

Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium¹

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During the past few years I have been reflecting on the best theological approach to reach out to the increasingly secular, postmodern society that has little or no regard for the authority of Scripture and hardly any acquaintance with the Bible. The Christian church in general, and the Adventist Church/Adventist Theological Society in particular, have a mission to reach the world with a biblical theology that will attract and allure an increasingly relativistic and biblically illiterate society. In reading literature on postmodernism and talking to gen-Xers with a postmodern mindset, I have discovered that on one hand the very idea of a big picture of reality—a grand metanarrative—is rejected as impossible to discover from our limited and provincial perspectives; and yet at the same time there is a hunger among postmoderns for a story, a narrative, with which they can identify and in which they can find meaning.

I see this as the opportunity for a new and exciting application of biblical theology for evangelism: to show that the biblical metanarrative does give meaning to life like none other. As postmoderns are introduced to the beauty and harmony of the biblical metanarrative, I believe the Holy Spirit will bring conviction that this overarching metanarrative is indeed a comprehensive and normative picture of reality. The old proof-text methods and logical discourses are not very effective with the postmodern mind. They need to hear anew the “big picture” of Scripture.

I believe the grand metanarrative of Scripture must be employed more intentionally in the new millennium for the purpose of presenting truth in a winning and relevant way. In fact, this way of presenting truth has an appeal far beyond the postmodern mind. A student of mine, a returned missionary from the

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DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

jungles of Papua New Guinea, now working for Adventist Frontier Missions, recently shared with me a personal story of his largely unsuccessful attempts to preach the Gospel to the animists of New Guinea through the traditional topical Bible-text methods. They simply could not pass on the message to others, and when a crisis came, they went back to their old animist ways; the attrition rate was phenomenal. But after earnest agonizing in prayer for divine wisdom to know how to present the Gospel message effectively to this people group, he followed God's deep impression upon his soul; he started sharing in detail the grand metanarrative from Scripture, concentrating on the opening chapters of Genesis where he found the biblical metanarrative summarized. What a difference he experienced with this new method! Now there was a total transformation of worldview on the part of the jungle people; the doctrines and the gospel message were viewed in light of that metanarrative; and in crisis they responded from within that biblical worldview. Their conversion was complete and wholistic.

The Biblical Metanarrative: Twin Foci

What is this biblical metanarrative that calls for our renewed attention in theology and mission in the new millennium? In answer to this question, I believe we still have some growing and further theological grappling to do as a Church and a Theological Society in the months and years ahead before Jesus comes. Let me share my own pilgrimage to date on this topic.

The Cosmic War. For almost twenty years now I have been teaching two of my favorite classes in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary—Theology of the Old Testament and Doctrine of the Sanctuary. In the Old Testament theology class, and even before as I taught undergraduate OT classes, I have regularly urged my students to study the Scriptures from the perspective of its overarching central theme. After surveying the many and varied suggestions for what constitutes the “center” of Scripture, I suggest that as in any other book of non-fiction, where one discovers the major thesis of the book by reading its introduction and conclusion, so the central thrust of the Bible appears in its opening and concluding chapters. Genesis 1–3 reveals a multi-faceted “center” of Scripture, including the following: (1) divine creation and God's original design for His creatures; (2) the character of the Creator, as the transcendent Elohim and personal Yahweh (in the complementary chapters Genesis 1–2); (3) the rise of a cosmic moral conflict concerning the character of God (Genesis 3); and (4) the Gospel solution to this ongoing conflict with the coming of the Promised Seed to bare His heel over the head of the venomous snake, i.e., to voluntarily lay down His life in substitutionary atonement in order to crush the head of that ancient Serpent and bring an end to evil (Gen 3:15). In the final chapters of the book of Revelation (especially 20–22) we find the repetition of this same multi-faceted metanarrative, with the wind-up of this cosmic warfare (Revelation 20; 21:6), the creation of a new heavens and earth, and restoration of humanity

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

through the second coming of the Messiah (Revelation 21–22), a final revelation and vindication of the character/name of God (esp. Rev 22:4, 6; cf. 19:1–2), and the Gospel promises of redemption centered in Jesus the Lamb (esp. Rev. 21:6, 22, 23; 22:16–17).

Adventists have followed Ellen White’s lead in summarizing this multifaceted biblical metanarrative under the rubric of the “Great Controversy.” Ellen White urges the study of the Bible in light of this “grand central theme”:

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.²

Recent evangelical studies have begun to recognize this “warfare worldview” as permeating and even central to Scripture. Most notably, Gregory A. Boyd’s recent book, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*³ has caught the attention of the scholarly evangelical community.⁴

The Sanctuary as Cosmic Battleground. Over the same period of time as I have taught Old Testament theology at the Seminary, I have also co-ordinated the team-taught course Doctrine of the Sanctuary. While teaching this course over the span of nearly two decades, I have been impressed by the immense amount of material in the Bible related to the Sanctuary. Some 45 chapters in the Pentateuch are devoted exclusively to the Sanctuary building and rituals; some 45 chapters in the Prophets deal directly with the Sanctuary; and the whole book of Psalms—the Temple Hymnal—with explicit references to the Sanctuary averaging one per psalm. The New Testament has similar Sanctuary saturation, with profuse allusions to Sanctuary terminology and ritual as fulfilled in Jesus. Whole NT books are structured around the Sanctuary, such as the Gospel of John, the book of Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation. It could be forcefully

²Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903, 1952), 190.

³Downers, Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.

