimately published, with the term “original sin” removed,³⁰ are less jarring. Adam’s sin had a dramatic impact upon the whole human race; with this none are in dis-

agreement. Unless the reader has a careful eye for the fit of the central theological machinery of hamartiology, atonement, and the nature of man, and an understanding of the historical development of those themes in Christendom, he may see little cause for caution. But the prepublication draft shows that the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* equated sinful nature with original sin. In one of the few responses returned³¹ to the prepublication draft that had been sent out, Raymond Cottrell then complained:

42.6.3 ‘Original sin.’ This is the first I knew that Adventists believe in ‘original sin,’ at least in the technical theological definition of the word. This term has a technical theological import to which we cannot subscribe which would require sacramental practices such as infant baptism.³²

The section was modified.³³ But even an editor cannot turn one system into its opposite. The essence of the *Questions on Doctrine* authors’ viewpoint remains, and is found in the book just two paragraphs later:

From Adam we all have inherited a sinful nature. We all are ‘by nature the children of wrath’ (Eph 2:3). Whether we be Jews or Gentiles we are all ‘under sin.’ ‘There is none that seeketh after God. . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one’ (Rom 3:9, 11, 12). Consequently, all are guilty before God (verse 19). But if men will only accept God’s free gift of righteousness, then no matter how far they have drifted from God, or how deeply they have become embedded in sin, they can still be justified, for Christ’s righteousness, if accepted, is accounted as theirs. Such is the matchless grace of God.³⁴

It is evident that the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* viewed man as guilty or condemned on the basis of his inherited birth-nature. This is seen also in the previous reference, which had emphasized that Rom 5:12 was referring “not to actual individual sins.” Adam’s sin, according to the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, brought not only death, but condemnation to our race—a condemnation existing apart from any willful personal decision to become a rebel.³⁵ Remember, the question according to Adventism had always been, “What is the nature of sin for

which man is considered guilty, so guilty that he must die in the fires of hell unless he is rescued by the grace of God?"³⁶

The 1957 teaching had never been Adventist doctrine. Sin, in its most fundamental essence—the sin for which we are considered guilty—always before had been viewed by Adventists as an issue of free will, choice exercised in rebellion. Nevertheless, the new doctrine of sin was now being portrayed to evangelicals as that adhered to by Adventists.

The New Problem

Unfortunately for all involved, this new-to-Seventh-day-Adventism explanation for sin introduced unnecessary theological contradictions. Until the *Questions on Doctrine* party had published the new view, statements such as the following by Ellen White and by other denominational writers offered no substantive difficulties. Afterward, they stood out as being inconsistent with the then-currently promoted view.

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth.³⁷

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.' John 14:30. Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan

could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.³⁸

These statements, among others,³⁹ demonstrate the problem newly created by the changes introduced via *Questions on Doctrine*. Ellen White pointed out that the sins of believers are being removed now, and must be eliminated before Christ's present intercession in the heavenly sanctuary ceases (at the "close of probation"). Through a decided consecration, believers in Christ are to experience personally the neutralization of demonic foothold-points. By the believer's surrender and discontinuance through God's strength of that which had been cherished but morally inappropriate, Satan's temptations are to be robbed of their effectiveness. Men are able by the power of God to cease from sin—in spite of their disordered human organisms and of cultivated sin habits.

But if sin is built into one's very human nature (as taught in *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 406-408), then there is no means for its eradication but to wait for God to change that nature at the moment of glorification (1 Cor 15:51-54). The above quoted statements, indicating what is to be the present experience of the believer, become impossibilities. Men do not act when they think their action cannot change their present situation. Something is required for the incentive to act.

To make a man act, uneasiness and the image of a more satisfactory state alone are not sufficient. A third condition is required: the expectation that purposeful behavior has the power to remove or at least to alleviate the felt uneasiness. In the absence of this condition no action is feasible. Man must yield to the inevitable. He must submit to destiny.⁴⁰

If he can be condemned apart from the exercise of his free will, and if he has no further recourse to remove condemnation through any subsequent action on his part, man sees only fatalistic destiny. He is utterly removed from any substantive part in changing his fate. The Great Contro-

versy War becomes a mere staged production to be helplessly watched, rather than a conflict between good and evil in which he has by the Deity been granted the opportunity (in small part) of vindicating the character of His saving God.

Furthermore, the 1957 introduction of the doctrine of original sin⁴¹ also makes it necessary to protect the humanity of Jesus from having the same vitiated nature as all other men. If we are guilty for our birth-natures, then Jesus cannot have the same birth-nature. The doctrine of original sin sunders the brotherhood between Jesus and fallen man. It denies the completeness of Jesus' humanity. And so, we see the imperative reason why the engineers of *Questions on Doctrine* felt it so needful to bend Seventh-day Adventist teaching concerning the humanity of Christ.

The Evidences for Condemnation by Birth Nature Examined

Questions on Doctrine offered two Bible passages in support of its new-to-Adventism doctrine of sin:⁴² Eph 2:3, and texts in Rom 3. We review these in turn.

Ephesians 2:3

Examination of Eph 2:3 reveals that nowhere in this verse or the passage in which it occurs (Eph 2:1-22) does Paul link the concept of “children of wrath” with birth-nature. Rather, numerous times the passage points to the source of wrath as being pre-conversion behavior (2:1-3, 5, 11, 12).

First, the phrase “children of wrath” need only suggest a group of people upon whom God's wrath abides. One should not miss Paul's use of the very similar “children of disobedience” in Eph 2:2; 5:6 and Col 3:6. The will is not exercised in rebellion until the choice is made

to disobey. In Eph 5:6 the connection between disobedience and wrath is made clear: “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” What things?

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience (Eph 5:3-5).

The listed behaviors bring God’s wrath. According to Paul, these should only be past behaviors for the Christian, not accompanying him into his new life in Christ.

In these passages (Eph 2:1-3; 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-11) and their broader settings, Paul refers frequently to the behavior that causes wrath in the aorist. In contrast, the present Christian experience is to be one in which the believer walks in light (Eph 5:8, 9, etc.; Col 3:8, 10, etc.). Children of wrath refuse to abandon their adversarial position. Adversaries of God, they make themselves equally so adversaries of their fellow man. They persist in trying to be god for themselves and for others.

“By nature” contains one of Paul’s many NT uses of the Greek *phusis*. He uses the word many ways. For example, in Rom 11:21-24 the Gentiles are grafted into the tree of Israel against their *phusis*. What’s more, even corrupted “nature” (*phusis*) should lead us aright in some cases (Rom 1:26; 2:13-16, 26-29; 1 Cor 11:14, etc.). Sometimes Paul uses *phusis* restrictively (Gal 2:14-16).⁴³ *Phusis* used for nature has no necessity of being interpreted as meaning *birth-nature*. The tendency of some theologians to interpret the passage in the sense of birth-nature owes more to dogma than to this passage. Children of wrath in Eph 2:3 are those who chose disobedience,

the unconverted. Zackrison, no advocate of the early Adventist view on original sin, addressing Eph 2:3 writes “Paul says nothing about Adam’s sin here and the term ‘by nature’ does not necessarily have to mean *innate*,” that is, again, it need not mean birth-nature.⁴⁴

We use the word “nature” in more than one way. Sometimes we say, “Let’s take a nature walk,” where we mean to take a walk in a park or a forest. Sometimes we hear someone say, “That is human nature for you.” Then we know the speaker is taking a specific incident and using it as an example of the behavior of people in general. The former is a kind of walk, the latter a kind of behavior. Here is the fundamental meaning of “nature”: the nature of something is that which sets it apart as that *kind* of something.

In Rom 2:14 Paul writes, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature [*phusis*] the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.” Human nature has not only its unnatural inclination to evil, a change resulting from the Fall, but, humanity also retains something from the original creation and its natural inclination to good. Rom 2:14 says that there is still in the Gentile an inclination to good. There is still some element of that original positive inclination in us that God can work with.

Another case is Rom 2:26-29:

If the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature [*phusis*], if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Nature as here used speaks of Jewish versus Gentile racial background. Gentile nature does not automatically mean evil, just as Jewish nature does not automatically mean good.

The Ephesians who had specialized in trespasses and sins had chosen for themselves the position of children of disobedience, of wrath. They had corrupted themselves so that the core principles of their character were self-centered. They had become that kind of person. They had chosen to become children of wrath. But just as they could be partakers of a demonic nature, so too they could choose to become “partakers of the divine nature [*phusis*]” (2 Pet 1:4). The Gospel grants man opportunity to choose the nature he will partake of. In the end man will echo Satan or Jesus. He does not choose the disordered humanity of his infancy, but he does choose the kind of person he becomes, the kind of character formed. He can change from one kind of human to another; it all boils down to whether he partakes of the nature inwrought in his humanity, or the nature inwrought in God’s divinity.

“Children of wrath” are people who disobey. In disobeying known duty, they incur condemnation. The disobedience and thus wrath Paul points to in Eph 2 was, in the past, willfully chosen. If the disobeying parties were lacking clarity on the precise ethical specifics which they were transgressing, still they were guilty of refusing to seek God who they knew, by intuition and by revelation, existed (Ps 19:1-4; John 1:9; 3:19, 20; Rom 1:18-21, 28, 32; 2:11-16).

