

A FORK
IN THE
ROAD
C O N D E N S E D

*Legacy Edition
In Honor of
Carlye Hummel-Strever*



HERBERT E. DOUGLASS

In Honor of
Carlye Hummel-Strever



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P.O. Box 1011
Ukiah, CA 95482

www.lastgenerationforchrist.org
info@lastgenerationforchrist.org • (805) 729-1754

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About the Author

Author of twenty-five books, Herbert E. Douglass, Th.D., enjoyed a distinguished career as a college professor at Pacific Union College; college academic dean and president at Atlantic Union College; associate editor, *Adventist Review*; vice-president, Pacific Press Publishing Association, and president of Weimar Institute. During the crucial period of the 1950s, Douglass wrote commentaries for five books of, and served on the staff that edited, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

This booklet contains his own “insider’s view” of the events that brought Adventism to the opportunity of a century.

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Introduction

Late in 2003, *Questions on Doctrine* (QOD) was republished by the Andrews University Press with new historical notes and a theological introduction by George R. Knight. Originally published in 1957, this book, as Knight wrote, “easily qualifies as the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history. A book published to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism, its release brought prolonged alienation and separation to the Adventist factions that grew up around it.”¹

In fact, Knight wrote that the “explosive issues” opened up by QOD placed the volume “at the very center of Adventist theological dialogue since the 1950s, setting the stage for ongoing theological tension.”²

How right he was! And, in the opinion of many, those “explosive issues” never had to be.

Historical Concerns

In Knight's Introduction he provides the background of early conversations between Adventist spokesmen and Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, Walter Martin, and others of the Calvinistic wing of Evangelicalism. Their theological paradigms were on a different planet compared to Wesleyan and Adventist theology. For example, Barnhouse declared that Ellen White's *Steps to Christ* was "false in all its parts."³

The mystery to many of us in Washington during the 1950s was T.E. Unruh's (president, East Pennsylvania Conference) letter to Barnhouse wherein he complimented Barnhouse's radio program on "righteousness by faith." Barnhouse's position was light years away from Adventist thinking prior to 1957. The question was, "How could Unruh possibly commend Barnhouse's position on 'righteousness by faith'?" Barnhouse was equally astonished!⁴

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

This letter started the strange chain of events that led to the publishing of QOD.

Unruh's missive led Martin, a young specialist in Christian cults, to visit Washington in March, 1955, and hear from Adventist leaders exactly what they believed regarding certain doctrines that Martin had said were cultic. Knowing that Martin was in the process of preparing another book, entitled *The Rise of the Cults*, Leroy E. Froom, W.E. Read, and R.A. Anderson thought it best to head off a negative bombshell by responding with irenic deference. A lofty goal for any leader!⁵

Of course there were many topics that Martin and Barnhouse would concede as interesting and different but not necessarily cultic. Yet there were four items they accused the church of teaching: 1) that the atonement of Christ was not completed upon the cross; 2) that salvation is the result of grace plus the works of the law; 3) that

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

the Lord Jesus was a created being, not from all eternity; and 4) that He partook of man's sinful fallen nature at the incarnation.⁶

Part of the drama of the mid-1950s was happening backstage. Those watching from the sidelines determined that we would not reveal certain pertinent facts concerning the creation of QOD for various reasons, the chief of which was that we never dreamed that the book would be so heavily advertised, with so many gratis copies. We thought it better to let the whole matter die for lack of attention.

Were we ever wrong!

The associate editors of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* had the privilege of watching QOD being processed, edited, rewritten, and rewritten again. Our Commentary office was on the same floor with Merwin Thurber, the seasoned Review and Herald Publishing Association book editor. Whenever he had a theological problem

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

of whatever nature, he would come to our office for counsel. Week after week for months this would be the routine as Thurber tried to delete much of the QOD manuscript and edit appropriately the rest. Finally, Froom dug in and said, “No more editing. We’re going with what we have.” At that point, the manuscript was about one-half of what they originally wanted. We had hoped to save the denomination from even worse embarrassment and trouble, but it was not to be.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday when one of the associate editors of the Commentary left the room and returned with a towel over his left arm and a basin of water in the other. We all took turns washing our hands, formally absolving ourselves of any connection to the gestating manuscript.

