

DISTINGUISHING BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES FROM FABRICATED INTERPRETATIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to distinguish biblical doctrines from fabricated interpretations. A doctrine may be considered cultic if an institution, group or individual "...develops a theological or doctrinal interpretation that touches minimally on the proper biblical emphasis and lives for the most part outside of that circle" (Breese, 1986). The author offers this work not as an analysis of Christian cultic doctrines but as a pointer to how some Christian movements, groups or individuals develop cultic doctrines or heresies. It is the author's abiding hope that readers will recognise falsehood and avoid being trapped. The spiritual danger arising from the teachings of false prophets calls for believers to strive for the right doctrines so that one can differentiate between truth and falsehood. The study concludes that some Christians unknowingly embrace Christian cult doctrines because the spiritual leaders who have been entrusted with the responsibility of teaching and preaching sound doctrines have failed to carefully and seriously provide supportive fellowship, true exposition of the word and raise awareness on cults and cultic teachings.

Key terms: Biblical Understanding, Christian doctrines, Comparative Analysis, Fabricated Interpretations, False Teachings.

INTRODUCTION

One of the dreadful spiritual problems facing the church of Christ in the twenty-first century is the rise of false doctrines. In 2 Peter, the Apostle Peter warned his readers about the rise of false teachers and prophets in their community.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Apostle Peter used the term 'people' to mean Israel during the Old and New Testament times (Acts. 26:17, 23). The false prophets he had in mind are like those who opposed the Prophet Jeremiah. In regard to these prophets, God said, "...The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them, or spoke to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds" (Jer. 14:14). These prophets assured the people of peace. They deceived the residents of Jerusalem that God was not going to punish them by the sword and famine (Jer. 14:13; Ezek. 13:2-3, 6-7; 23:16-17). Their prophecies proved to be false prophecies when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege around Jerusalem city (Jer. 39:1-2; 52:1-5). After two and half years of siege (Jer. 39:1-2; 52:5-6), the famine was so severe that mothers "cooked their own children, who became their food" (Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Jer. 52:6). Jerusalem walls were broken; King Zedekiah was captured, bound in chains, his eyes were gouged, and thereafter, he was deported to Babylon. Moreover, his sons were slaughtered in his presence. Priests, officials, prophets and masses of people were massacred in the streets and in their houses. In addition, the temple was burned, and those who survived the famine and the sword were deported to Babylon (Jer. 39:1-18; 52:1-30 and Lam. chapters 1-5). God warned Israel about rebelling against him (Lev. 26:14-46) by listening to false prophets (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20).

About 500 years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, Israel repeated the same mistake by listening to false prophets, leading to the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD. Josephus describes this incident as follows:

Romans now set fire to all the surrounding buildings, the remains of the porticoes and gates, and the treasury chambers...They then moved on to the one surviving portico at the outer court, where 6,000 women and children had taken refuge. They had gathered there because of a false prophet who had told them that God commanded them to go to the temple, where they would receive guarantees of deliverance. Before Caesar had made up his mind what to do with these people, the soldiers set fire to the colonnade, and not a soul escaped (Maier, 2003).

According to Bruce (1977), Peter's uses of future tense in 2 Peter 2:1-3 and present tense in verse 13 of the same chapter "makes it plain that the heretics were already active. Alternatively, the future tense here may imply that the present trends are bound to occur and to continue, or may give warning that the heretics that were already active elsewhere will soon make contact with the readers." Likewise, Jesus describes the deeds of those who promote false doctrines as harmless in their outward appearance, but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves (Matt. 7:15). The Apostle Paul also labelled false apostles as "deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13). In our day, false teachers portray themselves as

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'apostles', 'pastors', 'bishops', 'servants of God', 'prophets' 'the anointed' and 'teacher of the word.' They make people believe them for what they are not, exactly what Satan is known for, disguising himself "as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

