

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE: A CLASH OF WORLDVIEWS

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Introduction

Definition of Terms: In this paper, I will adopt J. H. Bavinck's definition of culture and, therefore, define contemporary culture as society's "common attitude of life, its style of living and thinking, rooted in its apprehension of reality."¹ By Christian lifestyle, I will be referring to the manner of life or way of life which agrees with and expresses the principles of Biblical faith. In the New Testament, the word which frequently expresses this concept is *anastrophē*, and it is often qualified as "holy" (2 Pet 3:11), "pure" (1 Pet 3:2), or "good" (1 Pet 3:16, James 3:13), to suggest that the fruit of such a life is godliness or piety.² Thus, without the adjectival qualifiers, the two terms—culture and lifestyle—may be used synonymously, to mean the typical way of life of an individual or group of people, based upon their perception of reality. This is the manner in which I am going to employ the terms.

The challenge of the topic arises from the fact that Christians hold dual citizenships in the world and in the kingdom of God. This naturally raises questions about the relationship of Christians to their respective cultures. How can they be in the world, yet, not be of the world? The specific question evoked by the topic—"Contemporary Culture and Christian Lifestyle"—is: Are there aspects of the Christian lifestyle that may be regarded as supra-cultural within our modern context of cultural diversity? In other words, are there some basic principles of attitude and behavior which apply to

all cultures that are represented in the worldwide Christian family? Can Christianity's call for a godly and holy lifestyle be actualized in all societies of our pluralistic world? The response to the above question may be partially determined by whether or not one adopts a descriptive or prescriptive approach to the issue.

Descriptive or Prescriptive Approach? If the topic—"Contemporary Culture and Christian Lifestyle"—requires a discussion of the relationship between today's culture and Christian lifestyle, then the treatment of the subject will suggest a *descriptive* approach, in which one would go into a historical and sociological analysis of *how* modern culture and Christian lifestyle have impacted upon each other. This kind of approach will call attention to the distinctive practices of Christians that set them apart from other religions or the general public. For Seventh-day Adventists, these practices will include such things as, Sabbath observance, healthful living, modesty in dress, in amusement, and in entertainment, and an abstinence from tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics. In the descriptive method, the measuring instrument of Adventist lifestyle is usually by means of opinion polls, surveys, or referenda.³ While this approach may be helpful in describing past or even the existing condition within Adventism, it must be remembered that behind the distinctive practices of Adventists, anywhere in the world or at any time in its history, lie some specific ethical and theological beliefs.⁴

On the other hand, if the topic requires an address of what Christian lifestyle *must be* within the different cultural matrices it finds itself, the preferred method will be primarily *prescriptive*, and therefore, will involve an ethical or theological reflection. This method seeks to understand the beliefs undergirding the Christian lifestyle by exploring the ethical and theological foundations of their practices and ascertaining whether or not those practices *must be* maintained. Since "eating and drinking and whatsoever things we do" should all be expressions to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), common things, such as greeting, eating, building, dressing, etc. that may appear neutral can assume theological significance. This may explain why a hamburger from McDonald's may have a different meaning in a Hindu culture, and also why bowing, prostration, or kissing as forms of greetings may raise ethical issues

in different cultures. Even the every day building of skyscraper towers on the plains of modern Shinars (cf. Gen 11:1-9), as well as assertive statements or "high-powered" resumes of one's accomplishments (cf. Dan 3:28) may all have religious significance.

Since Christian orthopraxy (right living) is rooted in its orthodoxy (right doctrine), a discussion of the topic—"Modern Culture and Christian Lifestyle"—from an ethical and theological perspective, rather than a historical-sociological viewpoint, is the method I intend to follow in this paper. I would be particularly concerned with the foundations upon which the two cultures—Christian and non-Christian—are based, and how these philosophical foundations affect their respective lifestyles. My paper will be organized in the following manner:

1. World View: The Philosophical Foundation of a Culture
2. Communicators: The Shapers of World Views
3. Contemporary Culture & Christian Lifestyle: A Clash of World Views
4. Characteristics of Modern Culture
5. Abortive Lifestyle: The Fruit of Modern Culture
6. Adventism's Challenge: A Counter Lifestyle

Worldview: the Philosophical Foundation of a Culture

To understand the lifestyle of any society—Christian or non-Christian—one must first identify the worldview that is held by that society. By worldview, I am referring to the "set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world."⁵ A worldview is, therefore, the conceptual framework through which a person or a group views life. Although every group has a world view, a group is not always aware of it until that world view is challenged by a foreigner from another ideological universe.⁶

According to Charles Kraft,⁷ a world view serves five major functions in any given society: (1) It explains how and why things got to be as they are and how and why they continue or change; (2) It is the basis of evaluation and validation of all values and goals of a society; (3) It provides psychological reinforcement (security and support) for the group, especially during times of crisis. For example

in times of birth, marriage, illness, uncertainty, death, etc., the reinforcement may take the form of a ritual (prayer, scientific experimentation, rational analysis, etc.) or ceremony (initiation, funeral, graduation ceremony, etc), in which many people participate; (4) It integrates the society, systematizing and ordering the culture's perceptions of reality into an overall design; (5) It provides, within its conservatism, opportunities for adaptation or perceptual shifts in times of disequilibrium thereby enabling the society to reduce cultural dissonance when a need comes for a change in perception or behavior.

