



The Burning Bush

ISSN 0219-5984

July 2024

Volume 30 Number 2

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THE BURNING BUSH

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Editor : Jeffrey Khoo
Publisher : Far Eastern Bible College
Website : www.febc.edu.sg
Permit : MCI (P) 017/03/2024

The Burning Bush (ISSN 0219-5984) is published bi-annually in January and July, and contains theological papers, sermons, testimonies, book reviews, College news, and alumni reports. Articles are indexed in the *Christian Periodical Index*. The journal is distributed gratis to the FEBC family and Bible-Presbyterian churches, and is available online at www.febc.edu.sg. Local/Foreign subscription rates in Singapore dollars: one year—\$8/\$16; two years—\$15/\$30; back issues—\$4/\$8 per copy. Make cheques payable to “Far Eastern Bible College.”

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UNITY IN TRUTH AND GRACE

Jeffrey Khoo

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

We thank and praise God for calling each one of us to salvation and to service. What a privilege it is to be called children of God and what a privilege to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords, even to be students of His Word. Theology is the king of all sciences, much higher than the sciences taught in the universities. The study of theology is the study of God, and who or what is higher or greater than God? The study of God should humble us to worship Him and serve Him forever.

As Christians we are not only called to salvation and service but also to suffer for the Lord's sake. In Ephesians 4:1, the Apostle Paul said, *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."* Paul was writing from prison. He was in prison not for any crime he had committed or wrong that he had done but for preaching the gospel and defending the truth. For doing that which was good and right, he was persecuted and cast into prison. This was because the Jewish elders had accused him falsely of many things and wanted to destroy him to silence the truth of the gospel.

Paul lived for Christ and the gospel and was willing to die for it. He said in Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* However, for the sake of biblical witness, knowing God's will for his life, he appealed to Caesar, asserting his right as a Roman citizen. Having appealed to Caesar, his enemies could not do anything to him. He would be heard by Caesar in Rome. When he was in prison waiting for his case to be heard, he preached the gospel to the imperial guards of Caesar who watched over him. Paul testified to the Philippians how there was wonderful conversion in Caesar's household (Phil 1:12-13).

These Roman soldiers got saved and became evangelists themselves, sharing the gospel with their fellow men. God is so great, and Paul counted it a privilege to be a prisoner of Christ. Indeed, Paul was held captive by the love of Christ. Constrained by the love of Christ, he was ready to suffer and die for Him. The Lord Jesus had said, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Matt 16:24). Our life does not belong to us but to the Lord. And the ministry that we have is not “MY ministry”. We do not have a ministry. In fact, we are not entitled to any ministry. The ministry that we have comes from God. That we are ministers of the gospel is all by the grace of God. He “allowed” us (1 Thess 2:4). He gave us permission to be ministers of His Word. So it is not my ministry, not your ministry, it is God’s ministry. We must remember that or else we may just build our own empire or kingdom. God forbid that we do that, for we rob Him of His glory and honour if we do. Who are we? What are we? We are nothing! The Lord Jesus, He is everything. *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30) must always be our constant motto.

Unity

Not only are we called to suffer for Christ, we are also called to be united in Christ. Paul called all believers to be worthy of their calling, *“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Eph 4:2-3). This he also enjoined in 2 Timothy 1:8-9, *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* Unity is something so precious and something to be desired greatly. The unity God wants us to have is not institutional or organisational but spiritual. It is *“unity of the Spirit”*. It is a unity that is brought about by the Holy Spirit—a unity of spiritually regenerate people sanctified by Christ and His Word, and indwelt by His Spirit.

In verse 3, we are told *“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Unity is cemented by *“the bond of peace”*. An institution can enjoy unity only when there is peace. Peace is not just a condition, it is

really a virtue that brings us together and keeps us together. We are glued together by peace. Spirit-filled people desire peace and have a peaceful spirit. Otherwise, with the sinful nature that we have, selfish ambition and politicking will take over. There will be envy and strife, schisms and divisions. Christians ought to be a peaceful people for we are designed to live in peace with one another for the sake of the Lord and His testimony. By so doing, we become good witnesses of His truth and grace, and are a blessing not only to ourselves but to others as well.

In the kingdom of God, this “*bond of peace*” is founded upon the love of Christ. In verse 2, we are told to conduct ourselves with the loving spirit of humility, gentleness, longsuffering and forbearance. In the world today, there is a whole lot of hatred, a whole lot of fighting, a whole lot of killing. How about in the church? Is it the same? If it is, then what kind of testimony or witness do we have in this world? We have nothing to offer to the world, no testimony and no witness if we are like the world and no different from it. Who will want to be a Christian if the ugliness of the world is also seen in the church? The world is full of unrest but the church should be a haven of peace.

We must possess the divine virtue of love if we want to enjoy peace. What is love? We do well to study carefully 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and practise it: “*Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*” Pride is opposed to love. Pride is divisive and destructive. There is a serious need for us to deal with one another with all lowliness, gentleness and longsuffering. Longsuffering speaks of patience, especially patience with people. It is to be super-patient, for God Himself “*is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pet 3:9). It behoves us to do our best to bear people up and not tear people down. We are called upon to help people in their spiritual pilgrimage—to help them draw closer to God and His kingdom, and we are called to do so lovingly, for without love, we are nothing—useless and worthless to God and to others (1 Cor 13:2).

The spiritual unity that is glued by peace is so precious and very powerful. Psalm 133:1 says, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for*

brethren to dwell together in unity!" If we truly desire unity, we must really work hard for it. That is why in verse 3 Paul used the word "endeavour" to speak of how unity ought to be pursued. This word is a very strong word for work or effort. It means to work very hard, to leave no stone unturned, to spare no effort, to do all we can to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This word is also used in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Students should know what it means to "study". Study requires a whole lot of hard work, sweat and tears. Our graduates here can testify to this. It has been a hard and long journey for them, but a worthwhile journey. Similarly, we must work very hard for this unity that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we are told to "*keep the unity*". This unity has been given to us by God, and it is our responsibility to work hard to keep and maintain it. The word "keep" here is a military term used of soldiers guarding the camp. It is a word of protection and preservation. We are to be on high alert all the time to prevent intruders or enemies from invading and attacking this unity that we have. Unity is very fragile and can easily be lost or broken. That is why we are told to work extremely hard to protect and preserve it from being lost or broken.

In Truth

The question now is how do we do this? Paul tells us how as well; not at the expense of truth but on the basis of truth. The unity that we seek is not the sort that is found in the world. It is not the false ecumenical unity that is so pervasive today that belittles the truth. Paul would have us know that unity is founded upon the truth and this truth is found in the Triune God. For this reason, Paul invoked the name of the Triune God over here. God the Holy Spirit is found in verses 3 and 4, God the Son in verses 5 and 13, and in verse 6, we see God the Father. The Holy Trinity is our perfect model, the supreme paragon of unity—One God in three persons, three persons and yet one God. The three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are one, equal in essence, in glory and in power. God the Father is God, God the Son is the very same God, and so is the Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one and the same living and true God (1 John 5:7). There is perfect unity and harmony in the Godhead. All three are equally powerful, and yet there is perfect agreement and cooperation.

God the Father sends the Son, “Go, save this world” (John 3:16). The Son in perfect, loving submission says, “Father, since you tell me to do this, I’ll do it willingly and gladly” (John 17:1–4). There is perfect unity and harmony because they are of one mind and heart. Later, the Father and the Son would send the Spirit to continue the salvific work on earth. The Spirit is likewise submissive to the Father and the Son, “Yes, I go” (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit agrees with the Son, and the Spirit and the Son agree with the Father—there is no disunity or disagreement in the Godhead at all. The Father is glorified in the Son and the Son is glorified by the Spirit, and all three are glorified in one and as one. There is no jealousy, no envying, striving, quarrelling among the three persons of the Trinity. It is something so beautiful and wonderful to behold.

Now, where do we go to find such unity and harmony in the church? How can Christians today, still sinful and imperfect, have such godly unity and harmony? Is it even possible? The answer is yes. We are called to unity. When we are of one spiritual mind and heart, having one holy purpose in the work of the Lord, the unity will come naturally. Unity comes by way of the truth—the truth of the Trinity and the truth of the Scriptures. Although we are still sinful and imperfect, we can have the kind of unity the Holy Trinity has when we are fully submissive to the Holy Spirit and obedient to the Holy Scriptures, for therein we find the mind and the heart of God. When we are full of the Spirit and of the Scriptures, we will have a common purpose which is the divine purpose—we are of one mind and heart and purpose with the Triune God Himself.

God gave to His people His Word so as to unite them to Himself and to one another so that they might serve Him together as a united people. That is why in John 17:11, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, “*that they may be one, as we are*”. How may they be one? Jesus prayed in John 17:17, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” When we are sanctified by His truth, we will have one mind, one heart, one purpose as God the Father and God the Son has. That is why the truth is so important. That is why at the Far Eastern Bible College we take the Dean Burgon Oath, that the Bible “is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the

direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme." The Board and faculty are of one mind and spirit with regard to the nature and quality of the Scriptures so that we might teach with a unified and uniformed voice, so that there will be clarity and not confusion when the Scriptures are taught. We must endeavour to protect and preserve this unity we have by His truth—the truth of the Holy Trinity and the truth of the Holy Scriptures which are our sole, supreme and final authority of doctrine and practice, which are absolutely and always infallible and inerrant.

And Grace

But there is one more thing we need, and that is grace. It is not just truth that is important but also grace. We read of grace in verse 7, "*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*" When God calls us to unity, He does not leave us without equipment. The Lord grants us the necessary grace to do His will. He gives us grace "*according to the measure of the gift of Christ*". Grace is God's gift and gifting. Grace is not just the free gift of salvation but also the grace-gifts of the Spirit that fit us for service. In verses 11-13 we read, "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*" For the sake of the unity in the body of Christ, the spiritual gifts are given. It is interesting that the gifts listed are the teaching gifts. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are all preachers of God's Word. They all have to do with the ministry of the Word. This underscores the importance of truth for unity. Truth with grace promotes unity.

Besides the gifts of the Spirit, there is also the need for these three graces, namely faith, hope, and love. Faith is mentioned in verse 5, hope in verse 4, and love in verse 2. We need truth, for without truth there is no life. But we need one more thing and that is grace. Without grace, there will be no joy and peace. Having truth alone without faith,

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hope and love is a miserable thing. The triple graces give us impetus to live for the truth. Faith in God and His Word gives the reason to live. This has been spoken at length earlier. How about hope? Hope causes us to look to the future, to our resurrection, the return of our Lord, and our heavenly home. With hope, the things of this world are no longer attractive. We are not here for power or position, property or possessions which the people of this world look for. The things of this world are temporal and temporary, and will pass away, but the things of God and His kingdom are eternal and they will last forever. When our thoughts are governed by hope, we get rid of selfish ambition and selfishness. We become selfless and sacrificial for the sake of the Lord and His work. What is valuable is not what I have now but I will have when Jesus returns. And so we serve with eternity's values in view. God's work is not about getting gain and fame but suffering pain and shame that comes with the good name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And then there is love. This we find not only in verse 2 but also in verses 15 and 16, *"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity"* (1 Cor 13:13). I learned in recent days this biblical formula: Truth + Charity = Unity. You can write a whole thesis on this. Scripture is full of this doctrine or principle. May the Lord help us to know experientially what unity in truth and grace means. I pray in these last days we may have a united body of Christ for the sake of His glory and His gospel. Amen.

The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is Pastor of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and Principal of Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). The above was delivered on the occasion of FEBC's 49th Graduation Service, 5 May 2024.