Whatever other texts may suggest, Eph 2:3 cannot mean that God’s wrath abides on newborn children. Humans of such age have not, with meaningful intellectual and moral awareness, purposefully chosen rebellion. Where there is no condemnable decision, there can be no condemnation. Such children are not responsible for being born into a sin-impacted environment. They did not choose their coming-into-being in a kind of human nature that is unnatural, that itself pulls toward self-indulgence. Seventh-day Adventists clear-headedly reject the teaching of an eternal punishment by God in a never-ending hell, finding the idea to be neither biblical nor a

just portrayal of His divine character. And yet, some are seen willing to embrace a conception of God as a Being whose wrath abides on newborn children. How consistent is this?

To summarize, those who are “by nature children of wrath” became such by choosing to act in rebellion to God and to come into solidarity with the clammers of their disordered humanity. The word translated “nature” need not mean innate or birth-nature. There is no requirement that we understand “children of wrath” as being more than a description of those upon whom God’s wrath abides. The text is, at best a tangential and speculative evidence in support of condemnation by fallen nature. In itself, Eph 2:3 is indeterminate; in its context, it actually supports the meaning of wrath abiding upon those who had chosen wicked behavior.

Romans 3

In order to grasp the basis upon which Paul offers his Tanakh (Old Testament) references found at Rom 3:9-20 (from which the *Questions on Doctrine* authors presented their teaching), something of the larger argument of the first three chapters of the epistle must be understood.⁴⁵

Both the righteousness and the wrath of God are revealed. While the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel via the faith of all willing men, so too God’s wrath is revealed against suppressors of truth (1:17, 18). Paul is demonstrating that all humans, Greeks and Jews and everyone, have chosen rebellion, expressed it by sinning, and so stand condemned and subject to God’s wrath. Thus, all need restoration into God’s righteousness. The gospel is Heaven’s appointed means for revealing God’s righteousness. (Paul would write in Heb 3:17-4:2 that Jews had the gospel long before him but that they failed to employ God’s means for victory.) Gentiles are condemned because in willfully rejecting their Creator (Rom 1:18-25), they willfully reject

their creatureliness. Rejecting the Ground of morality they descend to an image like a beast (1:26-32).

But the Jew is just as guilty of self-will and rebellion. Religious trappings aside, his condemnation of the wicked behavior of others in no way ameliorates his own wickedness when he engages in the same behavior (2:1-16). His hypocrisy is condemned, the same behavior identified in the Jew (2:17-24). Righteous behavior in the Gentile condemns unrighteous behavior in the Jew (2:25-27). The true Jew is identified by his behavior (2:28, 29). Finally, it is argued that even if the Jews fail to take advantage of God's help, their badness does not condemn God's un-failing goodness (3:1-8).

To summarize crucial points from the argument of 1:15-3:8:

1. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul repeatedly pairs Jews and non Jews side-by-side (1:14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9, 29).
2. Paul emphasizes that Jews and non Jews are condemnable for engaging in the same sins (2:1, 3, 21-23).
3. God's wrath is revealed, not only against Gentiles but against disobedient Jews, while glory, honor, and peace accrue to the obedient, again, whether Jew or Gentile (2:5-10).
4. There is no respect of persons with God (2:11-16).
5. The true Jew is the obedient man (2:28, 29), the false, the disobedient (2:25-29).
6. Ritualistic Torah-keeping is not the source of righteousness (2:17-20, 29).

Thus, before arriving at 3:9 or 19, already Paul, by several lines of argument, has demonstrated that Jew and Gentile are both condemned for wrong-doing, both granted God's approbation for right-doing. Only with a realization that for Paul, these points have all been made before 3:9, is

the reader ready to understand Paul's remaining statements concerning sin and guilt in chapter three.

After pressing his argument to 3:9, Paul asks, "What then? are we better than they?" His answer is "no," "for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." Via the preceding argumentation he has already made his case, namely, that Jews and Gentiles both stand under condemnation for their chosen acts of rebellion. By "under sin" in 3:9 Paul means every mouth stopped and all the world guilty before God (3:19).

What then of the seven Tanakh references strung across 3:10-20?⁴⁶ If Paul already has proven his point, why add these further references? Remember, none of Paul's references, in their original context, are universal in scope. But in a superficial reading of Romans, the quotations may appear to be offered as proving universal principles—may appear as being misused, lifted out of context.

Two solutions to the apparent problem here (Paul's alleged misuse of the Tanakh, turning its limited statements into proofs of the universal condemnation of humankind) have been offered. Believers in Judaism have held that Paul misuses the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴⁷ In most locations where the author has worked, adherents to Judaism do not line up at the church door asking for Bible studies. Their understanding is that the New Testament via the writings of Paul teaches original sin⁴⁸—a doctrine they find to be clearly at odds with the teaching of the Tanakh. Thus, the New Testament and its Christian claims are easily dismissed, requiring but little serious attention. Just as the Christian rejects doctrines he does not find sustained in his Bible, so the Jew. In this case, the Jew is both right and wrong: he is correct that original sin is not found in Tanakh,⁴⁹

but wrong, in that neither is it taught by Paul or the New Testament. The doctrine of original sin is a third-through-fifth-century development in Western Christianity.

Many Christians, on the other hand, have simply assigned interpretative precedence to the New Testament over the Tanakh. Neither solution satisfies. It is true that New Testament Scriptures offer the perspective of more recent revelation, but one revelation does not trump another because it is newer. David is not replaced but is supplemented by Paul.

The solution is to let Paul say only what Paul is saying. He never sets forth a doctrine of original sin. He does insist that all but Christ have at some point chosen rebellion and thus stand in need of salvation through Christ. Consider the references.

In Rom 3:10-12 Paul quotes from Pss 14 and 53. He lets the Psalmist's descriptions of sinners and fools serve as illustrative descriptions of the condemnability of humanity's behavior. But Ps 14:1 shows that the one described is the *nabal*, the fool who opposes God. In verse 4 the sinner is condemned, while verses 5 and 6 point out that there also exist the righteous and the poor; these are shown as victims of the fools and the workers of iniquity. All this is part of the context in which we find the apparently universal condemnation of man in verses 2 and 3.

In Rom 3:13 he offers a quotation from the fifth Psalm. In its fifth verse special condemnation is called out for the fool and the sinner. But verses 11 and 12 show that the psalmist also believes that there remain the righteous, there remain those who put their trust in God. It is in this context that Paul especially highlights verse 9 and the wickedness of the wicked.

In Rom 3:14 Paul quotes from Ps 10. Here, the wicked prey upon the poor and the humble. God is seen to defend the fatherless and the oppressed (Ps 10:18). No universal wickedness of man is indicated.

In Rom 3:15-17 the quotation is from Isa 59:7, 8. But in this immediate portion of Isaiah you have beside the wicked those who refuse to do evil (56:2), the righteous (57:1), those who respond obediently to God's appeals (58:6-14; 60:1-62:12). Isa 59:7, 8 cannot legitimately be disconnected from its context and turned to serve as a comment on the universal condemnation of men.

In Rom 3:18 the quotation comes from Ps 36:1. There we find mentioned not only the wicked but those also who know God (36:10).

In Rom 3:20 the quotation shows similarity to Ps 143:2. The statement is that no man can be justified in God's sight. There, David writes of his being persecuted and of his deep desire to be right with God, his desire to serve Him faithfully. He pleads for God's help. The text would seem to be more a plea for mercy and statement of humility than an intended proof of the impossibility of justification in the technical theological sense. David is saying that God is always more righteous than man.

In none of these cases may we expect that Paul intended his use of statements indicating the negative characteristics of fools, workers of iniquity, *et cetera*, as being offered in proof of universal guilt for humankind—certainly not on the basis of birth-nature. Rather, Paul presents these statements in his epistle to Rome to demonstrate that all, at some point, have chosen to sin and have thus become guilty. All need salvation through Christ because all have *chosen* rebellion—not from having been born into it. Paul does not contradict David or any other psalmist. All, at some point, have chosen the behavior of the worker of iniquity and of the fool, and in so choosing, registered their guilt. All, at some point, have chosen their way into a need for per-

sonal salvation. All have aligned themselves with the tendencies inherent in the disordered human organism.

Paul presents these texts then, not as proofs for that for which he has already argued in Rom 1:15-3:8, but in keeping with the points he has made in his argument. Because all, Jew and Gentile alike, have chosen rebellion, all these descriptions (Rom 3:9-20) are applicable to every individual. Paul is working on the same plan as in the first two chapters of Romans. There he demonstrated that, far from being “not as other men are” (Luke 18:11), the Jew had behaved just as the Gentile, and on the basis of this “same” (Rom 2:1, 3) decision to sin, was not to see himself as standing in a superior class above the sinner but rather as having himself demonstrated his inclusion in the class of sinner.

The original context of the seven quotations offered in Rom 3:10-20, in each case, mitigates against seeing those references as statements of universal human condemnation. Of this Paul was well aware. He has already made his argument and “before proved” (3:9) that all have condemned themselves. Here then, Paul makes an appeal, not that would be immediately faulted by his fellow Jews, but that (1) is in harmony with the Tanakh, (2) shows us that he is not teaching original sin, and (3) shows what Paul does instead teach. The bottom line is that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (3:23). By choice each man becomes a sinner. It is precisely in this way then that man acquires his condemnation.