To understand the lifestyle of any society, and even to attempt a change of the ethos of that group of people, one must first have a grasp of their worldview. There can only be lasting changes in a society's behavior if the desired changes first take place at the foundational level of the community's assumptions regarding reality. Since the Bible teaches that what a person "thinketh in his heart" is what he is (Prov 23:7), Christianity's call for repentance (*metanoia*-change of mind) is actually a call for a change in worldviews from the secular world's to that which is characteristic of the kingdom of God (Matt 3:8; Acts 20:21; 26:20; cf. 1 Thess 1:9). Thus, when the apostle Paul urges the readers of his epistle to the Romans to adopt a certain lifestyle—"present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God"—this is linked with his call for a transformation that is effected "by the renewing of the mind"—a change in worldview (Rom 12:1, 2). Consequently, repentance must be seen as a miraculous event in which God supernaturally intervenes in a person's life, changes that person's worldview, resulting in a change in that individual's behavior (Acts 5:31; 11:18; Rom 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25). Thus, a change in worldviews becomes evident in a change in lifestyle. This is why John says, "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). It should be noted that while repentance initiates the change in a person's worldview, this one-time event has to be sustained on a daily, moment by moment basis until we come to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. The process of Christian sanctification may thus, be defined as the daily, moment by moment change in believers' worldviews until they are conformed to the image of Christ. Of the many precious gifts given Christians, the most effective one that helps in re-shaping

worldviews is a daily reading, studying and meditation upon the written Word of God.

With this brief discussion of the relationship between worldviews and lifestyle, it may be necessary now to mention the human agents who serve as catalysts in the shaping of worldviews, and hence, the lifestyle of various societies.

Communicators: the Shapers of Worldviews

If it is difficult to accurately describe the lifestyle of any given society without first understanding its worldviews, it is equally hard to perceive the full dynamics of any group's worldviews unless one is aware of the people in that group who shape that society's views. A *Newsweek* (October 5, 1992) cover article refers to these guiding spirits of culture as "The Cultural elite." They come from every academic discipline—science, history, psychology, politics, technology, economics, religion, art, etc. The one word that I would use to describe all members of the cultural elite is *communicators*.

In all societies—whether they be oral, literate, or visual—it is communicators who enjoy the status of shaping and perpetuating the values of the ambient cultures. For example, in oral cultures, the principal actors are the verbal "story tellers." The story tellers may be the African or Asian parents instructing their children in their homes; they may be teachers in some Russian or Australian classrooms; or they may be the eloquent politicians or preachers in Europe or America. In literate and visual cultures, it is through books, magazines and TV that contemporary values are communicated. Thus, the shapers of contemporary culture are not only those who control the news media, but also includes all authors, editors, cartoonists and publishers—whether the individuals involved are religious or secular.

If communicators are the major shapers of culture, the best instrument to measure the ethical temperature of any group of people is in their music. It has been said that music is not only a thermostat that regulates cultural values, but also a thermometer that reads that condition. The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius is quoted as saying: "If one should desire to know whether a kingdom is well-governed, if its morals are good or bad, the quality of its music will furnish the answer."⁸ Therefore, in seeking to know

something about contemporary culture, one should not only be aware of the books and magazines people are reading, but also the kinds of sermons being listened to, TV programs being watched, and the kinds of music that are in the air.

The realization that communicators are the major shapers of the ethos of society has two important implications for Christians. First, it suggests that while every believer is a "salt of the world," the most effective shapers and propagators of the Christian worldview are parents, teachers, preachers, authors or musicians, all of who, in one way or the other, are actively involved in the theological enterprise. Second, if it appears that the entertainment industry is winning the battle over worldviews, it may be because Christians are failing to communicate effectively their Christian values. This fact ought to challenge Christian theologians to seek skills that would equip them to be effective communicators. What this means, in our case, is that we must not only examine the content of the material we teach or write about but also, we should re-evaluate our teaching and writing styles, to ensure that we replace our tendency to communicate in esoteric terms, with an intentional effort to present profound theological concepts in a language that can be understood by the average person on the street.

With the above in mind, we are now in a position to discuss the undergirding worldviews of Christian and non-Christian cultures, and how these worldviews impact on their respective lifestyles.

Contemporary Culture and Christian Lifestyle: A Clash of Worldviews

Although the Bible often presents many individuals as models of Christian living (Phil 3:17; 1 Tim 4:12; James 5:10, 11; Heb 11), Christian lifestyle is not based on the empirical study of the sum-total of the behavior of Bible believers—that is to say, Christian lifestyle does not take its prescriptive cue from the lives of Bible characters or nations, however noble they may have been. The lifestyle of Bible characters can only be emulated if, and only if, those lifestyles conform to either the prescriptive teachings of the Scriptures or the perfect life of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:1-11, 11:1; Heb 4:16-18; 1 Pet 2:21-22).⁹ Because an empirical foundation does

not adequately take into consideration the fact of sin and inconsistency in the lives of the believers, the only true foundation upon which Christian lifestyle must be based is that demanded by Biblical revelation (2 Tim 3:15-17). As explained by John Murray, in the Bible are to be found standards of behavior "for the creation, direction, and regulation of thought, life, and behavior consonant with the will of God."¹⁰ The study of these principles of Christian conduct constitutes Christian ethics—described by Ellen G. White as "the science of holiness."¹¹ Let me now briefly state the essential contours of Biblical worldview, as it is generally held by Seventh-day Adventists and other Evangelicals.