⁴While I have become convinced that the multifaceted metanarrative encapsulated in the opening and closing portions of the Bible constitutes the “center” of Scripture, I hasten to add that I do not see it as a center in the sense of an “organizing principle” or “grid” into which all the other themes, motifs, and concepts of Scripture are to be fitted. Instead, I see this “center” more as an “orientation point” in light of which the whole of Scripture makes ultimate sense. It is a warfare *worldview*, as Boyd rightly points out.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

argued that there is more material on the Sanctuary in Scripture than any other subject.

I have been especially intrigued by Ellen White's recognition of this all-pervading Sanctuary theme and her suggestion that the Sanctuary provides a heuristic key to the whole system of biblical truth: "The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a *complete system of truth*, connected and harmonious . . ." ⁵ Again, "Those [early Adventists] who received the light concerning the sanctuary and the immutability of the law of God were filled with joy and wonder as they saw the beauty and harmony of the *system* of truth that opened to their understanding." ⁶ Again, "The tabernacle and temple of God on earth were patterned after the original in heaven. Around the sanctuary and its solemn services mystically gathered the grand truths which were to be developed through succeeding generations." ⁷

As a team lecturer in our seminary Doctrine of the Sanctuary class, and in recent scholarly publication, Fernando Canale of our systematic theology department has given special emphasis to this role of the Sanctuary as (in his terms) a "heuristic key" into the biblical system of truth. ⁸ A recent article in *JATS* by Winfried Vogel further demonstrates how the Sanctuary concept encompasses the core of the Christian message. ⁹

The Cosmic Controversy and the Sanctuary—these are the two main areas where Seventh-day Adventists have made unique contributions to Christian theology, and as the Bible's self-testimony suggests, these are the dual foci of the grand metanarrative of Scripture. For years I have been pondering the relationship between these two central foci of Scripture and reality. Until recently I have been able to comfortably compartmentalize my deliberations within the confines of two separate courses which I taught, and thus I have never really been forced to come to grips with their interrelationship. I have sometimes suggested that the Great Controversy was the orientation point for biblical theology, while the Sanctuary constituted the organizing principle for systematic theology. But I have increasingly felt dissatisfied with separating these two disciplines too far apart (especially now that I am married to a systematic theologian!).

Some helpful studies have appeared analyzing the Cosmic Conflict motif and the Sanctuary concept separately, ¹⁰ but very little work has been done thus

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 432 (emphasis supplied).

⁶*Ibid.*, 454 (emphasis supplied).

⁷Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 2, 1886 (= *The Faith I Live By*, 194).

⁸See Fernando Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *AUSS* 36/2 (1998): 183-206.

⁹Winfried Vogel, "Man and Knowledge: The Search for Truth in a Pluralistic Age," *JATS* 7/2 (1996): 180-218.

¹⁰On the Great Controversy motif, see especially Norman Gulley, "The Cosmic Controversy: World View for Theology and Life," *JATS* 7/2 (1996): 82-124; Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and*

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

far in exploring the interrelationship between the two, and how these two foci conjoin to encapsulate the grand metanarrative of Scripture.”¹¹

How the “Cosmic War” and “Sanctuary” Motifs Interrelate in Scripture

In the remainder of this paper, I would like us to consider the broad strokes of how the “Cosmic War” and “Sanctuary” themes interrelate in Scripture and some practical implications that follow from this interlinking.

The Beginning of the Cosmic War and Its Sanctuary Setting. In Rev 12:7–8 the rise of the Cosmic Controversy in heaven is clearly spelled out: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” Here the heavenly participants are revealed in the first cosmic battle: Michael (or Christ) and his angels and the dragon (Satan) and his angels. V. 4 indicates that the angels of the dragon included a third of the heavenly hosts, and also indicates that the Great War spread to this earth. V. 9 indicates the involvement of this earth in the Cosmic War: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Vs. 10–11 hint of a Sanctuary setting—“Satan is called “the accuser of our brethren,” probably alluding to the trial of a malicious witness at the Sanctuary, as described in Deut 19:15–21. The saints are said to overcome him “by the blood of the Lamb”—the Sanctuary sacrificial animal *par excellence*.

The implicit linking of the start of the Cosmic War and the Sanctuary in Revelation 12 becomes explicit and even emphatic when we go to the two OT passages that form the counterpart to Revelation 12, namely Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Here we see a spotlight upon the heavenly Sanctuary setting for the rise of the cosmic conflict.

As a college student and aspiring theologian, I wrote my first research paper on Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28—passages that Adventists have traditionally regarded as referring to Satan and the origin of evil in heaven. Following the lead of various higher-critical commentaries, I came to the unsettling conclusion that

Spiritual Conflict; and Joseph Battistone, *The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, self-published, 1976). On the Sanctuary, see the studies by Fernando Canale and Winfried Vogel mentioned in previous footnotes.

¹¹A recent helpful *JATS* article by Alberto Timm on the central message of Ellen White suggests that in her thinking the Great Controversy provides the “framework” of the “entire drama of human existence,” while the Sanctuary serves as the “organizing motif of Bible truth.” Alberto R. Timm, “Ellen G. White: Side Issues or Central Message?” *JATS* 7/2 (1996): 168-179 (citations, 172-173). For further elaboration of these suggestions see his 1995 Andrews University Ph.D. dissertation, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Message, 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines,” 397-420, 476-477; and his syllabus in Portuguese, “Desenvolvimento Da Doutrina Do Santuario No Contexto Do Conflictio Cosmico,” Material de Classe para o Programa de Doutorado em Teologia, Seminario Adventista Latinoamericano de Teologia Universidad Adventista del Plata, Argentina, 1997, 1-27.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

neither passage made any reference to Satan or the origin of evil in its original context. Thus in my thinking major biblical supports for the Adventist understanding of the rise of the Great Controversy crumbled.