THE BEST LOVE SONG OF ALL: A COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON (III)

Jeffrey Khoo

5:2-6 *“I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.”*

Her beloved wants to make love to her, but she is not interested. She gives the excuse that she has already taken a shower, changed into her pyjamas and is already tucked in nicely, ready to sleep. *“I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?”* In other words, “It would be too troublesome for me to get up and open the door for you.” But he does not give up. He touches and caresses her to arouse her. When she finally finds herself moved with compassion (“*bowels*”, ie the innermost emotions) for him and starts to open up, he is gone. She was slow to respond. Frustrated, he left the house. She looked and called for him everywhere, but he was nowhere to be found.

Remember your wedding vow, “with my body I thee honour”. That was why the Apostle Paul said, *“to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time,*

that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” (1 Cor 7:2–5).

5:7 *“The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.”*

The watchmen or security guards found her outside the house and beat her up. Since she was veiled, they could not recognise her. They thought she was an intruder. The things that happened here could be just a vivid description of how she felt—she is “beating herself up” for refusing him.

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Ezek 3:17). The pastors of the church are watchmen sent by God. They preach God’s Word. They preach the Word to chastise, *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).* *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16–17).* The pastor’s main duty is to *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2).*

If you have such a pastor in your church, pray for him and submit to his God-given leadership. *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:7–17).*

5:8–9 *“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love. What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”*

She confides in her friends that she is lovesick, and wants them to convey to her husband how she feels if they were to see him. He must have kept himself away from her for a while (cf 1 Cor 7:5). Her friends

tell her, “What is so great about him? Go find another man! You are so attractive; surely you will have no problem finding a better man than him.” This advice is not good at all.

Believers who are truly born again and indwelt by the Spirit will surely repent and return to their Lord and Saviour. They know that when the Lord chastises them, it is because He loves them (Deut 8:5; Heb 12:6-14). Having been chastised, they will want to be chaste for Him for they love Him and desire to keep His commandments (cf 2 Cor 2:1-11; 7:8-16). Jesus said, *“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”* (John 14:23).

There are naysayers who will tell Christians not to return to the Lord, but to go after other gods. This is the seductive doctrine of Balaam and of Jezebel to *“seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”* (Rev 2:14, 20). But those who truly love the Lord will never deny Him but always confess Him, follow Him, and yearn for Him (see Ps 42).

5:10-16 *“My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”*

She responds by saying that her husband is incomparable—to her he is the best—*“he is altogether lovely”*. Her desire is only for him who is her “beloved [husband]”, her “[best] friend”. She praises the physical features of his body and it is his body that she wants to enjoy, no one else’s (cf 1 Cor 7:2-4). The description of the physical could very well be a description of the spiritual also. She sees in him all the qualities of a good and godly man.

The Church exalts Christ in the most glorious of terms for He is incomparable—*“the chiefest among ten thousand”*. He is absolutely

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perfect and entirely lovely. *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (Col 1:16–18). *“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:9–11).

6:1-3 *“Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee. My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.”*

Her friends repent of what they had said in chapter 5:9. She has convinced them that her husband is a good man and genuinely loves her. They agree to help her look for him.

She now knows where he is—in his gardens (cf Eccl 2:5). He has gone there to find comfort in beautiful surroundings and also to tend to his plants and flowers. There is no doubt that he is true to her and she is true to him. *“He feedeth among the lilies”*— the husband must continue to cultivate his relationship with his wife even after marriage to make it more beautiful (cf 2:16).

The Lord desires for His people to seek Him, and when they do so sincerely, they will find Him, *“Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD”* (Jer 29:12–14).

6:4-7 *“Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.”*

He heaps praises on her as before, that she is beautiful and attractive. He likens her beauty to Tirzah (which means “pleasing” or “delightful”)—a royal city in Canaan (Josh 12:24) that was famous for its natural beauty and its delightful gardens, and her attractiveness to Jerusalem—the capital city of Israel, a city of holiness and peace (Ps 48:1-2).

The two cities highlight the wonderful union of body and soul between husband and wife. Physical attractiveness alone does not hold a marriage together; there must be a deep appreciation for the spiritual. The husband must constantly encourage and enhance the spiritual qualities that are found in his wife, and vice versa, because that is what will bind and build a marriage. He again rehearses his praise of her on their wedding night (4:1-5). His desire for her has not waned one bit.

Christ reassures His Church of His love for her. Although she backslid, and He hid Himself from her for a while, His love for her is unfailing and unchanging (cf Rom 8:35-39). She is beautiful to Him, though frightening to others. She makes herself attractive only to her Saviour, and not to the world. *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19).

6:8-10 *“There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”*

Is Solomon referring to his harem here (cf 1 Kgs 11:3)? No, not at all since the sincerity and purity of his love for his wife and no one else is clearly seen throughout his Song. This Song of Solomon must have been written early in Solomon’s reign when he was spiritually close to God and wise in his ways. He has no harem at this point.

Here, it is probably a description of what is common in other royal courts where foreign kings often collect wives and concubines. Although other kings have other women and many virgins out there to choose from, Solomon says he has but one and only one—*“My dove, my undefiled is but one.”* None of the other women can compare to her. The

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women out there praise Solomon's wife for her beauty which exudes the invigorating freshness of the morning, the romantic dreaminess of the night, and the excellent brightness of the day. She is "*terrible as an army with banners*" (cf 6:4). Although a woman, she strikes fear in the hearts of her husband's enemies. She has shown herself strong and fortifying, quick and able to defend her husband when he is attacked. She guards his reputation zealously (cf 1:3, Prov 22:1).

The true Church comprising all the elect is incomparable. Christ has only one Bride, and none can usurp her position as His Wife. There may be many who vie for His attention, but He has only eyes for her.

6:11-13 "*I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib. Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.*"

He went down into his garden and found her there. She is still in love with him as much as he is in love with her (cf 6:2). His heart is so elated to find her. He felt like "*the chariots of Amminadib*" which were known for their speed. Amminadib may be translated "my willing people". When Solomon calls, his loyal servants rush to his aid. When she calls, his heart is sent racing for he desires to be with her immediately.

He together with her friends now enjoins her to return to him (cf 6:1). This is the first time her name is mentioned—*Shulammith*. Who was the Shulammite? It is possible she was Abishag—the Shunammite (cf 1 Kgs 1:3-4, 15). A Shulammite could be a person from Shunem (cf Josh 19:18, 1 Sam 28:4) which is located in Lower Galilee. According to Eusebius, Shunem is "five miles south of Mount Tabor, and then known as Sulem. This agrees with the position of the present *Solam*, a village three miles north of Jezreel and five from Gilboa." (Smith's Bible Dictionary). According to Adam Clarke, the two armies "may refer to the choirs of the bride's virgins, and the bridegroom's companions".

When Christ comes quickly to see His Church, He finds her to be lively and fruitful, full of the Spirit's graces and gifts. She who had backslidden is now returned to good spiritual health and strength.

“Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God” (Jer 3:22).

7:1 *“How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince’s daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.”*

The husband continues to admire the body of his wife. He commends her for her beautiful feet and thighs which are well sculptured by a skilful craftsman (cf Gen 2:22, the word “made” [banah] means “build”, it gives the idea of careful construction). God shaped the woman wonderfully to fit him physically and psychologically.

The Church has beautiful feet because she preaches the gospel. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isa 52:7, Rom 10:15).*

7:2-9 *“Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus. Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.”*

The effusion of praise for his wife’s physical beauty goes on and on (cf 1:8-15; 4:1-5; 6:4-7). This is the first time he mentions her feet, thighs, navel, belly, nose, head, height, mouth—they are altogether lovely and delightful to him. He exclaims, *“How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!”* (v6). Heshbon was a Moabite city near Amman and was famous for its recreational reservoirs. Nothing is known about Bathrabbim; some think it was the gate of Heshbon. The tower of Lebanon could refer to one of the snow-covered Lebanese

mountains. Damascus was and still is the capital city of Syria and located near the Lebanese mountains. Carmel is a hilly and scenic area in Northern Israel (cf Isa 35:2).

The Bride of Christ will truly be beautiful forever for her Husband, *“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Rev 21:2). What a glorious sight!

7:10 *“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.”*

The wife is so glad that her husband desires only her. She gives herself totally to him (cf 2:16; 6:3). A happy and healthy marriage is such—the couple will grow more and more in affection and appreciation for each other.

How Christ longs for His Church to be with Him for eternity. Nothing can separate us from His love for us. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 8:35–39).

7:11–13 *“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.”*

The wife, so touched by her husband’s love for her, initiates lovemaking directly. She desires for a staycation out of town. She wants to do this early without delay, to go away to a scenic and serene place and *“there will I give thee my loves.”*

Mandrakes (*dudha’im*, v13, cf Gen 30:14) are known as “love apples” (relating *dudha’im* with *dodhim*, “love”). It is a plant found all over Israel, and is abundant particularly in the spring. The flower of the plant is dark purple in colour and its fruit has an addictive smell and

taste. "The plant was well known as an aphrodisiac by the ancients" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

When the millennial kingdom of Christ comes, it shall be a time of plentiful planting and hearty harvesting. The glory of the Lord shall be seen in the fertility and productivity of all the lands of the earth. "*For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations*" (Isa 61:11). "*Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good and our land shall yield her increase*" (Ps 85:11-12).

8:1 "*O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised.*"

In Jewish and in Eastern culture, public displays of physical affection are frowned upon. However, the show of affection among siblings is publicly acceptable. As such, the wife wishes her husband were her own brother so that she can show her affection for him publicly without any embarrassment.

The Church should desire very much to have an even closer communion with Christ. That Christ is not only a husband to His Church, but also a "*brother*" to its members is not strange for He is "*the firstborn among many brethren*" (Rom 8:29); "*For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee*" (Heb 2:11-12).

The Church delights in expressing her love for Christ publicly and openly. A public confession of faith is required for all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as a secret believer or a reluctant believer. Jesus said, "*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven*" (Matt 10:32-33). Jesus also said, "*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*" (Mark 8:38).

THE BEST LOVE SONG OF ALL (III)

8:2 *“I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother’s house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.”*

The young wife consults her mother and asks for advice on how to love her husband and win his affection. It is good to consult one’s mother who is godly. What is a godly mother like and what kind of advice should she give? Titus 2:3–5 tells us, *“The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”*

The young wife has a sincere desire to please her husband (cf 1 Cor 7:34). The physical affection shown to each other is no longer restrained now that they are married (cf 2:6). Her husband has physical desires only for her and no one else (cf 2:7). The lovemaking must now wait till they are alone together, out of public sight. Lovemaking between a man and his wife must always be done behind closed doors to preserve its dignity and sanctity.

The Church is likened to a *“mother”* (cf Gal 4:26) who nourishes her children with God’s Word and instructs them to love their Lord and Saviour.

8:3–4 *“His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.”*

A constant show of physical affection between husband and wife will strengthen the marital bond. The holding of each other’s hand and the occasional hug goes a long way to enhance a loving relationship.

“O daughters of Jerusalem”, God has always loved you. As Jesus Himself said, *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”* (Matt 23:37). Nevertheless, the Lord promised, *“As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem”* (Isa 66:13).

8:5 *“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.”*

The couple remember their wedding day and reaffirm their wedding vows (cf 3:6). No longer apart (ie, in the wilderness), they are now together (ie, in the garden).

The journey from courtship to marriage and even after the marriage has not been altogether smooth (eg *“the little foxes”*, 2:15; the quarrel, 5:2-7). However, they have overcome their trials and have emerged stronger in their relationship (cf Jas 1:2-4). He reminds her of how they first fell in love under the apple tree. (In ancient times, the apple tree was known as a “tree of love”.) He is thankful that her mother gave birth to her. They are to stick together in good times as well as in bad times, “for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health”.

