

THE QUEST FOR AN ELUSIVE COMPROMISE

James Rafferty, *How Jesus Was Like Us* (Jasper, OR: Red Frame Publishing, 2013)

reviewed by Kevin D. Paulson

This brief but provocative book offers what gives every evidence of being a sincere attempt to find resolution to one of the most contentious disputes in modern Seventh-day Adventism—the question of whether Christ’s human nature during the incarnation was like Adam’s before the fall or like humanity’s after four thousand years of sin.

The tone pervading the book is one of grace, compassion, and pastoral care. The author, a personal friend of many years and fellow laborer in the Lord’s vineyard, writes from the background of one who has experienced and participated in the continuing Adventist struggle over the issue in question, and who seeks a workable and redemptive means of reconciling differences.

What follows is an effort, not to add needless fuel to the controversy’s flame, nor to further exacerbate the polarization among us regarding this issue, but rather, to consider in the light of inspired counsel the assertions and solutions offered by this book, and to enable the reader and the church in general to recover the harmony demonstrated by both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White on a subject declared by the modern prophet to be “everything to us” (1).

Thinking Evangelistically

Like this reviewer, the author of this book is a seasoned evangelist—he more so than I. Any who regularly engage in the work of soul winning understand that when studying with fellow Christians regarding seemingly contradictory Biblical evidence, the mind of the student isn’t likely to change unless a means is found to bring all relevant Biblical evidence into harmony. It does no good, for example, when studying with an evangelical Christian about the Sabbath, the state of the dead, or the manner of Jesus’ coming, to simply ignore such passages as Colossians 2:16, Philippians 1:23, or Luke 17:34-36, and focus solely on those verses more obviously friendly to our position. Unless the total consistency of God’s Word on any of these topics can be demonstrated, commitment by the student to the message of Scripture regarding these or similar issues is unlikely at best. Hence the value of such apologetic works as F.D. Nichol’s *Answers to Objections* (2) and Mark Finley’s *Studying Together* (3).

Some years ago, a leading denominational writer and speaker had an e-mail exchange with this reviewer over some of the issues surrounding the Biblical doctrine of salvation. At one point in our conversation I shared some Bible and Spirit of Prophecy statements which give every evidence of running counter to some of the positions taken by this writer/speaker. But rather than demonstrate, on the basis of his own study, how the inspired statements I quoted fit into the larger picture of Bible and Spirit of Prophecy teachings, he simply responded, “You have your inspired statements; I have mine. Which are more inspired?”

I couldn't help wondering whether this individual, an articulate and cogent defender of many orthodox Adventist teachings, would use a similar approach were he studying with other Bible-believing Christians regarding any number of issues where Biblical evidence appears to contradict our stand as a church. Unless one is willing to belabor the evidence and demonstrate its comprehensive unity, inquiring minds and searching hearts aren't likely to be persuaded.

This is really the point where we need to begin in assessing the case presented by the book in question. We need to approach the issue much as we would approach apparently conflicting Bible verses in a study with a fellow Christian regarding any number of key Adventist doctrines. For those with a high view of inspired authority, no doctrinal position is valid unless it takes into account all relevant inspired statements before reaching a conclusion. With this principle in mind, we need to ask of the book before us: Does it offer a solution to the controversy it addresses which can rightfully account for all relevant inspired statements on the subject, even if all such statements are not mentioned in the book itself? Or is the cited evidence so partial in nature as to leave pivotal questions in the controversy unanswered?

Only the former approach has a chance of solving the problem. The latter approach only perpetuates it.

At one point the author writes: "The purpose of this booklet is not to refute other views or to compile a total of all the references to be found on the topic so as to push one position against another by sheer weight of evidence. Instead, its intent is to find truth in the tension between the two extremes—to see and understand Jesus more clearly as our sinless yet sympathetic Savior" (p. 11).

I fully agree that to "push one position against another by sheer weight of evidence" offers little hope of settling the dispute. That isn't likely to work in a Bible study with a conscientious non-Adventist, and it isn't going to work in controversies inside the church either. Too much of the Adventist Christology debate has admittedly been conducted in this fashion. But neither is the answer to the dilemma to merely "find truth in the tension between the two extremes." Rather, the best approach is to show how all the relevant inspired evidence fits together, including those passages which seem on the surface less friendly to the overall position taken by the inspired writings.

The book's interest in finding a middle ground between the two camps is, unfortunately for its stated endeavor, subverted by its lopsided focus on the differences between the incarnate Christ and fallen humanity, with very little focus on the similarities. The vast majority of inspired statements quoted in the book emphasize what are believed by the author to be differences between Christ and us (pp. 22,23,31,38,39,43,45,46-47,52,53,64-65,67,70-71). Statements emphasizing commonality between Christ's temptations and ours are almost totally absent from the book. It is the arguments used by the post-Fall camp—real or exaggerated—which disproportionately draw the book's critical attention. Little if anything is said of perceived shortcomings in the arguments used by pre-Fall advocates.

My hope is that the review to follow will demonstrate underlying harmony within the relevant inspired evidence, including the considerable evidence left out of the book in question. While what follows does not pretend to cover every facet of the issue or all relevant inspired statements concerning it, it is hoped that sufficient evidence will be considered so as to reveal how the totality of inspired counsel speaks with a single voice—albeit from varying angles—concerning this crucial area of doctrine.

Regrettable—But Inevitable—Division

Concern over the divisiveness caused by this issue is noted both by the author of this book and one of its endorsers on the back cover. The endorser writes, “Bring the subject up in nearly any local church, and immediately strong words will begin to fly” (back cover). The phrase “nearly any” might fairly be called an exaggeration; in the variety of churches I have pastored or been closely associated with—most of which would be considered quite mainstream by current denominational standards—the humanity of Christ has never been a flash point of controversy. Others active in ministry at various levels could probably bear a similar witness.

This is not to deny or downplay the incendiary nature of this controversy, only to note—among other things—that perhaps more of our people than we realize find this issue much simpler and more practical in its application to their daily spiritual journey than certain folks would have us believe.

Indeed, I have long held that the staying power of this dispute in modern Adventism is primarily due to its demonstrable implications, both practical and theoretical. Adventists have argued at many times in their history regarding any number of subjects—the law in Galatians, the king of the north in Daniel 11, the “daily” of Daniel 8, the nature of Armageddon, the literal-versus-figurative nature of the 144,000, and a whole lot more. Some of these questions continue to provoke animated conversation, at least in some circles. But while vigorous discussion has often attended the above issues, none have impacted either the unity of the church or the overall doctrinal and moral integrity of the church’s witness the way the modern Christology and related salvation controversies have done. It is quite impossible to review the history of the past half-century in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, beginning with the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (4) and the furor it ignited over Jesus’ humanity, and not recognize the dramatic consequences for which this and kindred issues bear responsibility.

The second chapter of the book in question closes with the following observation:

Both sides reveal honest, sincere, conscientious Christians who love the Lord and His truth. It seems inconceivable to either A or B that both A and B could be correct. And so, the contention continues, dividing families, churches, and friends (p. 16).

But again we turn to the evangelism analogy. The doctrines we as Adventists proclaim to the world in our public efforts also divide families, churches, and friends. Jesus predicted no less as the result of preaching and accepting the gospel (Matt. 10:34-37). Such division is always regrettable and often heart-wrenching. But it is also inevitable when the issue in question

leads to major variances in one's spiritual outlook and practical choices. Such, without question, is the case with the continuing Adventist controversy over the human nature of Christ.

The “Two Extreme Views”

In the book's introduction, the word “extreme” is applied three times to the two leading perspectives in contemporary Adventism on the nature of Jesus' humanity (pp. 9-11). I would suggest this label is unhelpful, and for the following reasons:

First, the two views on this subject are each part of a coherent, reasoned construct which begins with respective understandings of the nature of human sin, from which respective but contrary understandings logically flow as to how the obedience required by God's law can be rendered this side of heaven. Both sides in the controversy candidly acknowledge this logical flow within their respective systems (5). Indeed, it is quite strange that the book in question says practically nothing about the decisive impact of one's doctrine of sin for how one views the human nature of our Lord, not to mention its impact on other features of the current Adventist salvation controversy.

To characterize the position of either camp as extreme is really quite unfair. Simple logic constrains the arguments of each side, a fact which helps explain why those who have sought to craft a “hybrid” between the two persuasions have consistently faced intolerable tensions in their belief systems, public witness, and the impact of their ministry on others. Even nature teaches that hybrids are usually sterile.

What is more, both sides correctly understand the inadequacy of the labels commonly used to describe their position. The terms “pre-Fall” and “post-Fall,” like all labels in any forum of ideas, are used primarily for convenience. Both camps acknowledge that Jesus was neither entirely like the sinless Adam in Eden, nor entirely like a fallen being at the time He came to this earth. The book in question rightly acknowledges that Jesus never had cultivated tendencies to sin (p. 21). The great divide between the two views is over *hereditary* tendencies. One is reminded of a book many years ago by the late U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy regarding the liberal and conservative labels in American politics. He too recognized the incompleteness of these characterizations, but nevertheless acknowledged, “There is not enough time to change the flags” (6). The same, in my belief, holds true for the contemporary Adventist Christology debate. The labels aren't adequate, but they are sufficiently accurate to the point where they aren't likely to change, so we're probably stuck with them.