Since that time, I have rejoiced to learn that the traditional Adventist interpretation of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 was the standard Christian interpretation throughout church history till the rise of historical criticism at the time of the Enlightenment. More importantly, to my delight I have found fresh and compelling exegetical evidence that Isaiah and Ezekiel were indeed referring to Satan in these passages. Much of this evidence is set forth in an Andrews University dissertation by José Bertoluci entitled “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil.”¹² Bertoluci has dealt a devastating blow to the critical views that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 only describe earthly, historical enemies of Israel and not Satan. He shows how in each passage there is a movement from the local, historical realm of earthly kings to the heavenly supernatural realm describing Lucifer/Satan and the rise of the Great Controversy. My own study has uncovered further evidence supporting this conceptual shift in Ezekiel 28—from earthly “prince” (*nagîd*, the king of Tyre, vs. 1–10) to cosmic “king” (*mele*, the supernatural ruler of Tyre, Satan himself, vs. 11–19)—and I have discovered that this judgment upon the Fallen Cherub comes at the climactic center of the whole book.¹³ The origin of evil in Lucifer the Covering Cherub is thus solidly supported from Scripture.

What I did not pay close attention to until very recently is how these OT portraits of the first cosmic battle are so intricately linked up with the heavenly Sanctuary. Note how these two chapters are suffused with Sanctuary imagery. Ezek 28:14 introduces the antagonist as “the anointed cherub who covers,” a description that (in light of the parallel with its earthly Sanctuary counterpart) ushers us into the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Sanctuary, “the holy mountain of God.” In v. 13, the language of Lucifer’s decoration with precious stones recalls the precious stones of the anointed high priest, and the timbrels and pipes the music of Sanctuary worship. As we will note shortly, even the mention of Eden, the garden of God, has Sanctuary connotations. Isa 14:12 calls the heavenly Sanctuary the “mount of the congregation”—implying the original worship function of the Sanctuary before sin. The heavenly Sanctuary, on the holy

¹²José Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil,” Th.D. dissertation, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1985 (available from University Microfilms, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346). See also Boyd, 157-162, who concurs with Bertoluci’s major points.

¹³Richard M. Davidson, “The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 71-93; cf. *idem*, “Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament,” *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, vol 1, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 118-119.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

mountain, was the location of the throne of God, and here the unfallen universe came to worship the Most High God.

It was on the mountain of God, in the very throne room of the universe, in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Sanctuary, that sin first arose in the universe. Lucifer, the covering cherub, was lifted up because of His beauty, and standing in the very presence of God, aspired to be like the Most High, to exalt his throne above the stars. Ezek 28:16 states that by the abundance of his “trading” the celestial cherub became filled with violence within. I have shown elsewhere that the term *rekullah* indeed means “trading” or “peddling”—going about from one to another to trade—either goods or gossip. In this context the meaning is probably slander—Lucifer’s pride and jealousy led to slandering the character of God, until it ripened into open revolt—“violence” (Ezek 28:16).¹⁴ Lucifer’s pride led him to rebel against the obedient, humble worship of God and to aspire to equality with God, to receive worship and adoration himself instead of God. Rebellion against God and rivalry with God. The Great War had begun! The issue was worship, and a Cosmic War dealing with worship had as its natural battlefield the *place* of worship—the celestial Sanctuary.

Ezek 28:16, 18 declares that the Fallen Cherub was cast out of the heavenly Sanctuary to this earth, in harmony with the depiction of Revelation 12. V. 18 seems to further develop the Sanctuary setting of the Great Controversy on earth: “You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities.” Sanctuaries—plural! On earth, the Fallen Cherub is portrayed as possessing rival sanctuaries to that of the Most High, sanctuaries that he defiles by his iniquities.

In this Ezekiel passage, we seem to have the pattern for Satan’s activity in the Great Controversy. The issue is worship. The setting of worship is the Sanctuary—the throne room of the Most High. The battle rages in the Sanctuary. The Fallen Cherub rebels against the Most High—directly challenges and maligns and even violently attacks Him—in the setting of His Sanctuary, and when expelled from the divine Sanctuary, he seeks to rival the Most High by receiving worship in a rival sanctuary. A two-fold battle strategy: direct attack against God and His loyal subjects worshipping in His Sanctuary, and rival worship in a counterfeit sanctuary.

The Cosmic War in Eden, the First Earthly Sanctuary. When we come to the opening pages of Scripture, Lucifer has already become the dragon, that ancient serpent, Satan. And we find him lurking in the Garden of Eden, ready to channel his messages through a beautiful serpent God has made. It is a commonplace to recognize that the moral conflict on earth arose at the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden—so states Genesis 3 emphatically. What is not so widely recognized is that Moses under inspiration of God clearly depicts the Garden of Eden as the first earthly *Sanctuary*.

¹⁴Richard M. Davidson, “Satan’s Celestial Slander,” *Perspective Digest*, 1/1 (1996): 31-34.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

There are numerous intertextual hints throughout Scripture that the heavenly Sanctuary had a counterpart on earth even before the Mosaic tabernacle. In fact, the language of Genesis 1–2 points toward the Garden of Eden as the earthly counterpart of the heavenly Sanctuary! As we compare the portrayal of Eden with the descriptions of later divine instructions for the building of God’s Sanctuary/Temple by Moses and Solomon, beautiful insights begin to emerge.¹⁵ I will list the major intertextual parallels I have seen so far.

