

THE TROJAN HORSE

The basic story is very familiar. The Greeks were determined to conquer the independent city of Troy, but they were having great difficulty. They laid siege to the city for ten long years with no success. Finally they came up with an unusual strategy. They constructed a huge wooden horse, hid a select force of men inside the horse, rolled it up near the walls of the city, and pretended to sail away as if they were giving up on the siege. The Trojans, with more curiosity than caution, pulled the horse into the city as a trophy of victory. That night the Greek soldiers crept out of the horse and opened the gates of the city for the Greek army which had sailed back under cover of darkness. The city of Troy was taken and the war was over. The strength of Troy's defenses were breached by deception and curiosity. We may be well prepared for a direct attack, but totally unprepared for an unexpected diversion.

There is another story for World War II. The French had faced invasion from Germany in World War I and they determined never to let that happen again, so they built a line of concrete fortifications, obstacles, and weapons in the 1930's on the borders with Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Luxembourg. The Maginot Line was impervious to bombings and tank fire. Seemingly there was no way that the Germans could invade France again. So what did the Germans do? They ignored that line completely and invaded France from the north through the Low Countries and the Ardennes forest, where the French thought the rough terrain would be an unlikely invasion route. Meanwhile a German decoy force sat opposite the Maginot Line to occupy the attention of the French. The major problem with the Maginot Line was the false sense of security it gave France.

Have we had Trojan horses and Maginot Lines in the recent history of Adventism? I submit that we have had exactly the same problem of curiosity and a false sense of security, and we have been successfully invaded while our guard was down. Adventist truths have been under attack from the very beginnings of the church, and we prepared our defenses carefully to withstand a frontal assault. We were able to respond very effectively to objections to our doctrinal beliefs. We had well-defined responses to Catholicism and liberal Protestantism. So the master strategist, Satan, devised a Trojan horse to attract our curiosity and lower our sense of danger.

We are not the only church to believe in the absolute authority of the Bible and the soon coming of Jesus, Who would destroy Satan's rulership of Planet Earth. Our evangelical friends seem to be much like us in personal salvation by God's unmerited grace through faith, as well as a strong drive for soul-winning. We feel that we can learn so much from them in the effective growth of churches, attractive worship methods, and the retention of youth. We have fought the enemy of worldly standards and lack of faith known as liberalism for many years. But we have been blind to the equally dangerous enemy of conservative evangelicalism. So our curiosity and our sense of doctrinal security allowed us to let the Trojan horse of evangelicalism right into the heart of Adventist beliefs, and the danger for us is the same as for the people of Troy, which is the total destruction of Adventism as the remnant church of prophecy.

So let us take a very close look at this Trojan horse that is sapping the life out of Adventism. What is the heart of this well-defined set of beliefs regarding salvation?

THE EVANGELICAL GOSPEL

There are five major issues at the root of this gospel:

1. Involuntary sin – This is the belief that all became sinners simply by being born.
2. The unfallen nature of Christ – This is the belief that the humanity that Christ took upon Himself was the sinless nature of Adam as it was before the Fall, or that He had a hybrid nature, partly fallen and partly unfallen.
3. Salvation by justification alone – This is the belief that the ground of the Christian’s salvation is justifying righteousness only, as distinct from the transforming, empowering righteousness of regeneration and sanctification, which are only results of salvation.
4. Justification is exclusively declarative, and not transformative – This is the belief that justifying righteousness only declares a believer righteous, as distinct from actually making him righteous.
5. The imperfectability of Christian character – This is the belief that even through imparted divine strength, perfect obedience to the divine law remains impossible for the Christian in this life.

In light of these beliefs of the evangelical gospel, it becomes imperative that we understand the true gospel. Following are a few brief responses to the evangelical gospel:

1. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” (1 John 3:4) Ellen White calls this the clear definition of sin, the true definition of sin, and eight times she calls it the only definition of sin. In commenting on this verse, she says it means to wilfully transgress the law of God in thought or word or action. (ST April 30, 1896)

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17)

“Jesus said unto them [Pharisees], If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth.” (John 9:41) The sin for which we are condemned and lost is never involuntary or a state of birth.

2. “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.” (DA 49) Christ did not exempt Himself from our nature so that He could be tempted as we are, from outside and from His own nature.
3. “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” (2 Thess. 2:13) Justification and sanctification are both necessary parts of one saving process. Justification is not more important than sanctification.
4. “Having made us righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God pronounces us just, and treats us as just....Therefore being justified by faith.” (1SM 394) Justification can never be limited to declaration alone. It is always a transforming process.

5. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5)

"Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression." (IHP 146) One of Satan's most accepted lies is that perfect obedience to God is impossible as long as we have fallen natures.

WHY CHARACTER PERFECTION?

It is very important to remember that full character maturity is not a requirement for salvation, as demonstrated by the thief on the cross. He certainly was not spiritually mature, but he surrendered his life in faith to God, willing to do or be whatever God wanted him to be. This is what God asks of us if we desire to be saved. Mature character perfection is for a completely different purpose.

"The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people." (DA 671) It is not our honor or our salvation that is involved here, but God's name and His character. He has promised that He will perfect His people. Can He really do it?

"The honor of His throne is staked for the fulfillment of His word unto us." (COL 148) Whenever God promises something, He puts His name behind His promise. His throne was at stake when Christ came to our earth, and His throne is at stake in what He will do through the last generation.

We must remember Satan's challenge against God and His law. "Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the lawgiver." (ST Jan. 16, 1896) Satan's charge was clearly leveled against fallen man's ability to keep God's law, so God has devised a response to Satan which will be so clear that not one question will be left in any mind in God's universe for the rest of eternity.

Revelation 7:1-3 tells us that the winds of destruction will be held until God's people are sealed in their foreheads. So what is this seal? It is "a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved." (FLB 287)

In a special vision, Ellen White saw the angels of Revelation 7 getting ready to let the winds go in her lifetime. "While their hands were loosening, and the four winds were about to blow, the merciful eye of Jesus gazed on the remnant that were not sealed, and He raised His hands to the Father and pleaded with Him that He had spilled His blood for them. Then another angel was commissioned to fly swiftly to the four angels and bid them hold, until the servants of God were sealed." (EW 38)

The reason Christ did not come in her lifetime, and has not come in our lifetime, is God's mercy. He will never send His remnant into the cataclysmic struggles of Planet Earth while they are unprepared,, and the only way they can be prepared is by receiving the seal of God.

These people are facing the greatest challenge ever seen by the people of God. They are facing the close of human probation and Satan's last desperate attempt to destroy God's plan of salvation.

"If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven,, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character

before the world.” (5T 746) This demands a full understanding of the plan of salvation and our place in the completion of that plan.

“Every character will be fully developed, and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion. Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people.” (DA 763) Note that God does the vindicating of His own name, but He will do it in the characters of His people. The fully mature development of both the righteous and the wicked is necessary for the final vindication of God’s character and His law.

THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

What is this Trojan horse that has insinuated itself into the heart of Adventism? We can trace its beginnings in the United States to a new-to-Protestantism method of interpretation of prophecy called futurism. This method was actually begun by Catholic scholars to deflect the Protestant identification of the Catholic Church as Babylon and the pope as antichrist. All the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were placed in the future with a yet unknown individual as the antichrist. In the Protestant version the seventieth week of Daniel 9 was placed in the future, the Old Testament prophecies of the restoration of the Jewish nation would be literally fulfilled, the temple would be rebuilt, the battle of Armageddon would be the final battle between the Jews and the heathen; also included is a secret rapture of the faithful so they will not have to go through the horrors of Armageddon. These beliefs are shared by a number of conservative Protestant churches who believe in the absolute authority of Scripture and the soon coming of Christ, and who emphasize evangelistic fervor and church growth—all of which are shared by Adventism.

Now the interesting thing about the evangelical movement in the United States in the last forty years is that it has morphed into the political arena. During the early 1800’s there were several political parties which settled into two parties, the Whigs and the Democrats. Soon the Whig party disintegrated and was replaced by the Republican party. These are our parties today, but the positions of these parties have changed with time, so that our parties are not even close to what they were fifty or one hundred years ago. Today these parties have become so polarized that labeling and demonization have become the norm. If you don’t agree with “my” party you are the enemy.

The evangelical movement has immersed itself in modern power politics. In the 1950’s religion and politics began to form alliances. Billy Graham and other evangelicals began to promote anti-communism. One nation under God became a catch-phrase. Religious leaders began to promote free enterprise and big business. They talked about the United States as a Christian nation, and there was even a proposed constitutional amendment protecting school prayers in public schools.