The second problem with the notion of “two extreme views,” as presented by the book in question, is that it plays to a popular but dangerous mindset in the middle class culture of the developed world, where Adventism in these territories is generally found. That is the mindset of middle-ground compromise, where conflict and disunity are often seen to be a worse enemy than wrong ideas or actions. When controversy arises, the first impulse of this mentality is not to ask what is right or wrong, but rather, to ask how soon we can stop the bickering and get everything back to “normal.”

It was to this segment of America that Richard Nixon appealed during his presidency, when he spoke of the “non-shouters,” “those who have not been the demonstrators,”—the so-called “silent majority.” Our Lord, by contrast, in His letter to the last of the seven churches of Revelation, describes this tendency in far less flattering terms (Rev. 3:15-17).

It is best we focus exclusively on learning what inspired counsel teaches regarding a given issue, rather than using language which might convey the impression that what we’re after is lowest-common-denominator unity. Pleasing as many and offending as few as possible is never the goal for the conscientious Bible student. Faithfulness to God’s written counsel must ever be our purpose in considering or studying any spiritual issue. My hunch is that the author of the book under review would heartily agree.

History of the Controversy

The book admits its perusal of the history of this debate in modern Adventism is brief, which is certainly forgivable (p. 20). But one is truly puzzled by the observation of one of the endorsers on the back cover, who claims this controversy has raged “with passion and predictability” for “more than 100 years” (back cover). Aside from the short-lived “holy flesh” heresy more than a century ago (7), evidence suggests this debate was largely absent from the church until the onset of the events surrounding the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* in the 1950s. Two surveyors of Adventist history from opposing sides of the controversy—Anglican scholar Geoffrey Paxton in his 1977 book *The Shaking of Adventism* (8), and the late Adventist pastor and scholar Ralph Larson in his 1986 book *The Word Was Made Flesh* (9)—both acknowledge the near-universal testimony of denominational thinkers for over a century in support of the post-Fall view of Christ’s human nature.

One is also amazed that the history of this dispute found in the book in question—brief though it is—makes no mention of the public stance of such post-Fall advocates as the late Kenneth H. Wood, who edited the *Review and Herald* (now the *Adventist Review*) from 1966 to 1982 (10). Even more prominent has been the scholarship of Herbert E. Douglass (11), who is identified by Paxton as the principal voice promoting this particular theology in the decades following *Questions on Doctrine* (12). And perhaps no book in the past thirty years has more widely promoted post-Fall Christology at the grassroots of the North American church than Dennis Priebe’s 1985 book *Face to Face With the Real Gospel* (13).

While the omission of the above authors and their work on this subject is minor compared with other shortcomings in the book under review, it is important for readers to understand that the post-Fall view of Jesus’ humanity has—until but recently—enjoyed conspicuous support within the mainstream channels of denominational life, including the pages of the church’s most prominent periodicals. Though the author of the book in question doesn’t say this, too many in recent times have sought to convey the notion that post-Fall Christology is a fringe viewpoint, held and promoted primarily by persons outside of denominational employment or at least lacking major influence. Such figures as Wood, Douglass, and Priebe—even more, perhaps, than those post-Fall advocates mentioned by the book in question

(pp. 18-19)—help clarify just how prominent this perspective has been, and continues to be, within mainstream denominational circles.

Another mistake, potentially more serious, is the book’s identification of the position taken by the 1988 book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* with the “official position of the church” (p. 19). The book under review is correct in saying that the deletion of the heading, “Took Sinless Human Nature”—originally used in *Questions on Doctrine* (14)—was “much to the relief of many church members and leaders” (p. 19). At the time *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* was published, Ralph Larson noted what he considered to be a significant shift away from the position on Christ’s human nature found in *Questions on Doctrine* (15). Whether this perception on Larson’s part was accurate may itself be debatable, as both the 1988 edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* and its updated version in 2005 speak—among other things—of Christ presumably being “free from hereditary corruption,” in apparent contrast with the rest of fallen humanity who are alleged to suffer such “corruption” (16). Most who hold to the post-Fall view of Jesus’ humanity would see such language as a major concession to the opposing view, as the principal point of distinction between the two camps is whether or not Jesus’ heredity was identical to that of other fallen humans.

In contrast to the book under review, Larson correctly observed that “neither (*Questions on Doctrine* nor *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*) was put through the formal procedure of being submitted to the General Conference for approval that would have made them ‘official’” (17). This is important to keep in mind. No doctrinal statement represents the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church without the endorsement of the General Conference in session. To this reviewer’s knowledge, such an endorsement has never been granted at any time to either position in the modern Adventist Christology debate. It appears this fact has at times been in need of clarification, as cases have been brought to this reviewer’s attention of various persons claiming the position of one book or another—including the successive versions of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*—to supposedly represent the church’s official voice on this subject.

Critical—But Unconsidered—Evidence

The book in question rightly notes one flawed argument that has at times been used by certain advocates of the post-Fall view—the claim that such Ellen White statements as the famous Baker letter of 1895 (18) should be given less weight than statements in a book such as *The Desire of Ages* (pp. 15-16), described by one leading post-Fall advocate—in contrast with the Baker letter—as “clearly her (Mrs. White’s) conscious and deliberate Christological position paper addressed to the whole world” (19).

This argument is not without its merits; a systematic treatise on a particular topic might generally be thought to have more transcendent relevance than a letter addressed to a local situation. At the same time, we enter treacherous waters when even remotely appearing to reduce the authority of inspired counsel addressed to a specific context. The vast proportion of Scripture, as well as the writings of Ellen White, fall into this category. What is more, Ellen White states quite plainly regarding her letters of prophetic admonition:

In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne (20).

The Baker letter need not be feared by advocates of the post-Fall position. What follows in this review will demonstrate the harmony of this letter, along with similar statements, with the larger Biblical and Ellen White consensus. Inspiration is its own interpreter. In Ellen White's words: "The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture" (21).

What should in fact be feared, however, is the omission of critical evidence from a conversation such as this. The book in question, unfortunately, omits such evidence. Such statements as the following—the first from the famous Baker letter, the second from another source—are included in this book:

Be careful, exceedingly careful, as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin (p. 15) (22).

He (Christ) was a mighty Petitioner, not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures, but compassed with like infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are (p. 65) (23).

But the book does not include such Ellen White statements as the following:

Adam was tempted by the enemy, and he fell. It was not indwelling sin which caused him to yield, for God made him pure and upright in His own image. He was as faultless as the angels before the throne. There were in him no corrupt principles, no tendencies to evil. But when Christ came to meet the temptations of Satan, He bore the "likeness of sinful flesh" (24).

Though He (Christ) had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling (25).

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 (26).

The book in question does include the following statement, often used to support the post-Fall view: "Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile or sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled; yet He took upon Him our sinful nature" (p. 15) (27). But those statements such as the above, which specifically identify Jesus as possessing fallen passions and sinful tendencies, clearly—when placed alongside those statements denying His possession of such fallen elements—set up a dilemma to which the conscientious student is constrained to seek resolution. Without a

representative number of these apparently contradictory statements on the table, and a corresponding effort to demonstrate their harmony, the book's case is left seriously vulnerable.

Just for clarification's sake, a side note might be helpful regarding the above statement which contrasts the sinless Adam with the tempted Christ, declaring that the former had "in him no corrupt principles, no tendencies to evil," then goes on to say that when Christ was tempted, "He bore the likeness of sinful flesh" (28). While the statement in question does not explicitly say Jesus had tendencies to evil within His inherited human nature, the contrast set up by the statement makes it clear this is exactly what is meant. The argument over "likeness" and "sameness" relative to Romans 8:3 is quite irrelevant to the contrast the statement is obviously drawing. The three elements declared by the statement to be absent from the sinless Adam, who is placed in contrast with Jesus, are "indwelling sin," "corrupt principles," and "tendencies to evil." While such phrases as "indwelling sin" and "corrupt principles" may be irreconcilable with the humanity of our Lord, it must at least be acknowledged that He had inherited tendencies to evil in order for the statement in question to make sense. Without this acknowledgement, there is no contrast whatsoever between Adam and Christ, and the statement would make no sense at all.

Equally important to underscore is that the statements quoted earlier about Jesus having "all the strength of passion of humanity" (29), and blessing children with "passions like His own" (30), cannot in context be construed as describing benign, sinless urges, like those possessed by Adam and Eve in Eden (31). The statement about Jesus possessing "all the strength of passion of humanity" states that *though* He had this strength within Him, He didn't yield to temptation. What is clearly implied by this statement is that these passions were a source of temptation to our Lord. The same is true about the statement regarding parents bringing their children to Jesus. The statement says these children "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" (32). Again, the passions being described are those that make our children wayward, and their parents less likely to bring them to the Savior. But we are counseled not to despair at the presence of these passions in our children, because Jesus was constrained to wrestle with them also.

The dispute over likeness-versus-sameness arising from the language of Romans 8:3 is briefly considered by the book in question. This verse, of course, is the one that reads:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3) (33).

The book in question offers the following comment on the dispute over the language of this passage:

The major issue springing out of these verses (e.g. Rom. 8:3) is the nature of our natural propensities to sin. The two key, and somewhat controversial words are "like" and

“likeness.” If Christ was in all things made like us, in sinful flesh, then He must have had propensities to sin, urges Side A. “Not so,” says Side B (A and B are fictitious names to protect the identity of “*After the fall*” and “*Before the fall*” advocates.) Side B maintains that *like* and *likeness* mean similar but not the same, urging that giving Christ propensities to sin would constitute Him a sinner and therefore He would need a Savior Himself (pp. 14-15, italics original).