Apostle Peter warned his readers against false prophets for a number of reasons. However, the author will highlight two of those reasons to emphasise why believers need to differentiate biblical doctrines from cultic doctrines. First, their teachings are destructive. Peter uses the word "destructive" a number of times in reference to the teaching of false prophets. In (2 Pet. 2:1), he calls their teaching "destructive heresies," leading to their "swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1) for "denying the sovereign Lord" (2 Pet. 2:1). The type of destruction Peter has in mind is the eternal punishment of ungodly people after final judgment (2 Pet. 3:7, 16). It is destruction parallel to what God did to the fallen Angels and the lawless living during the days of Noah (2 Pet. 2:4-6). The Greek word for "destructive" refers to "the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell" (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 17:8).

In 1 Tim 4:1, Paul informed Timothy that in the "later times" (i.e., between Christ's first coming and His second return), many believers will abandon their "faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." MacArthur (2005) remarks:

Those demonic spirits, either directly or indirectly through false teachers, who have wandered away from the truth, lead others to do the same. The most defining word to describe the entire operation of Satan and his demons is "deception" (cf. Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 4:1-6). Not teaching about demons, but false teaching that originates from them. To sit under such teaching is to hear lies from the demonic realm (Eph. 6:12; Jam. 3:15; 2 Jn. 7-11). The influence of demons will reach its peak during tribulation (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 9:2-11; 16:14; 20:2-3, 8, and 10). Satan and demons constantly work on the deceptions that corrupt and pervert God's word.

Therefore, the spiritual danger arising from the teachings of false prophets calls for believers to strive for the right doctrines so that one can differentiate between truth and falsehood. Just as Apostle Peter urges Christians to be "alert" (1 Pet. 5:8) as far as God's word is concerned so that none take them captive through false doctrines.

Cultic doctrines may develop if a religious movement alters the meaning of the text, "distorts or warps orthodox faith". In their book *Understanding the Cults*, McDowell and Stewart (2011) refer to a cultic doctrine as a "distortion of biblical Christianity and, as such, rejects the historical teachings of the Christian Church." Additionally, a group is believed to hold cultic doctrines if they strongly believe that salvation for the whole human race is obtained or accessible only through them. In such a group, any teaching or beliefs outside theirs is a perversion. The founder and subsequent leaders build up a system of beliefs in which total control of their followers is attainable, and the leader's words are regarded as words from God.

The term cult, as used in this book, is not intended to classify a person, group, movement or church but is purely used in regard to sermons, messages, teachings, visions and revelations, which are purported to come from God or claimed to be grounded on the Bible yet in the actual sense, they contradict what God says in the Scriptures. It is also necessary to inform the reader that the writer interchangeably uses the terms: "cultic doctrines", "Christian cultic doctrines", "false doctrines", "heresy", "false visions"; "false

prophecies", "cultic teachings", and "false revelations", the same applies to: "Bible", "scriptures", "Holy scriptures", "the word" and "the word of God." Equally, the terms "revelation", "visions", and "dreams" are interchangeably used in this study.

DISCUSSION

Extra-Biblical Authorities

Some of these spiritual leaders have turned their revelations, visions, prophecies and teachings into the source of truth (which explains the Bible). As a result, their followers regard them to be extra-biblical authorities standing at par with the Scriptures. Branham (1989) saw himself as more than a prophet when he said;

"People (have) called me a prophet. I don't call myself no prophet...Say, I can say this: that the Lord has let me foresee things, tell things that (have) happened, will happen, is happening, and not one time has it ever failed, in the tens of thousands of times."

Branham is insinuating that his words are records of things that have happened, are happening and will happen in the future, just like those recorded in the Bible. Branham's words are God's Words, and that is the bottom line of his claims.

Smith (2006) alleged that God gave him the position of High Priest and the keys to the office of High Priesthood.

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Joseph...(I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred)... And verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens; and whosoever sins you retain on earth shall be retained in heaven. Again, verily I say, whomsoever you bless I will bless, and whomsoever you curse saith the Lord; for I, the Lord, am they God.