Returning to *Questions on Doctrine*, we reject the assertion that men are condemned on the basis of birth-nature rather than their personal choices to rebel. Paul *does* present humankind as condemned in Rom 1-3, but *because of personal choices* and never on the basis of any doctrine of original sin. He says relatively little concerning the mechanism by which men become

guilty, but what he does state clearly points to chosen acts of rebellion (1:23, 25-27, 30-32; 2:1-3, 6-15, 21-23, 25-27, etc.).

The Doctrine Not Sustained

The biblical passages offered in behalf of the *Questions on Doctrine* authors in support of their new view do not sustain it. On the basis of what may have been only superficial thought by the “little committee of four” concerning the theological repercussions, the denomination was expected to adopt the concept of birth-condemnation. Here, then, was a new doctrine offered, ironically, in a book almost urgently represented as bringing no doctrinal changes.⁵⁰

The SDA Doctrine of Sin from 1957 to 1980

The 1960s and 1970s

According to Zackrison,

In the 1960s original sin became an openly discussed issue when M. L. Andreasen, long time Adventist, teacher, writer and administrator, declared in his *Letters to the Churches*, written to set forth his objections to the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, that Adventists don't believe in original sin.⁵¹

It was inevitable that the topic of original sin would arise after the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*, and this is precisely what happened. Robert Brinsmead also stimulated discussion of the issue of original sin during the period of his popularity, an altogether understandable outcome with the introduction of the 1957 view and the resultant confusion.

During the 1970s, Thomas A. Davis, Herbert E. Douglass, Kenneth H. Wood, and others, published articles and editorials in the *Review* and various books in which the views offered sus-

tained the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* hamartiology.⁵² But early in the same decade Froom presented a fresh salvo of self-justification in his dubious volume *Movement of Destiny*. Many of its pages were devoted to defending *Questions on Doctrine* and its positions⁵³—a clue that he felt that the capstone he had sought to place over Adventist theology in 1957 was not secure.

In a meeting held late in 1978 for PREXAD (President’s Executive Advisory Committee) and invitees, Kenneth H. Wood in 52 pages offered a recapitulation of Adventist history since the evangelical conferences. Wood detailed especially the published articles, denominational party-line, and atmospherics of the period, with a special emphasis on what was in effect an undeclared psychological warfare conducted against those who remained supporters of the pre-1957 views. His cogent, sometimes blistering report concluded by offering these ten factors behind what Douglass later called the “radioactive fallout”⁵⁴ that spread downwind from *Questions on Doctrine*:

1. Inadequate communication with the church membership while the Martin-Barnhouse dialogues were taking place with church leaders.
2. Publication of articles in the *Ministry* that seemed to be modifying Adventist teachings on the atonement and human nature of Christ.
3. Giving the impression that the traditional teachings on these two points had been held by only a minority—a kind of lunatic fringe or wild-eyed irresponsibles.
4. Suggesting that people who held the ‘old views’ on these two questions would, so far as possible, be held in check.
5. Making clear that changes would be made in our publications to bring them all into line with the ‘new views.’
6. Failing to give an adequate explanation to serious Bible students within the church as to how they could harmonize apparently conflicting statements by Ellen G. White on the atonement and incarnation.

7. Failing to state frankly to the church members that the church was in transition, gradually replacing biblical theology as normative with systematic theology.
8. Publication of *Questions on Doctrine* without by-lines and with the full endorsement of the General Conference.
9. Making no provision for discussion of theological questions that were being discussed privately.
10. Re-awakening old anxieties and controversies by publishing *Movement of Destiny*, again with full General Conference endorsement.⁵⁵

A review of Wood's points shows that he saw not only procedural and administrative errors, but pointed doctrinal issues. His material shows that within the ranks of top church leadership, the 1950s initiative had been carefully analyzed and consequences considered. In less than two years would come the new denominational statement of beliefs. It is arguable that *Questions on Doctrine* had a part in preparing the ground for the Desmond Ford theological crisis spiking at the end of the decade. The rising turmoil surrounding Ford must have been in the back of everyone's mind at the meeting in Nosoca Pines.

The New Fundamental Belief Statement of 1980

The seventh statement in the 1980 list included a serious item addressing man's nature and also the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of sin. This statement said

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of

God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. (Gen 1:26-28; 2:7; Ps 8:4-8; Acts 17:24-28; Gen 3; Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12-17; 2 Cor 5:19, 20; Ps 51:10; 1 John 4:7, 8, 11, 20; Gen 2:15.)⁵⁶

This statement was a careful elucidation of the Adventist position. It affirmed the principle of free will, the reality of the Fall and its destructive consequences, the marring of the image of God in man, the new reality of physical death. It affirmed a change in human nature after Adam's sin and the persistence of the new condition through generations—but stopped short of declaring our birth-nature guilty or condemned.

What it did explicitly state about fallen humans was that “they are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.” This phrase portrays a hamartiology fully consistent with the Bible and with the writings of Ellen White. Representative statements by White include her reference to the disciples all having “inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil.”⁵⁷ The Fundamental Belief statement reads as though the committee that wrote it intended to harmonize it with another pivotal anthropological statement of hers:

Christ is the ‘Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ John 1:9. As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power. The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ. Co-operation with that power is man's greatest need.⁵⁸

Even one who has not surrendered himself to God for salvation still has the benefit of a spiritual power from Christ operating in him. Methodists call this God's prevenient grace. At the same time, we all know by experience the bent to evil, the antagonistic power operative in our fallen

nature. Some, at least, of those who composed and voted the 1980 Fundamental Belief statement, must have understood that White's wording in passages like these was not arbitrarily chosen. The statement composed was consonant with pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Adventism.

Still, some had sought to carry forward the original sin theme from 1957. From the floor debate of the General Conference Session comes the following:

W. DUNCAN EVA: This statement [The Nature of Man] was stronger originally. We referred to the wording of Psalm 51:5, 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.' We had the idea here that we are born in sin. Because there were several objections to that, we took it out. We tried to say that the image of God was distorted and men became subject to death, and that their descendants share this subjection to death as part of their fallen nature. We used the words 'fallen nature' to strengthen the idea of what the distortion of the image of God meant.⁵⁹

The committee had temporarily considered for the wording of their draft a prominent text most often presented in support of original sin, but, after "several objections," it was removed.⁶⁰ And well that it was, for the Hebrews, who had had this passage 1,000 years before Paul's writings, never developed from it any doctrine like original sin. Indeed, Paul, in presenting his discourses concerning sin, never uses Ps 51:5, or makes any allusion to it. The doctrine had no existence in his day. Its development must await the third, fourth, and fifth centuries in Western Christendom.⁶¹

Weighing the thrust of the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs statement, Edwin Zackrisson writes

In Seventh-day Adventist theology the specific topic of original sin has received ambivalent response, a fact that has become more apparent in recent church discussions and debates over the nature of Christ and righteousness by faith. . . . We find this ambivalence on an even more fundamental level. . . It is also demonstrated in the church's most recent statement of Fundamental Beliefs (1980) entitled 'Nature of Man.' . . . Rather than follow the lead of some evangelical communities that have shown no reticence to explain precisely what they mean by the effect of Adam's sin on his posterity, Adventism has chosen,

even in its latest confession, to avoid the terminology of original sin and to allow for some variety of interpretation.⁶²

But Adventism had not been ambivalent about expressing its view. It rejects the doctrine of original sin. It is that simple.

Few discoveries are more irritating than those which expose the pedigree of ideas. “The idea of original sin is a post-New Testament development.”⁶³ To some, the church’s sustaining a pre-*Questions on Doctrine* hamartiology will disturb; it will seem to them to be the taking of backward steps. And yet, as we shall see, there are benefits in increased doctrinal clarity, versus debits in sustaining ill-conceived doctrines.

The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of Sin From 1981 to the Present

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (1988)

The adoption by the world church in General Conference Session of the 1980 statement of Fundamental Beliefs led to the preparation of a new doctrinal book for denomination-wide use. Even in 1957 the *Questions on Doctrine*-party, although advancing new-to-Adventism views on the nature of sin, the nature of Christ, and the atonement, was still officially bound by the 1931 statement of beliefs. With the 1980 update the time had come to either adopt the alternate *Questions on Doctrine* views, or repudiate them.

The 1980 revision of beliefs offered special opportunity to explain Adventist doctrinal views in some detail. The book finally came from the presses in 1988. Here would be found a carefully prepared and authorized explanation of the Fundamental Beliefs.⁶⁴ The line taken in the new volume—very much a replacement⁶⁵ book for *Questions on Doctrine* which decades be-

fore had intentionally been allowed to go out of print⁶⁶—was that sin is the result of choice. The new book stated

Many Scriptural passages, including particularly the account of the Fall, make it clear that sin is a moral evil—the result of a free moral agent’s choosing to violate the revealed will of God (Gen 3:1-6; Rom 1:18-22).⁶⁷

This viewpoint is sustained throughout the discussion of sin in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* Its text highlights the depravity and thoroughly sinful nature of fallen man.⁶⁸ While emphasizing our basic sinfulness, at the summation of this part of the discussion, the book declares, “by nature we tend toward evil, not good.”⁶⁹

At no point does the book suggest that condemnation or guilt adhere to us on the basis of our birth-nature. The book refuses to affirm the hamartiology of *Questions on Doctrine*.⁷⁰

Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (2000)

In the year 2000, the church added vol. 12 to the Commentary Reference Series, with the publication of the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. This volume contains the most extensive discussion of the doctrine of sin ever published by the church—a full 37 pages. In spite of certain weaknesses in the presentation,⁷¹ the following passages indicate the position offered.