Here is another major example of how the book’s brevity damages its case, undermining its ability to offer a reasonable solution to the conflict in question. The likeness-versus-sameness argument concerning Romans 8:3 is unquestionably one of the strongest in the case for the post-Fall view. The two most decisive aspects of this argument have never been seriously challenged by the pre-Fall camp. The first of these is found in the Greek word *homoiomati*, translated “likeness” in Romans 8:3. This word contains the prefix “homo,” which indisputably means “same.” It is obviously from this prefix that such English words as “homogeneous” and “homosexual” are derived. (One finds it interesting that more than half a century ago, when the modern Adventist Christology debate began, the word “homosexual” was not generally used in polite society. Now, due to the prominence of the gay rights movement, few need to be Greek scholars to know that “homo” means “same,” as distinct from “hetero” which means “different.”)

Little wonder that we find language identical to Romans 8:3 in Philippians 2:7, which speaks of Christ being made “in the likeness of men.” None will deny that likeness means sameness in this passage. The same terminology is found in Acts 14, where the inhabitants of Lystra claimed Paul and Barnabas were gods “come down to us in the likeness of men” (verse 11), whereupon the apostles replied, “We also are men, of like passions with you” (verse 15). Again, the word translated “like” or “likeness” (the same as in Romans and Philippians) clearly means sameness, for Paul and Barnabas were indeed real men, possessing passions like those of the Lystrians.

But even without looking at the Greek, it is clear that the “flesh” described in Romans 8 refers, not to what covers our bones, but to a human nature which Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered humans must resist. Let us review verse 3 again, this time in its immediate context:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. . . .

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . .

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:3-5,8-9,11-12).

According to this passage, those in whom the “righteousness of the law” is fulfilled “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (verse 4). The “things of the flesh” described in verse 5 are depicted as contrary to the “things of the Spirit.” “They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (verses 8-9). According to Paul, Christians “are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (verse 12), for those who “live after the flesh” will die (verse 13).

It is in this flesh—this human nature, with its contrast and hostility to the things of the Spirit—that Jesus “condemned sin” (verse 3).

By not considering the strength of the above evidence, and much more, the book in question conveys the impression that the dispute is unresolvable, and that a still-elusive middle ground remains to be discovered, on which both sides might heal the breach. But the need for such a middle ground isn’t likely to be perceived when such significant pieces of inspired evidence as the above—which go far toward solving the dispute in a different direction—are left out of the conversation.

Christ’s Temptations and Ours

A key objective of the book in question seems to be to prove the assumption that Jesus’ temptations couldn’t possibly have encompassed the variety of fallen attractions experienced by human beings at any particular time. The following statement, at the beginning of Chapter 3, introduces the book’s consideration of the substance of Jesus’ temptations:

Whatever position we may have on Christ’s human nature, there are two points upon which most everyone agrees concerning this subject. They are:

1. Christ had no *cultivated* tendencies, propensities or inclinations to sin (Christ did not sin).
2. Christ could not have inherited or possessed every tendency, propensity and inclination to sin.

Based on these two facts, one question haunts our image of Christ as our sympathetic High Priest. We *do* have cultivated, as well as inherited, inclinations to sin, and they vary from person to person; some of us have inherited or have cultivated a baser degree of sin-traits than have others (*Desire of Ages*, p. 517). How, then, can Christ sympathize with and succor all of humanity in every temptation?

No matter what side we take in the debate over the nature of Christ, to be both consistent and honest, we must question how Christ can sympathize with the effect *cultivated* sin has upon our temptations. He never cultivated sin. We must also wonder how Christ can sympathize with *every* inherited inclination or propensity present in humanity. Inheriting all of these would have required an arbitrary alteration of His genetic pool (which came from Mary, but not from Joseph) (pp. 21-22, italics original).

In another statement the book in question observes, “Nor was it possible that He could have inherited *all* the strength of *all* humanity’s inclinations to sin” (p. 26, italics original).

A number of issues, to be sure, rise from these comments. For starters, it is fair to say the only point stated above on which both sides would unequivocally agree is the fact that Jesus cultivated no sin, and therefore did not experience what Ellen White describes as cultivated tendencies to sin. The second of the above assumptions, though in a sense technically accurate, potentially conveys a misleading impression. No one, to be sure, is suggesting that Jesus experienced every single specific temptation known in the history of mankind. But does it therefore follow that it was not necessary for Him to experience and resist a sufficient number of fallen human urges in order to be a relevant Example?

The reference in one of the above comments to the Savior’s genetic inheritance raises an even greater concern on the part of thoughtful students of this controversy.

First of all, even though Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father, he—along with Mary—was part of the Davidic line (Matt. 1:20; Luke 2:4), as evidenced by the New Testament description of Christ as “made of the seed of David, according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3). The lineage of both, therefore, is included in the genetic heritage of our Lord. The fact that both lists in the Gospel record of our Lord’s earthly ancestors are traced through Joseph (Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:24) offers clear evidence of this. Joseph was not Jesus’ natural father, but both he and Mary partook of the genetic pool described in these passages, else Joseph’s lineage wouldn’t have been mentioned.

What is more, it is difficult to survey a more roguish gallery of ancestors than the ones found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Adultery, prostitution, incest, human sacrifice, social injustice, outrageous abuses of power, the slaughter of innocents—all are included among Jesus’ forbears. Even Ahab and Jezebel contributed to His hereditary line, as their wicked daughter Athaliah married Judah’s King Joram (Matt. 1:8). Though Athaliah isn’t mentioned in Matthew’s genealogy, we know she is one of the Savior’s ancestors because it was through her son Ahaziah that the royal line listed by Matthew continued; as all of Ahaziah’s siblings were killed (II Chron. 22:1-2). Later, of course, Athaliah tried to exterminate Ahaziah’s own children—her grandchildren (verse 10)—an effort which failed because of the concealment of Prince Joash in the temple (verses 11-12). Yet this perpetrator of heinous atrocity is nevertheless among those through whom the promised Messiah descended. So, too, was the evil King Manasseh (Matt. 1:10), whose crimes included gross idolatry, bold sacrilege, the offering of his children to pagan

gods, spiritualism, and the filling of Jerusalem with innocent blood (II Kings 21:2-7,11,16; II Chron. 33:2-7,9).

During the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign, businessman Steve Forbes was questioned about his privileged background while running for his party's presidential nomination. He replied a bit sardonically, "You just have to know how to pick your parents." He was joking, of course. But it helps us remember that only one Person in history has had that privilege. And the ancestors He picked were some of the worst imaginable!

This is the background to keep in view when reading the following statement by Ellen White, one of the best known in the modern Adventist Christology debate:

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 (34).

Notice how this statement doesn't say Jesus took our heredity merely to look like the ordinary human being of His day—with less physical strength and mental acuity than the sinless Adam in Eden. All agree Jesus took a physically and mentally weakened humanity through genetic inheritance. But the above statement encompasses more than that. It says, "He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations," and directs us to the history of His earthly ancestors to see just what that means.

It is hard to imagine very many sinful tendencies which wouldn't have been conveyed through the ancestors listed in the Gospel record. Equally important in a discussion such as this is to beware of the modern illusion of exaggerated uniqueness, which too often intrudes into conversations on this subject. Unfortunately, the book in question moves somewhat in that direction by raising the question as to whether "Joe Smoker," "Jane Drinker," or those wrestling with various other vices can relate to our Lord's temptation experiences (p. 22). Alcohol use, of course, was certainly an issue in Jesus' time; one contemporary writer has noted that alcoholism was as common in antiquity as it is today (35). Too many falsely assume that modern science and technology have produced temptations of a sort presumably unknown to the cultural context in which Jesus lived. Such persons often forget, for example, that while tobacco may not have existed in the culture of Jesus' upbringing, such recreational drugs such as opium and marijuana in fact existed in the ancient world (36). Pornography too was popular in the Roman culture of the first century A.D, as any visitor to the ruins of Pompeii can attest.

Certainly it wouldn't have been necessary for Jesus to experience temptation to indulge every conceivable chemical or herbal substance providing a measure of escape from reality, in order to relate to this particular tendency of human nature. But most users and former users would attest that the craving for all these substances—from alcohol and tobacco to recreational drugs of other sorts—is remarkably similar in the human experience, and the struggle to

overcome in each case significantly comparable. It is wise, of course, not to speculate about our Lord's struggle beyond what the inspired evidence reveals. But recognizing the commonality of many fleshly urges and cravings goes far toward disputing the notion that it was impossible for the human Christ to encounter a sufficient number of specific fallen temptations so as to offer a universal example of practical conflict and triumph.

The book in question observes as follows: "Many of our present-day temptations come to the surface in forms non-existent in Christ's time" (p. 25). Unfortunately, the author gives no examples of what he is talking about. Does he mean, for example, that because television or the Internet didn't exist in Jesus' time, that perverse forms of entertainment and the wrongful use of leisure moments were not accessible to Him? Any careful study of classical history reveals that imperial Roman society offered plenty of carnal diversions for all social classes. Aside from technological advances and the progressive hardening of hearts through centuries of transgression, the human repertoire of fleshly indulgences and sinful gratifications has experienced remarkably little change from the age of the horse and chariot to the age of the ipod and Facebook. Modern and postmodern humans like to think their moral dilemmas are more pervasive and complex than those of previous times, but the student of history has ample cause to affirm the wise man's observation that "there is no new thing under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9).