We recognize with the authors that “no statement of Seventh-day Adventist belief can be considered official unless it is adopted by the General Conference in quadrennial

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

session.” But perception often overrules. You can imagine our astonishment when we began to see the galleys of the forthcoming book with its self-congratulatory comments, such as on the title page: “Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors.” On pages 8, 9: “The replies were prepared by a group of recognized leaders, in close counsel with Bible teachers, editors, and administrators.... These answers represent the position of our denomination in the area of church doctrine and prophetic interpretation....

“Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” These statements did not represent the reality surrounding the production of QOD. Many were troubled by the direction of the book and told the authors so. And many more who are listed among the 250 “readers” never returned their comments.

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Still, many thought that the book would not amount to much because of its weakness in lucidly setting forth certain doctrines. They chose to remain respectful. They knew that the authors had to work with a vocabulary with which hard-core Calvinists could at least be comfortable. They believed that QOD would die a quick death because most of our teachers and ministers had been taught differently on at least two core subjects that were painfully stitched together.

Unfortunately for all concerned, Milian L. Andreasen, “the denomination’s most influential theologian and theological writer in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, had been left out of the process in both the formulation of the answers and the critiquing of them, even though he had been generally viewed as an authority on several of the disputed points.”⁷

This omission was not apparent until QOD was published. We were dumbfounded that

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

such an intended oversight could have happened. The writers of QOD, specialists in their respective fields, were not equipped to play in the same theological league as Andreasen. “Looking back,” Knight offers, “one can only speculate on the different course of Adventist history *if* Andreasen had been consulted regarding the working of the Adventist position on the atonement, *if* Fromm and his colleagues hadn’t been so divisive in their handling of issues related to the human nature of Christ, *if* both Fromm and Andreasen would have had softer personalities.”⁸

In 1957, I had reason to discuss certain biblical subjects with Arthur White, the director of the Ellen G. White Estate. QOD was fresh on his mind, only weeks off the printing press. He said, “Herb, I thought I would die trying to make my views known to Fromm and Anderson.” We still felt that QOD would die a quick death and the less we all said about it the better.

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

What we did not expect was the crescendo of *Ministry* editorials and articles that joined with a remarkably orchestrated PR program in workers meetings throughout North America from 1957 on. The new president of the General Conference, R.R. Figuhr, recently from South America, was captivated by what appeared to be a magnificent achievement—heading off Walter Martin from identifying Adventists as a cult in his next book. Many felt sure that if Elder Branson, General Conference President, 1950–1954, had not become ill, thus removing his name from the nominating committee at the General Conference of 1954, *Questions on Doctrine* may never have seen the light of day.

Within seven years the impossible happened! Few were reading QOD, but the story-line was out; the vice presidents, union presidents and conference presidents were assured that any misunderstandings

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

were only semantic. Denominational workers generally were either lulled to sleep or went underground to catch their breath. However, some administrators did read QOD and quietly made their positions known, at least this was my experience in talking with several that later became vice presidents and presidents of the General Conference. For a time, they too kept their peace, not wanting to appear disloyal.

When it seemed to Andreasen that the QOD authors plus the General Conference President were not interested in recognizing his concerns, Andreasen wrote open letters to church members. What may not be generally known is that Andreasen agreed that much of QOD was solid Adventist thinking. He did not “repudiate” the greater part of QOD.

Theological Concerns

Andreasen was primarily concerned with the “troublesome” issues—the “atonement” and “the human nature of Christ.”⁹

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Let's take another look at the problem that Froom and Anderson faced—it seemed monumental. For example, Froom took a poll of Adventist leaders and discovered that “nearly all of them” believed that Christ had inherited our sinful nature when He took on humanity. Further, the recently retired General Conference president, W.H. Branson, plainly wrote in the 1950 edition of his *Drama of the Ages* that Christ in His incarnation took “upon Himself sinful flesh.”¹⁰

But indefatigable Froom and Anderson began their offense, not defense.