Despite some differences, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a lot in common with other Evangelical churches. Together, they uphold the authority of Scripture as God's propositional revelation, and hence, the basis of all doctrines and practices. Based on their understanding of the Bible:

(1) they affirm the existence of a transcendent God who is the Creator, Owner, and Sustainer of the universe; (2) they teach that Satan, the adversary of God and His people, is a living being who, since his fall, has challenged the authority, veracity and claims of the triune God; (3) they also believe that while man was created in the image of God, he is not morally good or neutral; the fall of our first parents introduced sin into our world—sin that has affected the whole being of humanity and brought moral depravity upon the entire human race; (4) they affirm the truthfulness of the virgin birth, the substitutionary life and death of Jesus Christ, His bodily resurrection, ascension, high-priestly ministry in heaven, and His glorious second coming; (5) they maintain that the only realistic hope for helpless humanity lies in conversion—a transformation process that is effected by the Holy Spirit; and (6) they uphold the Decalogue as the clearest and most definitive moral code for all humanity; these Ten Commandments are rooted in the character of a good, holy, and loving God and they were exemplified in the perfect life of Jesus Christ, who is presented to us in the Bible as humanity's best Example.

Even though the above essentials of Christian worldview have always been challenged, in one way or the other by unbelievers throughout the centuries of time, since the Enlightenment, these contours of Christian worldview have been under severe attack from the naturalistic worldview—a worldview that is built on an

assumption that nothing exists outside the material mechanical natural order. "Born in the eighteenth century, it came of age in the nineteenth and grew to maturity in the twentieth."¹² According to Ronald H. Nash, naturalism offers "the major competition" to the Christian worldview.¹³

In his book *The Idea of Progress*, J. B. Bury argues that the two major foundations upon which modernism is built are (1) the idea of progress—the suggestion that humanity is inherently good and capable of improvement if only given opportunity—more time and (2) the belief in the invariable order of nature—that is, the view that the only thing that is unchanging and unchangeable is the physical laws of nature.¹⁴ These two pillars of modern worldview, run at variance with the essentials of Biblical worldview enumerated above. First, modern worldview greatly limits, if not totally denies, the existence of supernatural realities—God, Satan, angels—and miracles. Second, it leads to a denial of human sinfulness, and hence the need for Christ's atonement and second coming. Finally, modern culture's acceptance of physical laws as the unchanging and unchangeable laws in the universe runs contrary to Biblical teaching that the only unchanging and unchangeable laws in the universe are God's Moral Ten Commandment Laws (Ps 19:7, 8; Matt 5:17-19; Rom 7:12), which therefore, serve as the basis of ethical conduct.

Thus, we see that there is a clash between Biblical worldview and the contemporary naturalistic worldview. How this difference in worldviews plays out in lifestyle will be discussed in the next section.

Characteristics of Contemporary Culture¹⁵

Self-deifying Culture: We Are Gods. One characteristic of modern society is its deification of self. Words such as "self-discovery," "self-affirmation," "self-esteem," "self-actualization," "self-expression," and "self-acceptance" could reflect this mood. With an uncertainty regarding the existence of supernatural realities and even the existence of God, "Self" has been exalted as the new god for many people.¹⁶ Credit for this modern outlook goes not only to the pervasiveness of the New Age philosophy, but also to the anthropology of liberal theology. John Shelby Spong, the

Episcopal bishop of Newark, echoes the views of liberal thought when he dismisses the Biblical worldview as "pre-scientific." He writes in his 1991 bestseller: "We look for and find meaning and divinity, not always so much in an external God as in the very depths of our humanity, but it is divinity nonetheless. We discover transcending spirit within ourselves." He continues thus: "We have come to the dawning realization that God might not be separate from us but rather deep within us."¹⁷

On the personal level, self-deification makes it possible for one to cure one's ills by looking within, and even big enough to forgive one's sin (how often do we not hear the expression, "forgive yourself?"). On a group or societal level, self-deification assumes a corporate identity in which tribalism, nationalism, patriotism, and racism become the highest human authorities commanding whole-hearted allegiance. Despite the fact that the Bible condemns all forms of self-deification as selfishness, pride, or idolatry, and presents self-denial as the hallmark of Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26ff), modern culture has made a science out of self-worship. Based on an individualistic philosophy, this cult of the self basically states that every human being is an end in himself, and that each person must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others, but rather, the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose.¹⁸ Mike Yaconelli refers to this as "the legitimization of self-interest"—one of the hallmarks of the modern worldview that has infiltrated and tainted our Christian thinking, lifestyles, and everyday existence."¹⁹

Given the fact that in this modern worldview, self is now the king, it should come as no surprise to anyone when George Barna, in his 1991 survey of values and religious views in the USA reports that 63% of adults in the USA say that the purpose of life is enjoyment and the pursuit of fulfillment.²⁰ This fact may also partly explain the statement in the cover article of *Newsweek* (December 17, 1990) that the baby boomer generation that goes to church today has as its aim, "support not salvation, help rather than holiness, a circle of spiritual equals rather than an authoritative church or guide. A group affirmation of self is at the top of the agenda, which is why some of the least demanding churches are now in greatest demand."²¹

The point being made here is that the reason why the cult of self is held as a sacred tenet of contemporary culture is because of a worldview in which the Lordship of the triune God of the Bible has been replaced by the reign of the human self.