Any reader can easily notice that God's alleged words to Smith are basically a rephrasing and doctoring of Christ's words to Peter in (Matt. 16:17-19). Based on this revelation, Joseph Smith is setting a stage for his followers to view Scripture as subordinate to his visions and revelations. Joseph Smith taught that "many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled." Smith (2006) also stated that the Bible was correct since it came from the pen of the original writers, but that careless transcribers, ignorant translators, or designing and corrupt priests have committed several errors (HC 1:245; 6:57).

The church respects and reveres the Bible but recognises that it is not a complete or entirely accurate record and also affirms that the Lord has given new revelation through his prophets in the final days that sustains, supports, and verifies the biblical accounts of God's dealings with mankind.

Smith (2009) renders the Bible unreliable through his visions, revelations, prophecies and teachings, which regard them as the only dependable source of truth. This same thought is entrenched in the book of Mormon, in 1 Neph. 13: 28-30 and 2 Neh. 29:11-13. The Bible is considered unreliable and inaccurate, prompting God to give Joseph Smith additional revelations that are accurate and reliable.

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In the introduction of *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Joseph Smith proclaims "...that the book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." Furthermore, Latter-Day Saints presents the **Doctrine and Covenants** as an additional revelation from God as the introduction page reads:

The **Doctrine and Covenants** is a collection of divine revelations and inspired declarations given for the establishment and regulation of the kingdom of God on the earth in the last days.... The **Doctrine and Covenants** is unique because it is not a translation of any ancient document but is of modern origin and was given by God through his chosen prophets for the restoration of the holy work and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth in these last days.

Alongside *The Book of Mormons* and the **Doctrine and Covenants**, the Church (LDS and RLDS) considers *The Pearl of Great Price* as an equally authoritative source of truth. Peter A. Judd, who was one of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church (LDS) from 1996 to 2000, a graduate of Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas, recommended the following concerning the Bible, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants.

The Saints believe that God is self-revealing to all persons of all ages. As evidence of this, we accept three books of Scripture: the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants... These scriptures are compilations of inspired writings by persons who have experienced God at work in their lives... (Judd & Lindgren, 1985).

According to the Christian Science Church, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* is the only authority that unlocks human mind to understand God's Word. Eddy (2007), the founder of the church, gave to those desiring to copy from her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, a stern warning on how to handle her divine work.

I allowed till this permission was withdrawn, students working faithfully for Christ's cause on earth the privilege of copying and reading my works for Sunday service, provided they each and all destroyed the copies at once after said service. When I should so elect and give suitable notice, they were to desist from further copying of my writings... but it was intended to forestall the possible evil of putting the divine teaching contained in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" into human hands, to subvert or to liquidate.

For her, the book is divine and eternal. As a result, it requires protection against human misrepresentation.

No human pen or tongue taught me the Science contained in this book *Science and Health*, and neither tongue nor pen can overthrow it. This book may be distorted by shallow criticism or by careless or malicious students, and its ideas may be temporarily abused and misrepresented, but the Science and truth therein will forever remain to be discerned and demonstrated (Eddy, 1994).

Eddy (2007) claims that all the principles of Science and health emanate from God and are not susceptible to human misinterpretation and distortion. As a rule, therefore, she ordered all her followers to submit to the book (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*).

Humbly, and, as I believe, divinely directed, I hereby ordain the Bible and "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" to be hereafter the only pastor of The Church of Christ, Scientist, throughout our land and in other lands.

Ellen G. White is the pillar of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) movement. In 1888, she wrote *The Great Controversy*, which has proven to be one of the key reference books for Church history and theology as far as SDA is concerned. In her preface page, White (1997) made it clear that God in the past chose some special individuals whom He "communicate his truth ... by his Holy Spirit...and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write...." Moreover, according to her, this communication continued even after the closing of the canon (the Bible).

During the ages, while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds; apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.