- In what appeared to Knight as being “less than transparent,” they told Martin that “the majority of the denomination has always held” the human nature of Christ “to be sinless, holy, and perfect [true, when discussing His sinless character] despite the fact that certain of their writers have occasionally gotten into print with contrary views completely re-

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

pugnant to the Church at large. They further explained to Mr. Martin that they had among their number certain members of their ‘lunatic fringe’ even as there are similar wild-eyed irresponsibles in every field of fundamental Christianity.”¹¹

- The “lunatic fringe” obviously included W.H. Branson, M.L. Andreasen and a host of other authors through the years who held responsible positions as teachers, pastors and administrators.
- They kept the new General Conference president well informed. One of Froom’s letters, sort of a mea culpa, acknowledged that in QOD “some of the statements are a bit different from what you might anticipate.”¹² He went on to suggest that their approach was necessary in view of the backgrounds and attitudes of the evangelicals.

If Branson had been president he probably would have pointed out that though

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

the authors were using different vocabulary, they also were missing a grand opportunity to make clear certain theological points that Adventists have long considered truly biblically based.

QOD's Treatment of the Atonement

- One of Andreasen's chief complaints was the lack of lucidity and candor as the authors tried to pitch their answers to Martin's questions with language he could accept. Andreasen did not immediately put his concerns in front of the church at large. Instead, he wrote private letters to the General Conference President, imploring him to look at the big picture. After all, he had been cast as one of the "lunatic fringe."
- It seemed to some of us that both Andreasen and the authors of QOD (plus the General Conference President) were shooting right past each other. QOD did, in a way, try to salvage any criticism by quoting the Adventist position on Christ's me-

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

diatorial work as part of the atonement—a position that traces directly to the Bible and its original definition of the atonement process (Leviticus 4:16–20; 25, 26, 30, 31, 34, 35; 5:9, 10; 7:1–7).

But the general emphasis in their answer unnecessarily threw the center of gravity onto the cross, thus minimizing the equally essential role of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary—even though that may not have been their intent. Adventists for many years had believed 1) that “the conditions of the atonement had been fulfilled” on the cross (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 819) and 2) that “the intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is *as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross*. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 489, emphasis supplied).

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

- Andraesen was wary about Calvinism's limited gospel which focused Christ's atonement ministry primarily on the cross; he feared that the Adventist twin focus of Christ's atonement ministry on the cross and in the heavenly sanctuary was being muted. Many have felt that if Andraesen, with his undisputed theological experience, had been asked to participate in formulating answers to Martin's questions, theological equilibrium would have prevailed.

QOD's Treatment of the Incarnation

Here again we must recognize the Calvinistic presuppositions of Barnhouse, Martin, and others. The human Jesus for them was "impeccable," that is, incapable of sinning. Bavinck, one of their theological giants, wrote that the possibility of Jesus "sinning and falling is an atrocious idea.... For then God Himself must have been able to sin—which it is blasphemy to think."¹³

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

Therefore, Adventist authors for a century—and specifically Ellen White—who had been asserting that Jesus “took upon himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin,”¹⁴ appeared cultic, far separated from conventional Christian thought.

Froom admitted that some Adventists had made it into print emphasizing these “atrocious ideas,” but offered that such were from those in the Adventist “lunatic fringe”! Remember, Froom and Anderson were trying to find some common ground with their Calvinistic friends. They used language such as “exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam.”¹⁵ And, “all that Jesus took, all that He *bore*, whether the burden and penalty of our iniquities, or the diseases and frailties of our human nature—all was taken and borne *vicariously*.”¹⁶

Pure Catholic and Calvinistic notions!

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

These words, “exempt,” and “vicariously,” Catholics had been using for centuries in describing Christ’s humanity—cleverly insisting that the genetic stream was blocked with the Immaculate Conception of mother Mary. Most Protestants never developed a novel solution, as did Roman Catholics—they just philosophized their notions without biblical basis (such as Barnhouse and Martin would use).

How can we summarize what Knight called “a less than transparent”¹⁷ defense of conventional Adventist thinking on the humanity of Jesus?