It's easy to forget the kind of place Nazareth was (John 1:46), a town whose residents—according to the inspired pen—"were proverbial for their wickedness" (37). The servant of the Lord writes as follows, regarding Jesus' struggle with temptation in the setting where He grew up:

In the providence of God, His early life was passed in Nazareth, where the inhabitants were of that character that He was continually exposed to temptations, and it was necessary for Him to be guarded in order to remain pure and spotless amid so much sin and wickedness. Christ did not select this place Himself. His Heavenly Father chose this place for Him, where His character would be tested and tried in a variety of ways. The early life of Christ was subjected to severe trials, hardships, and conflicts, that He might develop the perfect character that makes Him a perfect example for children, youth, and manhood (38).

Two points stand out in this statement, among others. First, the statement assumes a variety of temptation experiences on the part of our Lord, a point to keep in mind as we consider the central assumption of the book in question regarding the nature of Jesus' struggle with temptation. Second, it says Jesus needed to be "guarded in order to remain pure and spotless amid so much sin and wickedness." One needn't be guarded against something one's lower nature doesn't find attractive! (I, for example, need not be on guard against overindulgence on cooked spinach, which I can't stand!)

Few discussions about Jesus' temptations fail to raise the question of whether He was constrained to wrestle with sexual desires. The book in question raises this issue when it asks whether "Mr. Child Molester" or "Mrs. Child Abuser" can relate to Jesus' struggles (p. 22).

“Did Christ,” the book asks, “battle with inclinations toward child abuse and child molestation?” (p. 22). Once again, it is best not to try answering questions not directly addressed by the inspired evidence. But in a pamphlet specifically devoted to the issue of sexual indulgence, Ellen White offers the following assurance:

All are accountable for their actions while upon probation in this world. All have power to control their actions. If they are weak in virtue and purity of thoughts and acts, they can obtain help from the Friend of the helpless. Jesus is acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature, and if entreated, will give strength to overcome the most powerful temptations (39).

The book in question recounts a discussion in which the question was raised regarding whether Christ was “drawn to self-abuse” (pp. 13-14)—a term in the writings of Ellen White generally believed to refer to the practice of masturbation. The pamphlet from which the above statement is taken warns at length regarding this practice. For Ellen White to say in such a context that “Jesus is acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature” is most significant. She isn’t talking here about innocent weaknesses like hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, etc. She is talking about weaknesses that incline toward sin, a reference which would hardly make sense if the weakness that is the subject of the pamphlet in question—sexual weakness, in particular the urge to engage in self-abuse—was not one with which our Lord had to contend.

Along lines similar to the above statement, Ellen White is clear exactly where our strongest temptations originate, and how Jesus is acquainted with these weaknesses:

His (the Christian’s) strongest temptations will come from within, for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses (40).

He knows *by experience* what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations, for He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (41).

Let us again bear in mind the principle we noted in our consideration of substance abuse—the commonality between urges of a particular genre. Sexual desire is sexual desire, regardless of where and toward whom it is directed. It therefore isn’t necessary for Jesus to experience every imaginable urge for sexual gratification in order to give an example of practical purity in this area. But in light of the history of Jesus’ ancestors, and the dominant role sexuality played in so many of their lives—not to mention the rest of us—it is well-nigh inconceivable to suppose that the “all points” in which the Bible assures us that our Lord was tempted (Heb. 4:15) did not include this universal human drive.

Other inspired statements further explore the specificity of temptations encountered by our Lord. Regarding our children, she writes:

Let children bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon Himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted (42).

He (Christ) was made a child that He might understand the temptations of childhood, and know its weaknesses and be able to help the children to be overcomers (43).

Writing to an eighteen-year-old youth, Ellen White encouraged him as follows:

Jesus once stood in age just where you now stand. Your circumstances, your cogitations at this period of your life, Jesus has had. He cannot overlook you at this critical period. He sees your dangers. He is acquainted with your temptations. He invites you to follow His example (44).

It helps to remember, in light of the above statements, that the sinless Adam was never a child or a youth, nor was he exposed to the peculiar temptations these periods of life bring.

Writing to an orphan boy inclined to self-centeredness and provocation, she likewise observed:

You should not be easily provoked. Let not your heart become selfish; but let it expand with love. You have a work to do, which you must not neglect. Endure hardship as a good soldier. Jesus is acquainted with every conflict, every trial, and every pang of anguish. He will help you; for He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet He sinned not (45).

In context, “every conflict” and “every trial” obviously include conflicts with selfishness and an easily provoked spirit. Without question these are the struggles one experiences with a fallen nature.

In another, very moving statement, Ellen White speaks of how Christ had to struggle with sinful thoughts:

Some realize their great weakness and sin, and become discouraged. Satan casts his dark shadow between them and the Lord Jesus, their atoning sacrifice. They say, It is useless for me to pray. My prayers are so mingled with evil thoughts that the Lord will not hear them.

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 (46).

Let us remember, of course, that the mere arousal of sinful thoughts within a person does not constitute sin, provided these thoughts are resisted by the will. The apostle James declares that “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin” (James 1:14-15). Ellen White agrees:

There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt and no other is defiled by their influence (47).

Further detailing the specifics of Jesus' temptations, Ellen White observes:

There were those who tried to cast contempt upon Him because of His birth, and even in His childhood He had to meet their scornful looks and evil whisperings. If He had responded by an impatient word or look, if He had conceded to His brothers by even one wrong act, He would have failed of being a perfect example (48).

Through the help that Christ can give, we shall be able to learn to bridle the tongue. Sorely as He was tried on the point of hasty and angry speech, He never once sinned with His lips. With patient calmness He met the sneers, the taunts, and the ridicule of His fellow workers at the carpenter's bench. Instead of retorting angrily, He would begin to sing one of David's beautiful psalms, and His companions, before realizing what they were doing, would unite with Him in the hymn (49).

The trials and privations of which so many youth complain, Christ endured without murmuring. And this discipline is the very experience the youth need, which will give firmness to their character and make them like Christ, strong in spirit to resist temptation (50).

Recounting the Savior's experience during His passion and trial, she writes:

Christ's agony did not cease, but His depression and discouragement left Him (51).

Satan led the cruel mob in its abuse of the Saviour. It was his purpose to provoke Him to retaliation if possible, or to drive Him to perform a miracle to release Himself, and thus break up the plan of salvation. One stain upon His human life, one failure of His humanity to endure the terrible test, and the Lamb of God would have been an imperfect offering, and the redemption of man a failure. . . .

Satan's rage was great as he saw that all the abuse inflicted upon the Saviour had not forced the least murmur from His lips (52).

What kind of human nature is tempted to indulge impatience, provocation, hasty and angry speech, discouragement, murmuring, and retaliation? The struggles depicted in the above statements are obviously those in which a fallen, lower nature would have been gratified by yielding.

Notice also the distinction drawn in one of the above statements between the temptation to retaliate and murmur on the one hand, and the temptation to perform a miracle to free Himself on the other. What is clear from this statement is that Jesus was tempted to do both, not simply one or the other. In the next section we will consider our Lord's struggle to use His divinity in

His own behalf, and how the book under review seeks to use this struggle as a general, even exclusive description of our Lord's battle with temptation.

In short, no advocate of post-Fall Christology in the Adventist Church has ever claimed Jesus experienced every single possible temptation to self-indulgence that has occurred, or may occur, in the human story. This is a misperceived stance that, unfortunately, the author of the book in question appears to believe is seriously held among post-Fall advocates. But from what we read in the inspired writings about our Lord's human ancestors and His daily struggle with sin, together with the inspired assurance that He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15), we have every reason to believe the sinful, fleshly allurement resisted by our Lord included a sufficiently broad representation of suggested practices to give Him intimate familiarity with the human struggle for purity in every age.

A False "Either/Or" Dilemma

While correctly acknowledging that Christ "could be tempted by the devil at any time and He was" (p. 27), the book in question focuses primarily on what Ellen White calls the "three great leading temptations" (53) confronted by Christ in the wilderness following His baptism (pp. 30-31). Quoting I John 2:17 regarding these three principal temptations—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (p. 25)—the book accurately observes that "all the temptations that plague us in this world fall under one of these three categories" (p. 26).

The problem arises from two key implications the author seems to draw from our Lord's conflict with Satan in the wilderness:

1. That because, in Ellen White's words, Christ's temptation in that setting was "an hundredfold stronger than was or ever will be brought to bear upon the human race" (p. 31 (54), it presumably wasn't necessary for Him to experience the normal barrage of internal fleshly urges you and I must daily contend with.
2. That because Jesus' wilderness temptations primarily involved the urge to employ His own divine power in His behalf—an option fallen mortals obviously don't have—this supposedly was the principal temptation He had to face throughout His earthly sojourn.