From this backdrop, White (1997) believes that God has given her the "Spirit of Prophecy" as part of the Holy Spirit's continued ministry through her life "to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God." In the opening pages of her book, she makes it clear that the Spirit of God has revealed to her the past, present and future deeper spiritual issues, which was only a privilege of the Old and New Testament authors.

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time, I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the author of our salvation, and Satan, the Prince of evil, the author of sin, and the first transgressor of God's holy law.

According to her, this body of knowledge, which she titled *The Great Controversy*, "...may be traced in the history of patriarchs, prophets and apostles of martyrs and reformers." In addition to the revelation of the struggle between Christ and Satan, she states that God has bestowed her ability to understand and communicate the mysteries of God's Word. "As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of his Word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others what has thus been revealed trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially to so present it as to shed light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future."

In her book, *Testimonies for the Church*, she categorically says her writings are from God through visions. 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 the vision of the precious rays of light shining from the throne.

As such, they are perceived as authoritative and unquestionable. When the second coming of Christ did not take place in 1843, as predicted by Miller and a group of his followers who proposed October 22, 1844, as the new date for the second coming of Christ, in response to the change of time, White (2022) said, "I have seen that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered, that the figures were as he wanted them."

It explains why the SDA states in their fundamental Belief No. 18 that her writings are “prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.”

She further saw that God brought the faithful to a point of decision either in support of the “truth”, and truth here means the vision she saw (True, which sanctioned Miller’s calculation of the return of Christ to have been in 1843). The small group, which accepts White’s (2017) endorsement of Miller’s calculation, becomes the remnant Church of Revelation 14. On the other hand, those who rejected the “truth” are treated as the apostates. Her sentiments are reflected in the following statement;

I saw that God was in the proclamation of the time in 1843. It was His design to arouse the people and bring them to a testing point, where they should decide for or against *1843*. Thousands were led to embrace *1843*, preached by William Miller. [Words in italics are added for emphasis].

The sign, or seal, of God, is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord’s memorial of creation... The mark of the beast is the opposite- the observance of the first day of the week. This mark distinguishes those who acknowledge the supremacy of the papal authority from those who acknowledge the authority of God.

Her visions lay the foundation and development of the doctrine of the sanctuary and investigative judgment, the Remnant Church (those who keep the Sabbath as a mark of the seal of God), and Papal Sabbath for those who observe Sunday as a Sabbath. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that Ellen G. White’s “writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church... They also make it clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (Fundamental belief number 18).” However, when it comes to eschatology and specifically the second coming of Christ, her visions provide the principles of interpretation

In her book, *The Great Controversy*, White (2022) developed a concept of heavenly sanctuary, which unwrapped the dilemma of the delay of Christ’s return to earth in 1844. According to Mrs. White, Christ moved from the holy place where He had been serving after the ascension until 1844. Instead of coming to the earth as expected by the Adventist movement, Christ entered into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly sanctuary to purify the Holy of Holy. She wrote:

The Scripture, which, above all others, had been both the foundation and central pillar of the Advent faith, was the declaration, “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” [Dan. 8:14]. These prophetic days had been shown to terminate in the autumn of 1844... They (SDA) understood that the cleansing of the sanctuary was the purification of the earth by the fires of the last great day and that this would take place at the Second Advent. Hence, the conclusion that Christ would return to the earth in 1844. But the appointed time had passed, and the Lord had not appeared. The believers knew that God’s Word could not fail; their interpretation of prophecy must be at fault, but where was the mistake? Many rashly cut the knot of the difficulty by denying that the 2300 days ended in 1844. No reason could be given for this except that Christ had not come at the time they expected him. They argued that if the prophetic days had ended in 1844, Christ would then have returned to cleanse the sanctuary by the purification of the earth by fire and that since he had not come, the days could not have ended.