- The Ellen White statements appended to QOD created “a false impression on the human nature of Christ.”¹⁸
- The authors supplied in boldface a sub-heading: “*Took Sinless Human Nature.*” As Knight wrote, “that heading is problematic in that it implies that that was Ellen White’s idea when in fact she was

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

quite emphatic in repeatedly stating that Christ took ‘our sinful nature.’”¹⁹

- Curious touches of intimidation were apparent when the authors said (after spelling out their interpretation of Ellen White statements) “it is in this sense that all should understand the writings of Ellen G. White when she refers occasionally to sinful, fallen and deteriorated human nature.” Further, “all these are forceful cogent statements, but surely no one would designedly attach a meaning to them which runs counter to what the same writer has given in other places in her works.”²⁰ And the implicit response to both assertions seems to be, “Of course not!”
- Later, such so-called “balancing statements” led Geoffrey Paxton in 1977 to conclude that Ellen White “has a wax nose. She is turned this way, and then that way, and then this way again.... The

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

final end of being made to take all positions is to take no position at all!”²¹

- Not only did the ideas highlighted in the quotations often contradict their contexts, they seem to have been arranged to foster a particular presupposition. For an example of misrepresenting the context, think of one that has been used many times since 1957: “*No one, looking upon the childlike countenance, shining with animation, could say that Christ was just like other children. He was God in human flesh.*” Yet a few sentences earlier, White had written: “He was not like all children. Many children are misguided and mismanaged. But Joseph, and especially Mary, kept before them the remembrance of their child’s divine Fatherhood. Jesus was instructed in accordance with the sacred character of his mission.... He was an example of what all children may strive to be if parents will

seek the Lord most earnestly, and if children will cooperate with their parents. In His words and actions He manifested tender sympathy for all.”²² We lay hold of the larger picture that White was painting when we look at the whole article.

- Here is another example where it seems we are observing a patently misconstrued meaning of Ellen White, in the attempt to force a prelapsarian position, the view that Christ took the nature of man before the fall: “Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, *He began where the first Adam began. Willingly He passed over the ground where Adam fell*, and redeemed Adam’s failure.”²³ Note QOD’s special emphasis. But there was more in the article quoted. The next sentence is: “But the first Adam was in every way more favorably situated than was Christ.”

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Then White went on to show why Jesus became man after the race had deteriorated: “In His human nature He maintained the purity of His divine character. He lived the law of God, and honored it in a world of transgression, revealing to the heavenly universe, to Satan, and to all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, that through His grace, humanity can keep the law of God. He came to impart His own divine nature, His own image, to the repentant, believing soul.”²⁴

- In the listing of six reasons for Christ coming to earth, it seems that the authors of QOD omitted two of the most essential: He came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He came to be our Example (1 Peter 2:21). It would have been more than helpful if they had listed the additional reasons Ellen White has provided us.²⁵

Radioactive Fallout

As Knight said, QOD “easily qualifies as the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.” To document this divisiveness is easy but painful. Most, if not all, of the so-called “dissident” or “independent” groups of recent times are direct results of the explicit and implicit positions espoused by QOD on the Atonement and the Incarnation. On two continents the reaction was immediate. Most, if not all, of these “dissidents” would not exist today if QOD had not been published.

Hovering over the theological fog that QOD generated was the “official” imprimatur that the book was getting around the Adventist world. Although the authors tried to say that QOD was not an “official” statement of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, the description of their efforts could not be hidden.²⁶

In my Washington years, I heard that the workers of a certain world division upheld

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

QOD's pronouncements "unanimously" as the denomination's official position. One of our young scholars told me that he had been taught in four of our denominational schools and universities and on each campus QOD was considered "official."

It was difficult to swallow QOD's contention that "a few, however, held to some of their former views, and at times these ideas got into print. However, for decades now the church has been practically at one on the basic truths of the Christian faith."²⁷ That statement is correct for the most part but surely not in QOD's treatment of the humanity of Christ or its lack of lucidity in expressing the sanctuary doctrine—both of which are enormously important when one considers the purpose of the gospel.

In 1975, a representative group of us gathered in Washington in response to the Review and Herald publishing house's call for counsel regarding the republication of

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

QOD. The leadership of the General Conference were generally opposed to its reprinting for many of the reasons included in this booklet. The more the book was examined, the firmer their denial for a reprinting became.²⁸

Knight is as clear as blue sky on a cloudless day when he recounts Andreasen's point in declaring QOD to be "a betrayal in order to gain recognition from the evangelicals." Knight observes, "Unfortunately, there does appear to be elements of a betrayal in the manipulation of the data and in the untruths that were passed on to Barnhouse and Martin on the topic.... The result would spell disaster in the Adventist ranks in the years to come. Official Adventism may have gained recognition as being Christian from the evangelical world, but in the process a breach had been opened which has not healed in the last 50 years and may never heal."