This is a reminder of how Christ saved His Church, from the desert into His paradise (cf Isa 43:19-21). *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:9-10). The Church has been our nurturing mother to feed us with the milk and meat of God’s Word after we became Christians (cf 1 Pet 1:23; 2:2; 1 Cor 3:2).

8:6 *“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.”*

She wants him to imprint her permanently in his heart, to affirm he will always remain true to her. “A seal is an instrument of stone, metal or other hard substance (sometimes set in a ring), on which is engraved some device or figure, and is used for making an impression on some soft substance, as clay or wax, affixed to a document or other object, in token of authenticity.” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). The sealing is like putting one’s signature onto a document to indicate that a relationship has been covenanted or contracted (cf Jer 32:10, 44; Neh 9:38-10:1; Hag 2:23).

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In so far as a marriage contract is concerned, the husband is warned not to break it or deal treacherously with his wife (Mal 2:14). The marital bond is as strong as death for only death is strong enough to break it (Rom 7:2-3). The husband is the wife's exclusive possession and she is rightly jealous if he should look at another woman. Albert Barnes commented, "'Jealousy' is here another term for 'love,' expressing the inexorable force and ardor of this affection, which can neither yield nor share possession of its object, and is identified in the mind of the sacred writer with divine or true life."

All sincere believers would want to be sealed eternally with their Saviour in their hearts. They love Him with a holy zeal and want to be united to Him forever. Indeed, the Lord Himself ensures this eternal union through His Holy Spirit; *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory"* (Eph 1:13-14).

8:7 *"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."*

Love cannot be bought. It is a gift. It is so precious, it is priceless. Neither can the hardships of life smother it. As Adam Clarke put it, "Neither common nor uncommon adversities, even of the most ruinous nature, can destroy love when it is pure; and pure love is such that nothing can procure it. If it be not excited naturally, no money can purchase it, no property can procure it, no arts can persuade it. How vain is the thought of old rich men hoping to procure the affections of young women by loading them with presents and wealth! No woman can command her affections; they are not in her power. Where they do not rise spontaneously, they can never exist."

Likewise Matthew Poole, in the first person, commented, "It is the nature of love in general, and of my love to thee, that it cannot be taken off, neither by terrors and afflictions, which are commonly signified in Scripture by *waters* and *floods*...; not by temptations and allurements. Nothing but the presences and favour of the beloved person can quiet and satisfy it. And therefore do not put me off with other things, but

give me thyself, without whom, and in comparison of whom, I despise all other persons and things.”

The love of Christ for His Church is unconditional and free. It cannot be bought. It is given. *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8). *“We love him, because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19, cf 1 Cor 2:9).

8:8 *“We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?”*

The bride’s brothers say they have fulfilled their duty to keep their virgin sister pure and chaste unto the day of marriage. We are not only to be our brother’s but also our sister’s keeper. The Apostle Paul himself was zealous for this purpose, *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor 11:2).

8:9-10 *“If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.”*

The wall speaks of protection, and the door speaks of prevention. Her brothers have protected her from youthful temptations and prevented tempters from coming in to tempt her. Such a zeal for purity and chastity is taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, *“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.”*

She says she has kept herself pure and chaste and that is why her husband is so pleased with her.

8:11-12 *“Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand*

pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred."

Solomon leased part of his vineyard to others for a price. Baalhamon is a "place of a multitude, a place where Solomon had an extensive vineyard (8:11). It has been supposed to be identical with Baal-gad, and also with Hammon in the tribe of Asher (Jos 19:28). Others identify it with Belamon, in Central Palestine, near Dothaim." (Easton's Bible Dictionary).

Solomon might lease his vineyard for a profit, but Shulamith gives hers to him free of charge. Her vineyard is none other than her own body (cf 1:6).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the owner of His Vineyard—the Church (cf John 15:1-2). He wants His Church to be profitable in the work of the Gospel and of His kingdom. He commands all believers to be good stewards of the gifts and resources He has given to them so as to accomplish the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). This is clearly taught in the parable of the vineyard (Matt 21:33-43) and in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30).

8:13 *"Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it."*

Solomon tells her that they are indeed married, and no more in the desert but in the garden (cf 3:6), and their friends are happy for them.

Christ here speaks to His Church. To His Bride the Church He is joined forever. The Church will one day enjoy paradise (*pardes*—Persian word for garden, cf Rev 2:7). Not only does the Bridegroom hear her voice, His "*companions*" hear her voice as well. John Gill identified the "*companions*" to be the first and third persons of the Holy Trinity, viz God the Father (cf Matt 6:6; 7:7-11) and God the Holy Spirit (cf Rom 8:26-27; Jude 1:20-21).

The New Jerusalem is a garden city for in it is a river of life which provides unlimited life-giving water to its residents (Rev 22:1). The river reminds all the residents that the Lord Jesus is the Author or Source of eternal life. There is also the tree of life which is found on both sides of the river (Rev 22:2 cf Gen 2:9). The tree of life found in the Garden of Eden is now replanted in the New Jerusalem to be enjoyed forever by God's people. The tree will produce 12 kinds of fruits, one

every month. Not only can the fruit be eaten, the leaves also for health. True health and wealth comes when we finally get to heaven.

8:14 *“Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”*

Shulamith tells him to hurry up to be with her and enjoy the love that is waiting for him.

Thomas Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary rightly concludes, “The primary purpose of the book seems to be to present an example of the proper premarital, marital, and post-marital relationship of a man and a woman. This example includes illustrations of the solutions to common problems that couples face in these phases of their relationship. The book reveals several facts about sex. Sex is a proper part of marital love, but we should reserve it for marriage (2:7; 3:5), and we should practice it only with our marriage partner (6:3; 7:10; 8:12; cf. Gen. 2:24). In a day when the ‘sexual revolution’ has led multitudes of people away from God’s revelation concerning what is best in this area of our lives, we need to expound this book. It can be very helpful if we explain it tastefully in public and use it as a private guide for marriage preparation and enrichment.”

Although the Song of Solomon is a divinely inspired exposition on courtship and marriage and should be read literally, the biblical reader should not fail to see its spiritual or theological import which reflects the amazing and awesome love of Christ for His Church. Typology is a feature found in the Holy Scriptures. The Song as poetic literature functions as such a type.

As the Bride, the Church cannot wait for Christ her Groom to come for her. In fact, she urges Him to come quickly. Indeed He will, *“behold, I come quickly”* (Rev 22:12). *“And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching”* (Luke 12:36-37). Let us be ready for the great and grand wedding to come!

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A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGEMENT OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

Cornelius Koshy

In order to understand the eschatological teaching of Seventh-day Adventism (SDA) called “Investigative Judgement”, it is needful to outline the inception of SDA and the series of wrong predictions of Jesus’ Second Coming (and their insistence that they were right!) which gave rise to this eschatological confusion and unbiblical teaching.

History of SDA

During the 1830s to 1840s, a Baptist lay preacher named William Miller¹ gathered a large inter-denominational movement of Christians who were looking for the fulfilment of the “2300 days” in Daniel 8:14, “*And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed*” (Dan 8:14). Miller interpreted “days” as years (hence, 2300 years), “the sanctuary” as the earth, and its cleansing as purifying fires of the Second Coming of Jesus. Based on his calculations, thousands of believers awaited the return of Jesus on October 22, 1844. Instead, they were all disappointed as Jesus did not return at that date.²

The First Problem: Trying to Calculate the Time of Jesus’ Return

Jesus said, “*of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*” (Matt 24:36). It is not for man to calculate, nor predict when Jesus will return. His coming will be as sudden and as unpredictable as a thief in the night (2 Pet 3:10). However, Miller took it upon himself to predict the return of Christ and derived year 1843. He was convinced that the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 represented 2300 years from 457 BC, with the decree of Artaxerxes I to rebuild Jerusalem.³ A calculation in the eschatology of SDA is herewith presented: – 457 BC + 2300 years = AD1843.⁴

How embarrassing it was for Miller and his followers when Jesus did not return in 1843. When Jesus did not come in March of 1844 as he had projected, Miller issued an apology,

Were I to live my life over again, with the same evidence that I then had, to be honest with God and man I should have to do as I have done. Although opposers said it would not come, they produced no weighty arguments. ... their denial was based more on an unwillingness for the Lord to come than on any arguments leading to such a conclusion. I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment, yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near even at the door; and I exhort you, my brethren, to be watchful, and not let that day come upon you unawares.⁵

Miller's apology was not really an apology. He said that if he could, he would repeat what he did again—and he did just that! After some snarky remarks against his accusers by attacking their lack of hope for Jesus' Second Coming and establishing his own supposedly "better" hope, he accepted a revised chronology introduced by S S Snow. (Snow was a strange man who rode around the countryside in a long white robe, calling himself Elijah.) This particular chronology, held only by an obscure "Karaites Hebrew sect", showed that the 2300 years would end on October 22, 1844.⁶ When that did not come to pass as well, it caused a huge psychological shock which was called the "Great Disappointment". Many thousands of Adventists had stayed up all night waiting for Jesus to return, only to be disappointed.

The Second Problem: Using Scripture to Explain Away Error

The failure of this interpretation led the followers of Miller to split. Many returned to their traditional churches. However, there was a small group who were still convinced by what Miller had taught, and this group reacted by an intensive re-examination of Scripture. It is this "remnant" group that would go on to become the SDA Church and formulate the doctrine of the investigative judgement.

On October 23, the morning after the Great Disappointment, Hiram Edson (a zealous follower of Miller) and his friend O R L Crosier (or Crozier) prayed together. During their prayer, Edson claimed to have seen a vision of heaven opening and the High Priest coming out of the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary and entering the Holy of Holies. Thus, both of them "realised" Miller's error. They explained away Miller's error by suggesting that Miller was indeed right about the

timing but wrong about the geography. In Miller's prediction, he had assumed that "the sanctuary cleansing" of Daniel 8:14 was Jesus' return to earth. However, since the earthly return failed to take place, they reinterpreted the prophecy and relocated the cleansing to the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus entered the Holiest place to blot out the sins of believers (so they claimed).⁷

Crosier then found Edson a "proof text" in Hebrews 8:1-2.⁸ It reads, "*We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.*" They understood that "the sanctuary" could not refer to the earthly because it was pitched by the Lord and hence must be a heavenly sanctuary.

The Third Problem: Undermining the Atonement of Christ

SDA errs gravely by claiming that Christ began the "final atonement" for sinners when he entered the Holiest Place.⁹ This undermines Christ's finished work of atonement on the cross (John 19:30; Heb 9:28, 10:12). Compare Statements 9 and 24 of SDA's "28 Fundamental Beliefs". Statement 9 reads,

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin ... The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The bodily resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death.¹⁰

On the surface, there seems little to contest with such a statement. However, the phrase, "those who accept the atonement" is odd. It is odd precisely because SDA has a warped version of Christ's! And that is revealed in Statement 24, on "Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary",

In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to

heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep [SDA teaches soul-sleep] in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.¹¹

This statement contradicts SDA's statement 9! Is Christ's perfect life of obedience the only means of atonement, or does it include Christ's supposed work in 1844? SDA teaches that total atonement includes the second atonement event in 1844 when Jesus supposedly entered the Holiest Place to atone for man's sins.

Furthermore, are the "heavenly intelligences" the angels? The all-wise God needs no special intelligence services, and what have the angels to do with God's choosing of those to be saved? The doctrine of election is exclusively God's prerogative. Even if "heavenly intelligences" is understood as the wisdom of God, why does God need to investigate who are worthy to be part of the first resurrection. He already knows! *"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine ... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:14, 27).