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White claims that there are two undeniable truths: First, the date of 1844 came as a result of prophecy communicated by the "angel" to the Adventist faithful. Secondly, the second coming of Christ, which was to bring the catastrophic end of the world in 1844, did not take place. Thirdly, God cannot lie. If God was the one who gave the prophecy, then what failed? Did God change His mind and choose not to communicate? Were the faithful wrong in their interpretation of the prophecy? In response to these questions, White explained:

To accept this conclusion was to renounce the former reckoning of the prophetic periods. The 2300 days had been found to begin when the commandment of Artaxerxes for the restoration and building of Jerusalem went into effect in the autumn of B.C. 457. Taking this as the starting point, there was perfect harmony in the application of all the events foretold in the explanation of that period in Dan. 9:25-27. Sixty-nine weeks, the first 483 of the 2300 days, were to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One, and Christ's baptism and anointing by the Holy Spirit, A.D. 27, exactly fulfilled the specification. In the midst of the seventieth week, Messiah was to be cut off. Three and a half years after baptism, Christ was crucified in the spring of A.D. 31. The seventy weeks, or 490 days, were to pertain especially to the Jews. At the expiration of this period, the nation sealed its rejection of Christ by the persecution of his disciples, and the apostles turned to the Gentiles, A.D. 34. The first 490 days of the 2300 having then ended, 1810 years extended to 1844. "Then", said the angel, "shall the sanctuary be cleansed." All the preceding specifications of the prophecy had been unquestionably fulfilled at the time appointed. With this reckoning, all was clear and harmonious, except that it was not seen that any event answering to the cleansing of the sanctuary had taken place in 1844. To deny that the days ended at that time was to involve the whole question in confusion and to renounce positions which had been established by unmistakable fulfilments of prophecy.

She admits that all the stipulated dates of Daniel 9:25-27 were accurately fulfilled, that is, Christ was baptised in A.D. 27, crucified in A.D. 31, and Christ began the ministry of "cleansing the sanctuary in 1844." Therefore, there is no dispute whether Christ began the ministry of cleansing the earth or not. He did begin the "cleansing the sanctuary in 1844", as prophesied. But the cleansing was to culminate in the return of Christ to "purify the earth by fire" in 1844. According to her, the subject is "clear and harmonious", denying that it did not take place "involve the whole question in confusion" and amount to rejection dates "which had been established by unmistakable fulfilment of prophecy". However, Ellen G. White was aware that there were mixed reactions among the Advent believers of 1844. "Some were disillusioned and disappointed while others held to the prophecy as true."

Finally, White (2017) discovers that the mistake of Advent believers of 1844 rests on their understanding of the "subject of the sanctuary, its nature, location and services." She interpreted the tabernacle, which God directed Moses to build as the first sanctuary. She explained;

After the settlement of the Hebrews in Canaan, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple of Solomon, which, though a permanent structure and upon a large scale, observed the same proportions. In this form, the sanctuary existed, except while it lay in ruins in Daniel's time until its destruction by the Romans, A.D. 70. This is the only sanctuary that ever existed on the earth of which the Bible gives any information. This was declared by Paul to be the sanctuary of the first covenant.

According to her, the believers of 1844 mistakenly believed that this tabernacle represented the earth and that this was the sanctuary, which "Christ would then have returned to cleanse the sanctuary by the

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purification of the earth by fire." From her perspective, the earthly tabernacle, which God instructed Moses to build (Exod. 8:1-2), is an exact replica of the heavenly sanctuary in accordance with the teaching of the book of Hebrews 8:1-2.

She further writes;

Here, it is revealed the sanctuary of the new covenant. The sanctuary of the first covenant of the new covenant was pitched by man, built by Moses; this is pitched by the Lord, not by man. In that sanctuary, the earthly priests performed their service; in this, Christ, our great high priest, ministers at God's right hand. One sanctuary was on earth, and the other in heaven.