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

However, the proposed explanatory solution for the nature of Christ in this recently republished QOD, pp. 522, 523, is less than sufficient to bridge the gap between the “pre-laps and post-laps.” Melvill’s position does not throw real light on our Lord’s humanity as do White’s explanations in *The Desire of Ages* and in all her other writings when properly understood.²⁹

Theological Concerns That Need Fresh Discussion

Assertions in both the main text of the original QOD and its republished edition beg for clarification and correction. These problems include:

1. *Mixing apples and oranges*. For example, “It could hardly be construed... that Jesus was diseased or that He experienced the frailties to which our fallen human nature is heir.... These weaknesses, frailties, infirmities, failings, are things which we, with our sinful, fallen natures, have to bear. To us

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

they are natural, inherent, but when He bore them, He took them not as something innately His, but He bore them as our substitute. He bore them in His perfect, sinless nature. Again we remark, Christ bore all this vicariously, just as vicariously He bore the iniquities of us all.”³⁰ “He was nevertheless God, and was exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam.”³¹

But Adventists have never argued that Jesus ever sinned, or inherited evil, corrupted “passions and pollutions.” Implying such creates a strawman! The Adventist position in our first century was solidly based on biblical statements such as Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:14–16; 5:7–9; Romans 1:1–3; 8:3, 4; 2 Peter 2:21; Revelation 3:21.

This biblical foundation lies at the core of Ellen White’s understanding of Christ’s humanity and is in sharp contrast to the QOD position outlined above. For example:

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

“It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man’s nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.

“Satan in heaven had hated Christ for His position in the courts of God. He hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him who pledged Himself to redeem a race of sinners. Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life’s peril in com-

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

mon with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.”³²

Throughout White’s *The Desire of Ages*, many statements only add to the clarity of the above.

2. *Hermeneutics*. One of the main principles of interpretation is to allow the author to interpret himself/herself. Further, the author can best state his/her position in a book designed to clarify all aspects of the author’s thinking. When an author has written sixty years on a subject, one should not be surprised to find statements lifted from letters, diaries, and general manuscripts that may seem to be contradictory. But when the student has a grasp of the intent of a letter and has access to the entire diary or manuscript, those apparent discrepancies vanish like Jell-O on a hot July day. In other words, *The Desire of Ages* should be the acid test of

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Ellen White's Christology by which all other statements should be judged.

3. *Modus operandi*. On subjects such as "The Ten Commandments," "The Sabbath and the Moral Law," "Scholarly Precedents for 1844," "The Meaning of Azazel," "The Investigative Judgment," "Condition of Man in Death," and "Champions of Conditional Immortality," the QOD authors used a host of non-Adventist writers to supplement and enhance their doctrinal positions.

The irony in using such a method is that an equal supply of non-Adventist writers could be gathered, other than Calvinistic writers, to substantiate the historic Adventist position on what is meant by Christ's "sinful, fallen human nature." Why aren't books authored by Harry Johnson, Karl Barth, T.F. Torrance, Nels Ferré, C.E. Cranfield, Harold Roberts, Lesslie Newbigin, Anders Nygren, C.K. Barrett, and Oscar Cullmann referred to, for starters?

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

Such scholars clearly espouse the New Testament position that Jesus was “truly Man,” and became the kind of person that He came to redeem, not only in His death but throughout His life, that He inherited fallen, sinful nature that makes sin very probable but He did not yield to that tendency (John 5:17, 18; Mark 4:26, etc.). His personal self, His untarnished will, never yielded to the inherited tendency to sin; He directed His energies and will power at every point toward overcoming all sinful tendencies and doing the will of His Father in heaven.

In other words, the biblical writers and Ellen White viewed what was generally understood by others as “original sin” as actually being the universal tendency in human nature to seek selfish interests. Jesus shared this commonality with humanity, but He remained the unsullied Example for us all (Revelation 3:21)—He remained sinless. “Thy will be done, not Mine” was His life motto (Luke 22:42).