Normless Culture: We Can Decide What is Right and Wrong. One of the most incisive analysis of our modern culture is that given by Will Herberg over half a decade ago. Writing on the "Moral Crisis of Our Time," Herberg describes our contemporary society as coming very close to a "non-moral, normless culture." He explains that the crisis does not consist so much in the flagrant violation of morally accepted standards of behavior, but rather, in the fact that "in the modern world, for the first time, at least on a mass scale, the very possibility of such standards has been thrown into question, and with it all essential distinctions between right and wrong."²²

Recent writers concur. Allan Bloom, for example, opens the introduction of his 1987 best seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, with the statement: "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."²³ George Barna's 1991 report confirms this. His survey reveals a "most disheartening" discovery:

Two-thirds of adults (66%) agree that there is no such thing as absolute truth. . . Even a majority of born again Christians (53%) and adults associated with evangelical churches (53%) concur with the sentiment. Unexpectedly, among the people groups most ardently supportive of this viewpoint are mainline [liberal] Protestants (73%).²⁴

Not a few in modern society believes anymore that there is absolute right and wrong. Speaking about the relativistic mood that is dominant in our contemporary society, Thomas Howard says that we all "have been schooled in the tradition of moral and intellectual democracy."²⁵ Rightness is defined as what is right *for me* or *for my society*. Group morality, ascertained by public opinion polls, surveys, referenda, etc., is that which governs the ethos of society. Nothing is a simple black and white issue anymore; everything is a shade of gray and in the words of Kenneth Greet, "The man who sees everything in black and white is morally color-blind."²⁶ In

other words, tolerance and pluralism are the crowned values of contemporary society and anyone who teaches that there are absolute standards for human behavior is stereotyped as a bigot.

It must be pointed out, however, that the normless culture today is the direct result of a modernistic worldview in which the existence of God, as a transcendent Being who determines the norms of morality is down-played. This is aptly pointed out by the *Barna Report*, which reveals that although 64% of Americans claim to believe in God, they are not sure whether that God is an impersonal force or a real being, and that 60% of Americans (and nearly half of all Christians) think Satan is just a symbol of evil and not a living being.²⁷ With such an uncertainty about the existence of a personal God and Satan as a living being, modern culture has little concept of the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, truth and error, and right and wrong. Not unexpectedly, the Biblical teaching that God is truth, Jesus is truth, the Holy Spirit is truth, the Bible is truth, and the Law is truth, are all being questioned within and without the Church.

Thus, while a *Self-deifying Culture* maintains that "We are Gods," a *Normless Culture* asserts that "As Gods, We know what is right and wrong." It is not surprising then, that the next characteristic of modern culture is the belief that "We are capable of doing whatever we want to."

Power-Conscious Culture: Can Do Anything We Want to. Much of our contemporary culture is bathing in the quest for power. We talk about "power brakes" for our automobiles, "powerpak" computer programs, "power communication," "power dressing," and "power politics." A recently published book, appropriately titled *Power Religion* (1992), has discerned the signs of our times and therefore, raises alarm over the fact that evangelical churches are falling to the temptation of contemporary culture's quest for power.²⁸

How did we come to this lust for power? One possible answer is the technological spirit of our time. First, it was a quest for power of *man over nature*. The technological imperative at this stage was: "Whatever technologically *can* be done, *should* be done."²⁹ This was a mixed blessing. For along side the beneficial inventions we are also left with unresolved ethical issues ranging from artificial

insemination, in-vitro fertilization, sex selection or selective breeding, surrogate parenting and some difficult environmental concerns.

Following on the heels of the quest of power of *man over nature* is the quest of power of *man over man*. This was fueled by the survival-of-the-fittest ethic, which today has filtered down as *the quality-of-life-ethic*, an ethic that seeks to respond to modern social and economic problems by arguing that "some humans are (a) not really true 'persons,' and are (b) a great hindrance to a better lifestyle for individuals and society, thus, (c) it is not wrong to kill them because their death enhances (in an expedient and cost effective way) the quality of life for those who are true persons."³⁰ The result of this ethic is war, violence and bloodshed. Walter Wink summarizes the situation thus: "Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. What is generally overlooked is that violence is accorded the status of a religion, demanding from its devotees an absolute obedience unto death."³¹ Philip Lee concurs; his description of the cultural reality of Western nations as a "culture of war"³² is applicable to every society in which war is glorified, rather than the Biblical ethic of peace, love, forgiveness, and non-violence (Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:14-21; etc.)

Besides the quest of power of *man over nature* and *over man*, we now have moved into a new quest of power—this time, the quest of power of *man over himself*. The philosophy here is that any decision or obligation that involves costly discipleship is not worth pursuing. It is more "humane and honorable," we are told, for one to take one's own life than to endure suffering, or that sometimes, the most loving act is to kill a person for his own sake, if not for the sake of his family, or community. The "trickle down" effect of this pleasure-pain principle on Christian lifestyle is the belief shared by many Christians that a believer cannot and must not suffer pain—a philosophy that runs contradictory to Biblical teaching that sometimes obedience to Christ may involve suffering (1 Pet 2:20; 3:13-17; 2 Tim 3:12; Rev 2:10).