White continues to view Paul's message in Heb. 9:9, 23; 8:5; 9:24 as a central teaching in regards to the pattern and its service of the earthly sanctuary as a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. Furthermore, she refers to the vision of John the revelator in Revelation 4:5 and 8:3 as providing irrefutably clear proof of the existence of the heavenly sanctuary. Her justification reads;

And Paul says that the first tabernacle "was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices;" that its holy places were "patterns of things in the heavens," that the priests who offered gifts according to the law, served, "unto the example and shadow of heavenly things," and that "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. The sanctuary in heaven, in which Jesus ministers on our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy. The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth. As in vision, the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in Heaven; he beheld "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne." Thus, those who were studying the subject found indisputable proof of the existence of a sanctuary in heaven. Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern which was shown to him. Paul declares that the pattern was the true sanctuary, which is in heaven. And John testifies that he saw it in heaven. The question is, what is the sanctuary? The term sanctuary, as used in the Bible, refers, first, to the tabernacle built by Moses as a pattern of heavenly things and, secondly, to the "true tabernacles" in heaven, to which the earthly sanctuary pointed. At the death of Christ, the typical service ended. The "true tabernacle" in heaven is the sanctuary of the new covenant. In addition, as the prophecy of Dan. 8:14 is fulfilled in this dispensation, the sanctuary to which it refers must be the sanctuary of the new covenant. At the termination of the 2300 days, in 1844, there had been no sanctuary on earth for many centuries. Thus, the prophecy, "unto two thousand three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," unquestionably points to the sanctuary in heaven.

Having established an idea of a heavenly sanctuary, it becomes necessary to show a direct correlation between the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary, which is the sole reason for the delay of Christ's second coming. But does heaven require cleansing? For Ellen White, it is an absolute yes, since Christ our High Priest offered sacrifice on our behalf in the Holy Place in heaven until 1844 when He moved to the Holy of Holies to cleanse it from our sins. Ellen White wrote;

The ministration of the priest throughout the year in the first apartment of the sanctuary, "within the veil," which formed the door and separated the holy place from the outer court, represents the work of ministration up which Christ entered at his ascension. It was the work of the priest in the daily ministration to present before God the blood of the sin-offering, also the incense which ascended with the prayers of Israel. Therefore, did Christ plead his blood before the Father on behalf of sinners

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and present before him also, with the precious fragrance of his own righteousness, the prayers of penitent believers? Such was the work of ministration in the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven. For eighteen centuries, this work of ministration continued in the first apartment of the sanctuary. The blood of Christ pleaded on behalf of penitent believers and secured their pardon and acceptance with the Father, yet their sins remained upon the books of record. As in the typical service, there was a work of atonement at the close of the year, so before Christ's work for the redemption of men is completed, there is a work of atonement for the removal of sin from the sanctuary. This is the service which began when the 2300 days ended. At that time, as foretold by Daniel the Prophet, our High Priest entered the most holy to perform the last division of his solemn work, to cleanse the sanctuary.

As anciently the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin-offering, and through its blood transferred in the figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith place upon Christ, and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary. And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out of the sins which are there recorded. Those who followed in the light of the prophetic word saw that instead of coming to the earth at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ then entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to perform the closing work of atonement, preparatory to his coming... When Christ, by virtue of his own blood, removes the sins of his people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of his ministration, he will place them upon Satan, who, in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty. The scapegoat was sent away into a land not inhabited, never to come again into the congregation of Israel. So will Satan be forever banished from the presence of God and his people, and he will be blotted from existence in the final destruction of sin and sinners.

It is equally important to note that Ellen White believed that from 1844 to the second return of Christ to the earth is the period of investigative judgment. It is a period when Christ began the work of investigating each name and deed written in the book of Life. It is a time that names are rejected or accepted, and all who have truly repented all their sins have their sins blotted out of the book of life and are deemed fit to enter into eternal life. On the other hand, individuals with unrepentant sins are removed from the Lambs book of Life forever. Quoting from Dan. 7:13, 14, 1 Pet. 4:17, Rev. 20:12, Luke 10:20, Phil. 4:3, Ps. 56:8, and Lev. 16:22.