Believers do not need to acquire extra knowledge that comes from an investigative judgement to know if they are already God's children. *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments"* (1 John 2:3). *"But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him"* (1 John 2:5). *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him"* (1 John 3:18-19). *"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us"* (1 John 3:24).

Finally, the idea that we are now in some sort of probation period is unbiblical (Heb 9:27) and sounds almost purgatorial. SDA teaches that presently, believers are in the period of investigative judgement and Christ continues to search the hearts to see who are true Christians. The completion of Christ's searching will close human probation.¹² Is Christ, being fully God, not omniscient? Does Christ need time to

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search out as if He does not already know? What happens if one is found to be not a true Christian, how does Christ inform that one during this probationary period?

Many within SDA would be at a loss to answer these questions, and many pastors would admit that they rarely, if ever, preach the doctrine.¹³ Yet, a significant portion of the denomination’s statement of beliefs is devoted to this rather convoluted and altogether confusing doctrine! The *Encyclopedia of Seventh-Day Adventists* presents a tabled breakdown of the SDA’s view of last day judgements:

EVENT / TIMING	Pre-Advent Judgment	Second Advent	Post-Advent Millennial Judgment	Post-Millennial (“Third”) Advent
LOCATION	Heaven	Earth	Heaven	Earth
NATURE	Investigative	Executive	Investigative	Executive
GROUP	Concerns Righteous	Rewards Righteous	Concerns Unrighteous	Rewards Unrighteous

The column in bold is the “Investigative Judgement” in question. It refers to the “activity of Christ ... until the second advent, [when] He will examine the hearts of all professing Christians to ascertain their sincerity.”¹⁴ The *Encyclopedia* explains the table and the investigative judgement as

an open, transparent investigation before full exoneration or execution takes place. For Adventists, the investigative judgment is a crucial part in portraying God as the just judge who reveals the divine evaluation of all the vast evidence of world history before angels and intelligent unfallen beings (Dan 7). Later during the millennium God allows the redeemed the same privilege (1 Cor 6:2, 3; Rev 20). God gives created beings time to evaluate all of fallen history in light of both his saving mercy and his moral law. The end result is that God is “proved right” when He judges, and his children gain new insight into His character and “ways.”¹⁵

Admittedly, it is not easy to understand the sense of “investigative”, but according to SDA’s framework, it has to be understood as the opposite of “executive”, which is a final, unchallengeable, authoritative decision. Hence, the period of investigative judgement is a kind of pre-test, or test-run, for Jesus to do some investigating work on the progress of believers’ repentance, so that finally, God will be seen as “fair” in His final judgement.

The Fourth Problem: Dismissing Context and Contradicting Other Passages

Investigative judgement is further explained by Ellen G White, who is touted as the “pillar of fire and driving wind of Adventism”.¹⁶ She says that

For all who have believed on Jesus ... beginning with those who first lived upon the earth. Jesus serves as an advocate for these professing believers. As their names come before him, their good and bad deeds, as chronicled in the “books” spoken of in Revelation 20:12, are “closely investigated.” During this time of judgment, “names are accepted, names are rejected.” Those rejected are ones who “have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven”. Those accepted are “all who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice ... and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God.”¹⁷

White’s explanation is highly problematic. Not only does she suggest that Christ’s atoning work on the cross was insufficient to forgive some sins, she also undermines the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Are “bad deeds” consequential to one’s salvation? For one’s good works do not save neither does one’s bad works automatically “unsave”. This line of reasoning diminishes the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

In addition, Revelation 20:12 says that “*the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*” This is clearly a judgement of unbelievers at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11), for they are cast into the lake of fire, and it is called the second death (Rev 20:14). To use Revelation 20:12 for believers is to conveniently ignore the context, and a classic example of eisegesis!

In January of 1845, three months after the Great Disappointment, White had her first vision, which commended Edson’s teachings to the followers of SDA. From that moment, her calling and vocation as a “Messenger” from God began. For the rest of her life, she and her husband, James White, worked to establish SDA. Often, she had visions concerning almost every doctrine in SDA. Critics accuse White’s “visions” and so-called “3 am visits” from angels, as delusional and merely “confirming” what the church leaders had already begun to accept.¹⁸

INVESTIGATION OF THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGEMENT

There is some ground to argue the lack of rationality in White's so-called visions. It must be stated that as a youth, she was the victim of a malicious assault involving a rock thrown at her face by a vicious schoolmate. Consequently, she suffered facial disfigurement and difficulty breathing through her nostrils for two years.¹⁹ In fact, this blow nearly killed her and left her brain badly damaged. Unable to continue her formal schooling, she stayed home as an invalid.²⁰ White's writings have today been well documented as not only rife with mistakes, but also that she plagiarised copious amounts wholesale, without acknowledgement from the original source.²¹ An SDA Elder, Walter Rea, who was a long proponent of White's so-called divine revelation, discovered through his scholarly study of 19th century religious books that White had incorporated into her writings enormous amounts of the writings of other divines. A special committee meeting was convened in 1980 to hear Rea and it was satirically called *The White Lie*.²² Unfortunately, after the meeting, the committee "spent a majority of its time discussing how to best present Rea's findings to the general Adventist population in ways least likely to destroy people's faith in Sister White."²³

One of the irreconcilable implications of White's confirmation of the doctrine of investigative judgement was that if the period of investigative judgement is indeed now, it follows that God had closed the door of salvation to sinners since 1844. In fact, White confirmed in one of her visions that the door had indeed been closed!²⁴ This goes against what we read in Matthew 24:14, "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*" What a contradiction to Jesus' prophecy!

Not every follower within SDA blindly followed the teachings of Ellen G White. A handful of Bible-reading SDAs saw the inconsistencies between Scripture's teachings and those of White. A significant dissident voice within SDA was Australian theologian Desmond Ford who was forced out of the SDA along with more than a hundred other teachers and pastors. In fact, Ford's ordination was annulled in 1983 after he denied that the year 1844 had any biblical backing and offered 80 "implicit" SDA teachings which are not supported by Scripture. These were written in his seminal piece—*Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgement*—a

760-page work which challenged the unscriptural Christological implications of SDA's eschatology.²⁵

Proper Understanding of Hebrews 8:1-2

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 8:1-2).

Hebrews 8:1-2 does indicate that there is a heavenly sanctuary, and that Christ functions as High Priest. But note that it also indicates that He is already *“set on the right hand of the throne.”* The word “set” is $\kappa\alpha\theta\iota\zeta\omega$ which means “cause to sit down”.²⁶ It is a posture of Christ's completion of duty, for the high priests of old had to stand to offer sacrifices, *“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; ... For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified”* (Heb 10:11-14). Christ cried out on the cross, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30), declaring the finished work and once-for-all atonement made on the cross. In fact, the veil separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies tore from top to bottom (Matt 27:51), indicating that Christ made possible a new way of access to the throne of God, making further sacrifice unnecessary. Hence, Christ is called, *“a new and living way, which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh”* (Heb 10:20). The SDA interpretation is a denial of Christ's completed work of atonement and other passages (even within Hebrews) that plainly teaches this doctrine (Heb 7:27; 9:28). Moreover, it involves a speculation of activities of Christ which find no support in Scripture. With the afore explanation of Revelation 20 and Hebrews 8, we conclude that there is no biblical basis for the SDA doctrine of investigative judgement.

Conclusion

On the surface, SDA seems to position itself as an evangelical Protestant denomination, leaning more towards orthodoxy than liberalism. However, a closer investigation of its eschatological doctrine of investigative judgement reveals serious errors in its belief and interpretation of Scriptures. Its doctrine of investigative

judgement has serious implications on its Christology and soteriology as well, for it gives the sense that Christ's atonement is still unfinished and continues to be achieved in heaven today in an intervening period of time called "Investigative Judgement". It appears also to promote a salvation by works. Anthony Hoekema's succinct and right evaluation is applicable: "[SDAs] have supplemented this pivotal doctrine of historic Christianity with their teaching on the investigative judgment ... [and it] detract[s] from the all-sufficiency of Christ."²⁷

Notes

¹ William Miller was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in 1782, the oldest of 16 children. As a youth, he was a sceptic who ridiculed the faith. However, in his mid-30s, he was converted after his avid study of Scripture. He began a verse-by-verse study of Scripture. Using only Cruden's Concordance as an aid and adopting only a literal interpretation of Scripture, he was convinced that key passages would reveal the point in history when Christ would return. See *Life of William Miller* in <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Books/LWM1875.pdf>.

² Adapted from Anthony MacPherson, "Investigative Judgment (Judgement)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-Day Adventists*, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=7FOL>.

³ Wallace D Slattery, *Are Seventh-Day Adventists False Prophets?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), 14.

⁴ John H Gerstner, *The Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 22.

⁵ Quoted by Gerstner, 8-9.

⁶ Slattery, 14.

⁷ Ruth A Tucker, *Another Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 97-98.

⁸ Gerstner, 15.

⁹ Slattery, 14.

¹⁰ "Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" accessed May 16, 2024, <https://adventist.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ADV-28Beliefs2020.pdf>.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Underlining added.

¹² Gerstner, 20-21.

¹³ Tucker, 110.

¹⁴ Gerstner, 22.

¹⁵ MacPherson, "Investigative Judgment (Judgement)."

¹⁶ Slattery, 15.

¹⁷ Quoted by Tucker, 110, from Ellen G White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), 483.

¹⁸ Slattery, 14.

¹⁹ Tucker, 99.

²⁰ Slattery, 15.

²¹ Tucker, 108.

²² Ibid.

²³ Slattery, 15.

²⁴ Tucker, 100.

²⁵ Available at <https://www.desford.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Dr-Desmond-Ford-Daniel.8.14.pdf>.

²⁶ F Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, eds, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), sv “καθίζω.”

²⁷ Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1963), 122.

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WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

Rachel Ann-Lee Leong

The second Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) initiated in 2016 and published in 2018, revealed that one in seven Singaporeans has had a mental disorder at some point in life.¹ Mental illness affects more people than we think. That is why the matter of mental health is getting more attention nowadays in Singapore. Terms like “depression”, “bipolar”, “schizophrenia”, “bulimia”, etc are not uncommon today. What used to be a stigmatised and taboo topic is now a common issue and frequently discussed by government bodies, companies and schools. For example, in 2007, Singapore rolled out its first National Mental Health Blueprint. Since then, Singapore has launched a national mental health and well-being strategy, signaling recognition by the authorities that mental health has become a significant health and social issue. Government policies have made it compulsory for more General Practitioners (GPs) to help identify those with common mental conditions. Besides that, by 2030, all polyclinics will offer services related to mental health.² The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) also came up with a mental health guidebook for educators in institutes of higher learning so that teachers understand their student’s mental well-being and know how to address mental health issues.³ The COVID-19 pandemic sparked an even greater interest in this issue of mental health and many came forward to share their experiences related to mental illness during the lockdowns.

What Is Mental Illness?

Mental illness is not easily defined. Robert Burton describes it as “great pain and horror of mind, distraction of soul, restlessness, full of continual fears, cares, torment, anxieties, they can neither drink, eat, nor sleep.”⁴ How does mental illness come about? There are three main

theories: (1) the supernatural, (2) the somatogenic, and (3) the psychogenic. Those who believe in the supernatural attribute abnormal behaviour to either demonic possession or divine punishment. These are regarded as beyond a person's control. The somatogenic theory sees mental illness as a result of disturbances in brain function due to disease or genetics and the psychogenic theory says that mental illness comes from a past traumatic experience.⁵

Unlike other diseases, mental illness shows neither definite organic causes nor anatomic changes. Even the most advanced medical tests will not consistently show a difference between the health of someone who is mentally unsound and one who is not. There is no definite medical test to verify the exact symptoms. But medical researchers cannot deny the presence and effect of mental illness. With careful research, they have come up with tighter guidelines for the classification of mental illness. It is often diagnosed based on observation of symptoms and behaviour rather than mechanically through biomarkers, brain scans, or blood tests. This makes it subjective because it depends on how much the patient is willing to share and how truthful the patient is. However, when the mind is disturbed in terms of the way a person feels and behaves, and certain criteria are met, medical professionals will classify the person as having mental illness. According to a list of mental disorders as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), there are at least 15 different disorders and at least 80 specific illnesses under the different categories.⁶

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”⁷ According to IMH Singapore, enjoying “good mental health” does not mean absence of mental distress at all in life because life is full of stressful challenges, be they in school, relationships or work. What is important is how one builds up resilience and cope with these challenges.⁸ The problem arises when one is unable to cope and pick oneself up for an extended period of time.