It needs to be emphasized again that the lifestyle exhibited by this power-conscious culture is firmly rooted in a worldview in which an all-powerful creator God has been replaced by invincible

"supermen" who believe that they can do anything they want to—without being held accountable to anyone.

Deterministic Culture: We Are Not Responsible for Our Actions. Endemic in contemporary culture is the belief that the individual has no choice in his moral actions, and therefore, must not be held accountable for them. One symptom of this modern outlook is the way in which certain phrases have gained currency—phrases such as, "it's not my fault. . .," "I had no choice. . .," etc. Not unexpectedly, it has become very fashionable for people to shift responsibility from themselves and blame it on either their environment, backgrounds, parents, governments, or even church. Sometimes even the "Devil" is blamed for this ("the Devil made me do it"), and some Christians respond that "It is the Spirit who led me to do it."

This is rather ironical. For at a time when people talk about "*alternative-lifestyle*," "*sexual preference*" and "*pro-choice*," all of which imply freedom of choice, when it comes to accepting full responsibility for their actions, they maintain that they have no choice and are therefore, inculpable. This contemporary cultural outlook may be traced to the naturalistic worldview that has been popularized by the teachings of behaviorism.

Behavioral scientists like B. F. Skinner and Leslie White have been so impressed with the influence of cultural, social, and psychological factors on our lives that they teach that attitudes and actions which in the past were attributed to free will, are now believed to be almost determined. Skinner, for example maintains that the concept of "autonomous man" (that is, the idea that man has freedom of choice or self-determination) is a "pre-scientific" notion that must be abolished. He maintains that "a scientific analysis of behavior dispossesses autonomous man and turns the control he has been said to exert over to the environment."³³

Following the same thought of behaviorism, the cover story of *Time* magazine (August 1, 1977) introduced, to the world, a new and highly controversial scientific discipline, called sociobiology, which seeks to establish that human behavior is genetically based. Hailing this theory as "the completion of the Darwinian revolution," advocates explain that all human beings have been programmed like computers according to some blind physical and

chemical laws. We cannot, therefore, be held accountable for our actions since they are all dependent on our genetic code. Operating on this naturalistic-materialistic worldview, some sociobiologists argue that lying and extramarital sexual relationships are not morally wrong, but simply ways in which the genes survive.

In response to critics of this doctrine of "genetic determinism," Robert Trivers, a leading sociobiologist at Harvard University, counters that this theory "has spread too far, to too many people, and to far too many studies" to be easily ignored. Trivers is quoted in the *Time* article as making this bold prediction: "Sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology." Could it be that the "discoveries" being made in recent times, by researchers, that some individuals are "Born to Smoke,"³⁴ "Born Gay,"³⁵ and even "Born murderers"³⁶ are partial fulfillments of Trivers' predictions?

It may probably be obvious that, those who accept this naturalistic worldview have no place for Biblical anthropology which teaches that human beings are created in the image of God, and endowed with freedom of choice. This modern worldview also, in effect, denies the possibility of divine judgment of human conduct.

Abortive Lifestyle: the Fruit of Contemporary Culture

What happens when a society adopts and lives out the life demanded by modern worldview? What happens when a person adopts a life in which God is left out? What quality of life results from an un-Biblical worldview? Martin Weber responds to these questions when he describes the life of modern man as an "abortive lifestyle." He maintains that this "abortive lifestyle" has become the preferred lifestyle for many in our society—the way they cope with any problem that comes their way. "Is there trouble at school? Don't bother to study harder, just abort your education. That's the take-it-easy attitude we have today. Are you having problems at work? Quit—abort your job. Has holy wedlock become unhappy deadlock? Divorce—abort your vows. Are you faltering in your Christian experience? Take the easy way out and abort your relationship with Jesus."³⁷

We are harvesting the fruit of a Godless existence—a lifestyle

predicated on modern worldview. According to the late British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge: "Just when happiness seems most accessible, in the happy lands—Scandinavias and Californias—many jump after it from upstairs windows or gulp it down in colored barbiturates or try to tear it out of one another's bodies or scatter it in blood and bone on the highways, along which, with six lanes aside and Muzak endlessly playing, automobiles roll on from nowhere to nowhere."³⁸

I have briefly described the "abortive lifestyle" of our modern culture, by explaining that this is the result of a modernistic worldview in which humanity claims to be, and even attempts to assume the role of God. The Bible describes this kind of lifestyle, in 1 Peter 1:18, as an empty or a vain way of life (*anastrophē*) that is characteristic of an unconverted human existence (Gal 1:13; Eph 4:22). In contrast to this "abortive lifestyle," I would now, in the next pages, discuss how the Biblical worldview may lead to a "holy" (2 Pet. 3:11), "pure" (1 Pet 3:2), or "good" (1 Pet 3:16, James 3:13), lifestyle.

Adventism's Challenge: A Counter Lifestyle

We began our discussion with a statement of fact, namely, the Bible has a *prescribed* way of life (*anastrophē*) for Christians, qualified by such words as holy, pure and good. I would continue by saying that this "Christian lifestyle" is rooted in two unchanging facts about the nature of God and human beings: (1) God does not change—His character of love, mercy, justice, etc., do not change; His knowledge and His power do not change; His Word and His moral Law do not change; (2) Human beings do not change—their finiteness as created beings does not change; their nature as sinners does not change; and their need for guidance and help does not change.