Unfortunately, the book sets up what appears to be an "either/or" dilemma regarding the substance of Christ's temptations, when the inspired evidence—some of which we have seen already—indicates it is a case, not of either/or, but of both/and. Let us again consider a statement from *The Desire of Ages* regarding Christ's abuse by the mob on the way to Calvary:

Satan led the cruel mob in its abuse of the Saviour. It was his purpose to provoke Him to retaliation if possible, *or* to drive Him to perform a miracle to release Himself, and thus break up the plan of salvation. One stain upon His human life, one failure of His humanity to endure the terrible test, and the Lamb of God would have been an imperfect offering, and the redemption of man a failure. . . .

Satan's rage was great as he saw that all the abuse inflicted upon the Saviour had not forced the least murmur from His lips (55).

Notice again how the enemy attacked Christ on two different fronts—to retaliate and to murmur, as a fallen being would want to do, *or* to perform a miracle to release Himself from His ordeal, as only a supernatural being could do. Very clearly, this passage is describing these as two different temptations. No one denies Jesus was tempted to use His divinity in this fashion, and that He was tempted in this way by the devil till at last He cried, "It is finished!" The book quotes the following Ellen White statement, often used to demonstrate a marked difference between Christ's temptations and ours:

It was as difficult for Him to keep the level of humanity as it is for men to rise above the level of their depraved natures, and to partake of the divine nature (pp. 46-47) (56).

A similar statement from the same article, also quoted by the book in question (p. 36), observes as follows:

Christ was put to the closest test, requiring the strength of all his faculties, to resist the inclination when in danger, to use His power to deliver Himself from peril, and triumph over the power of the prince of darkness. Satan showed his knowledge of the weak points of the human heart, and put forth his utmost power to take advantage of the weakness of the humanity which Christ had assumed in order to overcome his temptations on man's account (57).

But the collective inspired evidence does not permit us to read the above statements in an either/or fashion. Yes, Christ was tempted to use His divinity to rise above the human limitations He had assumed by becoming man. But this doesn't mean He wasn't also tempted to yield to the clamors of a fallen, fleshly nature. Indeed, the second passage reaffirms what we saw in an earlier statement about His passion and trial (58)—the fact that Jesus had to endure *both* the temptation to use the strength of His divinity *and* the temptation to indulge the weakness of His humanity.

The book in question declares: "By going far beyond any allurements that will ever assail humanity, by reaching down to the very depths of human suffering and enfeeblement, Christ is qualified to succor all who turn to Him for help" (p. 33). Again, none will deny Christ's struggle with temptation included exactly what the author of this book claims. But if he is alleging that these struggles over the use of supernatural power represent the totality of our Lord's experience in His earthly conflict with Satan, the problem of our Savior relating to fallen humanity's daily encounters with urges and gratifications far more mundane—but nevertheless decisive in the constant clamor for mortal allegiance—is still very real.

When addressing this subject, I often recall an incident from the 1960 U.S. presidential campaign, when John Kennedy was campaigning in the West Virginia primary. The story is told that at one of Kennedy's campaign stops, a coal miner asked, "Is it true that you've never had to work a day in your entire life?" As the smile of wordless embarrassment crossed the candidate's

face, the miner leaned over the railing and whispered in Kennedy's ear, "You haven't missed much."

Had Kennedy replied, "Be of good cheer, sir; we rich folks have financial problems too," he would not have been lying. Wealthy people do have financial headaches, far and above anything experienced by the poor or middle-income wage earner. But we wouldn't likely find many poor or middle-class folks who wouldn't gladly exchange their daily, monthly financial burdens for those of a Kennedy, a Rockefeller, a Bill Gates, or a Michael Bloomberg.

The fact that Jesus endured temptations far and above what fallen beings are called upon to face, does not relieve Him of the necessity of facing—and defeating—the normal fleshly urges and proclivities confronted by us all. As a child I remember Del Delker singing that beautiful song:

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free
He could have called ten thousand angels
But He died alone, for you and me.

These soaring lyrics articulately describe a temptation our Lord most assuredly met and conquered, a fact for which we cannot but abase our hearts, bow our heads, and praise His name. But you and I can no more relate to this temptation than could the West Virginia coal miner have empathized with the vexations of the Kennedy family's stock portfolio. The inspired testimony is clear that Christ not only endured the unimaginable test of resisting the use of divinity to end His suffering and leave fallen man to perish, but that He also endured those tests presented each day by the inner demands of fallen, sinful human nature.

The Book's Proposed Solution

In Chapter 5, the book in question starts to develop in earnest what its author holds to be the solution to the great divide in Adventism over Jesus' incarnate humanity. Though, as we have seen, the book's perusal of inspired evidence focuses disproportionately on statements which seem to separate Christ from fallen human nature, the author seeks in the end to rise above the dispute by proposing common ground on which he hopes the two camps can find basic agreement.

Despite the book's apparent rejection of any inherited tendencies to sin within the human Christ (pp. 36,42,45,49,55,63), the author assures us that fallen humans still have something fundamental in common with their Savior—the need to surrender one's will to God. In His own words:

We have to resist the inclinations of our sinful nature. Christ had to resist the inclinations to rely upon His divine nature. So how does Christ help us? Where is the connection between fallen humanity and Christ? Follow this next point carefully.

Though the inclination of Christ was to rely upon His righteous self and our inclination is to rely upon our sinful self, the test is the same. The question distills down to one vital choice: self-reliance or God-reliance (p. 41).

Repetitively, in the book's closing chapters, this point is hammered home (pp. 42-47,49,55,58,63,69), and is suggested at one point by the author as the "missing link and final chapter in the quest to understand the nature of Christ" (p. 66). Elsewhere the book states that "during His entire life on earth Jesus strove against sin at the root level by surrendering His will to God" (p. 44), that "the battle against sin rests upon one major point—the surrender of the will" (p. 45). The will of Christ, the book acknowledges, was in fact "weakened by 4,000 years of self-serving. Yet from day one He yielded that will to God" (p. 42; see also p. 45). None would argue with this latter point, of course. But the book seems to pursue a path followed by the teachings of various modern Adventists by drawing an apparent contrast between the battle against self-reliance and the battle against particular sinful tendencies. The author writes at one point:

Yielding to temptation to rely upon His divine-self would have led Christ down self-sufficient avenue to sin boulevard (p. 61).

With this premise in mind, it ceases to be necessary—from the book's perspective—for Christ to have inherited sinful urges, desires and passions, and to have thus been constrained to defeat these proclivities through the same divine strength available to us. All that is needed is for Christ to have struggled against self-dependence, which in the book's view would have solely involved the struggle of an admittedly weakened human will to keep from summoning inherent divinity to its aid. According to the book, this particular commonality of struggle—our struggle to not rely on our sinful selves just as Christ struggled not to rely on His divine Self—is all the example we need from the incarnate Christ.

This is not a new theory. We've heard it before.

Perhaps its most ardent promoter in modern Adventism, in an interview several decades ago, stated quite clearly why he didn't believe Jesus had to take our fallen human nature in order to give mankind a relevant example:

I think that the contention is quite valid that if a person defines sin primarily in terms of transgression of the law—in legalistic terms and understandings—then he is going to need a Saviour who is just like he is. A Saviour who has struggled with all his same temptations to transgress the law. . . . Now, if you go back to define sin in terms of relationship—sin in terms of living a life apart from God—you don't need to have a Saviour exactly as you are (59).

Taking his view of Jesus' humanity to its logical next step—its implications for the human struggle for total victory over sin—the above author continued by saying:

Perfection of character must be defined in terms of relationship, not in terms of spelling out ethical and moral options (60).

Another leading contemporary Adventist author, addressing the subject of Christ's human nature, also attempts to close the gap between fallen humans and their Savior with the assurance that the "root" of temptation is not to get us to do bad things, but rather, to sever our relationship with God (61).

It is quite beyond the scope of this review to consider in depth the implications of this popular "relationship" theology (62). To state it briefly, this theology presents a bouquet of egregious departures from Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy teachings. For starters, the claim that to define sin "primarily" as the transgression of the law is somehow "legalistic," flies directly in the face of a number of Ellen White statements, which declare I John 3:4 ("sin is the transgression of the law") to be "the only definition of sin" (63). Another component of this theory—which would seem to dovetail quite neatly with the statement noted earlier from the book under review about "self-sufficient avenue" leading to "sin boulevard" (p. 61)—holds that the choice to separate from God comes before the choice to commit specific sins. Yet the Bible is clear just the opposite is true:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear (Isa. 59:2).

A number of very clear Ellen White statements likewise affirm that sin is what causes separation, not the other way around (64).

But perhaps the best known feature of "relationship" theology is its insistence that human effort in the Christian life is to focus exclusively on maintaining one's "relationship" with Jesus through what are often called the "three tangibles"—prayer, Bible study, and witnessing—while the work of fighting sin and Satan is left entirely to the Lord. Some very straightforward Bible verses (II Cor. 7:1; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 12:4; James 4:7-8), together with similarly unambiguous Ellen White statements (65), make it difficult if not impossible to harmonize this construct with the written counsel of God.

The book in question quotes the following Ellen White statement regarding the battle with self:

The battle which we have to fight—the greatest battle that was ever fought by man—is the surrender of self to the will of God, the yielding of the heart to the sovereignty of love (p. 43) (66).