Adventists do not stress the sense of original sin in the sense that ‘personal, individual moral guilt adheres to Adam’s descendants because of his [Adam’s] sin. They stress, instead, that his sin resulted in the condition of estrangement from God in which every human being is born. This estrangement involves an inherent tendency to commit sin.’⁷²

While *Questions on Doctrine* taught that man was guilty on the basis of his birth-nature, the *Handbook* is careful, in the final analysis, to present the result of Adam's Fall as being "an inherent tendency to commit sin." The article states that

Tendency to sin or temptation to sin is not sin. Neither constitutes a revolt against God. Yielding to sin and committing the act of sin, thus transgressing the law of God, alienate us from God and make us guilty before Him.⁷³

Guilt is resultant only when yielding, "committing the act of sin." Thus, again in 2000 the Church continued its reaffirmation of the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* hamartiology.

(Questions on Doctrine Annotated Edition (2003))

The surprising republication of *Questions on Doctrine* by the Andrews University Press in 2003 does not qualify in any way as a denominationally significant milestone, and so it does not truly fit well anywhere in this paper. Its republication as a volume in the projected "Adventist Classics Library" underlines how definitely the book has been retired. A classic it is not.

While the new notes are more honest about the 1957 edition's treatment of the nature of Christ, in the 2003 edition the atonement questions are yet again explained as semantical non-issues. In terms of this paper's study, long after Adventists should know what is "the issue behind the issue" (the doctrine of sin), the reprint does not touch upon the topic. That is, except to admit that the 1957 author's assertion that Adventism is neither Calvinistic nor Arminian is false.

It is difficult to understand what is meant by saying that 'the Seventh-day Adventist Church is neither Calvinist nor totally Arminian in theology' in the context of *Questions on Doctrine's* discussion of the five cardinal points of Calvinism and the five points of Arminian rebuttal. In that context it is safe to say that Adventism is totally Arminian.⁷⁴

The admission that Adventism is essentially Arminian is an indirect recognition that the doctrine of sin offered in the book was skewed. For as George Park Fisher confirms,

The Arminians introduced into their theology other deviations from the current system. In particular, they modified the accepted doctrine of Original Sin, excluding native guilt in the literal and proper sense of the term...⁷⁵

Seventh-day Adventists Believe (2006)

In the 2005 General Conference Session, the denomination voted to add a new statement to the Fundamental Beliefs, bringing the total to 28 items. After this addition and consequent reshuffling of the beliefs, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* was revised and republished in 2006 as *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (the title was slightly changed with removal of the ellipses). The text of the sections on the nature of man and the doctrine of sin offered no changes.

Summary

From the 1980s to the present, significant waymarks⁷⁶ and thus, potential intervention or clarification points, offered opportunities to salvage the *Questions on Doctrine* alternative hamartiology. But the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* teaching concerning sin was instead persistently affirmed. Thus, of the half century that has passed since *Questions on Doctrine*, much of it has seen a rejection of the 1957 doctrine of sin. At the very core of Adventist doctrine a wind had passed through the church and blown itself out. The one doctrine set forth in the 1950s that had the potential to remake Adventist theology had been repudiated.

Excursus: History Repeated in North American Division in 1990s

If the primary actions and publications of the church do not sustain the alternative hamartiology of *Questions on Doctrine*, why then, both today and in the 1990s, do we find certain lead-

ing Seventh-day Adventist writers and theologians apparently siding with *Questions on Doctrine*? That is, why have we found them offering their influence in the advancement of a largely evangelical conception of salvation? Having reviewed the most notable high-level church decisions, statements, and publications to the present, we pause to revisit the turbulent 1990s in the North American Division. During this period in this part of the field, a remarkable conflict arose between various lay-ministries/groups upholding the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* theological perspective, and a small group of leaders within the North American Division.⁷⁷

The sides were aligned exactly along the divide opened up by the theology of *Questions on Doctrine*. The question of sin and its definition was mentioned repeatedly in *Issues* and other books.⁷⁸ A group of individuals within the North American Division was still seeking to sustain the alternative hamartiology offered decades before. And, as in the initial period of conflict following the 1957 book, these seemed bent on suppressing the persisting pre-1957 consensus views.

One part of the reason for their resistance to the pre-1957 theology is that many of the workers then in leading positions had at seminary come under the influence of the theology of Edward Heppenstall. Although Heppenstall's role in *Questions on Doctrine* appears to have been very limited, he is mentioned several times in Nam's dissertation.⁷⁹

In 1992 the North American Division published *Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries*.⁸⁰ In *Issues*, opponents to the North American Division's preferred line of theology were said "to have an informal church operating within the body of the regular church..."⁸¹ *Issues* authors said that this was "like having active cancer cells in a healthy body."⁸² They stated that the church (who made *them* "the church"?) felt "forced to act."⁸³ The

authors wrote of having the cancer “cut out.”⁸⁴ It does not normally engender feelings of good will to compare loyal church members to cancer cells.

In 1994 Roy Adams offered his *The Nature of Christ*, attacking the theology of the same large segment of Adventists. In his book, Adams even wrote,

I believe that the moment to strike is now, and I think that the chapters included here do engage the salient questions of the current debate. . . . We are simply dreaming if we think that the dissident movement among us will simply collapse before our very eyes if we wait long enough.⁸⁵

Adams further stated that for writing his book, he would be subject to attack, “but I do it for our people.”⁸⁶ His book assailed some Adventists by name, including Amazing Facts founder Joe Crews. Adams mocks Adventists who see a problem with original sin theology in one place,⁸⁷ while elsewhere claiming that Ellen White offered a like teaching “without using the expression.”⁸⁸ Adam’s book defined a new low in his portrayal of his perceived opponents. And it was published under the imprimatur of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

The year 1995 saw the debut of *The Fragmenting of Adventism* by William G. Johnsson, editor of the *Review*. Adams has nothing on Johnsson, whose language included naming those who disagreed with his preferred views on sin, the nature of Christ, and related topics, as “parasites.”⁸⁹

It is certainly true that in those years some of the aforementioned opponents of the *Questions on Doctrine* theology presented their views in an antagonistic style. But these vicious reprisals in print, under the names of top denominational editors, spoke volumes. Church members took note.

What can be said about the situation here described—the most official statements of the church refusing to sustain the *Questions on Doctrine* hamartiology, while some individuals in significant segments of the organized church such as the North American Division, remained bent on publishing in its support?

An instructive parallel exists between the small party of a few men who produced *Questions on Doctrine* and shepherded it through the committees to publish it in the name of the church, and again, the small group of men who led out in the publishing of *Issues* and of the above mentioned books and articles in the 1990s. Both sought to introduce or sustain a foreign view that, though out of harmony with the official stand of the church, carried with it the apparent sanction of leadership in prominent positions.

What in effect had occurred was a mutiny—by the captain! To offer the analogy, the navy had instructed its captains (the Church had called upon her workers) to conduct their mission according to certain guidelines (as seen in the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs); the crew, who had signed on under the flag of the nation, had every reason to expect that their ship's officers would conduct themselves according to their commission (church members had a right to expect leaders to sustain the theology offered in the Fundamental Beliefs). Instead, betrayal (the alternative hamartiology of *Questions on Doctrine* was supported). Not the nation, not the crew, but the captain had mutinied.

It all traces back to *Questions on Doctrine*. Fifty years after the fact, the mission of the church continues to be hindered by the ongoing fragmentation, lack of clarity, and the confusion resulting from competing views of sin, salvation, and atonement in the denomination. If the church is ever to unite—if it is to rise up and fulfill its mission, its calling, and its God-ordained

destiny—it must squarely face up to and grapple with the core issues introduced by the publishing of *Questions on Doctrine* and subsequent views sympathetic to it. Clearly, the two viewpoints cannot coexist. A decision has been made by the church. But will individual leaders sustain the teaching as evidenced by the Bible, held to by the church prior to *Questions on Doctrine*, and upheld by official church statements in recent decades? Or, will the 1957 view continue to be promoted by a relatively few influential leaders? The challenge is clear, the implications manifold, the consequences far-reaching.

Discussion

Many Religious Groups Reject Original Sin

Questions on Doctrine is often lauded for bringing Adventists and evangelicals together. It is seen as a tool for bridging religious divides. But it is not as widely considered that for several groups who have historically rejected original sin, the book created new barriers.

Not only do Judaism⁹⁰ and Islam⁹¹ explicitly reject the dogma of original sin, but the notion is discredited in Eastern branches of Christendom as well.⁹² Russian and Greek Orthodox, Assyrian and Coptic Christianity, and even America's own Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—all reject the doctrine. Some of these groups are not insubstantial, as the increasing number of Muslims attests. *Questions on Doctrine* creates difficulties with this belief-system and so many others. For adherents of all these groups, and others not here listed, both within and without Christianity, *Questions on Doctrine* meant the erection of new walls.