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

4. *Distinguish between terms.* For example, it is important to carefully differentiate terms such as “propensities of sin” and “propensities to sin;” between “inherited passions” and “evil, corrupted passions;” between “lower” and “higher nature.” Space does not here permit a full discussion as to the distinction between these terms. Nevertheless, we should let an author tell us what she means by permitting her own usage to define her own terms.

Jesus had all the natural appetites and passions of a child,³³ or a teenager, or an adult—the same desires, impulses, and passions common to all humans to which Ellen White referred when, of the apostle Paul, she wrote: “The words, ‘I keep under my body,’ literally mean to beat back by severe discipline the desires, impulses, and passions.”³⁴ Jesus never allowed these to become “evil, corrupted passions.” By the constant submission of His will to His Father, He never permitted Himself to

yield to sinful indulgence of any of these natural passions (Luke 22:42). “Even Christ pleased not himself” (Romans 15:3).

Jesus took our inherited tendencies to evil but He always chose to resist them. “He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation.”³⁵ He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” because He “was in *all* points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis supplied).³⁶

All means *all*!

Christ’s higher nature, as ours, consisted of the “higher powers”—intellect, “kingly power of reason,” choice, and the will.³⁷ His lower nature involved normal human passions that, unless controlled by the higher powers, continually submitted to God, would seek selfish, indulgent ends. The difference between Jesus and us is that this continual submission to His Father prevented defilement. He was uncorrupted.

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Many are Ellen White's insightful comments: Speaking of those discouraged and who say, "My prayers are so mingled with evil thoughts that the Lord will not hear them," she offers "These suggestions are from Satan. In His humanity Christ met and resisted this temptation, and He knows how to succor those who are thus tempted."³⁸

"...your *passions* and *appetites* may be subject to the control of reason.... Our natural propensities must be controlled, or we can never overcome *as Christ overcame*."³⁹

"...enabling men to bring all their propensities under the control of the higher powers..."⁴⁰

Many such statements abound. ^{41, 42}

5. *Other areas of concern.* The reprinted QOD introduces other matters that may still require open discussion. Some of these are found in the extended notes on pages 516–529. The author of the notes framed in gray was precisely correct: "The logic that

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

flowed from that belief was that if Christ was just like us, yet had lived a sinless life, then so must other human beings—especially those of the last generation.... [This teaching] became the belief of the majority of Seventh-day Adventists in the first half of the twentieth century. That teaching was so widely accepted that it no longer needed to be argued in Adventist literature. It was accepted as a fact. It was upon that teaching that M.L. Andreasen would build his final generation theology.”⁴³

- Here is the clear statement why QOD was so “explosive”! QOD directly contradicted many years of Adventist Christology that had been a Rock of appreciation and personal trust among clergy and laity.
- This “widely accepted” understanding of the nature of Christ’s humanity was not Andreasen’s novelty—Andreasen, a remarkable student of Ellen White’s thought, reasoned from the Bible and her

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

writings. Andreasen was only one of many thousands of pastors and teachers who had reached the very conclusions that were “accepted as a fact” up until QOD was published.

- The suggestion that Ellen White’s understanding of Christ’s humanity was derived from her reading of Henry Melvill is far off the mark. Just because she underlined certain passages in Melvill’s work does not mean that she bought his argument any more than the many books I underline suggest that I agree with the author. She could easily use certain phrases without borrowing the author’s general meaning. This so-called Melvill connection does not occur to those who spend a few moments noting how White herself used the words “propensities,” “passions,” “infirmities,” etc.
- The suggestion that since the 1890s “two quite distinct Adventist understandings

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

on the human nature of Christ in Adventism” (pre-Fall Adam versus post-Fall Adam) have flourished needs substantiation. To suggest that all other writers except Ellen White were in either camp and Ellen White was in a third, “invisible” camp, seems to be a strange observation. The immediate examples of that new “position” follow exactly the pattern of the 1957 QOD’s mistreatment of Ellen White’s writings.⁴⁴