At several points throughout the book's closing chapters, this thought is repeated (pp. 46,49,58,64,67,69). Unfortunately, the book gives every evidence of viewing this Ellen White statement through lenses similar to those of the "relationship" theology noted above—that is, the idea that fighting to surrender self is somehow distinct from fighting specific sins. But the

context of this particular Ellen White statement makes no such distinction. Here is the statement, in its immediate context:

The belated traveler, hurrying to reach the city gate by the going down of the sun, could not turn aside for any attractions by the way. His whole mind was bent on the one purpose of entering the gate. The same intensity of purpose, said Jesus, is required in the Christian life. I have opened to you the glory of character, which is the true glory of My kingdom. It offers you no promise of earthly dominion; yet it is worthy of your supreme desire and effort. I do not call you to battle for the supremacy of the world's great empire, but do not therefore conclude that there is no battle to be fought nor victories to be won. I bid you strive, agonize, to enter into My spiritual kingdom.

The Christian life is a battle and a march. But the victory to be gained is not won by human power. The field of conflict is the domain of the heart. The battle which we have to fight—the greatest battle that was ever fought by man—is the surrender of self to the will of God, the yielding of the heart to the sovereignty of love. The old nature, born of blood and of the will of the flesh, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The hereditary tendencies, the former habits, must be given up (67).

Notice how, in this statement, the battle to surrender self to God is contrasted, not with battles waged against individual sins, but rather, with battles for earthly dominion and temporal power. The very last sentence makes it clear that the relinquishing of sinful tendencies and evil habits is an integral part of this warfare. It is like another Ellen White statement on battles with self, in which she declares:

But Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of character is an easy matter. A noble, all-round character is not inherited. It does not come to us by accident. A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. God gives the talents, the powers of the mind; we form the character. It is formed by hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies. We shall have to criticize ourselves closely, and allow not one unfavorable trait to remain uncorrected (68).

This statement not only acknowledges the cooperative nature of the struggle against sin, which involves the blending of divine power with human effort. It also makes no distinction whatsoever between battles with self and battles with specific sinful tendencies and wrong traits of character. All these struggles are depicted by the inspired pen as the same.

We cannot, therefore, eliminate the need for Christ to experience the full genre of fleshly temptations on the grounds that His struggle to deny His divine Self is a sufficient parallel to our struggle to deny our human selves. In the first place, we have already seen substantial inspired evidence demonstrating that Jesus did experience the battle with fallen fleshly urges and wicked desires—whether regarding impatience (69), impurity (70), sexual indulgence (71), hasty and angry speech (72), provocation (73), murmuring (74), and sinful thoughts in general (75). The

inspired testimony is clear these struggles were very much part of Jesus' human experience, in addition to the struggle not to use His divinity as a means of surmounting conflict in ways not available to fallen, earthly beings.

Neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White distinguish the struggle to surrender self from the struggle with particular sins, as promoters of the popular "relationship" theology in modern Adventism have so long insisted. No one, after all, objects to surrendering self except for specific ideas and practices self wishes to retain. Many there are in today's world who willingly surrender themselves to God as they understand Him—or Her, or It, depending on their definition. Many contemporary self-help programs and philosophies are based on such surrender. What makes Biblical self-surrender unique is the necessity of relinquishing all ideas and practices found to be contrary to God's Word—a commitment to which human resolve and imparted divine strength must be consecrated each day, each hour, each moment, in the process called sanctification.

The Lower and Higher Natures—A Better Solution

Several times, the book in question quotes an Ellen White statement which declares:

As one with us, He must bear the burden of our guilt and woe. The Sinless One must feel the shame of sin. The peace lover must dwell with strife, the truth must abide with falsehood, purity with vileness. Every sin, every discord, every defiling lust that transgression had brought, was torture to His spirit (pp. 22,38,67) (76).

What we need to examine is the contrast drawn by both Scripture and Ellen White between the spirit and the flesh, and how this distinction offers a solution to the present controversy more considerate of the totality of inspired evidence than the one proposed by the book in question.

Jesus acknowledged the existence of both lower and higher forces in human nature when He declared to His disciples, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Paul said the same thing when he wrote, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (I Cor. 9:27). Ellen White speaks along similar lines when she writes: "The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power" (77). Other passages spell out this clear distinction:

The body is to be brought into subjection. The higher powers of the being are to rule. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which is itself under the control of God (78).

If enlightened intellect holds the reins, controlling the animal propensities, keeping them in subjection to the moral powers, Satan well knows that his power to overcome with his temptations is very small (79).

Intemperance of any kind benumbs the perceptive organs, and so weakens the brain nerve power that eternal things are not appreciated, but are placed upon a level with common

things. The higher powers of the mind, developed for elevated purposes, are brought into slavery to the baser passions (80).

Another statement makes it clear that the flesh of itself is incapable of sin:

The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words "flesh" or "fleshly" or "carnal lusts" embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God (81).

Remember, it is through the higher powers of our being that moral and spiritual choices are made. Neither sin nor righteousness is possible unless the higher nature is exercised. Evil passions and sinful propensities can only be contained in the lower nature, which the above statement declares to be incapable of sin. But such passions and propensities can be cast out of the higher nature, which involves the will and character. The following statements make this clear:

The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension (82).

We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity (83).

Clearly, when Ellen White speaks of evil passions cast out and sinful propensities not retained, she is not teaching holy flesh, for in another statement we read that "appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity" (84). Here is how we can resolve what appears to be conflict between those Ellen White statements which say, on the one hand, that Jesus did not have evil propensities or like passions as we (85), and others which clearly say He did (86). The one set of statements refer to His higher nature, where the will and character choices reside. The other set of statements refer to His lower, fleshly nature, which "of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God" (87).

This distinction also helps us understand two different definitions Ellen White uses in her writings for human nature. One set of statements speak of human nature in terms of natural, inherited equipment, otherwise called the lower nature:

The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist (88).

In our own strength it is impossible for us to deny the clamors of our fallen nature. Through this channel Satan will bring temptations upon us. Christ knew that the enemy

would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God (89).

Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature (90).

You cannot bring up your children as you should without divine help; for the fallen nature of Adam always strives for the mastery. The heart must be prepared for the principles of truth, that they may root in the soul and find nourishment in the life (91).

The second set of statements speak of human nature as synonymous with the will and character, or the higher nature:

Connected with Christ, human nature becomes pure and true. Christ supplies the efficiency, and man becomes a power for good (92).

A Christlike nature is not selfish, unsympathetic, cold. It enters into the feelings of those who are tempted and helps the one who has fallen to make the trial a steppingstone to higher things (93).

If your nature is not transformed, if you are not refined and elevated by the sanctifying truth for these last days, you will be found unworthy of a place among the good and holy angels (94).

The word destroys the natural, earthly nature, and imparts a new life in Christ Jesus (95).

When Christ shall come, our vile bodies are to be changed, and made like His glorious body; but the vile character will not be made holy then. The transformation of character must take place before His coming. Our natures must be pure and holy; we must have the mind of Christ, that He may behold with pleasure His image reflected upon our souls (96).

Let us again bear in mind those Ellen White statements which speak of the struggle with our fallen natures as continuing till the coming of Jesus:

So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained (97)..

Appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity (98).

This is not to imply, of course, that occasional defeat will be with us till the coming of Christ, as certain ones sadly believe—a concept fully at odds with any number of statements which promise total victory for the Christian prior to probation's close (99). But uninterrupted victory doesn't mean the absence of struggle. During World War II, from the time the Allies invaded Normandy in June 1944 to the German surrender the following May, the Allied forces

won a series of hard-fought but constant victories. The same was true on the Russian front, where the Red Army won a comparable series of unbroken triumphs from the aftermath of Stalingrad in the spring of 1943 to the conquest of Berlin two years later. It took the Soviets, in other words, a full two years to regain territory that had been lost in four months during the German invasion of 1941.

That's a lot like it is with sin in our lives. It often takes but a short time to lose considerable ground to the adversary. However, it often takes many years of painful conflict to win that ground back.

When we understand the distinction in inspired writings between the lower and higher forces within human nature, we can see how Ellen White can say regarding Christ, on the one hand, that “He was perfect, and undefiled by sin . . . without spot or blemish” (100), yet on the other hand say, “He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin” (101). It was His higher nature—His will and character—which remained unspotted by sin, while within His lower, fleshly nature, sinful urges strove against His chosen course. We have seen how the book in question quotes several times Ellen White’s statement of how “every defiling lust” was torture to Jesus’ spirit (102). But we have seen from the inspired pen how the flesh and the spirit are two different elements within our nature. Another statement speaks of how “Christ did in reality unite the offending nature of man with His own sinless nature” (103). Putting all these statements together, it becomes clear this offense was felt within His very being. Fleshly desires were very real within our Lord’s inherited humanity, but their continually-resisted demands were torture to His sanctified spirit—just as they may be with us. The book in question quotes the Bible verse declaring the human Christ to have been “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26) (p. 53). But Ellen White is equally clear that sanctified humans, who still retain their fallen natures (104), can and must have this same experience:

Cherish those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; but put away whatever is unlike our Redeemer. . . . Every soul that gains eternal life must be like Christ, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26) (105).

For those with further interest in how the distinction between the lower and higher natures resolves the modern Adventist Christology debate, a more in-depth article by this reviewer is available (106).