1. Notice how the Garden of Eden was situated with an eastward orientation, as were the later sanctuaries (Gen 2:8; cf. Exod 36:20–30, 1 Kgs 7:21, Ezek 47:1).

2. God “plants” (*nāta’*) the garden in Eden (Gen 2:8), and He will “plant” (*nāta’*) Israel on His holy mountain, the place of His Sanctuary (Exod 15:17; cf. 1 Chr 17:9).

3. The tree of life was “in the midst” (*betwk*) of the garden (Gen 2:9), and this is the precise term for the presence of God “in the midst” of His people in the Sanctuary (Exod 25:8).

4. The description of God “walking around” (*Hithpa’el of hālak*) is found only twice in the Old Testament, once in connection with God’s walking in the garden (Gen 3:8) and the other His walking in the midst of the camp of Israel (Deut 23:14 [Hebrew 15]).

5. There was a four-headed river flowing from the central location in the Garden (Gen 2:10), parallel to the river of life flowing from the Sanctuary shown to Ezekiel (Ezek 47:1–12) and from the throne of God as shown to John (Rev 22:1).

6. The precious metals mentioned in the Eden narrative (gold, bdellium, and onyx, 2:12) are mentioned again in connection with the wilderness Sanctuary (bdellium, only elsewhere in the Old Testament in connection with the manna [Num 11:7]; onyx, upon the shoulder pieces and breastplate of the high priest [Exod 25:7, 28:9, 20; 35:9, 27; 39:6, 13]; and gold throughout, overlaying the walls and articles of furniture in the Sanctuary [Exod 25:9, etc.]).

7. On earth after creation there were three spheres of space, in ascending degrees of holiness (“set apartness for special use”): the earth, the garden, and the “midst of the garden.” These three spheres are seen again at Sinai: in the camp, the place where the seventy elders could go on the mountain, and the im-

¹⁵For more detailed discussion, see William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning* (Homebush, New South Wales: Lancer, 1985), 35-76; Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12-13; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, 1985), 142-145; Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19-25; and Eric Bolger, “The Compositional Role of the Eden Narrative in the Pentateuch” (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), especially 205–266.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

mediate presence of God where only Moses could go.¹⁶ They are repeated in the court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place in the Sanctuary.

8. Numerous parallels may be noted between the accounts of Creation as a whole and the construction of the Mosaic Sanctuary. For example, there is a series of key verbal parallels: Gen 1:31; 2:1; 2:2; 2:3 with Exod 39:43; 39:32; 40:33; 39:43, respectively. Just as “God saw everything that he had made/done [*‘āśah*],” “finished his work” and “blessed” the seventh day, so “Moses saw all the work” which the people “made/did [*‘āśah*]” in constructing the Sanctuary; “and Moses finished the work” and “blessed” the people for their labors.¹⁷

9. Again, as the creation of the world is said to occupy six days (each introduced by the clause “And God said”), followed by the seventh day Sabbath, so God’s instruction to Moses regarding the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 is divided into six sections (introduced by the phrase “The Lord said to Moses”), followed by a concluding seventh section dealing with the Sabbath.

10. In Eden the work assigned to man was to “till” (*‘ābad*, literally “serve”) and “keep” (*šamar*) the garden, and it seems more than coincidence that these are the very terms used to describe the work of the Levites in the Sanctuary (Num 3:7–8, etc.).

11. Note also how the term for light (greater and lesser light) used to describe the sun and moon in Gen 1:14–16 is elsewhere in the Pentateuch used *only* for the light of the menorah in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary (Exod 25:6; 35:14; 39:27, etc.).

12. The references to the portrayals of nature in the Sanctuary are fascinating. In both the Solomonic and Mosaic Sanctuaries, the lampstand was a stylized almond tree (Exod 25:31–40; cf. 1 Kgs 7:49). Carved in the Solomonic architecture—on the walls round about, and on the doors, were palm trees and open flowers (1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35). Lily work appeared on the tops of the two free-standing pillars, and representations of oxen, lions, and more lilies and palm trees in the laver (1 Kgs 7:26, 29, 36). Could these artistic portrayals be representative of the return to the lost Garden? The earth’s original Sanctuary?

When we move to the post-Fall depiction of the Garden of Eden, we have confirmation of its Sanctuary character.

13. Before Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden, God “clothes” (*la-baš*, *Hif’il*) them with “coats” (*k’tonet*), Gen 3:21, and these are the very terms used to describe the clothing of the priests—Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:7, 13; Num 20:28; cf. Exod 28:4; 29:5; 40:14).

14. After Adam and Eve are expelled, in their sinful state they are no longer able to meet with God face to face in the Garden. But at the *eastern* entrance to the Garden (as with the eastern entrance to the later sanctuaries), we encounter

¹⁶See Angel Rodríguez, “Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus,” *AUSS* 24/2 (1986): 131–137.

¹⁷See Fishbane, 12.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

cherubim—the beings associated with God’s throne in the heavenly Sanctuary (Rev 4–5; Ezek 1:10).

15. These cherubim are “placed” (Hebrew *šākan*), the same specific Hebrew verb for God’s “dwelling” (*šākan*) among His people (Exod 25:8).