She develops further the concept of investigative judgment as indicated below:

In addition, behold, one like the Son of man came with clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away" [Dan. 7:13, 14]. The coming of Christ here described is not his second coming to the earth. He comes to the Ancient of days in heaven to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom, which will be given to him at the close of his work as a mediator. It is this coming, and not his second advent to the earth, that was foretold in prophecy to take place at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844. Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies, and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of his ministration on behalf of man, to perform the work of investigative judgment, and to make atonement for all

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who are shown to be entitled to its benefits. In the typical service, only those who had come before God with confession and repentance and whose sins, through the blood of the sin-offering, were transferred to the sanctuary, had a part in the service of the Day of Atonement. Therefore, on the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment, the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work and takes place at a later period. "Judgment must begin at the house God; and if it first begins at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel" [1 Pet. 4:17]?

The books of record in heaven, in which the names and the deeds of men are registered, are to determine the decisions of the judgment. Says the Prophet Daniel, "The Revelator, describing the same scene, adds, "Another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." [Rev.20:12] The book of life contains the names of all who have ever entered the service of God. Jesus bade his disciples, "Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven." [Luke 10:20] Paul speaks of his faithful fellow worker, "whose names are in the book of life" [Phil. 4:3]. In the book of God's remembrance, every deed of righteousness is immortalised. There, every temptation resisted, every evil overcame, and every word of tender pity expressed is faithfully chronicled. In addition, every act of sacrifice, every suffering and sorrow endured for Christ's sake, is recorded. Says the psalmist, "Thou tellest my wanderings. Put thou my tears into thy bottle; are they not in thy book" [Ps. 56:8]? Every man's work passes in review before God and is registered for faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered, with terrible exactness, every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling. Heaven-sent warnings or reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all are chronicled by the recording angel.

As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed in Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, and every case closely investigated. Names are accepted and rejected. When anyone has un-repentant sins upon the books of record and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their good deeds will be erased from the book of God's remembrance.

The work of the investigative judgment and the blotting out of sins is to be accomplished before the second advent of the Lord. Since the dead are to be judged out of the things written in the books, it is impossible that the sins of the men should be blotted out until after the judgment at which their cases are to be investigated... When the investigative judgment closes, Christ will come, and his reward is with him to give to every man as his work shall be. In the typical service, the high priest, having made the atonement for Israel, came forth and blessed the congregation. So, Christ, at the close of his work as a mediator, will appear "without sin unto salvation" to bless his waiting people with eternal life. As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel, was sent away "unto a land not inhabited;" [Lev. 16:22] so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit, will be for a

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thousand years confined to the earth, which will then be desolate, without inhabitant, and he will at last suffer the full penalty of sin, in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked.”

While Seventh-Day Adventists believe that the Bible is their final authority, their practice seems to suggest that Ellen G. White’s visions, revelations, prophecies and teachings are final and equally authoritative as the Scriptures. The Church (SDA) has no option but to uphold her doctrine of sanctuary and investigation as per her vision. The Adventist Fundamental Belief number 24, entitled “Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary”, describes it as follows:

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it, Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once and for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment, which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service, the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things were purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligence who among the dead are asleep in Christ and, therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have a part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

Likewise, SDA theologians, writers and researchers all arrive at the same conclusion. For example, Dr. Herbert E. Douglass, S.D.A theologian, holder of a doctorate in Theology, served as a college professor and president of Atlantic Union College (SDA institution) had this to say regarding Christ’s ministry in the Heavenly sanctuary.

After October 22, 1844, early Adventists re-examined the biblical prophecies, clarified the nature of the events then taking place, and thus explained the “Great Disappointment.” They recognised that instead of coming to earth to cleanse it in judgment, Jesus had begun the last phase of His high priestly role in the heavenly sanctuary. The reason why Jesus did not come after 1844- during the generation that saw the great signs in the sun, moon and stars- was that His “people were not ready to meet their Lord. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them. Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven, and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His administration there, new duties would be revealed (Douglass, 2014).