Why This Controversy Persists—Even Among Conservative Adventists

The number of theologically conservative Seventh-day Adventists—those holding to a high view of authority for both Scripture and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy—who adhere to the pre-Fall view of Christ’s human nature, has never been carefully studied or calculated. It is probably fair to say that due to the logical, philosophical, and circumstantial association of ideas common to various groups in the contemporary church, most Adventists generally thought

of as “conservative” are presumed to be in the post-Fall Christology camp. In the absence of hard data, the extent to which this assumption is accurate may be argued. But most observers of the current Adventist scene—across the theological spectrum—would likely agree that the post-Fall view of Christ’s humanity is a typical feature of conservative Adventist theology, in particular at the church’s grassroots in First World countries.

Why, then, in some circles of conservative Adventism, does this issue remain controversial, even divisive? I suggest the following three reasons:

First, respect for authority. Religious conservatives, like conservatives of other stripes, tend to give the benefit of the doubt to established institutions, belief, custom, and tradition within the setting in which they find themselves. Despite a general conservative Adventist awareness in recent times of widespread departure from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy in the modern church, the fact remains that what is assumed and taught through the church’s established channels—especially if its promoters appear gracious, deeply spiritual, and otherwise faithful to classic Adventist teachings—is easy to accept and take for granted. Such persons often ask themselves, silently if not vocally, “How can so many good, intelligent, obviously committed Seventh-day Adventist Christians be mistaken?”

Regard for authority being what it is, religious conservatives who are convinced a certain spiritual environment is secure from the likelihood of error and misguidance, will often fail to apply the Berean test to all they hear or read (see Acts 17:11). While intellectually they know they should always apply this test, instinctively they assume such wariness is needed only in questionable spiritual settings. If, for whatever reason, a setting is deemed beyond the need for such questioning, the application of Berean diligence can be neglected. Sometimes, in situations like these, even the suggestion of the need for such testing is considered insulting or perhaps insubordinate.

The second such reason is often negative associations in certain minds with the post-Fall view, particularly on account of those who strongly and publicly uphold it. In recent times the assumption has been widely promoted, even within certain segments of conservative Adventism, that belief in post-Fall Christology is a trademark of critical, anti-denominational malcontents more interested in throwing rocks at the church than in doing God’s work. If one has been connected in the past with a ministry or institution which (rightly or wrongly) carries such a reputation, those desirous of shedding these negative leanings and associations may find it easy to cast off ideology seen as peculiar to the agenda of such a ministry or institution, irrespective of what in fact is taught by the written counsel of God.

It would lead too far afield to address in depth the root causes of this perception. For our present purposes, these assumptions—be they true, false, or somewhere in between—are irrelevant. Most would acknowledge, to be sure, that negative attitudes can be found among persons on both sides of this controversy. When all is said and done, the teachings of God’s Word remain valid irrespective of the faults of those presenting them. A Ku Klux Klansman who befouls the Christian cause with hate and racism does not lessen the claims of Christ on the

soul. (Those unmindful of American history may forget that during the rise of Biblical fundamentalism in the early 20th century, many claimed to have found Christ through the influence of the Klan (107).) Nor does a child-molesting Sabbath-keeper negate the Bible truth that the seventh day remains the Sabbath of the Lord our God. Certainly hypocrisy of any kind is a curse to the striving Christian, in particular to those upholding the necessity of perfect conformity to God’s law here on earth. But the ultimate test of authenticity in all things spiritual must ever be the objective, transcendent, written counsel of God (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11). Deadly as an inconsistent Christian example always is, it does not make the truth professed by such a one any less true.

The third reason post-Fall Christology remains controversial among some conservative Adventists is the problem of pious revulsion against our Lord having to wrestle with inward sinful desires. One recounts a 1991 edition of the ABC News talk show “This Week With David Brinkley” (now “This Week With George Stephanopoulos”), in which reporter Cokie Roberts commented on the disclosure that then-President George H.W. Bush was suffering from what was diagnosed as an “irregular heartbeat.” Medically, Roberts noted, this was not serious. The only problem, she said, was that whenever people hear the words “President” and “heart” in the same breath, they get worried.

Much the same can be said, perhaps, regarding the adjective “sinful” being used in the same phrase or breath as the name of Christ. The idea of our pure, spotless Savior having anything that could be called “sinful” is abhorrent to certain ones, despite the clear statements of Inspiration. For many devout Christians, even negative contact with evil is thought to have a soiling effect, like fighting off a mud wrestler. To think of wicked urges pulsing through the nerves and senses of their unblemished Lord, even if thoroughly resisted by a sanctified will, is deeply disturbing. Knowing their own penchant to yield to such urges, even perhaps reflexively at times, they don’t want the incarnate Christ anywhere near such struggles.

But the only thing that ultimately matters to the true conservative Adventist is faithfulness to the collective testimony of inspired counsel. For such persons, all circumstantial, cultural, emotional, even spiritual impulses must be subordinated to the consensus of Scripture and its amplification in the writings of Ellen White. This collective inspired witness is really the only thing worth “conserving.” Unity in conservative Adventist ranks on the subject of Christology will only occur when the inspired evidence is dispassionately laid open, and its implications permitted to work their unfettered will on the convictions of the striving faithful.

Conclusion—The Quest for An Elusive Compromise

Once again, it is not this reviewer’s purpose either to prolong argument or exacerbate disunity over this issue. The book in question represents, I believe, an honest effort by an honest worker in the Lord’s cause to find resolution to a debate many find hopelessly vexing and irreconcilable. The author deserves gratitude for his candor, and even more for his willingness

to address the issue openly. For too long, at least in certain circles, conversation on this subject has been discouraged, often by authoritarian means. This hasn't solved the problem. Only an open, candid consideration of all relevant inspired evidence—together with the constraining logic of this evidence relative to other issues of salvation, doctrinal integrity, and moral seriousness—offers any hope of settling the dispute.

We spoke at the start of this review of “thinking evangelistically.” It is easy for some to look at the two contending views regarding Jesus' humanity and see the advocates of both as equally sincere, equally dedicated to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, equally dedicated to a loving and consistent walk with their Lord, equally dedicated to the finishing of God's work. None will argue with this assessment. But millions of Christians with whom we seek to share the truth of the Sabbath, the Biblical relation of law and grace, the condition of man in death, and so much more, are likewise sincerely dedicated to Jesus and the Bible and a genuine relationship with God. This doesn't mean we stop trying to persuade them of the truth of Scripture on all these points. Nor, as we all know, does the sincere use of Bible verses on both sides of any of these issues mean the Biblical evidence lacks an underlying harmony that points toward one side of the argument and away from the other.

The book in question offers the church what its author holds to be a middle ground between the two Christological camps in contemporary Adventism. But the book spends almost no time considering the vast reaches of inspired evidence presented by the post-Fall camp, nor in demonstrating how this evidence is to be harmonized with the evidence produced by the opposing camp. As with evangelism, no hope of resolution is possible unless all the evidence is laid upon the table, or at least shown to be reconcilable with itself. The book in question, unfortunately, fails to do this.

The book's quest to “find truth in the tension between the two extremes” (p. 11) is neither valid on the basis of inspired teachings nor needful as a means of settling the controversy. Its proposed solution, we have seen, is not new; it has been offered before by persons who have sought to distinguish the nitty-gritty human struggle with sin from some lofty, generic attempt to keep united with God above the fray of practical conflict. Such an approach to the Christian walk, as we have found, runs seriously counter to the inspired testimony. Neither Scripture nor the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy depict “self-reliance” as something distinct from the choice to commit specific acts of disobedience to God. And when the full weight of inspired evidence is considered, those Ellen White statements on the humanity of Christ which seem in apparent conflict with each other are found at last to be consistent.

Like the ill-fated effort of certain ones to read Ellen White's language on this subject through the lenses of Henry Melvill's theology, whose writings she is alleged to have borrowed to some degree on this subject (108), the book before us seems yet another quest for an elusive—indeed, impossible—compromise.

We noted at the beginning the demonstrable connection between the Adventist Christology debate and a variety of other issues in the contemporary church. A brief review of these connections might impart a measure of clarity as we close our study.

Until the late 1970s, the debate in Adventism over Christ's human nature—as well as such kindred topics as the nature of sin, the relation of justification to sanctification, and character perfection this side of heaven—were largely recognized by persons in both camps as discussions among committed Seventh-day Adventists. But often, in the course of events both sacred and secular, time is required to assess the fruition of ideas. Attitudes toward the Spirit of Prophecy writings offer a revealing window into this process. During those days not so long ago, both sides—at least for the most part—gave evidence of similar respect for the writings of Ellen White. Describing the use of these writings on both sides of the salvation and Christology issues, Geoffrey Paxton spoke of Ellen White having a “wax nose” that was twisted both ways with ease (109). But in the years that followed, it would seem the “wax” had turned to granite, as large numbers holding to pre-Fall Christology, justification-alone salvation, and the denial of perfection in this life took a decidedly reduced, even negative view of Ellen White's role in the church.

During this period one such author, who candidly rejected Ellen White's authority in doctrinal matters, wrote an analysis of two different Sabbath School Quarterlies holding opposite views on the human nature of Christ. Here he frankly admitted which side in the controversy most accurately represented Ellen White's theology—a theology which, in the context of the article, he clearly disagreed with:

Does it follow, then, that Ellen White did not really have a consistent viewpoint concerning the nature of Christ and the issue of perfection? Probably not, because her entire theology was perfection-oriented. The Sabbath and health reform, two of her great concerns, have their rationale in perfectionism in preparation for translation.... Using some of Ellen White's statements to prove that perfection is unattainable would seem as futile as using some of her statements to establish that she repudiated the significance of 1844 (110).