16. It is also the same root as for the *Shekinah* glory, the visible presence of God in the Sanctuary.¹⁸

17. To this eastern entrance of the Garden, guarded by the cherubim with flaming swords, Adam and Eve and their children came to worship God, built their altars, brought their sacrifices; here the *Shekinah* glory was manifested as God came down to hold communion with them.¹⁹

If indeed the Garden of Eden was the earth’s original Sanctuary, and the trees in the midst of the Garden comprised its Most Holy Place, then Satan, upon his expulsion from the Holy of holies of the heavenly Sanctuary, gains access to Adam and Eve at a place that is none other than the Holy of holies of the earthly Sanctuary! Here we see him conducting the same strategy as in the heavenly Sanctuary, attacking and slandering the character of the God in His Sanctuary. He urges Eve to set up herself as equal with God, just what Satan himself had aspired to in the celestial Sanctuary. Rebellion against God, and rivalry with God—the earthly battle lines again are drawn, and the battlefield is the earthly Sanctuary. Adam and Eve capitulate to the enemy’s side, and the Great Controversy enters human existence.

The Cosmic War and Sanctuary Battlefield Outside the Garden of Eden. The first Gospel promise in Gen 3:15 predicts the continuation of the conflict till the end—the enmity between the spiritual descendants of Satan and of Eve. It also promises ultimate victory by the Seed of the woman—now a singular He—who would stand as humanity’s Representative and voluntarily lay down His life—step on the head of the venomous serpent—so that humanity might be saved in Him and the serpent finally dealt a mortal crushing blow to the head.²⁰ The outcome of the Great War is announced and assured!

This prediction in Gen 3:15 of the course of the Great Controversy on earth must be seen in connection with the Sanctuary ritual presented a few verses later. In v. 21, the record states that God clothed Adam and Eve with skins—implying the sacrifice of animals. Instead of the fig leaves of their own works with which they unsuccessfully tried to cover their nakedness, God covered them with the robes of a Substitute. The blood of an innocent victim is shed

¹⁸The name *Shekinah* does not appear in Scripture, but is used in the later Jewish literature. See also White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 349, etc.

¹⁹That Adam’s children brought their sacrifices to the gate of the Garden is probably implied in the narrative of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. See Joaquim Azevedo, “At the Door of Paradise: A Contextual Interpretation of Gen 4:7,” *Biblische Notizen* 100 (1999): 45-59. Cf. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 62, 83-84.

²⁰For discussion and substantiation of the Messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15, see, e.g., O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 93-100.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

instead of theirs. Here is intimated the Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of man. God instructs Adam and Eve in the rudiments of the sacrificial system of the Sanctuary.

After Adam and Eve are expelled, in their sinful state they are no longer able to meet with God face to face in the Garden. But, as we have already seen above, the Gate of the Garden becomes the Sanctuary where Adam and Eve and their descendants were to meet with God, worship Him, and bring their sacrifices. Here the Shekinah glory was manifested as God came down to hold communion with them.

Outside the garden, Cain and Abel are aware of the sacrificial system and bring their offerings to the gate of the Garden (implied in Gen 4:7). But here at the Sanctuary the Great Controversy rages—again over the issue of worship and rebellion/rivalry. Cain refuses to worship in the way prescribed by God, by bringing a bloody sacrifice, representing the atoning blood of the coming Messiah. He continues the alternate, humanly-devised methodology demonstrated by Adam and Eve when they constructed the fig leaves. He introduces a counterfeit ritual at the true Sanctuary. A recent article in *Biblische Notizen* has shown that the best translation of the word usually translated “sin” in Gen 4:7 should in this context probably be “sin offering.”²¹ God points Cain to the appropriate sin-offering available at the gate of the Garden, but Cain persists in rebellion which, as in Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, leads to violence, even to murder. The battle rages in the story of Cain and Abel; the issue is true worship, and the battlefield is the place of worship, the Sanctuary.

Rival Sanctuaries Throughout the Cosmic Conflict in OT Salvation History. There is not space in this article to trace the interlocking of Great Controversy and Sanctuary themes in detail throughout the rest of the OT. We briefly note that at those crucial junctures in the OT where the spiritual forces of evil—concentrated in the demonic being called Azazel or Satan—are mentioned, there is almost always a Sanctuary setting. In Leviticus 16, which describes the Day of Atonement, the high-point of the Hebrew Sanctuary rituals,²²

²¹Azevedo, 45-59.

²²That the Day of Atonement came at the highpoint of the Hebrew Sanctuary ritual services is indicated by the Hebrew name for the day. Its more accurate name (from Scripture) is not *yôm kippur*, but *yôm hakkippurim*—the Day of Atonements,” the “Day of Complete or Final Atonement.” All during the year, atonement was made for sins, but this day was the climax of the yearly ritual, in which final atonement was made “for all the sins of Israel” (v. 16) and for the entire Sanctuary, which had been defiled during the year. The climactic nature of the Day of Atonement is also underscored by its literary placement in the exact chiasmic center of the book of Leviticus. See William H. Shea, “Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus,” in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 131- 168. Cf. Wilfred Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), passim, who also arrives at Leviticus 16 as the literary center of the book by means of analyzing the 37 divine speeches that structure the book—18 on each side framing the divine speech in Leviticus 16.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

we find the ritual of the two goats, representing respectively Yahweh and Azazel, the Protagonist and Antagonist in the cosmic drama.²³ In Job 1–2, when Satan brings accusations against God, it is in the place where “the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord” (Job 1:6; 2:1)—most probably a reference to the “mount of assembly” or heavenly Sanctuary (cf. Isa 14:13 and Ezek 28:14, 16).²⁴ In Zech 3:1–10, where Satan is God’s enemy and malicious witness accusing Joshua, again the setting is the Sanctuary—Joshua as the high priest of the Sanctuary stands in the presence of the Angel of the Lord and receives pardon/vindication, symbolized by the change of priestly garments.