Douglass (2014), who has been a pastor, a dean and president of Atlantic Union College (a Seventh-day Adventist college) and an associate editor of the Adventist Review, further argues in support of White’s (2017) doctrine of the sanctuary as follows;

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Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless; their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling... While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away sin, among God's people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14. When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.

Ratzlaff (2014), a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, left SDA when he failed to find Scriptural support for the doctrine of investigative judgment "...while nearing the end of this doctoral program at Andrews University..." He writes;

I had originally hoped to deal with the doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment alone, without confronting the writings and ministry of Ellen G. White (EGW). However, after my study, I found this to be impossible. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative as a continuing doctrine is the legacy of Ellen White and no one else. True, others invented it, supported it, and explained it, but she cemented it into the foundation of Adventism as an immovable "truth." The whole SDA movement rests upon the integrity of October 22, 1844, being the fulfilment of Daniel 8:14, which Adventists teach to be the beginning of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment. What actually happened on that day has been the centre of Adventist debate and reinterpretation since October 23, 1844, to this very day. Removing the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment doctrine from SDA theology will bring into question the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White and the integrity of the whole Adventist movement (Ratzlaff, 2014).

There is a need for the church to create opportunities for believers to read and study God's Word instead of the current emphasis on prophecies, visions and revelations as a vehicle of spiritual transformation. It is through the study of God's Word that believers towards "...unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12)." As a result, Christians "...will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and crafting of men in their deceitful scheming (Eph. 4:14)." If Christians need to know the truth from deception, then, like early church they need to devote themselves to teaching of the word. Breese (1986) reminds those who claim to have received or are receiving revelations and visions from angels that God used this form of message delivery in the Old Testament but not at this dispensation. Breese comments;

It is true that in biblical times, the word was carried to man by angels (Heb. 2:2). We are told, however, that the revelation of Jesus Christ supersedes this... Christ is better than the angels, and all of the angels of God are commanded to worship Him. The final words of Scripture, therefore, "the revelation of Jesus Christ," can never be superseded by the ministry of angels. This is why Jesus Christ advised His disciples and us to "continue in my words" (Jn. 8:31). Our present age is also well advised to heed the words of the Father. "This is my beloved Son... hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). The Final truth, therefore, is the Person, the word, and the work of Jesus Christ. No subsequent revelation as to the nature of the truth can supersede the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is simply impossible for there to be a greater revelation than that of Christ in this universe or any other under the God who made this and all possible universes.

Jude 1:3 further testifies that God did not extend the writing of His Word beyond the Apostles of Jesus Christ. Bruce (1977) comments: "Therefore, all claims to convey an additional revelation... are false claims... whether these claims are embodied in books which aim at superseding or supplementing the Bible, or take the form of extra-Biblical traditions which are promulgated as dogmas by ecclesiastical authority." God's oral revelation in both the Old Testament and the New Testament was written in order for his people to know about them and for them to function as an objective standard for faith (Deut. 13:1-5; Is. 8:20; 2 Pet. 1:21). Therefore, the only acceptable revelations, visions and prophecies given to guide God's people are the written Scriptures (the Bible).

CONCLUSION

Some Christians unknowingly embrace cultic doctrines because the spiritual leaders who have been entrusted with the responsibility of teaching and preaching sound doctrines have failed to carefully and seriously provide supportive fellowship, true exposition of the word and raise awareness on cults and cultic teachings. That is what the Second Pan Africa Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA 11) gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 1994 observed during their assembly. The assembly identified this deficiency of "Knowledge of the Bible and faulty application of its teachings as the primary weakness of the Church in Africa. They described the Church in Africa as a mile long in terms of quantity but only an inch deep in terms of quality (Adeyemo, 2010).

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