In light of the general definitions on mental health given above, it must be settled that feeling blue, depressed, sad, anxious or confused is not

the same as having mental illness. Owing to the sinfulness and wickedness of the world wherein we live, there will inevitably be disappointments and distresses in life. Ecclesiastes 3:3-5 makes this clear, *“A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.”* Our lives are not just always fun, laughter and enjoyment. There are down times too when we suffer physically, emotionally and mentally. Hence, there must be a proper examination and reflection on the individual’s part to differentiate what type of emotions are normal emotions when facing difficulties in life and what are abnormal. Events like a loss of a loved one or witnessing a traumatic event may cause some disturbance to the mind, but they are considered normal. By trusting in God’s grace and with time, a believer will start to get back on track and live normally again. But this differs from person to person. Others are not able to pick themselves up from the impact of the event and become mentally ill. Thus, emotions must never be the only factor of consideration when trying to determine mental illness.

There is a need to come down to the specifics to better identify and empathise with someone who has mental illness for there is a possibility of misidentification. David Murray says it well, *“A mental illness may end up being treated as a bigger issue than it really is, or being taken less seriously than it should be.”*⁹ The better we understand mental illness, the less likely we will misidentify someone as having one when actually he does not. Generally, mental illness is seen as either a mood disorder or a mind disorder. Mood disorders are considered affective disorders which primarily affect the mood or emotions, like anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder. According to an IMH research, mood disorder affected 6.3% of the adult population in Singapore at some point in their life.¹⁰ Mind disorders are those that primarily confuses the thought processes, like schizophrenia and psychosis. The four most common mental illnesses in Singapore today that received services from the hospitals are anxiety, depression, bipolar and schizophrenia.¹¹

Anxiety

There are many illnesses related to anxiety, but to properly diagnose a person with anxiety disorder, the symptoms must

significantly affect his personal life, family, social, education and work. Symptoms include excessive worrying about several aspects of everyday life, general anxiety, muscle tension, restlessness, overactive physical symptoms like nausea and rapid heartbeat, nervousness, difficulty concentrating, being irritable and disruptions in sleeping. Symptoms must persist for at least several months, for the majority of days. They should not be better accounted for by another mental disorder, and should not be the result of another medical condition or the use of substances or medication.¹²

However, even within the anxiety disorder, there are many branches. For examples, generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, phobia, etc.

Depression

Possibly one of the most commonly talked about mental illnesses in Singapore is depression. It is a medical condition that can be caused by social, biological, psychological and environmental factors.¹³ There is a spectrum of depression types, from the major depressive disorder to psychotic depression. Symptoms include a loss of interest in daily activities and hobbies, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, depressed moods, concentration problems, restlessness, guilt, tiredness and suicidal thoughts.¹⁴ These symptoms have to go on for at least two weeks and have to be affecting the person's daily functioning for him or her to be diagnosed as having depression.¹⁵ Feeling depressed is not the same as depression as a mental illness. The intensity and duration factor must both be met.

A depressive episode can be categorised as mild, moderate, or severe depending on the number and severity of symptoms, as well as the impact on the individual's functioning. The different patterns of depressive episodes includes: (1) Single episode depressive disorder, meaning the person's first and only episode; (2) Recurrent depressive disorder, meaning the person has a history of at least two depressive episodes; and (3) Bipolar disorder, meaning that depressive episodes alternate with periods of manic symptoms, which include euphoria or irritability, increased activity or energy, and other symptoms such as increased talkativeness, racing thoughts, increased self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, distractibility, and impulsive reckless behaviour.¹⁶

Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder experience intense mood change, whereby they go through alternating depressive episodes with periods of manic symptoms. During a depressive episode, the person experiences depressed mood, a loss of pleasure or interest in activities, for most of the day. These depressive episodes can last for weeks, months or even years. Manic symptoms may include euphoria or irritability, increased activity or energy, and other symptoms such as increased talkativeness, racing thoughts, increased self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, distractibility, and impulsive reckless behaviour.¹⁷ They are at an increased risk of suicide. There are three types of bipolar disorder. Bipolar I is characterised by manic episodes lasting for at least 7 days, with depressive episodes lasting at least two weeks. Bipolar II is similar to bipolar I; however, the manic episodes are less severe and are classified as hypomanic, while depressive episodes last at least two weeks. Cyclothymic disorder (mood swings) involves hypomanic and depressive episodes but is less severe than the other two types of bipolar disorder.¹⁸

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that involves significant problems in perceiving reality, difficulty with memory and attention, and changes in behaviour and movement. Symptoms include persistent delusions, hallucinations, disorganised thoughts and behaviour that may result in incoherent speech, experiences of control or passivity, negative symptoms, changes in movement. To diagnose schizophrenia, one must have at least two of the symptoms for a month.¹⁹ People with this disorder may think that others are out to get them or kill them. Some may claim to hear voices from God and think that they are set on a special divine mission. Their highly imaginative or confusing thoughts often result in spoiled relationships with others. They do not want to be around people, even those who were once close to them. They also do not want to attend church. Although there are similarities, schizophrenia must not be confused with split personality or multiple personality or dissociative identity disorder. Schizophrenia causes disturbances in thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and beliefs, but does not produce different identities.

Both bipolar disorder and schizophrenia have symptoms that overlap as they cause significant emotional disruptions. For example, both experience hallucination, delusions and severe mood changes. But they differ in that those with schizophrenia experience functional impairment like social withdrawal but those with bipolar disorder during their maniac episodes experience heightened levels of energy. Schizophrenia can also cause more persistent psychosis symptoms.²⁰

Observations

When assessing a person, there must be certain non-negotiable factors that will distinguish normal negative emotions from mental illnesses. According to clinical definitions, both the duration factor and the impact factor must be met for someone to be considered as suffering from mental illness. Traumatic experiences in life or grieving over the loss of loved ones are trying circumstances, but these circumstances alone do not mean that a person is suffering from mental illness just because he or she is not feeling good. For mental illness to be diagnosed, doctors need to conduct further investigations to ascertain exact symptoms. As noted from the above symptoms, most of the symptoms are not just invisible mental symptoms, but there are also physical symptoms. The physical body is tortured, damaged and broken. Insomnia, body aches, headaches, stomachaches are very common effects in times of fear, anxiety and depression.

However, there are limitations in the secular world as their definitions keep changing. There is much debate and uncertainty over what kinds of physical illnesses should be classified as mental illnesses. For example, the world does not have a clear stand as to whether certain conditions like dementia²¹ or Alzheimer's²² are mental illnesses or not. Most of these cases would be treated in the psychiatric ward since the World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified such as mental or behavioural disorders. This is because people with dementia tend to face psychiatric disturbances along with cognitive and functional symptoms.²³ WHO is now seeking to reclassify them under diseases of the nervous system.²⁴ Up till today, there is no conclusion.

What has been listed above are just four of the most common mental illnesses in Singapore. There are many more types and categories. While it may be helpful to attach a mental illness diagnosis

to a person suffering from it, these labels are not infallible. Human doctors may misdiagnose due to their limitations. Should we then ignore the medical viewpoint of mental illnesses? As David Murray says, "We do not want to err in downplaying the reality of illness of any kind, but neither do we want to err in believing that an illness has the power to overshadow the unique combination of God-given talents, gifts, experiences, and personality that make up a human being created in the image of God."²⁵ As such, where the clinical definitions do not contradict Scripture, we can accept them and learn to use these definitions to our advantage. But where the Bible speaks definitively about issues which contradict what the world says, we must definitely take the stand of the Bible. For example, the world considers substance addiction a mental illness because it affects a person's brain and behaviour, leading to their inability to control their use of substances. But the Bible calls it sin. Alcoholism for instance is a sin (Gal 5:21). The Bible teaches that Christians can overcome such sins and sinful addictions when they understand and are convicted by the Holy Scriptures, when they see such addictions as ungodly and believe in the power of the Spirit to help them overcome their addictions.

Although this term "mental illness" was coined only in the last century,²⁶ the Bible speaks a lot about the brokenhearted and the condition of the mind and soul. We shall now consider what the Bible says about mental illness through a word study.

What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible is not insufficient and incapable of solving 21st century problems as it is a practical Book written by an omniscient and infinitely wise God. The all-sufficiency of Scripture is seen in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*" The Westminster Confession of Faith states in chapter 1.6,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the

Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

Thus, those who search the Scripture will find all things necessary for faith and life, including issues about mental illness. It is high time that the church addresses this issue on mental illness without fear and the stigma attached to it. Church leaders must approach and confront this issue according to the biblical approach and not use worldly philosophies. There is hope for all believers for *“we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed”* (2 Cor 4:8–9).

Although there are those who say that the Bible does not speak about mental illness per se, there are actually various words like “mad” or “madness” in the Bible to describe someone who is mentally unsound. There are a total of six Hebrew words and three Greek words used in the Bible to portray madness.²⁷ A word study would be useful to see under what circumstances such words were used and what sort of people could fall under this category. These words are sometimes used interchangeably though there are slightly different emphases in their varying contexts. Their differences are more connotative than denotative.

Hebrew Words

(1) **שָׂגָא** (*šāgaʿ*) / **שִׁגְגָּ׳וֹן** (*šiggāʾôn*)

The Hebrew word **שָׂגָא** (*šāgaʿ*) is translated as “mad” in the King James Version (KJV). This word is used seven times in the Old Testament (OT). Five times it appears as a Pual participle, once as a Hithpael participle and once as a Hithpael infinitive construct.²⁸ In each occurrence, it is used to refer to a man who is like a maniac who thinks irrationally and is not in a right state of mind. Rather than being ecstatic babbling, it is the content of their speech that is altered, degrading those men of their status.²⁹ For example, in 2 Kings 9:11a *“Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord: and one said unto him, Is all well? wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?”* This was when Elisha the prophet anointed Jehu as king, and the servants of Jehoram perceived

Elisha who did this to be like a mad person. In the time of their prophesying, prophets may seem to be like mad men because of their appearance, words or actions. In this case, Elisha as commanded by God poured oil on Jehu. Jehu came out of the room with oil all over his head and was probably looking terrified at the news he just heard. Thus, the people jumped to the wrong conclusion that this strange act of Elisha was the act of a deranged man.

A derivative of it is the Hebrew word שִׁגְגָּ'וֹן (*šiggā'ôn*) translated as “madness” in the KJV. It is used twice, in Deuteronomy 28:28 and Zechariah 12:4. In both cases, these are judgments and curses pronounced by the Lord if Israel disobeyed His commandments or on those who would attempt to destroy Israel. God does judge and chastise the Israelites to cause them to fail in their pursuits and their enemies would be astonished by their failure. This was to cause the Israelites to realise their folly and turn back to the Lord in repentance. Thus, this word is used to depict an irrational state of not having a right mind and being capable of erratic behaviour similar to panic.³⁰

(2) הָלַל (*hālāl*)

Another Hebrew word used to describe madness is the word הָלַל (*hālāl*). It is a common word which means to shine, to praise or to boast. However, in the intensive hithpoel stem, it means madness. It is used in 1 Samuel 21:13 when David pretended to be mad in front of King Achish. David changed his behaviour and acted like a mad man. He scabbled on the doors at the gate and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Achish believed that he was truly mad. Thus, he replied in 1 Samuel 21:14–15, “*Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence?*” All three times the Hebrew word שִׁגְגָּ'וֹן was used. From this we can draw that madness was seen as behaviour that is different from the usual and hence abnormal.