In this sense, the volume understood to herald a widening of Adventism, actually marks a short-sighted constriction of itself. Whatever the book may appear to have gained for Seventh-

day Adventist standing amidst Western Christianity, it certainly takes away again for Eastern Christianity and the other monotheistic faiths. As the denomination distances itself from the book, it progresses in reclaiming its self-view as heaven's intended conduit offering a message global in scope (Rev 14:6-12; 18:1).

The Influence of *Questions on Doctrine*

It may be asked how a few pages in one book could effectually introduce an alternative hamartiology to a denomination. But Herbert E. Douglass recounts how he and others behind the scenes then determined that they would keep their dismay to themselves.

We never dreamed that the book would be so heavily advertised, with so many gratis copies. We thought it better to let the whole matter die for lack of attention. Were we wrong! . . . What we did not expect was the crescendo of *Ministry* editorials and articles that joined with a remarkably orchestrated PR program in workers meetings throughout North America from 1957 on.⁹³

These meetings and advertisements greatly multiplied the influence of the book. The generally positive attitude in society toward leadership and institutions prevailed also within the church at that time (late 1950s, early 1960s), and was another help in the progress of the book. Not on the basis of the book's merit, but of the assumed faithfulness of church leaders was this trust vested.

Another reason for its heavy influence was that its theology included significant change at core-level doctrine. As already noted, few theological elements are as pivotal as the doctrine of sin. This doctrine inevitably sets the parameters for how a host of other concepts will be understood. It determines the agreed upon scope of the sin problem as well as the expectation regarding the anticipated change to be effected through the gospel. Although an item may be at the doctrinal core, its significance may not be apparent to all observers.

A fourth reason for *Questions on Doctrine's* influence is the subtlety of the theological questions under discussion. Froom was certainly an intelligent man, but he served only a few short years as a pastor.⁹⁴ He had little experience that would lead him to see the pastoral concerns about the teaching. Nor was he a systematic theologian trained to see doctrines in relationship to each other; he was an editor, historian, apologist. It is not even clear whether Froom and his associates understood how significant their new hamartiology was, or, even that they were introducing it. The new doctrine of sin that they offered the church, on their part appears to have been incidental. And if Martin and Barnhouse understood the long-term implications these changes would wreak upon Adventism (it is difficult to think that they did not!), they weren't saying.

But before the infamous book was a gleam in anyone's eye, the shape of a pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Adventism had been worked out. It remains the only viable pathway forward, the only vision that accepts all of the distinctive components of Adventism at their full value, retaining them in a package intended to transport the church to the gates of eternity.

A Wrong Prescription

In 1989 the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) stated that

The world church has never viewed these subjects [nature of Christ, nature of sin] as essential to salvation nor to the mission of the remnant church. . . . There can be no strong unity within the world church of God's remnant people so long as segments who hold these views agitate them both in North America and overseas divisions. These topics need to be laid aside and not urged upon our people as necessary issues.⁹⁵

History demonstrates the opposite. Indisputably, the strongest blow in the last 50 years against the unity of the remnant church was struck with the 1957 publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.

On precisely these points (the nature of Christ, the nature of sin), the book offered views alien to the previous theology of this church. On these very items then, it is especially since *Questions on Doctrine* that the fires of disunity have crackled.⁹⁶ The correct prescription for unity is not to ignore these topics, but to recognize the contemporary church's rejection of the incorrect positions offered it back in 1957, and to teach positions consistent with the theological consensus previous to *Questions on Doctrine*.

How Many Adventists Included?

Let it not be lost upon us that the supposed "gains" reaped through the *Questions on Doctrine* adventure never applied to the majority of Seventh-day Adventists. The evangelicals stated that they saw only the Adventists who believed as the few Seventh-day Adventist leaders had claimed they did, as being fellow Christians.

In Donald Grey Barnhouse's Foreword to Walter Martin's 1960 book, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, Barnhouse stated that

When we [*Eternity Magazine*] published our conclusion... we were greeted by a storm of protest... Let it be understood that we made only one claim; i.e., that those Seventh-day Adventists who follow the Lord in the same way as their leaders who have interpreted for us the doctrinal position of their church, are to be considered true members of the body of Christ.⁹⁷

The vast majority of Adventists were never included in the 1957 rapprochement. This fact dramatically mitigates the imagined benefit of the whole adventure.

Pastoral Concerns

Discussion should not close without addressing pastoral concerns. Most of the ministerial workforce had completed their training under the period of M. L. Andreasen's ascendancy.

His numerous books and his years teaching at Seminary (1937-1949) assure us that his viewpoints were widely known. From most church members filling the pews, to the conference presidents, were familiar with and many were at one with his views.

Thus, when *Questions on Doctrine* arrived, some pastors found themselves facing congregations without good explanations for the new views issuing from headquarters. Remember, Wood complained that the leadership had made “no provision for discussion of theological questions that were being discussed privately.”⁹⁸ Did the bulk of Adventists notice that their new “acceptance” by evangelicals as being fellow Christians applied to almost none of them? No wonder the muted reaction to the new book by the laity!

People join the church and are carefully taught a tightly integrated doctrinal package by their pastors. Now they were being told quite something else, mostly by men long departed from the local church pastorate. This played a large role in what Wood later called the creation of “a climate in the church favorable to criticism, suspicion, uncertainty, rumor, and a loss of confidence in leadership.”⁹⁹ There are enough challenges in pastoral ministry without being blindsided by theologically misguided surprises from leaders far removed from the front lines.

It is imperative that theological decisions of *Questions on Doctrine* magnitude not be made in secret. Church members and pastors of churches both large and small need to be included, not kept in blackout. It is the conviction of this author that had pastors been included in the preparation of the 1957 book, not only would its theology have been more Adventist but that the added heart for pastoral concerns could have helped the church avoid the tangled legacy inevitably accruing to a theology-bending book prepared in secrecy.

Summary and Conclusion

The history of the doctrine of sin in the Adventist Church shows a steady line, interrupted only by the aberration introduced in 1957. The proofs then given in support of the new hamartiology, certain interpretations of Eph 2:3 and from Rom 3:9-19, were superficial and erroneous. Since the dissipation of the fallout from that period, the most official statements and publications of the church show a clear discontinuity with the teaching introduced by *Questions on Doctrine*. The significance of this for the remaining elements of the theological system then introduced should not be understated. Without the hamartiological foundation, the rest of the program is ultimately doomed.

God is never hostage to His people. If hope remains, He will wait, offering initiative after initiative in blessings or cursings. And yet, what will happen if human leaders persist in going their own way? Theologians and church administrators do not determine truth, no matter how certain they may feel that their ideas are vested with positive significance. The *Questions on Doctrine* adventure, in spite of good intentions, has proven itself a debacle. The secretiveness, lack of transparency, talking to non-Adventists before talking to Adventists, and the heavy-handedness of the *Questions on Doctrine* era, wounded the church. In particular, this is a problem for which the leadership of the church is responsible, not the laity. And some leaders in certain Divisions repeated key aspects of this behavior in the 1990s. Hence, it is the leadership of the church today that has a work to do in order to reestablish the spirit of integrity and collegiality which can and should exist. The wreckage stretches unambiguously before us.

What now?

Questions on Doctrine demonstrated several points. On the positive, it showed Seventh-day Adventists to be interested in friendly relations with their neighbors; that Adventists respect their religious views even if they do not agree with all of them; that Adventists themselves desire to be understood by others.

On the negative side, it showed embarrassing traits. It told the astute observer that Adventists would trade identity for perceived legitimacy; that at least some denominational views could be bartered. Although Froom and company relentlessly insisted that they had not changed Adventist beliefs, none were fooled. Neither Barnhouse nor Martin, neither Andreasen nor Figuhr, were blind.¹⁰⁰ All could see that “a few men” had carried events too far. The traditional Adventist landscape had been radically changed.

The book soon came to be known for the furor over the nature of Christ and the atonement issues; more significant was its new-to-Adventism doctrine of sin. Without the new hamartiology, the modification of positions on the nature of Christ and the atonement could never have been seriously attempted. Today, it is clear that the church has centered itself in the doctrine of sin held precedent to the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.

The rejection of *Questions on Doctrine*'s modification of the single most significant theological element (the doctrine of sin) in the core of the Adventist system, foretells inevitable abandonment also of viewpoints falling along the same axis, on the nature of Christ and an insistence that the atonement was finished at the cross with only the application of benefits following. If Froom and his associates—at the height of their denominational influence, in an era when the church was perhaps more malleable by administrative initiative than at any other time—by the introduction of their errors were unable to evoke enduring change in core theological essence,

what then is the likelihood of accomplishing such in today's era of networked openness? None. The core beliefs of the church cannot and should not be changed without the body first developing that openness and consensus which were never attained—or seriously attempted—in 1957.

Adventism is not a formless mass shapeable by administrative oligarchy. If one holds that there is an objective truth and that the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Adventist understanding of what sin is, is correct, then it should not surprise the reader to see the collapse of the 1957 initiative, and the return of the denominational view to its unperturbed shape. Truth, by its very nature, comports with reality. Truth contains its own inherent strength, error its own inwrought weakness. Our perception of doctrinal truth can suffer temporary distortion, but error tends to retreat with the passing of its promoter generation.