Alberto Timm, in an unpublished class syllabus in Portuguese, has briefly shown how throughout salvation history, there has been a true Sanctuary and a counterfeit—either a frontal attack/distortion of the true or a separate rival sanctuary.²⁵ We also know from archaeology that throughout the OT period of the patriarchs, judges, and kings, there were pagan sanctuaries in existence in the ancient Near East. Often these sanctuaries remarkably resembled the Sanctuary designs given by God to Moses, Solomon, Ezekiel, and Zerubbabel. But despite amazing similarities, two striking differences in the layout and ritual stand out.

The first difference is in the Sanctuary layout. In the floor plans of other ancient Near Eastern sanctuaries, the worshipers had immediate access directly into the holy of holies, into the presence of the deity, whereas in the sanctuaries of Yahweh such access was restricted to the high priest, and only once a year. Thus a stark difference in the theology of the two systems was underscored. In the true sanctuaries of the Bible, copies of the heavenly Sanctuary, Yahweh was holy and utterly transcendent, and humans were finite sinners, unable to endure the immediate glory of the Holy One of Israel. There was need of a mediator, the high priest, to approach the Shekinah glory. By contrast the pagan sanctuaries had no such lofty conceptions of the deity’s holiness/transcendence and the worshipers’ inherent defilement/sinfulness.

The second major difference is in the ritual of the sacrifice. While animal sacrifices were used throughout the ancient Near East, in the pagan sanctuaries the purpose of the sacrifices was to placate or appease the deity. In contrast, the sacrifices of Israel’s Sanctuary services were provided by the gracious Yahweh Himself, to propitiate His own wrath (Lev 17:11). These sacrifices pointed forward to God’s self-sacrificing gift of the Lamb—His son—to atone for the sins of the world. In summary, Satan’s counterfeit sanctuaries copied the outer trappings of the heavenly Sanctuary, but distorted the two essential features that revealed the heart of God’s character and the true nature of worship—the holy

²³See Boyd, 82, 319, for discussion and bibliography supporting Azazel as a demonic power and the ritual performed upon him an elimination ritual.

²⁴See Boyd, 143-149, for a helpful discussion of the cosmic warfare motif in these chapters.

²⁵See Timm, “Desenvolvimento Da Doutrina Do Sancturio No Contexto Do Conflictio Cosmico,” 1-60.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

transcendence of Yahweh in distinction to man's sinfulness, and the covenant love of Yahweh in providing for a substitute and mediator to bridge the gap between His holiness and human sinfulness.²⁶

Cosmic War and Sanctuary Setting in the NT. When we come to the NT, we once again find the Great Controversy centered in the Sanctuary. Jesus' ministry involves a double cleansing of the earthly Temple, and much of His ministry was spent at the Temple. In a broader sense, Scripture presents this earth as the outer court of the heavenly Sanctuary, and thus Jesus' entire ministry was Sanctuary-centered (see Rev 11:2). Boyd has provided a comprehensive survey of the "warfare worldview" that permeates Jesus' life and ministry.²⁷ Not only His life and ministry, but most importantly, Christ's atoning death and resurrection is presented in Scripture as the part of the "*Christus Victor*" motif. On the Cross Christ has "disarmed principalities and powers" and "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col 2:15). Gustav Aulén and Boyd have provided lavish biblical substantiation of this motif.²⁸ Scripture also gives Christ's death and resurrection a Sanctuary setting. According to Heb 8:3–5 and 13:10, Calvary was the altar of the heavenly Sanctuary. Christ's death on the cross was as Antitype of the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb at the Sanctuary (John 1:29; 19:33–36; cf. Exod 12:46), as well as the fulfillment of all the sacrificial services prescribed in the OT (Ps 40:6–8; Heb 7–10). On Calvary we find the greatest battle of the Cosmic Conflict—the "D-Day" of the Cosmic War. And the Battlefield, the "Normandy" of that Cosmic Battle, was the Sanctuary.

Beyond the Gospels, the New Testament writers continue to present the gospel realities against the backdrop of the Cosmic War and within a Sanctuary setting. Christ the Victor in the Cosmic Battle of Calvary takes His seat as King/Priest in the heavenly Sanctuary (Heb 1:3; 8:1); "D-Day" of the Cosmic War is over, but Christ still awaits the final "V-E Day" victory over His enemies (Heb 1:13, citing Ps 110:1). He is seated "in heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion" (Eph 1:20–21), while the church, Christ's body and Temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:23; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), also "wrestle . . . against principalities, against powers, against the rulers

²⁶For further discussion (with bibliography) of the similarities and dissimilarities between the Sanctuary/Temple of the Hebrews and their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, see, e.g., Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Jerusalem Temple of the Hebrew Bible in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), 37–66.

²⁷Boyd, 171–237.