(3) תִּמְמָהוֹן (*timmāhôn*)

The third Hebrew word is תִּמְמָהוֹן (*timmāhôn*) which has the root meaning of astonishment or bewilderment with an element of fear.³¹ This word is used twice in the Bible. The first is in Deuteronomy 28:28, “*The LORD shall smite thee with madness [שִׁגְגָּ'וֹן (*šiggā'ôn*)], and blindness, and astonishment [תִּמְמָהוֹן (*timmāhôn*)] of heart.*” The other occurrence is

in Zechariah 12:4 “In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment [תִּמְמָהוֹן (*timmāhôn*)], and his rider with madness [שִׁיגָא’וֹן (*shiggā’ôn*)]: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.” For both occurrences, the word תִּמְמָהוֹן is used in the same sentence as the word שִׁיגָא’וֹן which is another word for madness. Those who pit themselves against God will not be able to accomplish what they intend to do because God will intervene and show that He is the almighty God that is to be feared and worshipped. This will cause the enemies to be astonished. Although translated as “astonishment” in the KJV, the idea behind this astonishment is confusion. It describes a person in a confused state and unable to respond normally to daily life or activities.³²

(4) הַמָּם (*hāmam*)

The Hebrew word הַמָּם (*hāmam*) means to bring unrest or to confuse.³³ This word is most often used in a war setting and the subject of the verb is the LORD. In Exodus 14:24, it describes the LORD’s supernatural hand in intervening through nature to trouble the Egyptians. The thunder and lightning frightened the horses to the point that the chariots were crashing into one another and there was chaos. In Joshua 10:10, it was the battle against the Gibeonites when the Lord discomfited them. In Judges 4:15, it was used to confuse Barak; in 1 Samuel 7:10, it was against the Philistines. These confusions brought about terror and panic in the hearts of the enemies. This confusion sent by God caused the people to be unable to think straight. Stolz sees it as an ecstasy called forth by God that paralyses any capability for action.³⁴ Those struck by it were rendered helpless.

A derivative of this word is the word מְהוּמָה (*məhūmah*) which is usually translated as tumult or destruction and has the meaning of confusion. The basic meaning of the root word הוּם (*hūm*) expresses a severe disturbance.³⁵

Greek Words

(1) μανία (*mania*) / μαινομαι (*mainomai*)

The Greek noun μανία (*mania*) means to think or reason in a completely irrational manner. This describes a person who is not in his right mind and is insane.³⁶ The root word is used thrice in Acts 26:24–25, “And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul,

thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." In both cases, it is translated "mad" and used in the negative, "drive one out of one's senses" (contrasted with ἀλήθεια and σωφροσύνη).³⁷ However, it sometimes is used as an idiomatic expression to describe a person with senseless thoughts.

(2) ἐξίστημι (*existēmi*)

The Greek word ἐξίστημι (*existēmi*) means to be removed out of a place or state. It is usually translated as change, displace or drive out. This word is used 17 times in the Bible and is translated as "amazed", "astonished", "bewitched", "beside (one's) self" and "wonder". In the New Testament (NT), this word is used metaphorically to express astonishment and amazement of the mind to the extent of being insane. The Cambridge Dictionary explains the idiom "beside oneself" to mean being filled with a particular emotion that is so strong that it almost makes one out of control.³⁸ When used in 2 Corinthians 5:13, "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause," a contrast is seen between being beside ourselves and being sober. ἐξίστημι and σωφρονέω are opposite description of the condition of one's mind. A sober mind behaves itself modestly and is in complete control, regardless of the circumstances.

(3) παραφρονία (*paraphronia*)

This noun παραφρονία (*paraphronia*) means foolishness or madness.³⁹ It is only used once in the whole Bible to describe Balaam in 2 Peter 2:15-16, "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." This was a narration of the account in Numbers 22 where God had to use a speaking donkey to knock Balaam to his senses for he was behaving irrationally as if insane. It is used here to denote how Balaam was engaged in acting contrary to reason with a headstrong disposition. Albert Barnes comments,

He was so under the influence of avarice and ambition that his sober sense was blinded, and he acted like a madman. He knew indeed what was right, and had professed a purpose to do what was right, but he did not allow that to control him; but, for the sake of gain, went against his own sober conviction, and against what he knew to be the will of God.⁴⁰

Summary

In summary, these words are the general words used in the OT and NT to describe a person who is not functioning or perceived to be not functioning as he should in terms of a normal mental state or response. These words are non-exhaustive and their meanings overlap. Through the Bible we see that the people in ancient times understood what madness or mental derangement is. They could see it as God's hand at work in striking a person with madness that come with symptoms like panic and paranoia. The descriptions correspond with what modern society knows as mental illness.

Now that we have some idea on how the Bible describes mental illness, how about mental wellness?

What Is Mental Wellness?

Besides the words in the Bible describing madness, the Bible has more to say about the state of mind of believers who have been regenerated by the gospel of Christ. First, it is important to note that the human mind is a wonderful creation of God. It not only controls our physical body, it also processes our thoughts to understand the very complex things and phenomena of this world. The word "mind" in the OT and NT is employed in a number of ways. In the OT, לֵב (lēbh) is made to stand for the various manifestations of our intellectual and emotional nature, and is translated as "heart" or "mind". This word is used in reference to the mental and spiritual life of a person which can be his entire inner life. Sometimes, נֶפֶשׁ (nepheš) which means soul, living being and desire are also rendered by "mind".⁴¹ It is sometimes used to speak about mental acts like in Esther 4:13 where Mordecai commanded Esther to "think not with thyself." In the NT, νοῦς (nous) which means the intellectual mind and disposition, and its derivative διάνοια (dianoia) which means understanding, can also be translated as "mind".⁴² Therefore, the Hebrew and Greek words for heart, mind and soul do overlap in meaning and can be used interchangeably as they refer to the inner being of a person. There can be no specific distinction made for each word. Where the Bible makes an implied distinction between them like in Matthew 22:37, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," it is to emphasise the fullness of a believer's devotion to God with all of his being.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

To describe a believer with sound mental health is to examine the inner being of the person. This person is one who has the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) and a heart that is after God's own (1 Sam 13:14). Below are characteristics of what their minds would be.

Good Mind

When one carefully reads the creation account of man, one sees the perfectness of all that God had created. In Genesis 1:26, 27, 31 we read, *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."* From these verses, one can see that man was made in the image of God. God also said that His creation of man was "very good". This means that every part of man—the body, the mind, the emotions were all in perfect working condition when God created him. But after the Fall, man became corrupt and sin now exists in the world. The ground was cursed and man would have to labour in sorrow, resulting in stresses to both body and soul. Despite this, man, by the common grace of God, still has the ability to function physically and psychologically though not optimally or perfectly. The mind since the Fall is corrupted by sin and not aligned to that which is good and godly, and falls prey easily to the devil and his wiles. Christians though justified by faith still have their sinful nature, and can fall into sin and be tempted by the devil. And that was why Paul and Peter reminded believers to *"be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph 6:10-11) and *"gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 1:13). Spiritual and mental sobriety in all aspects of life is required if one is to live victoriously and be ready for the coming of Christ.

Renewed Mind

Particularly for born again believers, there is a transformation and renewing of the mind. Romans 12:2 makes this clear, *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your*

mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Ephesians 4:23, 24, 30 speaks of how the mind is renovated by the Spirit of God, “*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. ... And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*” Once, the sinfully depraved mind was at enmity with God and cannot please God, but now, the spiritually regenerate mind is being continuously renewed to become more and more in line with the will of God (Rom 8:7-11). This renewal is not just an external transformation of nonconformity to the carnal lifestyle and activities, but an internal transformation of the mind and soul. The mind now minds the things of God and is sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Believers are able to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. As the hymn goes, “May the mind of Christ, my Saviour, live in me from day to day, By His love and pow’r controlling all I do and say.”

Believing Mind

With the renewal of the mind comes a mind that is fully trusting in God. The renewed mind is not a mind that is hostile to God, nor a mind that is blinded by the devil, but is a mind that is able to understand and appreciate God’s Word. This mind is able to comprehend spiritual things. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 tells us, “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” The unbelieving mind is dull to spiritual things and considers such things as absurd and distasteful. But the renewed mind is able to exercise faith and trust in its Creator and Saviour. Martha for example had such a renewed mind for she believed in the future resurrection and said, “*Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world*” (John 11:27). A believing mind takes God at His Word and is able to fully rest on the fulfilment of God’s Word. When a Christian has a mind of faith, he believes and lives in hope of things yet unseen (Heb 11:1). This does not mean that there

will never be times of doubt or fear, but the believing mind knows that the way to overcome it is by believing and trusting in God.

Sound Mind

In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul speaks of a sound mind that believers should have. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The word "sound mind" is the Greek word σωφρονισμός (*sōphronismos*), which is used only once in the NT. This word means an admonishing or calling to moderation and self-control.⁴³ Paul wrote this epistle to Timothy when he was in prison and he knew his death was near. Timothy, his spiritual son, would have to take on more duties and responsibilities to carry on pastoring the church and fulfilling the Great Commission. He had to "*stir up the gift of God*" which was within him, which is to rely on the Spirit to enable him to use his spiritual gifts effectively (2 Tim 1:6). The Spirit will help Timothy use his spiritual gifts with power, love and a sound mind. Timothy, by nature, is timid in his disposition which makes him less efficient as a minister. Therefore, for that position, he had to have force of character, love (which is not softness), and self-discipline, which is opposed to self-indulgence.⁴⁴ Sound mind is thus a stable mind that is disciplined and under the control of the Holy Spirit. Having a sound mind requires the wisdom and clarity that God imparts which would guide a believer in his thought processes and not be manipulated by fear.⁴⁵ This means that as believers, we realise God's calling of us to specific duties in life and are focused on fulfilling them only by His strength. The result is a faith-filled and fearless life despite the sufferings and challenges that may come.

Peaceful Mind

The mind of Christ is also one that is peaceful. There are many usages of the word "peace" in the Bible,⁴⁶ but the focus here is peace as an individual virtue or state, that is tranquility or serenity.⁴⁷ Despite the storms of life, the believer has the assurance that God is still on the throne. God promised in Isaiah 26:3, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" Peace is what every believer possesses. However, its manifestation is sometimes not apparent as the trials of life may result in one's seemingly loss of peace. But when the believer is fully trusting in God's higher plans, the

believer can stop being anxious and find peace in the knowledge that God is in control. It is thus the believer's duty to keep his mind stayed on God by thinking godly thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

Holy Mind

Finally, the minds of believers are made to be holy. The Greek word for "holy" is ἅγιος (*hágios*) which means to be set apart or be different. When used in the moral sense, it has the idea of a person who is upright and pure, different from the sinful world. This is God's expectation of His children because He is holy and we are to reflect His holiness (1 Pet 1:16). God wants us to give proper and decisive thought about the choices we make in life. However, while on this earth, the believer still struggles with sinful tendencies. Paul writes about it in Romans 7:21-25, *"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."*

Observations

While the Bible does not give any explicit definition for mental illness, there are words used in the OT and NT that describe its symptoms. On the other hand, the Bible does speak a lot on mental wellness, especially on what the minds of believers should be like. We have looked into what is mental illness from both the secular as well as the biblical. The secular provides the labels and terms for the various mental illnesses. We can say that the secular definition is descriptive, but the biblical is prescriptive. The biblical definition must be upheld and the secular must be subject to the biblical. God's Word is the supreme authority to define what a sound or unsound mind looks like and for all other issues encapsulating mental health. In our study and observations, this principle applies, *"Let God be true, but every man a liar"* (Rom 3:4).