Far better had it been, if, with narrow and prejudiced minds, the cult experts in 1957 had identified the Seventh-day Adventist Church (false though such a representation would have been) as one among the cults. Far better had men in our midst not coveted the recognition and legitimacy only available at the price of an attempted rewiring of the theological center of the Adventist biblical theological system.

In 1980 the new Statement of Fundamental Beliefs made clear that the larger church had never made *Questions on Doctrine's* hamartiology its own. Today, the windy doctrine of sin behind *Questions on Doctrine* has all but blown itself out. But if that doctrine has been rejected, what imprint is left behind? The stink of secrecy, revisionism, heavy-handedness, and untruthfulness. The leadership of the denomination broke faith with its members, and did not correctly represent its faith to outsiders. It did not hold Froom, Anderson, Read, or Figuhr accountable. And what has changed? Too often, some in leadership today are permitted to press home their

own agendas heedless of the will of the world church (e.g. women's ordination, *et cetera*). This is the accepted practice, the legacy, the imprint of *Questions on Doctrine*. Unless there is a change in what happens, similar behavior will repeat, generating other church crises, and we may see more 50-year conferences on other topics along the same fallout trail.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has today returned to embrace the theological consensus on the doctrine of sin that existed before the publication of “the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.”¹⁰¹

Endnotes

¹ Juhyeok Nam, “Reactions to the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences and *Questions on Doctrine* 1955-1971,” pp. 280, 281. Also, “Elder L. E. Froom is one of the small group of us who have prepared these answers” (Letter, R. A. Anderson to H. E. Whitford, Dec. 13, 1956). Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loma Linda University, DF 3773.06C, Correspondence regarding *Questions on Doctrine*, 1956.

² Aage Rendalen, “Adventism: Has the Medium Become the Message?” *Evangelica*, Dec. 1980, p. 35.

³ According to the salutation of L. E. Froom in a letter to T. E. Unruh, W. E. Read, R. A. Anderson. (Presumably Froom was the fourth comrade.) Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loma Linda University, DF 3773.06C, Correspondence regarding *Questions on Doctrine*, 1956.

⁴ It is important to note that the idea of publishing a new book was not that of the Adventists initially, but that Martin’s party insisted that the “repudiation” of earlier errors must appear in print in order to be taken seriously. Martin was adamant that there be some authoritative Adventist volume as proof for assertions he would publish about the updated Adventist position—an understandable point, and one also, that, very conveniently, trapped the Adventists. Froom and friends thus found themselves drawn into the production of *Questions on Doctrine*. This mitigates against a theory that the changes offered in the book began as part of any intentionally planned conspiracy on the part of Adventist leaders.

⁵ Raymond F. Cottrell, “General Suggestions on *This We Believe*” [third working title for what became QOD], Dec. 12, 1956, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loma Linda University, DF 3773.06C, Correspondence regarding *Questions on Doctrine*, 1956.

⁶ Kenneth H. Wood, “How We Got Where We Are: A review of some aspects of Adventist history since 1955,” prepared for PREXAD and invitees, Nosoca Pines, SC, Feb. 10-23, 1978, p. 2.

⁷ Roy Adams: “The tension between these two understandings of sin (the narrow and the broad—not to say the shallow and the deep) lies at the heart of the perennial debate over sanctification, perfection, and Christ’s nature in the Adventist Church,” *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1994), p. 87; Norman R. Gulley: “In their assessment of the ministry of Christ, some Adventists see him as primarily Example, others primarily as Substitute. These two conflicting views spring from two differing understandings of what constitutes sin,” *Adventist Review*, Jan. 25, 1990, p. 12; A. Leroy Moore: “Denial of the doctrine of original sin lies at the heart of [Ellen] White’s understanding of the conflict between good and evil,” *The Theology Crisis* (Corpus Christi, TX: Life Seminars, Inc., 1980), p. 119 (see also pp. 105, 112, 114, 117, 121, 123, 125); Dennis Priebe: “At the foundation of the theological divisions among Adventists on the question of righteousness by faith lie differing beliefs on the nature of sin and guilt. The real debate is over the nature of sin,” *Face-to-Face With the Real Gospel* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1985), p. 41; J. R. Zurcher: “Without question, the first step toward a solution [concerning the understanding of the nature of Christ] lies in a biblical definition of the concept of sin,” *Touched With Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ*. Edward E. White, trans. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn, 1999), p. 254.

⁸ William G. Johnsson, “Our Matchless Saviour—V,” *Adventist Review*, Aug. 26, 1993, p. 4.

⁹ “Only... if Jesus shared ordinary human nature to begin with was He genuinely part of our history. . . . [He] *was genuinely human in terms of the ordinary tensions which men must bear, both from without and from within*. . . . If God entered man in such a manner that He did not share the full history of mankind, there was no real Incarnation,” N. F. S. Ferré, *Christ and the Christian*, op. cit., Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, (London, Britain: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 76, 89, 99, italics those of Ferré.

¹⁰ Some primary discussions are found, in order of appearance as follows: Dennis Priebe, *Face-to-Face With the Real Gospel*, pp. 22-41; Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ*, pp. 87-98; J. R. Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings*, pp. 287-294; Larry Kirkpatrick, *Cleanse and Close: Last Generation Theology in 14 Points* (Highland, CA: GreatControversy.org, 2005), pp. 11-48.

¹¹ The most extensive treatment is Edwin Zackrison, *In the Loins of Adam: A Historical Study of Original Sin in Adventist Theology* (iUniverse, Inc., New York: 2004), 406 pp. Zackrison’s main theme in his dissertation is Adventist hamartiology in the years 1850-1900. He has little to say with reference to 20th and 21st century Adventism, the *Questions on Doctrine* issues, or contemporary belief statements and their main book treatments by the church in 1957, 1980, 1988, 2000 (and 2005); he tracks the views of individuals. Even in his conclusions, he sustains the idea that Seventh-day Adventist hamartiological understanding is sharply differentiated from Augustinian/Calvinistic understanding (p. 285), and yet concludes that Adventists should use the term “original sin” (p. 286). It is most difficult to agree with this, since the use of the term will almost invariably include in the mind of the listener the idea in some form or other of condemnation on the basis of birth-nature.

¹² “As a church, we have never formally defined our beliefs in these three critical areas—sin, Christ, and perfection. And because of our unclarity and divergent views in these areas, we have been wandering in the theological desert of uncertainty and frustration for these past forty years. Further, because we have held contradictory views in these areas, we have been unable clearly to define our message and mission,” Priebe, p. 9.

¹³ “Sin” and “sinners” are mentioned numerous times in *Questions on Doctrine*, often via expressions conventional to Adventism. The focus of this paper has been delimited especially to statements promoting the transmission of condemnation, guilt, or imputation of the same.

¹⁴ “Froom and his colleagues were less than transparent on the denomination’s position since the mid-1890s” (*Questions on Doctrine*, Annot. Ed., Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), p. xv.

“Suspicion of the Adventist conferees having hedged on the truth of the traditional Adventist position is seemingly confirmed in the section of the appendix to *Questions on Doctrine* on ‘Christ’s Nature During the Incarnation.’ In that appendix of Ellen White quotations the authors of the book supply a heading stating that Christ ‘Took Sinless Human Nature.’ That heading is problematic in that it implies that that was Ellen White’s idea when in fact she was quite emphatic in repeatedly stating that Christ took ‘our sinful nature,’ and that ‘He took upon Himself, fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin’” (*Ibid.*, p. xvi).

“It is... difficult to justify the Adventist conferees’ presentation and manipulation of the data they presented on the human nature of Christ... the change of position on the human nature of Christ was one of substance. Whether Froom and his colleagues were willing to admit it or not, the view of Christ’s human nature that they set forth was a genuine revision of the position held by the majority of the denomination before the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*” (*Ibid.*, p. xvii).

“The authors at times push the facts a bit too far... they even present their data in a way that creates a false impression on the human nature of Christ” (*Ibid.*, p. xxx).

“Due to... the problematic presentation of the topic in *Questions on Doctrine*... the human nature of Christ would become central to much Adventist theological discussion for the second half of the twentieth century” (*Ibid.*, p. 305, annot. fn.).

“*Questions on Doctrine* not only supplied a misleading heading, but it also neglected to present the evidence that would have contradicted the heading” (*Ibid.*, p. 516, annotated fn.).

“Both the heading to page §650§ and the non-inclusion of Ellen White’s statements claiming that Christ had a sinful nature were less than straightforward and transparent” (*Ibid.*, p. 517, annot. fn.).

“The authors of *Questions on Doctrine* apparently were tempted to avoid some of Ellen White’s strong statements in their compilation and to provide the misleading heading on page §650§” (*Ibid.*, p. 518, annot. fn.).

“The data was manipulated by the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*” (*Ibid.*, p. 520, annot. fn.).

“Leroy Froom and his colleagues in the evangelical dialogue had not told the truth about the longstanding denominational teaching on the human nature of Christ” (*Ibid.*, p. 521, annot. fn.).