- The “last-generation” concept (the one that waits expectantly for Christ’s return, cooperating with Him to be entrusted with His sealing—Revelation ch. 7) is the distinctive feature of Ellen White’s eschatology as she reflects on many biblical themes. Moreover, the record indicates that this theology represents the consensus of Adventist belief for most of our history as a denomination. Indeed, Geoffrey Paxton observed

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

that “the doctrine of the perfecting of the final generation stands near the heart of Adventist theology.”⁴⁵

6. *The second topic that severely divided the Adventist Church since the late 1950s was the issue of righteousness by faith.* Watching evangelicals observed that by the 1970s our church was divided between “Traditional Adventists”—those who defended positions that were “accepted facts” before QOD—and “Evangelical Adventists” who emphasized the so-called Reformation understanding of righteousness by faith.⁴⁶

Implied in this “evangelical” understanding was a rejection of 1) Adventism’s distinctive view of a pre-Advent investigative judgment and 2) the connection between the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the cleansing of the soul temple in believers, culminating in the close of probation.

In minimizing the “essential”⁴⁷ aspects of the atonement contained in the heavenly

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

sanctuary doctrine, the spotlight focused attention primarily on the cross. When this double focus is lost, the biblical concept of righteousness by faith is greatly damaged. Everything is connected to everything else on the genuine gospel tree; when one aspect of gospel truth is compromised, many other doctrines become tainted.

A limited gospel wherein righteousness by faith is focused only on the cross is like a bird trying to fly with one wing!

7. Part of the fallout since 1957 is the cavalier treatment of Ellen White's ministry.

The convoluted efforts to cite her as authority for positions she had never taken, left on many minds the impression that she has a "wax nose." As Paxton observed: "The final end of being made to take all positions is to take no position at all!"⁴⁸

Thus, in recent years, Ellen White has too often been dismissively viewed as a devotional writer, not a theological guide. But

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

throughout her writings she consistently connects the twin doctrine of Christ as “an atoning sacrifice and an all-powerful Mediator”—the truth that Satan “hates” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 488). This theological clarity was an inconvenient obstacle to maintaining the position taken in QOD, and the obfuscation of her understanding was a tragic step toward splitting these inseparable truths.

This muting of the connection between our Lord’s mediatorial work and His death upon the cross opened the door to a limited understanding of justification and sanctification—a division that has perplexed and misled Adventist congregations in the years since.

A Deeper Lesson to Be Learned

What seems to be an unspoken, deeper problem with QOD is what was left unsaid. Martin and Barnhouse were recognized evangelical scholars though working with

QOD: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957

different presuppositions, largely Calvinistic. But they could think theologically. What a perfect opportunity it would have been for Adventists to use equally trained minds to show why Adventists have a distinctive understanding of soteriology, Christology, and eschatology!

Like Hezekiah,⁴⁹ who failed to show the Babylonians his rich treasure of truth, we missed the greatest opportunity of the last century to share a glimpse of the special, grand truths God gave to His remnant people to prepare a last generation of believers to meet Christ at His glorious second coming.

Decades of division now trace to QOD. The events surrounding its publication and the resulting seismic theological shift are no longer a mystery. That was then, this is now. What will be in our day? What will we do with this treasure of truth entrusted to us?

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

Endnotes

1. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, Annotated Edition, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), p. xiii. The format of the new edition is helpful, with all annotations inserted in gray.
2. *Ibid.* p. xi.
3. *Ibid.* p. xiii. Open citation.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.* p. xiv.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.* p. xviii.
8. *Ibid.* p. xxvi (emphasis in original). I had the unusual pleasure of knowing Drs. Froom and Anderson personally. Long after Dr. Froom retired, while I was associate editor of the *Adventist Review* in the 1970s, he would sit in my office, time after time, to discuss theological topics. All the while he had been reading a number of my editorials that contradicted his positions in QOD. We were friends and did not let theological differences poison our friendship. In 1974, I was one of the very last persons to stroke his hand just before he died in Sligo Gardens Nursing Home, Takoma Park.

For many years after Dr. Anderson retired to his condo in Loma Linda, I would look forward to his telephone calls. His frequent questions went like this: “Herb, what is happening to our church?” This went on for years until his death in 1985. It seemed that

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

they both regretted the unintended consequences of their labors in the 1950s.