Puritan Perspective

Although they lived in a time when medicine was not advanced, the Puritans did acknowledge that believers could fall into melancholy, which is similar to today's clinical depression. Richard Baxter for instance wrote a famous book, *The Cure for Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow, by Faith*. Melancholy was described as lethargy, loss of pleasure in things, a sense of hopelessness, and having suicidal thoughts.⁴⁸ Baxter then went on to give 13 specific symptoms of those who fall under this category:

The trouble and disquiet of the mind becomes a settled habit. They can see nothing but matter of fear and trouble. All that they hear or do feeds it ... In a word, fears, and troubles, and almost despair, are the constant temper of their minds. 2. If you convince them that they have some evidences of Christian sincerity, and that their fears are causeless, they may not disagree, and yet it does not take the trouble away, for the cause remains in their bodily disease. 3. Their misery is so much that they cannot but think of it. You may almost as well persuade a man not to shake in a fever, or not to feel when he is pained, as persuade them to cast away their self-troubling thoughts, or not to think all the enormous, confounding thoughts as they do, they cannot get them out of their heads night or day. 4. And when they are grown to this, they often seem to feel a voice within saying this or that to them, and they will not believe how much of it is a diseased imagination. 5. In this case they often think they have had revelations from God, often confusing Scripture or falsely applying it, and sometimes taking up errors in religion. 6. But the sadder, better sort, feeling this talk and stir within them, are sometimes apt to be confident that they are possessed by the devil. 7. Most of them are violently haunted with blasphemous suggestions of ideas about God or Scripture, at which they tremble, and yet cannot keep them out of their mind. 8. When it is far gone, they are tempted to lay some law upon themselves never to speak more, or not to eat, and some of them starved themselves to death. 9. And when it is far gone, they often think that they have apparitions or some spirit touched or hurt them. 10. They avoid company, and can do nothing but sit alone and muse. 11. They cast off all business, and will not be brought to any diligent labour in their callings. 12. And when it comes to extremity, they are weary of their lives, sometimes become strongly tempted to take their own lives, which, alas, too many have done. 13. And if they escape this, when it is ripe, they become quite distracted.⁴⁹

Richard Baxter viewed mental illness as a spiritual as well as a physical problem which must be identified and addressed by both

sides. Faith is a remedy, but in certain cases a medical solution may be needed. Baxter said,

If it were, as some of them fancy, a possession of the devil, it is possible that physic (medical treatment) might cast him out, for if you cure the melancholy, his (Satan's) bed is taken away, and the advantage is gone by which he worketh. Cure the choleric, and the choleric operations of the devil cease. It is by means and humours that he worketh.⁵⁰

Another Puritan, Timothy Rogers, also published a book entitled, *A Discourse Concerning Trouble of Mind and the Disease of Melancholy*. He wrote this book because he suffered from melancholy himself and wanted others to understand the power of God's Word for redemption and restoration.⁵¹ To him, depression is a sin problem that requires the intervention of the minister. But he did not despise counsel given by physicians.⁵²

There seems to be a mix of views among the Puritans. Some say that mental illness is only a spiritual problem, while others say that it is both spiritual and physical. Some relied on faith and repentance alone for a cure, while others sought medical assistance as well.

Role of Church

What then is the role of the church in ministering to professing believers who are mentally ill? Surely, the local or visible church is not spared from such problems. More and more church members have shared and discussed with their leaders or friends that they are facing mental illness, or that they know of someone who is suffering from it. Matthew Henry said, "Inward trouble is the sorest trouble, and that which, sometimes, the best of God's saints and servants have been severely exercised with. The spirit of man, of the greatest of men, will not always sustain his infirmity, but will droop and sink under it; who then can bear a wounded spirit?"⁵³

There are Christians who suffer from mental illness and they deal with it on their own. They do not seek help from the church because of certain assumptions on how mental illness is perceived. Some seek help from secular institutions as they feel they are getting more sympathy there and not judged as much. With rising awareness and cases of

mental illness, there is an urgent need today for the church to address it from a biblical perspective. As such, the church should do its part to teach and instruct its members so that they are not led astray by worldly philosophies and methods.

Notes

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“2084: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY”: A REVIEW

Winston Yoon-Chong Chew

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a rapidly developing field of science which has taken the world by storm. Much has been raised and discussed about its use and abuse, but much is still unknown, leading to a sense of fear as to what this is going to develop into. Science fiction has speculated much of the “out-of-control” scenarios in which machines take over the world and control human beings.

In his lecture on “2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity” which was the 2023 John Warwick Montgomery Lecture in Evidential Apologetics organised by the Lanier Theological Library (<https://www.youtube.com/@LanierTheologicalLibrary>), Prof John Lennox presented a general explanation on the development and functions of AI and the emergence of a worldly, humanistic aim of producing a superior human being called a transhuman or Homo Deus, and then contrasts it with Jesus Christ who is the true God-Man.

Lennox quoted from a number of authors ranging from novelists to philosophers to scientists to show the world view on the future of humanity. He shows how this leads to the not so obscure desire of leading thinkers of the modern world to perpetuate human life for eternity, albeit in a combination of organic and inorganic form, with the help of technology. He then dissects their opinions and uses God’s Word to counter their goals.

Summary

In the video, Lennox started by quoting two authors with prophetic views of the future of humanity. George Orwell’s fear in “1984” was that “what we hate will ruin us”, ie, the Big Brother oppression. On the other hand, Aldous Huxley, in “Brave New World”, feared that “what we love will ruin us”, ie, technologies that will undo

our capacities to think. Both these scenarios, it seems, are converging, and are happening simultaneously in the current world. High-definition video surveillance is being used to accomplish that purpose, as an example.

There are opposing views as to the capabilities of AI for independent volition. Mark Andreessen says that “AI is not alive, is math, codes, and is controlled by man”, and hence will not do what man does not want it to do. Geoffrey Hinton, on the other hand, warns that AI as a learning algorithm, “may escape control when it writes its own computer code to modify itself”.

As good as AI is at performing tasks with great intelligence, it is at best a simulation of intelligence, an imitation of human intelligence, and is artificial. A human being not only has intelligence, but has conscience and consciousness, which AI is not able to achieve. Chat GPT was asked whether it was an atheist, and the answer was in the affirmative. It was asked again whether it was Christian, the answer was again in the affirmative. This is both confusing and amusing at the same time, but could have great implications.

There are two broad categories of AI. The one we are familiar with is “Narrow AI”, in which the algorithm is programmed to do one specific task, such as to be able to detect a tumour in a chest x-ray with much higher accuracy than a trained radiologist, at a fraction of the time. Applications of Narrow AI include Digital Assistants, Online Shopping, Research, Job Interviews, Crime Prevention, Chat GPT, Deep Fakes, Autonomous Vehicles and Autonomous Weapons. In a sense, AI is like a sharp knife – it can be used for good or for bad. “The current AI – and the AI we can foresee in the reasonable future – does not, and will not, have a moral sense or moral understanding of what is right and what is wrong” (Yoshua Bendigo). However, ethics and regulations have lagged behind the development of AI and its applications.

What is more worrisome is the attempt at developing the second category of AI, the Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which is the building of a superintelligent AI system that equals or exceeds all human capabilities, either by enhancing existing humans by bioengineering, or by constructing a superintelligence. Such a concept and goal is proposed and propagated by authors such as Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who, in his book *Homo Deus*, proposed

the development of the Homo Deus (Man who is god, or god-man, also called “transhuman”), through a “serious bid for immortality” by using technology to solve the problem of death, and the “intensification for the pursuit of happiness” by re-engineering Homo Sapiens to “enjoy everlasting pleasure” and to “upgrade humans into gods” by “raising humanity above the beastly level of survival struggles” and “replace natural selection with intelligent design and extend life from the organic realm into the inorganic”. In short, it is to enable humans to be immortal, and live a happy and meaningful life by enhancing human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities. The problem with this is the degrading of humanity into “mere material for our manipulation, exploitation and transformation” (Leon Kass).

The possibility of AI getting out of control and taking over humans is not unfounded. One way to prevent that is to ensure the alignment of the goals of AI with ours. This requires regulation, which takes time. Stuart Russell laid down three principles for this alignment: (1) Restrict AI system’s goals only to maximising the realisation of human goals. (2) Keep AI uncertain about what those goals are so that it has to keep asking. (3) Insist that AI tries to understand the nature of those goals by constant observation of human behaviour. However, these are more difficult to enforce than it seems.

The development of AGI results in some scary projected scenarios by author Max Tegmark: (1) Protector God scenario, in which an omniscient and omnipotent AI maximises human happiness by intervening only in ways that preserve our feeling of control of our own destiny and hides well enough that many humans even doubt the AI’s existence. (2) AI takes over control, in which it decides that humans are a threat and nuisance, and are a waste of resources, and gets rid of them by a method they do not understand. (3) Omega Project, where the “whole planet is run by a single power (called Prometheus) amplified by an intelligence so vast that it could potentially enable life to flourish for billions of years ... throughout the cosmos.” One of the goals will be economic control - where, “with the excuse of fighting crime and terrorism and rescuing people suffering medical emergencies, everybody could be required to wear a ‘security bracelet’ that combined the functionality of an Apple watch with continuously

uploading of position, health status and conversations overheard. Unauthorised attempts to remove or disable it would cause it to inject a lethal toxin into the forearm ...”.

A spiritual development is the worship of AI, resulting in a new AI religion. The description of Prometheus brings to mind the rule of the Antichrist in Revelation 13, in which he has control over all humans who has the mark of the beast, and alludes to the possibility that the antichrist is a Homo Deus, who in 2 Thessalonians is described as one with spiritual lawlessness.

Lennox compares and contrasts the Homo Deus (as per Harari) with the Lord Jesus Christ: Harari wants to solve the problem of physical death, but Jesus has already overcome death through His resurrection. Harari wants to upgrade humanity to a superintelligence, a god. Christ has also done that by giving new birth that enables man to become the children of God (John 1:12), and the resurrection of the dead at the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–53). Proponents of the transhuman or Homo Deus want man to become god, by “bottom-up reductionist atheism”, through the impersonal workings of nature’s patterns”, by trusting technology. Using AI as a tool to help create a Homo Deus will not succeed—they ignore the fundamental flaw of human beings: sin. Instead, in “top-down Christian theism”, God became man, the true God-Man, so that all who trust in Him can become the children of God. And this God-Man is coming again to judge the world.

Critique and Comments

John Lennox is Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, and is an internationally renowned speaker on the interface of science, philosophy and religion. His intellectual presentation drawing upon the writings of various authors may appeal to those with inquisitive minds, strong mental faculties, and professionals in the fields of science and philosophy. He is well read, and quotes from a variety of sources ranging from novels to scientific writings, and most importantly from the scriptures. His arguments are clear, systematic and logical, and interesting, being highly persuasive and convincing in his opinions.

AI is something which is fast developing with many potential applications for the good of mankind. Lennox did well to explain the two types of AI, and the applications in the fields of science, medicine, criminology, economics, arts, and even warfare. AI will become or is becoming so ubiquitous that it is applied to every aspect of our lives. As he mentioned, AI is like a sharp knife, and can be used for good or evil. We already see the evil applications of AI in Deep fakes, and scams that blur the lines between truth and falsehood. Although mentioned in passing, Lennox did not elaborate on the developments in ethics and governance for AI, and brushes over it. This is important as a concerted effort for regulation and control of the development, use and application of AI is important.