“Unfortunately, there does appear to be elements of a betrayal in the manipulation of the data and in the untruths that were passed on to Barnhouse and Martin on the topic” (*Ibid.*, p. 522, annot. fn.).

¹⁵ L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1971), pp. 484, 485.

¹⁶ “As an apparent correction to the misleading approach taken in *Questions on Doctrine* and *Movement of Destiny*, in 1972 the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference developed a revised version of the controversial Appendix B. The revision eliminated the heavy italicization of the original, so that readers could reach their own conclusions without undue editorial prompting. Beyond that, some of the less than helpful quotations were deleted. Other quotations were added and sections were reordered. In addition, and most importantly, the revision supplied several rewritten subtitles to make them more accurate and less controversial” (*Questions on Doctrine*, Annot. Ed., p. 533, annot. fn.).

¹⁷ The preliminary title for the paper is, “Slanting the Atonement: A Review of *Questions on Doctrine*’s Appendix C, The Atonement. Upon completion this document will be published in PDF format on GreatControversy.org.

¹⁸ Zackrison, p. 117.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Zackrison, pp. 132, 147.

²¹ Gerhard Pfandl, “Some Thoughts on Original Sin,” Shelf Document, Biblical Research Institute GC, p. 15.

²² See Pfandl, p. 15. Zackrison, in the index of persons and names for his dissertation, on p. 389 offers more than 40 pages with reference to Smith.

²³ J. N. Loughborough, “Romish Dealing With Sins,” *Review and Herald*, Jan. 30, 1874; “Origin of Popish Errors,” *Signs of the Times*, Mar. 30, 1876; J. H. Waggoner, “Thoughts on Baptism,” *Review and Herald*, Mar. 21, 1878, etc.

²⁴ E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), p. 26.

²⁵ The 1872 Statement offers little either way, but in its XIV item affirms that by a radical transformation of the heart’s affections, its “enmity can be subdued.”

²⁶ The seventh statement says that the Sabbath is “a sign of the believer’s rest from his own works of sin...” But context makes clear what is meant. The statement finishes with “and his entrance into the rest of soul that Jesus promises to those who come to Him.” Thus, the works of sin are from the past, before he was a believer, before he found entrance into rest in Christ. Furthermore, Ellen White states that every individual “may work the works of righteousness” (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 30, 1897).

²⁷ Reproduced here from *Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries* (Silver Spring, MD: North American Division Officers and Presidents, 1992), Appendix XLII, pp. 442-446.

²⁸ *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 406, 407.

²⁹ Differences in prepublication draft wording are here indicated by italics.

³⁰ The term “original sin” actually appeared at least five times in the prepublication draft. All occurrences were stricken before final publication. Nevertheless, removal of the term did not mean removal of the doctrine; the label was stricken but the package remained.

³¹ It had been claimed that *Questions on Doctrine* had been reviewed—and approved—with excruciating care. In fact, only a very small number offered substantive critiques of prepublication drafts forwarded to them. “While it is true that the manuscript was widely distributed, documentary evidence and later testimonies from those involved in the publication of the book indicate that there was never a resounding and unanimous ‘chorus of approval.’ Indeed, the manuscript enjoyed unprecedented pre-publication dissemination, but as discussed above, almost all of the meticulous reviews were conducted right at the General Conference headquarters. As such, contrary to Figuhr’s claim, it [QOD] remained essentially the product of a few men” (Nam, pp. 280, 281).

³² Raymond F. Cottrell, General Suggestions on *This We Believe* [third working title for what became QOD], Dec. 12, 1956, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loma Linda University, DF 3773.06C, Correspondence regarding *Questions on Doctrine*, 1956.

³³ For a reproduction of some the pages in which the phrase “original sin” appeared in the prepublication draft, and its editing changes, see Larry Kirkpatrick, “Original Sin in Prepublication Draft of *Questions on Doctrine*,” <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/kir-qod-osin.pdf>.

³⁴ *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 407, 408.

³⁵ Speaking of Rom 5:12, Sanday and Headlam offer, “the effects of Adam’s Fall were transmitted to his descendants; but St. Paul nowhere says how they were transmitted; nor does he even define in precise terms what is transmitted,” op. cit., Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of Jesus*, p. 76.

³⁶ Priebe, p. 12.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 425.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

³⁹ “Every one who by faith obeys God’s commandments, will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression,” Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 23, 1902.

⁴⁰ Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action, A Treatise on Economics* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1996), Revised 4th Ed., vol. 1, p. 14. Although Mises is an economist, he bases his entire four volume, 1044 page work, on the theme of free will.

⁴¹ It might be objected that the term “original sin” never appeared in the printed version of *Questions on Doctrine*. The term is found with a variety of meanings and nuances in theological writings. The essence of the issue at hand is that a condemnation is proposed for individuals on the basis of what ultimately is an involuntary form of sin; men are condemned apart from their choice, a view that must be anathema to the believer who has a care for God’s good name. Although the term “original sin” was not used in the published version of *Questions on Doctrine*, we use the term to represent that book’s teaching because (a) The authors of *Questions on Doctrine* themselves used the term in prepublication drafts of the book, (b) The manner in which Eph 2:3 and Rom 3 are used in the book is to sustain an interpretation that humans are guilty or condemned by birth—echoing the primary theme of original sin, (c) The authors of the book aggressively abandoned the post-Fall view of the nature of Christ in their urgency to affirm His sinlessness, (d) Although some of us have offered for this unbiblical teaching the more accurate term “involuntary sin,” some have not embraced that term. Therefore, we fall back on the label “original sin” as the most widely held consensus term in use to represent the teaching that men are born guilty or condemned, however expressed. It may be further noted that on p. 22 of *Questions on Doctrine* sin is spoken of but not original sin. But we should keep in mind that this is one of 36 single-sentence statements describing the SDA position in relation to others. Since the concepts are expanded later in the book to include condemnation by birth-nature, it is clear that the single-sentence explanation of what Adventists believed in this point did require further elucidation. Because of the ideas later developed, it is clear that the sentence on p. 22 is both inadequate and inaccurate in describing the doctrine of sin adopted by the book.

⁴² Other books followed *Questions on Doctrine* with this teaching, such as Harry W Lowe, *Redeeming Grace* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1968); Edward Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1974); *The Man Who Is God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977), and others. But they only followed where the 1957 authors had first blazed the path. *Questions on Doctrine* was in Seventh-day Adventism the seminal statement of this doctrine of sin and its alien theological system.

⁴³ For a more detailed study of *phusis* in the NT, see Larry Kirkpatrick, “Is Our Nature Condemned?” at <http://lastgenerationtheology.org/lgt/doc/1ant/kir-ionc.php>.

⁴⁴ Zackrison, p. 29.

⁴⁵ For an outline of Rom 1-3, see <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/rom1-3outline.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Rom 3:10-12 from Pss 14:1-3; 53:1-3.

Rom 3:13 from Ps 5:9; 140:3.

Rom 3:14 from Ps 10:7.

Rom 3:15-17 from Isa 59:7, 8.

Rom 3:18 from Ps 36:1.

Rom 3:20 from Ps 143:2.

⁴⁷ Here is a description from the perspective of Judaism: “Followers of Paul read and understand the Hebrew Bible through a certain philosophical lens—they bring to it the premise that Jesus is the savior, that salvation is from him. They read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New. They prioritize the New over the Old. // Jews who believe as Jews do just the reverse. They prioritize the Old over the New. They begin with the premise that God speaks through the Hebrew Bible. With this in mind, they may proceed to evaluate the claims of Christianity. Because they approach and interpret scripture in chronological order—as seems reasonable, after all—they find that the New Testament does not arise naturally or logically from the foundation document, the Old Testament,” David Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2005), pp. 109, 110. Klinghoffer is wrong in the conclusion he draws (that Christianity does not “fit” the Hebrew Scriptures), but correct about method, insofar as he insists that the New Testament must be able to harmonize with the Hebrew Scriptures not only reading from New Testament to Old, but Old to New. The point being that we cannot fairly interpret Romans 3 by simply claiming that because it is newer, the original context of David’s Psalms is unimportant.

⁴⁸ “Paul (d. ca. 65 C.E.), the apostle of Jesus, was a Jew who shaped early Christian thought. His views on sin, which formed the basis of Christian teaching, differed dramatically from those of rabbinic Judaism. Paul and Augustine (354-430), the early Church Father, taught that man was innately sinful as a result of Adam’s disobedience to God, and that this condition was transmitted to all newborns... In Christianity, sin is a fact of birth, whereas in Judaism, sin is a matter of choice,” David S. Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 85.

⁴⁹ “Scholars generally acknowledge that the classical (ecclesiastical) doctrine of original sin is not found explicitly stated by the writers of the Old Testament” (Zackrison, p. 19).

⁵⁰ “We are *not* changing our faith. We need to be very careful about statements along that line. We are repudiating the positions of some who, in earlier days and a few hang-overs today, held positions in contravention to our sound scholarship, and the clear counsels of Mrs. E. G. White” (Letter, L. E. Froom to Walter R. Martin, June 18, 1956, TL, ADF 3773.06c, LLU, emphasis in original).

⁵¹ Zackrison, p. xix.

⁵² Zurcher, pp. 184, 185.

⁵³ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, pp. 465-540.