9. *Ibid.* p. xv.
10. *Ibid.* In 1953, Branson had changed his “sinful flesh” statement slightly to keep the peace, still knowing that Ellen White used this phrase many times.
11. *Ibid.* p. xvi.
12. *Ibid.*
13. G.C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 259.
14. *The Youth’s Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900; *Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1896; Sept. 29, 1896.
15. QOD, p. 383 (1957).
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 62, 59 (emphasis in original).
17. *Ibid.* p. xv (Andrews University Press Annotated Edition).
18. *Ibid.* p. xxx.
19. *Ibid.* p. xvi. I remember well those days in 1970 when I at last had the opportunity to examine QOD’s references. As associate editor of the *Review and Herald*, I had the luxury of research in the publishing house’s magnificent library. I began to read the context of each of QOD’s statements that seemed to be cherry-picked by someone who tried to emphasize a certain point of view. One by one I would bring those statements to Kenneth H. Wood, editor in chief, and we stared with amazement at someone’s remarkable disregard for the context. This collection of tampered quotations has since become the armament factory for teachers and

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

pastors and authors who relied on this collection for their understanding of Christ's human nature, thus missing the big picture.

20. *Ibid.* p. 60 (1957).
21. Geoffrey Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Wilmington, Delaware: Zenith Publishers, Inc., 1977), p. 156.
22. In QOD, p. 649 (1957, emphasis in original), a portion of this article was republished. But consider more from the article, *The Youth's Instructor*, September 8, 1898.
23. QOD, p. 650 (1957, emphasis in original).
24. *The Youth's Instructor*, June 2, 1898.
25. See Herbert E. Douglass, *God At Risk* (Roseville, CA; Amazing Facts, 2004), pp. 440–453.
26. QOD, pp. 8, 9 (1957).
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.
28. In the same year, a call was made to republish L.E. Froom's, *Movement of Destiny* (1971). Again a representative group studied the question. Again, because of a number of assertions in it that were dubious and misleading, *Movement of Destiny* was not republished. Space here does not permit a review of this book.
29. Some have postulated that Ellen White agreed with Henry Melvill (1798–1871), an Anglican preacher whose writings she held in her library and had underlined (as she did with other authors). Melvill taught that *fallen* human nature had two characteristics: innocent infirmities and sinful propensities—Jesus took the

QOD: *The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957*

- first but not the second. This “solution” to the pre-laps, post-laps controversy is problematic given that Ellen White never used the term “innocent infirmities.” She used “infirmities” in the sense that “For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the *infirmities of degenerate humanity*. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117 (emphasis supplied).
30. QOD, pp. 59, 60.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
 32. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.
 33. “The words of Christ encourage parents to bring their little ones to Jesus. They may be wayward, and possess passions like those of humanity, but this should not deter us from bringing them to Christ. He blessed children that were possessed of *passions like his own*.” (*Signs of the Times*, April 9, 1896, emphasis supplied.)
 34. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 314.
 35. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.
 36. One of the best books available on this topic is, J.R. Zurcher, *Touched With Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1999).
 37. *Ministry of Healing*, p. 130.

A Fork in the Road: Condensed

38. *Signs of the Times*, November 18, 1903; See also *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 408; Manuscript 1, 1892 in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. VI, pp. 334–343.
39. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 235 (emphasis supplied).
40. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 491.
41. For an excellent study on the terms *passions* and *propensities*, see *The Word Was Made Flesh: 100 Years of SDA Christology*, by Ralph Larson, especially the chapter, “VII. A Word Study: Passions and Propensities in the Writings of Ellen White” beginning on page 22.
42. See *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, pp. 182, 183 for a clear distinction between “corrupted propensities” and “fallen but not corrupted.”
43. QOD Annotated Edition, pp. 518, 519.
44. The question of the Adventist Church’s historical position on the incarnation of Christ has been comprehensively answered in Ralph Larson’s meticulously documented tome, *The Word Was Made Flesh: 100 Years of SDA Christology*.
45. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism*, p. 114.
46. Kenneth R. Samples, “From Controversy to Crisis: An Updated Assessment of Seventh-day Adventism,” *Christian Research Journal*, Summer, 1988, p. 9.
47. *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.
48. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism*, p. 156.
49. Isaiah ch. 39.