Lennox seems to present the probability that the Antichrist is a transhuman, an AI enhanced human being with superintelligence and powers, or even Prometheus. He even suggested that the Omega Project description of a “security bracelet” could be the mark of the beast described in Revelation, for the absolute control of all human beings, with the threat of death on attempting to remove or disable the bracelet. While some aspects of the description may fit that in Revelation, many other aspects do not. The Antichrist in the scriptures is described as a real human being, not a cyborg, or an inorganic being such as Prometheus.

He also seems to imply that what is described in Revelation about the Antichrist and False Prophet and their actions are “symbols and metaphors”, alluding that behind the “symbols and metaphors” are the real things, as in “there is no smoke without fire”. This implies that he subscribes to, or is accepting of, an allegorical method of interpretation of the Bible, in particular, Revelation 13. We accept the literal form of interpretation, in which we accept at face value what is described.

Whilst it is very attractive to use current understanding of the world to fit into the Scriptures of what is described, we must be very careful not to straitjacket the Bible, and use our limited understanding to explain future events that we do not fully know. God can use any form of technology, even those that are not currently developed to fulfil His Scriptures, and we should not be dogmatic in implying any specific form or method used. Many have used the credit card to explain the number of the beast, the use of a chip to insert into the hand or

forehead as the mark of the beast, etc. Whilst these are plausible, we must not be too quick to identify them as the technology described in the Bible.

Rightly mentioned by Lennox was that as the importance of the image of God in human beings is being diminished in the pursuit of Homo Deus, the male and female distinction in His creation is also becoming fluid, ie male can be female, and vice-versa. This we can see in Romans 1 that when man rejects God as his creator, idolatry and homosexuality ensues.

Lennox did well to compare and contrast the world view on Homo Deus with the Lord Jesus and what He had done to save mankind. Explaining the Biblical perspective on the end times events is important, and the developments in the world in the fields of science and technology, whilst important, should not take too much emphasis. The presentation of the full gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important message. Whilst Lennox brought in the salvific work of Jesus Christ, more needs to be explained, especially if the audience comprises mainly non-Christians. In preaching and expounding the scriptures, we do not need the support of science to explain the veracity of the Word of God.

Thoughts and Impressions

Prometheus is the Greek god of wisdom and forethinking, and creation, and is used as a metaphor for “genetic engineering”. This is the icon of the transhuman which humanist scientists and philosophers are trying to create. This is a fearful thought - that man is trying to rebel against God, and build another Tower of Babel. They totally ignore the fundamental problem of sin in all human beings, as mentioned by Lennox, and seeks to overcome the consequences of sin by human effort. This is an absolutely futile endeavour.

In trying to overcome the problem of death on their own by bypassing the reality of sin, man is bound to fail: “Thou shalt surely die”. The need for the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Saviour, God becoming flesh, living a perfect life, dying the propitiatory and expiatory death on the cross, rising the third day in victory over death and the grave, is all the more stark in contrast to the futile efforts of man.

The development of AI, in particular AGI, the attempt to create a superintelligence, a transhuman or god-man, is indeed scary. No doubt some of these technologies will be used by the Antichrist to fulfil his purposes. However, we thank God that He is Sovereign, and is still on the throne controlling all the affairs of man. He is also Faithful, and all that He says will come to pass, to the jot and tittle. This gives the Christian great comfort and assurance, even as we face the last days, culminating in the reign of the Antichrist.

The future of humanity is in the hands of God, not in AI. What humanity needs is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation, to overcome the power and penalty of sin, and to be elevated to become the children of God, to be with God forever.

Dr Winston Chew is a Specialist Orthopedic and Hand Surgeon, and an Elder in Truth Bible-Presbyterian Church. The above review was an assignment submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the Life of Christ II course of Far Eastern Bible College, January–April 2024.

COLLEGE NEWS

The College started another semester in the new year with a Day of Prayer on 2 January 2024. The Principal opened the service by reading Isaiah 43:10–11, *“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.”* This was followed by the singing of the hymn “Our Great Saviour” and the opening prayer. The Lord’s messenger was FEBC alumnus James Tan who is a missionary to Kenya with his wife Shermaine (an FEBC alumna). Both are teaching at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) in Nairobi. Missionary James preached from Isaiah 6:1–8 on the glory and holiness of God. He enjoined all to be humble before God and our fellow brethren so that we might be useful for Him and be a blessing to others. He reminded all of Calvin’s three rules of theology which are (1) Humility, (2) Humility, and (3) Humility.

The lecturers/tutors (and courses) for the January to April 2024 semester were Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (Life of Christ II, Systematic Theology II), Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew (Old Testament History II, Homiletics), Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy (Romans), Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo (Bible Geography II, Cults IV), Rev Stephen Khoo (2 Samuel), Rev Tan Kian Sing (Ephesians), Rev Clement Chew (Hebrew Elementary II, Acts of the Apostles), Rev Dr Jose Lagapa (Acts of the Apostates), Rev Samuel Joseph (Westminster Standards I, Greek Exegesis II), Rev Zhu Jianwei (Westminster Standards II [Chinese]), Miss Carol Lee (Theological Research & Writing, Adult Christian Education), Pr Cornelius Koshy (Greek Elementary II), Pr Joshua Yong (Contemporary Theology IV, Greek Reading II), Mrs Cheng May Lynn (Beginner Pianoforte), Mrs Patricia Joseph (English Intensive II), and Mr Aw Beng Teck (English Intermediate II/English Advanced II [combined]).

Thirteen Basic Theology for Everyone courses were offered to the public on campus and online this semester—12 were livestreamed (Old Testament History II, Life of Christ II, Westminster Standards II, Contemporary Theology IV, Cults IV, 2 Samuel, Acts of the Apostles, Romans, Ephesians, Acts of the Apostates, Adult Christian Education,

Westminster Standards II [Chinese]), and one was video-screened (Systematic Theology II: Anthropology).

Total enrolment in the January to April 2024 semester was 534: 34 fulltime residential students and 500 part-time/online students from 15 countries: Australia, Cambodia, China, Congo, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, USA. There were four new students: Charlyn Mampo Julian (Philippines), Joshua Vilas Bansode (India), Khai Sian Thang (Myanmar), Suan Za Kim Laai (Myanmar).

Miss Janet Lim (DipTh 1994) stepped down as FEBC's office clerk after serving for three decades. Her last day of work was on 30 April 2024. We thank the Lord for her faithful service all these years. Here is her farewell testimony given at the end-of-term thanksgiving service on Friday, 26 April 2024:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

First of all I'd like to thank the Lord and Dr Khoo for this privilege to share my farewell testimony. I'd suppose you would know by now that I'm resigning from my service at FEBC. God has answered my prayer in that He has shown me the way. Somehow, His confirmation became clear. The last day of my work is April 30th, 2024.

Looking back on my memories, I recalled how I came to work at FEBC. It reminded me of the late principal, Rev Dr Timothy Tow, the founder of FEBC. As a student in my final semester of studies, Rev Tow asked me this question, "Would you like to work in the office?" With much prayer and consideration, by God's grace, I was finally directed to start my work in the college office. Thank God for His grace and providence in opening the door for me.

It has been a great honour to have the opportunity to work for FEBC, especially getting to know all of you. Amazingly, the Lord has guided me to persevere through thick and thin. Over the years, not only have I gone through the physical duties, I have also noticed how God uses all sorts of hardships and trials to increase my faith. These experiences have given me more opportunities to draw close to Him and to pursue and develop spiritual growth and maturity. I thank the Lord for His patience and His graciousness, for being there with me in good times and bad times.

Nevertheless, I reckoned them as blessings. By trusting and obeying the Lord, I could sail through various storms despite difficulties. God loves us, and as His children, we must prepare ourselves to face experiences of

struggles and failures so that we may grow stronger, not only in our faith but also in the fruit of the Spirit and be capable of overcoming what may come so as to prepare ourselves for good work. Romans 5:3–4 says, *“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.”*

God has also provided me with lots of delightful moments of happiness along with a sense of contentment and peace of mind. Though I can't be here with you for long, I will cherish the precious memories of the good times and the joy of our fellowship in FEBC, especially the wonderful and delicious meals you have been cooking. You will always be in my prayers. I will see you again, God willing.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to the Board of Directors, the principal Dr Jeffrey Khoo and Mrs Khoo, Mrs Ivy Tow, the treasurer, faculty and tutors, thank you for all your prayers and your supportive ministries and commitment to FEBC. The examples of your faithful ministries and efforts are very much appreciated. To all staff of FEBC, True Life, students and friends, thank you for the blessed fellowship and all your encouragements. I appreciate all your hard work too. *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58).

The Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC) course on the Harmony of the Gospels was conducted from 29 April to 4 May 2024. About a hundred students registered. The course sought to explain the unity and harmony (or “Harmony”) of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and defend it against the attacks of historical and textual critics who deny the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Scriptures that God has not only verbally and plenary inspired originally (VPI) but also verbally and plenary preserved throughout time (VPP).

FEBC's 49th Graduation Service was held on 5 May 2024 at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. A total of 13 graduands were awarded their well-earned certificates. Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS): Amor A San Juan, Victoria Cheow On Yik, Esther Leong Ann Min, Low Boon Siang, Rodolfo Puntasan Gayon Jr, Tan May Yoke; Diploma in Theology (DipTh): Cheow Teong Kean; Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE): Kwak Won Young; Bachelor of Ministry (BMin): Stephen Wachira Kimani; Masters of Theology (ThM): Cornelius Koshy, Maritus, Rachel Leong Ann Lee, Zakharia Suhartono.

The Principal was the graduation speaker and he spoke on the topic, “Unity in Truth and Grace”, taken from Ephesians 4:1-16.

FEBC’s Annual Retreat was held at the Resort Lautan Biru (RLB) in Mersing, Malaysia from 6 to 8 May 2024. It was a blessed time of spiritual fellowship and outdoor activities. We had a total of five chapel periods with messages from the Revs Zhu Jianwei, Stephen Khoo, Jose Lagapa, Clement Chew, Koa Keng Woo, and Prabhudas Koshy. Our degree graduates were given a chance to present their respective theses on these important topics: “The Doctrine of Repentance”, “Mutual Christian Love: The Commands to Love One Another in the New Testament”, “The Christian and Mental Illness”, “A Biblical Study of the Intermediate State of Man’s Soul”, and “A Critical Study of the Heretical Doctrines of World Mission Society Church of God”.

The Rev Samuel Joseph (MDiv 2018, ThM 2019) is promoted from tutor to lecturer at FEBC with effect from 30 January 2024.

Mrs Ng May Shyen is new English tutor at FEBC starting 15 July 2024. She holds a BA (majoring in English Language and Economics) from the National University of Singapore (NUS), a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE Secondary) from Nanyang Technological University (NTU), and the Masters in Early Childhood (MECH) from Macquarie University. She teaches Intermediate English. The College has two other English tutors—Mrs Patricia Joseph teaches Elementary English and Mr Aw Beng Teck teaches Advanced English.

Mrs Ivy Tow (BTh 1966), former Lecturer in Greek, Matron of FEBC and beloved wife of the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow, went home to be with the Lord on 17 May 2024. The vigil/homegoing services were conducted at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church, and the body was laid to rest at the Chua Chu Kang lawn cemetery on 21 May 2024. *“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them”* (Rev 14:13).

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE
49th Graduation Service
Class of 2024





Far-Eastern Bible College, Annual Retreat, Resort Lautan Biru, Mersing, 6-8 May 2024