⁵⁴ Douglass, *Opportunity of the Century* ([Booklet] Highland, CA: GreatControversy.org, 2005), p. 24.

⁵⁵ Wood, pp. 50, 51.

⁵⁶ Voted statement of Fundamental Beliefs, 1980 General Conference Session.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 296.

⁵⁸ _____, *Education* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 29.

⁵⁹ W. Duncan Eva, quoted from “Ninth Business Meeting, Fifty-third General Conference Session, April 22, 1980, 3:15 P.M., Session Proceedings,” *Adventist Review*, Apr. 24, 1980, p. 21.

⁶⁰ The Ps 51:5 wording was removed from the Fundamental Belief statement, but the reference to it remained in the list of accompanying Scriptures. The wording that remained was clear in sustaining a hamartiology consonant with the Bible, Ellen G. White, and pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Seventh-day Adventist theology.

⁶¹ The first to assemble most of the concepts that became the doctrine of original sin into one package was Origen (d. 299 a.d.), and the package developed through Cyprian (d. 258), Didymus the Blind (d. 399), Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), and finally Augustine (354-430). See Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002), pp. 46-75; also, Zackrison, pp. 39-85 for a similar description.

⁶² Zackrison, pp. 4, 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), 392 pp. The views on the doctrine of sin in connection with man’s nature are found especially on pp. 81, 85, 87-91, 93, 94.

⁶⁵ There had been no widely distributed book treatment of the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs. *Questions on Doctrine* was the first such major book. Unfortunately, it did not recapitulate the 1931 beliefs but rather offered its own set. It was never a legitimate book treatment of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1988 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* was published in support of the 1980 statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Thus, it replaced *Questions on Doctrine*’s skewed representation of Adventist teaching.

⁶⁶ See Douglass, p. 25, and endnote 27 on p. 45.

⁶⁷ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*, p. 89.

⁶⁸ Texts like Ps 51:5 and Eph 2:3 are included in the discussion, although elsewhere this paper shows that their use in this way is superficial and misguided.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Curiously, while the text concerning the nature of man and of sin provides a satisfactory discussion of the topic, the chapter of the book that addresses Jesus' humanity is still marked by an attempt to retain much of the erroneous view of the nature of Christ offered in 1957 (see pp. 42-57)—an unfortunate point which sharply curtails the usefulness of the volume. Be that as it may, in terms of the book's teaching on sin, even in this chapter, it never states that men by birth-nature are born condemned or guilty.

⁷¹ Among weaknesses in the article are an over abundance of the use of the idea of sin as a "status of lostness" (p. 235), "status of rebellion" (pp. 237, 246), "status of revolt" (p. 239). This goes along with vague discussions of sin as state (p. 246), offering the man of Romans seven as the anticipated Christian experience. The article mentions distinct meanings for certain Hebrew words for sin but fails to note their frequent interchangeable usage in the Tanakh (e.g. see "transgression" "iniquity," "sin," "evil," and "wickedness" in Exod 34:7, 9; Pss 32:5; 51:1-5; Ezek 18:4, 8, 14, 17-22, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, etc.). Finally, the discussion of inherited separation (p. 257) leaves vague questions. Fortunately, the article makes some very clear statements about sin which were included in the main body of this paper, and which comport with the pre-*Questions on Doctrine* Adventist view of sin. The article would have been considerably improved had a more significant discussion been offered of sin as choice and a more careful treatment of the doctrine of sin as represented in the writings of Ellen G. White. It is true that within the article, it is stated that we are guilty for our sinful nature too. The problem with this document is that it is internally contradictory. Problems of internal contradiction are solved by giving closer attention to the introductory and conclusion statements of the article. In the case of this document, the summary statements indicate the "sin is choice" position. For a brief discussion of certain potentially problematic statements by White, see Larry Kirkpatrick, "What is the New Theology? Part 13: The Substance of 1888: Shall We Hear Heaven's Message Through A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and Ellen G. White, or Ignore it in Favor of Martin Luther?" <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/rar/kir-wint13.php>.

⁷² Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), "Sin," p. 265.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁷⁴ *Questions on Doctrine*, Annot. Ed., p. 324 annot. fn.

⁷⁵ George Park Fisher, *The Reformation* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 399.

⁷⁶ It may be asked, why has the author not included Norman Gulley's *Review* articles, or the Palmdale conference, etc.? The purpose of this document was to especially address the primary documents and statements that enter into the lives of the average church member. Articles in the *Review* are often printed that present opposite opinions to previously published articles. The readership of the *Review* is small. Many Adventists have abandoned the *Review* because of its long-term sustenance of the New Theology. As far as theological conferences like Palmdale, gatherings of small groups of theologians and administrators tend to have very little impact on the belief system of the average church member. Many times participants leave these very conferences with just as diverse a set of positions as before, perhaps moreso. Hence, the meetings and articles were not included because they represent a significantly limited impact on the faith and practice of the church, whereas General Conference session approved statements of Belief, and the major explanatory denomination-wide publications supporting those beliefs do have an influence impacting the average church member. These were the criterion of the author.

⁷⁷ It is beyond the scope of this paper to lend itself to an all-sided discussion of the features of this conflict. It must suffice to reiterate that the provocations offered by some in self-supporting groups in their endeavor to defend truth were very great. This cannot justify the over-reaction of certain editors, authors and administrators, but it does help us to understand that reaction by them, and to forgive.

⁷⁸ In *Issues*, see pp. 47, 109.

⁷⁹ Nam, pp. 99, 248, 255, 325, 326, 330, 386.

⁸⁰ This volume harkens back to *Questions on Doctrine* not only in certain theological and attitudinal respects, but also in that, like the 1957 volume, no authors are named.

⁸¹ *Issues*, p. 19.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Adams, pp. 9, 15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21, 25, 26.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁸⁹ William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1995), p. 61.

⁹⁰ See for example, “Judaism’s Rejection of Original Sin,” Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Original_Sin.html, accessed 2007-09-25 21:18Z. Adherents in Judaism generally fall into one of two groups here. One group accepts that original sin is a post-New testament development. The other group, apparently the greater number, hold that Paul and thus the New Testament is the source of the teaching.

⁹¹ The following comes from the perspective of Islam: “As regards the ‘original sin,’ Islam does not admit this theme. Its main concern is the ‘Acquired Sin.’ According to Islam ‘sin’ is neither like a hereditary disease that is transferred from a father to his son through reproductive system nor is sin like a rank or a title that can be passed from an older to a younger person of the family. . . . A human being is born without any sin (guiltless or innocent) and he remains such unless he intentionally commits a sin (i.e. disobeys God’s commandments)” (Abdus Sattar Ghauri, “The Concept of Original Sin,” <http://understanding-islam.com/related/text.asp?type=article&aid=178>, accessed 2007-08-24 16:06Z).

⁹² The following comes from the Greek Orthodox perspective: “The presuppositions of the Greek Fathers precluded any notion of universal inherited guilt of original sin. The Fathers simply could not have called Adam’s transgression the original, generic, or first sin, nor could they have imagined God imposing legal guilt for it on all human beings at the moment of their conception. The Fathers assigned responsibility solely to the transgressors: Adam and Eve” (George S. Gabriel, Introduction, John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Pub., 1998), p. 8).

⁹³ Douglass, pp. 6, 11.

⁹⁴ Froom served in the pastoral ministry beginning part way through 1913 in Maryland and then on to Delaware before moving to editorial work during 1915. Thus, his total time in direct pastoral ministry was less than three years, with little spent in the districts where he served as pastor. See “Obituary, Le Roy Edwin Froom,” *Review and Herald*, Apr. 4, 1974, p. 30.

⁹⁵ Biblical Research Institute, “An Appeal for Church Unity,” In *Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries*, Appendix XVI, pp. 238-244.

⁹⁶ For a concise discussion of the central importance of the post-fall nature of Christ position, see Dennis Priebe, *Is it Essential or Nonessential* ([Booklet] Highland, CA: GreatControversy.org, 2007), 24 pp.

⁹⁷ Donald Grey Barnhouse, Foreword to Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Wood, pp. 50, 51.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Nam, fn., pp. 87, 88, “In his January 24, 1957 letter to R. A. Grieve, an ex-Adventist minister in New Zealand who was dismissed from ministry in 1956, Barnhouse stated that ‘the whole doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment have undergone recasting and reinterpretation in Adventist theology within the last few years, and in the new definitive volume entitled *This We Believe—The Faith of Seventh-day Adventists*, [one of the names considered for *Questions on Doctrine* in early 1957] . . . these interpretations are rather plainly evident,”” (Donald Grey Barnhouse to R. A. Grieve, 24 January 1957, TL, Donald Grey Barnhouse Collection, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA). “... The push by Froom, Read, and Anderson for a more friendly text toward the evangelicals disturbed even Figuhr who had been very supportive of the book and the dialogues that led up to it. Figuhr, in a letter to Olson, expressed being ‘rather perturbed’ that the three men ‘were putting on pressure to liberalize’ the document further” (R. R. Figuhr to A. V. Olson, 4 May 1957, TL, RG 11, box 3738, GCA). Nam, p. 260 and fn. See also pp. 87, 94, 95, 360-365.

¹⁰¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, Annotated ed., p. xiii.