²⁸See in particular, Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969), and Boyd, 238–268.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).²⁹

The Cosmic War and Sanctuary Setting in Church History. The history of the Christian church, and especially the rule of the antichrist or “man of sin” predicted in Bible prophecy, constitutes the period of “mop-up” operations between the “D-Day” and “V-E Day” of the Cosmic Battle. Here again we find the fusion of the Great Controversy and Sanctuary themes. Daniel 8 predicts the work of the little horn in Sanctuary language: he would take away the *tamid* or continual heavenly mediatorial ministry of Christ as he tried to substitute a counterfeit priesthood and forgiveness of sins and a way of salvation by works. Thus, the Sanctuary would be trodden underfoot, along with the saints of the Most High (Dan 8:11, 13), and the abomination of desolation would be set up (Dan 11:31; 12:11). Rev 13:6 indicates that during the 42 prophetic months referred to in Daniel (7:25; 12:7), the apostate religious power would “open his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, *His tabernacle*, and those who dwell in heaven. And it was granted him to *make war* with the saints . . .” “Make war”—the Great Controversy; “His tabernacle”—the Sanctuary.

At the same time, this apostate antichrist power would seek to elevate himself “as high as the Prince of the host” (Dan 8:11). According to 2 Thess 2:4, the “man of sin” “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God *in the temple of God*, showing himself that he is God.” The same two-fold battle strategy: rebellion against God and rivalry with God. The same issue: worship. The same battlefield: the Sanctuary.

End-time Cosmic Conflict Centered in the Sanctuary. When we move to the “time of the end” (Dan 11:40; 12:4), coming immediately after the 1260 prophetic days (Dan 12:4–7), once again we have the fusion of Great Controversy and Sanctuary motifs. Rev 12:17 portrays the end-time culmination of the Cosmic War involving the last-day “remnant” in language echoing Gen 3:15: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

In this wind-up of the Great Controversy, the sin problem is dealt with in the very place where it had its beginning—the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Temple. Daniel 7 depicts that heavenly Sanctuary scene and the pre-Advent activity of investigative trial judgment that takes place (vs. 9–10). Rev 14:6, 7 announces the arrival of this heavenly Sanctuary judgment to this earth: “Fear God and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment *has come*; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” The issue again is worship. And the second and third angel’s messages clarify the Great Controversy over worship, as the battle lines are drawn between those who worship the

²⁹For a good overview of the profuse NT data featuring both the heavenly and earthly spiritual warfare in the NT, see Boyd, 269-293.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

Creator (implying a faithfulness to His commandments, especially the fourth, which is quoted in Rev 14:7),³⁰ and those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (implying a counterfeit worship). The issues in the pre-Advent cosmic judgment scene are set in the framework of the Great Controversy and the Sanctuary (see Rev 11:19).

The Broader Meaning of the “Great Controversy.” In this context of the cosmic covenant lawsuit or investigative judgment I would like to suggest that the term dear to Seventh-day Adventists —“Great Controversy”—perhaps has a more direct connection with the Sanctuary message than we have before realized. Recently I have been doing some in-depth analysis of the concept of the investigative judgment in the Bible. I have come to the conclusion that throughout Scripture *God’s regular procedure* in dealing with humanity before announcing the close of probation on a given individual or people is to first conduct an investigative judgment, throwing open all the books, as it were, so that all can see that He is just and fair, before pronouncing the verdict and sentence and executing judgment.

We find this divine procedure from the very first entrance of sin in heaven, summarized in Ezekiel 28. The description follows the precise structure of the legal trial of the ancient Near East. The one presiding at the investigative judgment in the heavenly Sanctuary is introduced (“Thus says Yahweh” v. 12); there is a historical prologue summarizing all that Yahweh has done in behalf of the Fallen Cherub (vs. 12–15a); then follows the indictments against him (vs. 15b–16a, 17a, 18a), the verdict and sentence (vs. 16b, 17a, 18a), and the reference to the witnesses in the legal proceedings (vs. 17c, 18c, 19).

The same divine procedure is found after the Fall in the earthly Garden of Eden, the first earthly Sanctuary. When God comes walking in the cool of the day after Adam and Eve sinned, He initiates a legal trial or investigative judgment before pronouncing the verdict and sentence. This insight is not one recognized only by Seventh-day Adventists. The famous liberal Protestant German scholar Claus Westermann points out that after the Fall God comes for a “legal process,” a “trial,” a “court process.”³¹ Adam and Eve are placed on the witness stand, as it were, and given opportunity to testify, and in their very testimony, they perjure themselves and reveal the truth of their guilt. God pronounces the verdict of guilty and sentence of judgment. But note that in the heart of that judgment is the first Gospel promise (Gen 3:15)! God’s investigative judgment is not to see who He can damn, but to make a way of salvation for all who will respond to His grace!

We see this same procedure all the way through the book of Genesis. God comes for a legal investigation before He brings the Flood (Gen 6:1–13). The same procedure is described in His coming down to investigate at the Tower of

³⁰See Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *JATS* 9/1&2 (1998): 179-186.

³¹Claus Westermann, *Creation*, trans. by John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1974), 96.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

Babel (Gen 11:5–7) and in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20–21). In each of these cases, Biblical scholars of various religious traditions have recognized that a legal trial procedure, an investigative judgment, is involved.³² God comes to investigate, not because He needs to know, but so that it can be seen that He is fair and just in all His dealings. And in each case, there is at the heart of the judgment the element of grace, God's desire to save those who are under judgment.