As evangelical theology has become increasingly linked with politics, an interesting thing has taken place. Since evangelicals were primarily conservative, their political leanings became exclusively conservative, and evangelical theology began to take second place to conservative politics. Evangelicals saw conservative politics as their only mechanism to effect moral change in America. Modern society has been damaged by godlessness and lawlessness, with absolute truth being replaced by “whatever works for me,” and the boundaries of sexuality being hopelessly blurred. So evangelical conservatism joined itself permanently to conservative politics as the only way to defeat moral degeneracy and save the United States for the promised future of Jesus setting up His millennial kingdom on the earth.

Since Adventists share many concerns about America with evangelicals, it was very easy to agree with them about conservative politics being the only way to nullify the corrosive influence of liberal religious beliefs combined with liberal politics. Once again our defenses against liberalism outside our walls allowed us to ignore the dangerous Trojan horse of conservative religion and politics invading our minds and our churches. If only we would have followed Ellen White's wise inspired counsel to bury political questions, we might not have opened the doors of the Trojan horse so widely.

Suddenly a new issue took center stage in the religious/evangelical alliance with politics—abortion. (Now I want to make clear that Adventism is opposed to abortion on demand as a birth control option.) I am talking here about how abortion has become a political issue. In 1968 even Christianity Today (an evangelical magazine) refused to call abortion sinful. In 1971 delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention allowed abortion under certain defined circumstances, which was reaffirmed in 1974 and 1976. But in 1979 opposition to abortion became a rallying cry for evangelicals due to the influence of a Catholic activist who coined the term Moral Majority and saw the effectiveness of the abortion issue in defeating some prominent liberal politicians in 1978. This resulted in the modern Religious Right and the Catholic/evangelical Protestant alliance, which believes that morality can and should be a matter for political legislation. In 1984 a New York governor said, "Are we asking government to make criminal what we believe to be sinful because we ourselves can't stop committing the sin? The failure here is not Caesar's. The failure is our failure, the failure of the entire people of God."

Make no mistake, the use of civil power by apostate Christianity is making coercion a substitute for conversion and will lead directly to the formation of the image to the beast. It is very significant that in August, 2018, a state-like dinner was held at the White House for one hundred evangelical leaders to celebrate evangelical leadership, especially in politics.

It would be well for us to remind ourselves that religious liberty means two different things for Adventists and evangelicals. Adventists want to allow freedom of conscience for all, especially minority religious beliefs. We advocate freedom for Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, Muslims, and even atheists. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics advocate liberty for their version of Christianity, since they believe that is the only way of salvation, while other beliefs are "heathen" and do not merit special protection.

The disturbing reality is that the same people who stand strongest against abortion and stand for moral values are the same people who want to unite with conservative Catholics to restore a Christian dominionism that will trample on religious freedom for minorities. Evangelical theology has been hidden inside evangelical politics, and is the greatest danger our church has faced from outside Adventism. How tragic that evangelical theology has penetrated so deeply into Adventist theology that we are promoting it at the highest scholarly levels and we are marginalizing those who believe in genuine Adventism as fanatics and fringe groups.

This is the Trojan horse that is fascinating Adventism right now, and we allow it in our midst at the peril of our reason for existence. We have formed our Maginot Line against attacks by the enemy, and Satan has bypassed our carefully prepared defenses by appearing to be our friend and ally, since we are also opposed to abortion and homosexuality. We are being dragged into the muck of political involvement. We don't seem to realize that the evangelical message and evangelical politics are broken cisterns. They are the false prophet of Revelation—Babylon—with their hands stretching across the gulf to form the

image to the beast. Can we really trust and ally with a movement because it supports a few strands of truth? The army outside the walls is also hiding inside the horse while we sleep on.

We desperately need to return to our Adventist pioneers who refused to get involved with party politics. They stood for moral issues like temperance and religious liberty. They opposed errors in society like slavery, even defying immoral laws like the Fugitive Slave Act, but they never supported the political parties of their day and they refused to get involved in the dirt of power politics.

We are here for two purposes, first and foremost, to prepare our characters to receive the seal of God and put the final nail in the coffin of Satan's lies, and second, to prepare our hearts to be ready for the latter rain and take the truth of God to every corner of Planet Earth. Matthew 24:14 will see its fulfillment as the gospel is taken to the whole world so that God will finally be able to say in Revelation 12:14, "Here are they that keep my commandments." May that day come very soon.