The same author states earlier in this article that a series of “antiperfectionistic” Ellen White statements quoted by another author “are generally not very convincing when read in context” (111). He goes on, writing of the end-time-perfection theology: “To repudiate it would be to repudiate the very nature of Adventism” (112).

Well said!

The fact is that while both sides in the Adventist debate over sin, salvation, the humanity of Christ, and character perfection have used Ellen White in support of their positions, only one side in the debate has actively sought to reduce Ellen White's authoritative role (113). If her writings were truly as ambiguous as certain ones have alleged, both sides would likely seek to reduce their role in the controversy. But only one side has sought to do this, and when the weight of evidence is objectively and comprehensively considered, we begin to understand why.

If Ellen White is granted her full authority on doctrinal issues as defined in her own writings (114), and if the consensus of her counsel—along with that of Scripture—is permitted to explain itself regarding sin, Christology, salvation, and perfection, it eventually becomes clear that the evidence naturally, decidedly gravitates in one direction as opposed to the other.

What is more, a notable contrast has emerged between the impact of the two camps in the salvation and Christology debate, regarding any number of distinctive Adventist doctrines and lifestyle standards. The compelling logic between contending Adventist views of Christ's humanity and related perspectives on sin, the ground of salvation, and the perfection issue has exerted by any measure a most observable effect on numerous doctrinal, moral, and liturgical issues in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. The theological engine that has driven widespread rejection of such core denominational teachings as the sanctuary, Ellen White's inspiration and authority, the Sabbath, and the remnant church theology is indisputably that particular doctrine of salvation of which the pre-Fall view of Christ's humanity is a major component. Visit the numerous anti-Adventist websites, with their screeds of venom against our distinctive message, and not a one fails to trace its premises to the "gospel" theology of inborn sin, the pre-Fall nature of Christ, justification-alone salvation, and the imperfectability of Christian character. I haven't found a single exception to this rule yet.

The continuing debate over lifestyle and worship standards in the Adventist Church is largely driven by varying views on the gospel, from which the Christology debate is rarely absent. Anomalies can always be noted, of course, but the evidence from grassroots Adventism regarding the effect on standards exerted by the debate over salvation and Christology is nothing short of decisive. Visit your average church board convulsed by the broken marriage of a popular local elder, and see how quickly someone plays the "grace card" in seeking to forestall the disciplinary process. ("We're all sinners, nobody's perfect, and salvation doesn't depend on how well we keep the law anyway. So let's not be so rigid.") Attend a church business meeting divided over contemporary worship forms, and see if members' (and the pastor's) stances on the salvation and Christology issues aren't a fairly accurate predictor of their stances in the worship debate. Join a group of Adventists dining leisurely at a restaurant after church on Sabbath, and ask how many hold to post-Fall Christology and the perfectibility of Christian character. (Chances are, you won't find many who do!) Come to a youth conference where intelligent, educated young people seek the recovery of fundamental Adventism, where the vast majority hold to the Last Generation Theology taught by such as M.L. Andreasen, Herbert Douglass, Dennis Priebe, and numerous others, and note the near-total absence of jewelry—even wedding rings—among those present.

In his book *Lifestyles of the Remnant*, published in 2001, author Keavin Hayden—who has since left the church and recently appeared on the lecture circuit with ex-Adventist minister Dale Ratzlaff (115)—frankly acknowledges the connection many had recognized for some time between the salvation/Christology debate in modern Adventism and the ongoing debate over lifestyle and worship issues. In Hayden's view, the irksome rigidity among conservative Adventists regarding lifestyle and worship standards is primarily traceable to their views on

salvation, Christology, and character perfection (116). If only this particular theology could be set aside, Hayden believes, the church could achieve greater flexibility in addressing such issues as diet, dress, adornment, dancing, worship, and countless others.

This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the merits or lack thereof in the lifestyle and worship trends here noted. Rather, the point is to ask whether the beliefs of pastors and laity concerning salvation and the humanity of Christ exert any noteworthy impact on the choices Adventists are presently making in matters of doctrine, worship, and lifestyle. The record of recent decades and the impact of dominant thought patterns among us suggest a decided correlation.

One endorser of the book in question makes a comment with which, I suspect, we can all agree: “What this debate needs is not more debate, but the power of simplicity” (back cover). I learned this in a very personal way myself not too long ago, while enjoying a social outing with a close friend and her cousin. The cousin was from a foreign land, and spoke very little English. At one point my friend asked me to explain to her cousin the debate in the church over the nature of Christ. After a few sentences my friend started laughing uproariously. “You’ve lost her already, Kevin,” she said.

Reflecting on that conversation, I know I could have explained the issue much more simply! At the bottom line, the difference is whether our Lord was tempted as a fallen human being is tempted, or only as either an unfallen or divine Being would let himself be tempted. That contrast is easy enough for anyone to understand! It takes no scholarly degree or superior intelligence to figure out that a being in a perfect environment, or One with supernatural powers, is in a far different position when tempted by the adversary than fallen, finite beings like ourselves, who must daily keep at bay the internal urges, irritations, frustrations, and hormones of a nature constantly seeking gratification.

The student quoted at the start of the book in question spoke of the need to “overcome the hurdle in our minds that Jesus was not exactly the same as we are. He was God” (p. 10). No one, at least in this conversation, disputes the fact that Jesus was God. But Ellen White is very clear Jesus didn’t come to prove what a God could do in the conflict with sin:

Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflict with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity. . . .

The obedience of Christ to His Father is the same obedience that is required of man. Man cannot overcome Satan’s temptations without divine power to combine with his instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ; He could lay hold of divine power. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s holy law, and in this way He is our example. The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God’s

power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to become a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset.

The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam, through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in human nature which we now have. The Lord Jesus has bridged the gulf that sin has made. He has connected earth with heaven, and finite man with the infinite God. Jesus, the world's Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them (117).

There is no debate, to be sure, over the type of human nature the sons and daughters of Adam now have. It is in that nature, with its tendencies and desires, that Christ lived a life free from sin. It is thus that He gives hope to those wrestling with vices great and small, to those struggling to break the shackles of addiction and self-destruction. He "condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4).

A wonderful Savior indeed!

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85. ----*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 201-202,509; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1128.
86. ----*In Heavenly Places*, p. 155; *Christ Triumphant*, p. 260; *Signs of the Times*, April 9, 1896; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 235.
87. ----*The Adventist Home*, p. 127.
88. ----*Education*, p. 29.
89. ----*The Desire of Ages*, p. 122.
90. ----*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 428.
91. ----*The Adventist Home*, p. 205.
92. ----*Messages to Young People*, p. 35.
93. ----*Counsels to Teachers*, p. 266.
94. ----*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 258.
95. ----*The Desire of Ages*, p. 391.
96. ----*Our High Calling*, p. 278.
97. ----*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560-561.

98. ----*Counsels to Teachers*, p. 20.
99. ----*The Great Controversy*, pp. 425,623; *Early Writings*, p. 71; *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 187,619; vol. 2, p. 355; vol. 5, p. 214,216; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 506-507; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1055,1118; *Evangelism*, p. 702; *Review and Herald*, Nov. 19, 1908.
100. ----*Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1872.
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102. ----*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.
103. ----*Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900.
104. ----*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560-561; *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 20.
105. ----*In Heavenly Places*, p. 160.
106. <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/reportandreview/pau-lhnature.php3>
107. See Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp. 167-185.
108. Tim Poirier, "Sources Clarify Ellen White's Christology," *Ministry*, December 1989, pp. 7-9; "A Comparison of the Christology of Ellen White and Henry Melvill," Shelf Document, Washington, D.C: Ellen G. White Estate, 1982; Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1997), pp. 48-49. Readers are again referred to this reviewer's paper on "The Lower and Higher Natures" (reference no. 105) for consideration of what I have term the "Melvill explanation" of Ellen White's teachings on this point.
109. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism*, p. 156.
110. Dennis Hokama, "Wallowing in the Gulley of Indecision—*Christ's All-Atoning Sacrifice* versus *Jesus the Model Man: An Analysis*," *Adventist Currents*, July 1983, p. 14.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.

113. See Graeme Bradford, *More Than a Prophet* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2006), pp. 187,188,269; Roy Adams, “Divided We Crawl,” *Adventist Review*, February 1995, p. 21; Desmond Ford, *Documents from the Palmdale Conference on Righteousness by Faith* (Goodlettsville, TN: Jack D. Walker, Publisher, 1976), pp. 42,43; *Daniel 8:14; the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Castleberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980), pp. 4-6; George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle Over Righteousness by Faith* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1989), p. 107; Martin Weber, *Adventist Hot Potatoes* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1991), pp. 110-113; *Who’s Got the Truth? Making sense out of five different Adventist gospels* (Silver Spring, MD: Home Study International Press, 1991), pp. 187-211.
114. White, *Early Writings*, p. 78; *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 32; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 989; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 655-656,665; *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 126; *Gospel Workers*, p. 302.
115. See “Summer Tour of Encouragement (Remembering),” *Proclamation!* Fall 2009, p. 25.
116. Keavin Hayden, *Lifestyles of the Remnant* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 2001), p. 24.
117. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 929.

Note: For supportive documentation go to: www.ourfirmplatform.com Written Articles, Paulson, Kevin, “The Lower and Higher Natures”.



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