These two unchanging facts about God and humanity raise some major questions: (a) How can God's demand for godliness, piety and holiness in life, be actualized in sinful human beings? (b) How should Christians—citizens of two different kingdoms—relate to the two different cultures? In short, how can Christians follow the imperative of Paul given in Titus 2:12: "*Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts [the results demanded by a modernistic*

worldview], we should live soberly, righteously, and godly lives in this present world [the demands of a Biblical worldview]”?

God's solution to this dilemma is bound in One particular individual, Jesus Christ—who once came to the world to show us that holiness in life is possible, and who also will come again to receive those who follow in His steps. The answer to this seemingly impossible expectation of godly lifestyle in an “evil and crooked generation” is still bound to that One individual—who is currently performing experiments on human hearts, form a secured laboratory in the heavenly sanctuary where He serves as our Mediator and High Priest. And the complete blueprint of how God deals with this problem is best explained by a particular worldview within Christianity, known as Seventh-day Adventism.

Of all the Evangelical churches, the Adventist church is the most equipped to offer a Biblically consistent response to modern culture. Adventists have their own unique culture. Its people comprise of individuals from “every nation, kindred, multitude, and tongue” (Rev 14:6). They see themselves as active participants in the cosmic conflict (the great controversy) between Christ and Satan—a conflict that involves the character of God and His plan for the universe. It is their understanding of this cosmic conflict that has given birth to that system of theology which is reflected in the Adventist church. Their very name—Seventh-day Adventists—captures the scope of the cosmic conflict. The weekly seventh-day Sabbath points backward, reminding the world of the power of the transcendent God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, thus, undercutting the evolutionary foundations of modern culture. The “Adventist” component of their name is a daily reminder to Christians that their true citizenship is in the kingdom to come. Between the expanse of Adventist *protology* and *eschatology* is what Paul describes as “this present world” (Titus 2:12)—the period in which Christ's experiment on human hearts is taking place.

The organizing principle of Seventh-day Adventist worldview may be termed *the great controversy*. Let me briefly state, in this ongoing clash of worldviews, two major issues in “the great controversy.”³⁹

(i) The character of God, as is reflected in the sinless life of Jesus Christ and expressed in the Moral Law, is the focal issue at

stake. On the one hand, Satan maintains that God is unjust, His Law is faulty and that a loving obedience to Him is impossible in a sinful world. On the other end, God points to the Savior's life of obedience as a proof that even in this sin-marred world believers, who rely solely on the merits and power of the living Christ, can exhibit in their lives the same excellence of character that Jesus revealed in His earthly life.

(ii) Human beings are at the center of this great controversy, since it is they who must *choose* who to believe. They must answer the following questions: Is God to be trusted? Is His Word truth? Does God know what is best for humanity? Does God have enough power to help anyone who chooses to follow Him—power to transform his/her life, power so great that if possible He can miraculously intervene in behalf of His people, and even if death is permitted to occur, He can resurrect the Christian?

The Adventist's response to the above questions in the great controversy may be summarized as follows:

1. Since human beings are sinners and cannot trust their own judgment on what is right and wrong, true Christian principle does not follow human impulse nor judgment. Instead, the Christian looks to the revealed will of God in Scriptures, and seeks to walk according to the definite commandments of God, no matter the circumstances and the cost. For them, the only unchanging and unchangeable law in the universe is not physical laws (which can be transcended by God), but God's Moral Ten Commandment Law. This Law is the only unerring standard of right and wrong (Ps 19:7, 8; Matt 5:17-19; Rom 7:7, 12; 1 John 3:4).

2. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme will never be placed in situations for which God has made no ample provision (1 Cor 10:13). Not only can God help them overcome all cultivated and hereditary tendencies to sin (contra the behavioristic philosophy), but also, the weakest and most helpless human beings who spread their trials, anxieties and perplexities before God will find enough help to meet their needs.

3. The fact that human beings were created as *free moral agents*, and the fact that God has made ample provision for their needs, imply that human beings are never brought into such situations that yielding to sin becomes a matter of necessity. Not even

the strongest temptation is an excuse to sin. Christians who know the power of Christ and His Word will, therefore, not follow suggestions of Satan to lie, to steal, commit adultery, kill, etc. in order to save their lives or other's lives. As Ellen G. White puts it, whenever we face difficult situations—even life-threatening ones—"our only questions will be, What is God's Command? and what is His promise? Knowing these, we shall obey the one, and trust the other" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 121).

4. True Christian lifestyle takes seriously Christ's statements in Luke 14:26-27—"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Adventists understand this to mean that they must be willing to die, if necessary, than to sin against their Savior. They know that "the deepest poverty, the greatest self-denial, with His approval, is better than riches, honors, ease, and friendship without it" (*Great Controversy*, p. 622). They know that death is but sleep, and the One who holds the key of life and death will resurrect them at His coming (John 5:25-29; 1 Thes 4:13-18). Therefore, Adventist Christians seek to be faithful unto death (Rev 2:10).

Conclusion

The contours of Christian worldview that I have sketched above has some far reaching implications regarding how Adventists ought to look at some contemporary issues such as war (personal, tribal, national, international), abortion (even in cases of rape, incest, and deformity), marriage and divorce, polygamy, homosexuality, eating and drinking, dressing, entertainment, etc., all of which are included in Christ's demand for a godly and holy lifestyle (2 Pet 3:11; 1 Cor 10:31; cf. Col 3:17). Even more, the trying circumstances of everyday life ought to be viewed as God's preparation of His faithful people for the final eschatological conflict between God and Satan.