This legal procedure is often given a technical name in the Old Testament—a *rib*, or covenant lawsuit—and it regularly includes *investigation* of the evidence before the verdict and sentence are pronounced upon God's professed covenant people and executive judgment is meted out. Of the dozens of cases of the divine *rib* in Scripture, we note, for example, the covenant lawsuits or investigative judgments described by Hosea and Micah upon the Northern Kingdom, and that of Malachi in the post-Exilic period.³³ A covenant lawsuit or investigative judgment is also clearly present in the New Testament with regard to the theocratic nation of Israel in 34 A.D. before their close of probation and divine executive judgment.³⁴

Now the interesting point for our purposes in this presentation is that the King James Version of the Bible often translates this term *rib* as "controversy." For example, Micah 6:2—"Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy [*rib*] . . . ; for the Lord hath a controversy [*rib*] with his people, and he will plead with Israel." Again, Jer 25:31: "A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy [*rib*] with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord." (See also Deut 17:8; 19:17; 21:5; 25:1; 2 Sam 15:2; 2 Chron 19:8; Ezek 44:24; Isa 34:8; Hos 4:1; 12:2.) Ellen White actually quotes this latter passage with reference to the Great Controversy:

For six thousand years the great controversy has been in progress; the Son of God and His heavenly messengers have been in conflict with the power of the evil one, to warn, enlighten, and save

³²For example, regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, T. F. Mafico, "The Crucial Question Concerning the Justice of God," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 42 (1983): 13, points out that "Yahweh came down to make a *judicial investigation*" (emphasis supplied).

³³The word *rib* explicitly introduces the covenant lawsuits of Hosea and Micah: Hos 4:1; Mic 6:1, 2. Sometimes the prophets use a synonym, *mišpat* ("judgment"), as in Mal 3:5; Ezek 5:8, etc. The recent scholarly literature on the covenant lawsuit is immense. For introductory discussion, starting bibliography, and numerous biblical examples, see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL* 88 (1969): 291-304; the article on *rib* in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2: 845-846; and Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)*, JSOT 9 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978).

³⁴See Wilson Paroschi, "The Prophetic Significance of Stephen," *JATS* 9/1&2 (1998): 343-361; William Shea, "The Prophecy of Dan 9:24-27," *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 80-82.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

the children of men. Now all have made their decisions; the wicked have fully united with Satan in his warfare against God. The time has now come for God to vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. Now the controversy is not alone with Satan, but with men. “The Lord hath a controversy with the nations;” “He will give them that are wicked to the sword.”³⁵

Note that in a technical sense Ellen White understands that the Great Controversy through the ages has been between Christ and his angels and Satan and his angels—not with men. God has taken the side of humanity, expending every divine energy to rescue them. But when probation closes and the wicked are fully and inextricably linked with Satan, then God’s War is also against men—those who have become irretrievably settled in rebellion. This phase of the battle is described in Rev 19:11. Notice how the picture combines the imagery of *judgment* and *war*: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He *judges* and *makes war* And the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations”

In light of this biblical legal usage of the term “controversy,” with which Ellen White was no doubt familiar when she coined (or popularized) the term “great controversy,” it seems appropriate to broaden the meaning of the term “Great Controversy” from that which we have usually employed—from regular armed combat terminology—to include the “legal battle” between Christ and Satan that climaxes in the investigative judgment, the close of probation, and the pronouncement of the verdict in the heavenly Sanctuary. This would also include the legal deliberations of the saints and Christ concerning the sentence upon the wicked during the millennium, the last Great White Throne Judgment and sentencing after the millennium, the execution of the sentence in giving just retribution upon the wicked, and the final cleansing of the earth. All of these latter activities, it should be noted, are conducted from the New Jerusalem, which has descended from heaven, that city which is called in Rev 21:3 “the tabernacle of God.” It is in the shape of a cube (Rev 21:16)—it is the counterpart of the Most Holy Place of the earthly Sanctuary. The New Jerusalem is portrayed in the final chapters of Revelation as the apocalyptic Sanctuary, with the ultimate Sanctuary—the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb—in its center. The saints are priests and kings in this eternal tabernacle of God (Rev 20:6).

The Wind-up of the Cosmic Conflict in the Ultimate Sanctuary. Then it can be truly said, the War is over—both the “armed conflict” and the legal Courtroom Battle. The cosmic V-E Day has come! And of this time Ellen White can pen those words in the last paragraph of her work *The Great Controversy*: “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire uni-

³⁵White, *Great Controversy*, 656.

DAVIDSON: COSMIC METANARRATIVE

verse is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation.”³⁶

Only the Battle scars remain—the nail prints in the hands of the Chief Commander of the forces of heaven. And the Sanctuary—the New Jerusalem, can return to its original function of doxology—the place where the saints live and serve in the Father’s presence, and where the whole universe comes to worship the King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation 21–22 describes the eternal life in the New Jerusalem in language referring to the Feast of Tabernacles. The earth made new will be an eternal festival celebration in the Sanctuary, with the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

Conclusion

What a metanarrative! The Grand Metanarrative of metanarratives. I’ve become convinced that in the coming third millennium of Christianity the Christian church must focus more on presenting this “big picture” of Scripture and then let the other doctrines naturally flow forth from this grand central theme. This “warfare/Sanctuary worldview” provides a Grand Story encapsulating the Christian message to share particularly with our postmodern friends, but also with our Enlightenment friends, with our animist, Buddhist, and Moslem friends. Indeed, the Bible presents this Grand Story to give to every kindred and nation, tongue, and people—centered in Jesus, mighty Protagonist of the Great Controversy and ultimate embodiment of the Sanctuary/Temple (John 2:19–21; Rev 21:22). God’s Spirit is promised to convict the honest in heart that this big picture of Scripture is truth—eternal, universal, normative, beautiful truth. This is the timeless and timely Cosmic Metanarrative for the coming millennium!

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³⁶White, *Great Controversy*, 678.