Concerning this impending cosmic conflict, E. G. White Writes: "The season of distress before God's people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even

that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart, the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death." She continues with this assurance: "As in the days of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so in the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right. He who walked with the Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace will be with His followers wherever they are. His abiding presence will comfort and sustain. In the midst of the time of trouble—trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them, and in their behalf Jehovah will reveal Himself as a 'God of gods,' able to save to the uttermost those who have put their trust in Him."⁴⁰

This counter lifestyle of Seventh-day Adventists is both a challenge and a promise. If, for whatever reason, the Church prunes this aspect of its message and compromises its obedience in order to become acceptable and respectable in modern society, it runs the risk of losing its christian identity and also its saving influence in the world. On the other hand, if Seventh-day Adventists live the kind of life demanded by the Biblical worldview, we can only faintly speculate on what will happen!

Endnotes

1 J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 57, also defines culture as "religion made visible; it is religion actualized in the innumerable relations of daily life" (ibid.). For a critical review of concepts and definitions of culture, see A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kuckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 75-154.

2 In contrast to the empty or vain way of life characteristic of an unconverted heart (Gal 1:13; Eph 4:22; 1 Pet 1:18; 2 Pet 2:7), the remaining nine out of the thirteen occurrences of *anastrophē* in the New Testament employ the term in the positive sense of godliness or piety, a prescriptive lifestyle worthy of emulation (1 Tim 4:12; Heb 13:7; Jas 3:13; 1 Pet 1:15, 18, 2:12, 3:2, 16; 2 Pet. 3:11).

3 For examples of works that adopt the descriptive method, see Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Among Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992); Roger L. Dudley and V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press, 1992). See also Michael Pearson's *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

for a descriptive analysis of how certain lifestyle issues have been dealt with in Seventh-day Adventist history.

4 For a detailed discussion of the Biblical basis for Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle see, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1988), pp. 232-309.

5 James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalogue*, Updated and expanded edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 17. This work is an excellent introduction of alternative worldviews—Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, the New Age—and how these worldviews result in different kinds of ethics.

6 A person's worldview covers such basics as ontology (space, time and existence), epistemology (basis of knowledge), metaphysics (how different realities relate to one another) and ethics (how humans ought to live). See Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 16-33.

7 Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, (New York: Maryknoll, 1979), pp. 53-57.

8 Quoted in Wolfgang Hans Martin Steffani's, "Music and Character," an unpublished manuscript (Andrews University, 1988), p. 3.

9 John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), p. 78, states: "Not all practices described by Scripture are thereby endorsed by Scripture as moral ideals. Solomon had many wives, but that constitutes no endorsement of polygamy; monogamy is clearly the divine standard. . . . The precepts and commands of Scripture have priority over the narrative passages in discerning the moral law."

10 John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 13-14.

11 See E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 10 vols (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:276, where she writes: "The ETHICS inculcated by the gospel acknowledge no standard but the perfection of God's mind, God's will. God requires from His creatures conformity to His will. Imperfection of character is sin, and sin is the transgression of the law. All righteous attributes of character dwell in God as a perfect, harmonious whole. Everyone who receives Christ as his personal Savior is privileged to possess these attributes. This is the science of holiness."

12 James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, p. 82. He describes the persistence of naturalism in modern culture thus: "While signs of age are now appearing, naturalism is still very much alive. It dominates the universities, colleges and high schools. It provides the framework for most scientific study. It poses the backdrop against which the humanities continue to struggle for human value, as writers, poets, painters and artists in general shudder under its implications. No rival world view has yet been able to topple it, though it is fair to say that the twentieth century has provided some powerful options and theism is experiencing somewhat of a rebirth at all levels of society." (Ibid.)

13 Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 116.

14 J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: Dover Publications, 1932). Using the phrase "the idea of progress" for modern worldview, Bury argues: "It may surprise many to be told that the notion of Progress, which now seems so easy to apprehend, is of comparatively recent origin" (ibid., 6). Describing the evolutionary basis of modern worldview, Bury continues by saying that one cannot fully understand "the idea of Progress" until one goes on "to conceive that it [the world] is destined to advance indefinitely in the future" (ibid., p. 7).

15 I would like to point out that there is not a single worldview that is predominant in contemporary society. What I attempt to do here is to show that an un-Biblical worldview does have a profound impact on one's lifestyle. In discussing the characteristics of modern culture, I would limit myself to four characteristics that are prevalent in western societies. These are going to be illustrative of the argument in this paper—that a person's worldview determines his or her lifestyle.

16 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 173, describes the essence of "the self" in this way: "mysterious, ineffable, indefinable,

unlimited, creative, known only by its deeds; in short, like God, of whom it is the impious mirror image. Above all, it is individual, unique, it is *me*, not some distant man in general or man-in-himself."

17 John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p. 33.

18 Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 13, 16, argues that individualism, which is "one of the prominent traits of American ethos," contains three distinct types: individualism as a metaphysic, a value system, and a social philosophy. Although these three categories are not mutually exclusive, our discussion is more concerned about metaphysical individualism, defined as "a view of reality in which the individual is the most basic entity and the defining principle of all existence" (ibid., 16-17). For a brief discussion of an individualistic philosophy, see Roger H. Crook, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 15-18.

19 Mike Yaconelli, "Becoming Pagan," *The Wittenburg Door*, 98 & 99 (Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. 1987):61, explains the meaning of the phrase "The legitimization of self-interest" thus: "We no longer believe that Jesus is first, others are second, and ourselves, last. Jesus is first as long as Jesus benefits ME. Others are second as long as putting others second makes MY personal situation better. We are even willing to put ourselves last IF putting myself last guarantees that I will be first. We are more than glad to follow Jesus as long as Jesus puts MY wants and needs as His first priority. Self-interest is no longer contradictory to serving Christ, it is complementary to serving Christ: Of course Jesus wants me to be happy. Jesus wants me to be fulfilled. Any talk of 'losing oneself' is meaningless because people are incapable of understanding that Christianity costs them anything."

20 George Barna, *What Americans Believe: An Annual Survey of Values and Religious Views in the United States* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), p. 36.

21 *Newsweek* (December 17, 1990), p. 56.

22 Will Herberg, "The Moral Crisis of Our Time," *Intercollegiate Review* (Fall 1986):9.

23 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 25.

24 George Barna, *What Americans Believe*, pp. 36-37.

25 Thomas Howard, "The Touchstone: Orthodoxy Guides Us through the Data," *Christianity Today* (January 5, 1979):12.

26 K. G. Greet, *The Art of Moral Judgement* (London: Epworth, 1970), pp. 88.

27 George Barna, *What Americans Believe*, pp. 299-300.

28 Michael Scott Horton, ed., *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992). The authors discuss the dangers of familiar "power" themes in today's Christian circles—topics such as "power evangelism," with its emphasis on spiritual warfare and the need to "bind" and exorcising all the demons plaguing Christians; "power growth," in which prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing has given way to "celebrations," and megachurch strategies and programs; "power within"—in which psychologists tell us we have answers to our problems within ourselves; "power preaching"—whether it is done by charismatic televangelists, or some cultic "prophets"; and "power politics" that seeks to change public morality "by the legislation of ideology" rather than "by the proclamation of theology." (Ibid., pp. 13-20).

29 Edwards Stevens, *Making Moral Decisions*, enlarged & Revised ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 56.

30 See the excellent article by Richard Fredericks, "Who Deserves to Live?: Toward an Ethic of Compassion," *Signs of the Times* (April 1990):3, in which he has explained how this ethic is amplified in the abortion issue.

31 Walter Wink, "The Myth of Redemptive Violence: Exposing the Roots of 'Might

Makes Right,' *Sojourners* (April 1992):18. He continues by remarking: "The myth of redemptive violence inundates us on every side. We are awash in it yet seldom perceive it. Its simplest, most pervasive, and finally most influential form, where it captures the imaginations of each new generation, is children's comics and cartoon shows" (ibid., p. 20).

32 Philip Lee, "Images of a Culture of War," *Media Development* 4 (1991):12ff. In this work, Lee argues that many dimensions of Western society—education, religion, and government—from cradle to grave, subtly strengthen people's acceptance of, and weaken their resistance to, violence and war.

33 B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971) [ref. from Bantam edition of 1972], pp. 21, 96. Leslie White, *The Science of Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), p. 167, also states: "the individual. . . is merely an organization of cultural forces and elements that have impinged upon him from the outside and which find their overt expression through him. . . the individual is but the expression of a supra-biological cultural tradition in somatic form."

34 Quoting a study that appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a *Time* magazine article in the September 28, 1992 (p. 33) issue reports that chromosomes are the reason why some people are "Born to Smoke."

35 See a discussion of this issue in *Christianity Today* (June 22, 1992):20-23.

36 Refer, for example, to Brian Nomi, "Murder and the Christian Faith: A Study for the Church's Reflection and Deliberation," *Dialogue* 31 (Summer 1992):231-233, where the author seems to offer a theological justification for psychopaths. Following the argument similar to that employed in the justification of homosexuality, the author writes: "Scientific data has shown that murder is often inevitable for some individuals in society. On the one hand, we have heard that murder is sin. On the other hand, some confessing Christians are murderers and testify to the signs of God's gracious love in their lives. How do we deal with these conflicting messages? Murderers are also children of God who need the means of grace and the community of faith. After all, if we decide murder is not a sin, then there will be less sin in the world and less need for God's grace."

Our baptism makes us children of God. God does not revoke our baptism when we commit murder. We need to realize that what we find personally repulsive is not necessarily sinful. Furthermore, we need to realize that if we categorically condemn all murder, we may be deeply offending and alienating the murderers in our congregations, implying that their status is determinative of their character" (ibid., p. 232).

37 Martin Weber, "The Abortion Dilemma," *Ministry* (September, 1992), p. 15.

38 Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Portable Conservative Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 617.

39 The significance of the doctrine of the great controversy lies in the fact that (1) it produces a constant state of watchfulness among believers, (2) it explains the mystery of suffering, (3) it displays Christ's present loving concern for the world, and (4) it reveals the cosmic significance of the cross. See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . .*, pp. 98-105. For a detailed and authoritative discussion of Seventh-day Adventists' understanding of the "great controversy" theme, see the five volume *Conflict of the Ages* series by Ellen G. White [*Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *Desire of Ages*, *Acts of the Apostles*, & *the Great Controversy*] (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1890-1917).

40 E. G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), pp. 512-513.